
EAST-WEST CENTER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Greg Trifonovitch Interview Narrative

5-4-2009 interview in Honolulu, Hawaii

Please cite as: Greg Trifonovitch, interview by Terese Leber, May 4, 2009, interview narrative, East-West Center Oral History Project Collection, East-West Center, Honolulu Hawaii.

These narratives, which reflect interviewees' personal perceptions, opinions, and memories, may contain errors of fact. They do not reflect positions or versions of history officially approved by the East-West Center.

The **East-West Center Oral History Project** strives to capture the Center's first 50 years as seen through the eyes of staff, alumni, and supporters who have contributed to its growth.

Co-coordinators: Terese Leber and Phyllis Tabusa

Narratives Editor: Susan Yim Griffin

Copyright East-West Center, 2009.

Greg Trifonovitch
5-4-2009 interview in Honolulu, Hawaii

Personal Background

Both my father and my mother were born in Jerusalem. My father was Macedonian and my mother was Russian. My father worked as a mechanic. After the Israeli-Arab War started, we moved to a Russian compound on the Lake of Galilee where we tended to a big garden and lived off the lake catch.

I was born in Palestine. That became Israel in 1947. And since I was neither Arab nor Jewish, it was a time for me to leave that country. So I began to explore opportunities to come to the United States.

I was 14 years old, working in the YMCA in Jerusalem as a waiter, waiting on American tourists to the Holy Land. So in between the three daily meals, I had ample time to practice my English. I became an unofficial free tour guide for the purpose of practicing my English language and searching for a benevolent person to help me go to the United States.

One day as we were returning from one of my mini tours of Jerusalem, this couple stopped by the travel agency to validate their tickets. I stood outside admiring a model of a ship in the window. When they came out, they asked what I was doing. I told them I was admiring the ship model in the window. And then, out of the blue, they said “Would you like to go to the United States and finish your education?”

Well, having been brought up in that particular culture, you don't act surprised. You act like, “Maybe, well...” So I said (in accent), “I think about it.”

It's just, you never show emotion immediately. So the next morning when they came for

breakfast, I waited on their table and I really wanted them to ask me whether I had made up my mind or not. But they were very quiet, they didn't say anything. Later at lunchtime they asked me, and I said, "Yes, I think so." (laughter) Well, but the trouble is that they stayed in Israel for one year and taught school in Nazareth, where I was a student. And after that year they brought me and two others from Palestine to North Carolina.

I came to America in 1953 and attended Campbell College in Buies Creek, North Carolina. I tried my best to find out how I could stay in America and get my citizenship. Some said, "Get married." Well, to get married at seventeen? No. Later I discovered that if a non-U.S. citizen got married, he or she had to return with their spouse to their country of origin.

Life Before EWC

Joining the Army

At that time the Korean War was on and a new immigration law was passed in Congress (Public Law 69) that any alien who volunteered for the United States military would be eligible to receive their U.S. citizenship after 90 days of active duty. They don't have it anymore. That was only an emergency because they needed fodder for the front lines. So I did. But I wanted to become a pilot, so I decided, OK, I'll go to the Air Force. And they noticed my accent and they said, "No. You're not an American citizen." So I tried the Navy -- the same thing, and I tried the Marines -- they almost took me. And then all of a sudden, they said, "Trifonovitch, report to the Captain."

So I went there all so proud, I figured he noticed something about me because I must be a good fighter, because I went through the Second World War and then the Israeli-Arab

War. So he gave me a ticket to go back to Jackson in North Carolina -- that's where I was living. And he said, "We have to check with Pentagon." And I didn't know who this guy Pentagon was; must be some important guy in Washington. Well, the next day, he sent me a letter, "No, you're not an American citizen, you can't join the Marines."

None of them actually knew about Public Law 69.

So anyway, I went to the Army recruiting sergeant at the city hall in Jacksonville, North Carolina, and I said, "Sergeant, I want to join the Army." He said, "Sign right here." I said, "But I'm not an American citizen." He says, "We take anybody." And I signed. And so that's how I got in. I started to recite Public Law 69 to him and he said, "No, no, I know all about it." So I went through basic training and then advanced infantry training, and I was sent to Korea. In Korea, I remember very well the day I was in a fox hole when a captain came over calling my name, "Trifonovitch" and asked me to raise my right hand. "Repeat after me." I repeated after him. And then he said the most endearing military words to me, "Now you bastard, we will drape your coffin with the American flag."

Oh, I'll never forget it. But that's endearing words in the military, you know. Anyway, I got my citizenship. And after I finished my tour of duty in Korea, I came back and I went to college, used the GI Bill, met my future wife Beverly, got married, and went to graduate school, University of Pennsylvania. In '63, my wife and our two sons traveled to Saipan, Micronesia, for my first job with the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands.

Bringing Family to U.S.

Yeah, but before that, I was able -- in 1958 -- to bring my parents and my two sisters from Bethlehem. When I went to the Immigration Department, I told them, "I'm American citizen, but my parents are still in Palestine." "You can't bring them," they said. The quota for America from Palestine was closed, it wouldn't open for another 13 to 15 years.

So believe it or not, I was taking at that time Political Science 101, and it says that the American president is the servant of the people. So I figured I'm one of those people. And he's my servant, so to speak, so I'm going to write him a letter. And so -- all my friends laughed, of course. And so I wrote a letter. I figured, he was a military man himself, Eisenhower, at that time. So I finally told him that I was in Korea, Seventh Division, 17th Regiment, in the 7th Division, which was well-known at that time. My friends told me that he would not answer me, but within about 10 days, he answered. And he said, "I know about your case and I have referred it to the two senators from Illinois, Dirksen and Douglas. So Douglas writes, and he says, "What can I do to help out?" Dirksen writes and says, "I'm in contact with the American ambassador in Amman, Jordan, and I'll keep you informed via copies of my letters." And so within three months my mother came. They just let her come by herself first. And six months later, my father and my two sisters came. So I have a lot of *aloha* for President Eisenhower. And that's how I came to America, and that's how they came to America, and... Met my wife when I was in Wheaton College, in Illinois. And we have two sons, and a daughter. Two sons live here, on this island, and we have eight grandchildren altogether. The daughter lives on the Big Island.

Educational Background

As far as my background from an educational point of view -- I graduated with a degree in anthropology and physical education from Wheaton College. And I graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in linguistics. And then at the age of 50, while I was here, I decided to get a master's degree in the School of Public Health with international health and gerontology, because I was getting old.

I figured a variety of subject matters probably will make me a good candidate for some good job with all the languages that I knew – but not in Hawai‘i.

Arrival in Hawai‘i

Went to Micronesia in 1963. While there, a gentleman by the name of Baron Goto, who was the first vice chancellor of [EWC] ITI Institute [*Institute for Technical Interchange*] came over to Saipan. His background was agriculture and I got to know him, showed him around and so forth, and just supposedly was only a casual type of meeting. And after he left, we got involved with Peace Corps volunteers in 1964. We set up a program for teaching the different languages of Micronesia, and came over here to Molokai, and that’s where we had our training -- we rented, actually, the facilities that -- oh no, I take it back. I was with the Peace Corps, and I did some training, and one of the persons at the training was from the University of Hawai‘i. We paired up together to teach different languages. We didn’t teach it; we actually put the curriculum together, and then we brought Micronesians to teach their own languages. We supervised the training program.

Professor Richard Sitler from the University of Hawai‘i’s English Language Institute wrote to me after the program, inviting me to come to the University of Hawai‘i to join

the English Language Institute. This was perfect timing as we had already spent four years in Micronesia, and we wanted to go someplace where we could live “island life,” and still be able to have the privileges and opportunities provided in the U.S. Hawai‘i, just the right place.

So we came here, and I was an associate professor with the University for about a year. Dick Sitler, the chairman of the department of ELI died, and so I started wondering whether I should stay there.

Life at EWC

Joining ITI, 1967

Dr. Baron Goto found out that I was there. So he said, “You’ve got to come and work with us at ITI.” And so, I resigned from the University. At that time, actually, not really resign; I just transferred, because we were a part of the University at that time. So I transferred. And I really loved the way I got in, because Dr. Goto said, “Come here.” So he took me downstairs. This was Jefferson Hall. Took me downstairs, and Keiji Kukino was the fellow who was actually the personnel officer at that time. And he says, “I want you to put him on our payroll!”

That’s it. I said, “OK,” and that was it.

This was in 1967. But during that time, also, we had a program to train American teachers who were going to Micronesia. And we did that also in Molokai. No, this was not Peace Corps. This was actually a program that Baron Goto was willing to put together, because there was a request that came from Micronesia, to help train American teachers bound for their assignments in the various islands of Micronesia.

This was way beyond culture shock. So anyway, they said, “Is there any possibility that

we can have a program in Hawai‘i that will work out?” I’d come to EWC actually in ‘64 to work during the summer with those teachers on the island of Molokai. And the public relations officer at that time thought this makes a good story, so he sent his photographer. So the photographer at the East-West Center who came was Gordon Ring.(laughter) He was young guy, and he had a crew cut, and he came over and took a lot of good pictures. And so with that, I had some connections in here, and so that’s how I got in at the East-West Center in 1967. And with ITI.

Now, at that time, the East-West Center was established in order to improve understanding between the people of the East and the West. Through three channels: IAP, Institute for Advanced Projects; ISI, Institute for Students Interchange; and ITI, Institute of Technical Interchange. It was not designed to be a research center. It was not designed to be a think tank. It was designed through these three avenues, to bring people here who would work together, and with some of us working with them, in order to help them understand, cross-culturally, each other for the future of peace in this area. That started back in the early ‘60s.

Governor John Burns

It was a marvelous experience, because I remember at that time we worked directly with Governor *[John]* Burns, because he was one of the ones that got this institution going. And so it was great: I’d go meet people that were coming for ITI -- I was a program officer at that time -- I’d go down to the airport to meet those people. Because I had an EWC badge, I could walk right through immigration, right through customs, right to the plane. I got to know those people after awhile. “Hi Greg, got some more people coming to the East-West Center?” East-West Center was known at that

time, you know, in the community, because it was part of the community. And then I'd go meet them, and just walk them right through.

Where was the East-West Center car parked? Right at the curb, because I had a sign on the windshield, and nobody would touch it. That was it -- they knew it was East-West Center.

And then after that, we would call Governor Burns' office to schedule an appointment for him to meet the new participants. He always wanted to meet everybody that came. So we'd take them right to his office and he'll talk to them. This was after they've been here for awhile. And he'd meet them, and spent about 10, 15 minutes to welcome them to Hawai'i, and how happy we are they came to the East-West Center, and it's about understanding between East and West and all that.

And then he would allow us, as program officer, to take them every Friday for dinner someplace, as long as it was no more than \$5. And that was a lot of money. Oh, yeah, back in the '60s, yeah, that was a lot of money. And so, we go, and send him the receipt. And we got reimbursed.

Student Life, 1960s

We started out by giving the students meal tickets so they could eat down in the cafeteria in Jefferson Hall. And that was wonderful. I remember one time, a tourist came out of there, and she said, "Oh, that was the best meal that I had for \$1.90 in my life!" We had a fabulous cafeteria down there.

But then the students rebelled, and they said, "We don't want to eat [*your food*] -- give us the money." So we started giving the money, but that didn't work out, so then after that, they asked if they can actually cook in the dorms. It was Hale Manoa. And so they added

a whole bunch of kitchens, you know, and then they had all kinds of fights in there. I mean, not food fights, or not fist fights, but just misunderstandings.

We started out by putting two people from two different countries in the same room. Because we thought, at that time -- right from the beginning, that's back in the '60s -- that if you put them from two different countries -- these are the students -- that eventually they'll learn to love each other.

Uh-huh. We did it on purpose. We were just -- you know, ignorant! Just starting out. We didn't know. And finally, the students told us, "Look," they said, "all day long, we're fighting. We're in a new community. We don't know the language well. We can't study well. And all we want is to come back to our room and share that with somebody who comes from my country that understands our thinking."

So then we realized the problem, and that's why they cut them down to one person per room. I remember this gal came over -- from the mainland, I think California, but I'm not sure -- and she was really upset. And she was crying. I said, "Why?" And she said, "I'm on the floor with all the Chinese. I hate Chinese!" I said, "Why do you hate Chinese?"

She said, "Because! They cook with *ham ha!*" *Ham ha* is a fermented shrimp paste. And when you cook it, it smells to high heaven. And she said, "My cornflakes in the morning taste just like *ham ha!*" (laughter) So we had all those things going on.

There's the ideal and the real. And you know what happens is, during the real, all that stuff is going on. But after you leave -- in psychology, they call it "retroactive inhibition" -- they forget all the negatives and they remember the positives, which is good. I'm glad it works that way. But oh, we had all kinds of... They'll come and say, you know, "They're stealing my food!" [*from communal refrigerators*].

But these are some of the things that we had -- in order to achieve the better understanding of the future. Going back to ITI -- BYU [*Brigham Young University-Hawai'i*] at that time was called Church College. Church College, but they changed it to BYU later. And I called them, and they would take these three Okinawans for about a month. They could stay with them, and actually they fed them, and took care of them. That's how close we were, working with the community.

So I took them out there, and I said, these people have certain beliefs and you have to respect them. For example, they don't drink coffee, they don't smoke. And I said, "I'd really appreciate it if you don't smoke on campus -- you can go right on the beach and smoke all you want and get all your nicotine fit." And then as far as the coffee is concerned, I said, "You go down to the café or something but whatever you do don't brew it in your room, because they'll smell it and then we're in trouble, we're going to lose this relationship with them."

So then after a month I went to pick them up -- I'd visited them a couple of times -- but then I asked them, I said, "How's it going?" "Fine." I said, "Where do you smoke?" They said, "Oh, go way out -- found the bushes in there someplace." I said, "What about coffee?" They said, "Oh, we drink it in our room." I said, "I told you they're going to smell it." They said, "Oh no no no, we got this instant coffee. And we take a spoon – [*he demonstrates putting spoonful of instant coffee into his mouth, muffled, as if mouth full*] Then they had to [*sip*] hot water.

And they swish it together, a little bit at a time, you know? So they had the coffee. And another time [*at BYU*], we had a woman from Afghanistan or Pakistan -- I think, Pakistan. I still remember her name, her name was Faruz. So I told her, I said, "You're a

Muslim there," I said, "those people will try to convert you." So I said, "Be very nice, listen, but don't feel like you're being compromised."

So I went to pick her up, and I said, "How did it go?" She said, "Right from the beginning, I told them, 'I will not try to convert you if you don't try to convert me.'" And so I said, "How did that go?" She said, "No, it's no problem at all. In fact, they called me, 'Sister Faruz.'" (laughter) And I said, "Good for you!"

EWC Institutes

Oh, it was so wonderful in those days. And I worked almost 24 hours a day, but I loved it. We had programs in health (that's Harold Ajirogi), we had programs in women's interests (with Beatrice Billings), we had programs in agriculture (Horace Clay), we had programs in communication, education (that was me) and political exchange. We used to bring senators from Samoa -- American Samoa, and other Pacific Islands -- to spend a month at the State Capitol working with equivalent politicians from Hawai'i.

So we didn't bring them here [*EWC buildings*]. We either brought them to the University -- and some, you know, they worked with people -- but basically, it's to actually put them together with people. All these groups would meet with us once a week, then write reports about their interactions with the community here. So, to us, it was teaching them the cultures by putting them in the culture that America is, you know, and all the varieties that we have. And that was great.

Writers came to IAP -- that was Institute of Advanced Projects -- for one year to complete their manuscripts. They worked together over in Lincoln Hall. Every Friday, they had dinner together to exchange and share their writing and critique each other, saying "What do you think about...? "Do you really believe that?" And that's cross-

cultural understanding.

With ITI, the longest term was three months. Our responsibility was to encourage them to learn from the community. And one way was to look at recurring patterns. Significant recurring patterns. So whether they are lawyers working in the capital, or whether they were anesthesiologists working at the hospital. So they report, next time, about what significant recurring patterns they found about our groups. I mean, the groups that they were working with.

These were all avenues of bringing these people together. And it was our responsibility to create programs where they could learn from each other, you know. We had a group that came here from Alaska. And they're a group of teachers. And we brought them here in July, one of the summers, they came here. And I'll never forget; they wanted to go swimming. So, they bought their swimming suits, we went to Hanauma Bay, and they all went in the water. Then there they were, about 30 of them, standing right in front of me, shivering.

And I started laughing. They said, "Why are you laughing?" I said, "I never thought, in my life, that I'll see 30 Eskimos shivering in July, in front of me." "Well see, that's a different cold!" You know, it's not the same cold that they have there. So that's one small highlight that I have from that program.

ISI, the same thing. The idea was to get their degrees at the University, but at the same time it was our responsibility to put them in a situation where they could learn from each other -- that was the hardest one, because they get focused on the fact that they came here and all they want is an education. And so it was extremely difficult for us to get them together. I didn't have a chance to work with them until my last three years at the East-

West Center, to work with the students. And it was difficult, because there were 100 students -- every year, we'd get about 100. And so, we met on Tuesdays and Thursdays. And basically, they'd come from all over, and would take a particular subject, and then we'd talk about: for example, death and death rituals where you come from. And so they'll start explaining to each other. I did that when Dr. Sarah Miyahira was the Dean of Students and the Director of Open Grants.

Polynesian Voyaging Society /Mau Pialug /Hokule'a

One of the highlights that I'll never forget was in 1976, when the Hawaiians wanted to participate in the U.S. bicentennial. They wanted to participate and so they decided, wouldn't it be wonderful if they actually built a canoe that can go back to Tahiti -- to the Marquesas Islands?

Well, Ben Finney, who was at the University, was the anthropologist behind this. But of course, they wanted to make this trip as authentic as possible. Ben Finney asked the Center to help find a navigator from Micronesia – he knew that I worked in Micronesia earlier. I knew one personally and had heard of three others from the Caroline Islands. These Micronesian navigators would occasionally sail from such islands as Truk (now Chuk), Poluwat, Pulusuk to Saipan where I worked.

Verner Bickley was the Director of the Culture Learning Institute at that time [1975]. So I told him about this possibility, and I said, "I know that if we get somebody here, that we won't be able to pay the transportation to come here. And we won't get them in, because they're not here either as a student or with ISI, they don't fit any of the programs. Nobody will take them."

So he said, "Well, let's see." So he went down to Ets [*President Everett Kleinjans*] at

that time, and he -- *[John A.] Brownell* was the vice president at that time -- and he tried to sell that idea. And they fought it, and fought it, but finally, he succeeded.

So I wrote a letter with his signature -- Bickley -- to the High Commissioner in Saipan, who was Johnson and asked for Mau Piailug from Satawal to join us at the Center and help with the Polynesian Voyaging Society. Johnson wrote back and said, "Yes, and he's willing to come." And so he came, and we gave him the title of a Special Fellow.

Yeah, he was special. But in spite of all the restrictive rules (red tape) at that time, we were able to bring Mau to the Center. And it was marvelous, because this was the first time in the history of the East-West Center that somebody with a third-grade education from a Japanese school came as a Fellow. That's all he had. Very little knowledge of English -- knew some when he came over here. And he was our responsibility -- because he was now part of our institute, Culture Learning Institute.

I would go almost every other day, down to where he was working on the canoe. And I said, "Mau, are you sure, you know?" And he's using some Micronesian pidgin -- and I speak some Trukese. So I was able to communicate, "Bew rebwe tibwe himmetiw." "Do you think you can make it?" Because he's never been to Tahiti. He's heard about Tahiti like he'd heard about Hawai'i, but he's never been there.

I remember one time Kenzi Mad, our program officer at CLI, and I asked Mau to assure us of his knowledge and ability to find Tahiti. He humorously pointed to an airplane flying in a southern direction and said, "I will follow that bird" pointing to the airplane. One time he told us that his problem was finding a good sailing crew -- "I want people with -- (thump thump thumps on chest) -- good heart." To go with him. So anyway, the day came to set sail and Mau Piailug stood up, and his son-in-law who was a Peace Corps

volunteer, came over to interpret what his father-in-law was saying. And he told them, "When we go -- *kawika* is captain -- nobody talk to him. Talk to me. I talk to *kawika*."

And then he said that the ocean and land are different. Once we're not on land, then ocean rules will take over.

Because I asked him one time, I said, "I can understand, you know, during the day you've got the sun, you know where east to west is, at night you see the stars. What about when it's raining? What about when it's overcast? What about overcast at night too?"

"Either way," he said, "I know the patterns of the waves. So I look behind me, and I look at the wake, and as long as the wake is cutting the waves at a particular angle, then I know where I'm going." He taught us a lot.

They sailed from here. And we tracked their trip at the EWC because there was a little ship following and they would send us the signals. So we plotted their course daily. We worried when they deviated from their course and celebrated when their course was corrected. He knew -- because of the Bishop Museum planetarium [*star charts*] -- the first landfall was going to be Mata'iva. After about 30 days they arrived at Mata'iva and then later to Papeete, Tahiti. Mau had never been to or known about these islands.

In Papeete [*Mau*] decided he's not going to return on the *Hokule'a* to Hawai'i. Instead he returned to his island. Later we received an audiotape from him with his son-in-law interpreting for us. He thanked the EWC for our role in his coming to Hawai'i. He explained his decision not to return by saying he had experienced difficult conditions sailing with an inexperienced crew. So that was all, end of the program.

They actually brought it [*the Hokule'a*] back, but without Mau. Don't know who they actually had or how they did it, but most likely they sailed according to our style

navigation, besides they had that small ship following them. I told you they sent us the tape, and he said he'd never come back.

Two years later Nainoa Thompson asked the Center if it'd be possible to get in touch with Mau. And so, we gave him information to contact Mau. And believe it or not -- I guess after all this time, Mau had mellowed out, and so he came again. And there were a group of them that wanted to learn from him. So you see this cross-cultural interchange that's going on right now.

So Mau came back. And I remember he came right to my office and he sat, and I said, "How is it going?" And he says, "No good." I said, "Giving you trouble?" "No." He said, "You know, I talk. They write. No good. You go on canoe. Big storm come, big wind. Take *peba* [pidgin for paper], you lost." I said, "You know, that's how people in America learn to remember things." He said, "No. It came from my father's mouth to my ear. And went from my mouth to their ear." I said, "Good luck, buddy." (laughter) Well, time went by, he came back to visit us again. No, he came to our house, actually, and he had a beer, sitting there, and I said, "Mau, how's it going?" He said, "Good." I said, "From your mouth to their ear?" He said, "No. From my mouth, I told them they can use tape recorder." (laughter) So they put in a tape recorder. He was allowing them to sort of learn their own way, not memorization, but at least they can put a tape recorder, can memorize it later.

So since then, they traveled all over -- the Galapagos Islands -- and he came back several times to help them sail to those places. Went to New Zealand, they went to Tonga, and Rarotonga, and all those places. However, nobody mentions that he was a Special Fellow with us at the East-West Center. That's the story that's never been told. The Big Island

has an astronomy center called '*Imiloa*, which tells the story of Mau and Nainoa's adventures. But no one mentions the EWC's role in this story.

You see [*at 'Imiloa*] pictures and narrations with Nainoa Thomson and also Mau Piailug. But the story of how he came here -- that he was our [*EWC*] Special Fellow -- has never been told. This story will be told eventually.

We brought Mau Piailug over here, because we thought this would be a tremendous contribution to the people of Hawai'i who wanted to retrace Hawai'i's beginnings. And the East-West Center tried to work with them as much as possible.

Culture Boards

People used to invite our participants to their homes, invite them to luaus, invite them to birthday parties, and all that. But after we became problem-oriented institutes, no more invitations.

No, just very little, you know? Our purpose and intention was to put them in the community -- the students -- was actually to let them interact with each other, and they never did until really, when I was getting ready to retire, and I wanted to do this. So I asked at that time, Sarah Miyahira -- and Sumi Makey was also there -- I said, "I really would like to get involved with the students." And so we had fabulous things, because in that room [*pointing to a Burns Hall director's conference room*] -- across the bathroom -- we met, but also, we did culture boards. A culture board is actually where they would come up with this poster of where they came from, who they are, what was going on. That's how we started, right in that room. And, of course, we hung them, actually, all around the room. They were three high, actually. And when they come in, in the morning, before we had our muffins from Costco, they'll come in and they'll look and

say, “Did you say that? Wow! What does this mean to you?”

And that’s how this became their passport for cross-cultural interaction. But the saddest part about it at that time: EWC will not give *[us]* any funds -- the students would come in without breakfast, some of them, you know? Because we started at 8 in the morning, and so I said, “Look, we need to get some coffee,” and I was able to bring my big urn from my house to give them coffee, and I bought the coffee. I’d get some Costco muffins. And finally, I said, “I want to get reimbursed for the muffins.” And they said, “Well, it’s not in the budget.” So I kept doing it anyway, because I figured, well... It’s easier to ask for forgiveness, you know, than to ask for permission. So we did that for quite some time. And like I say today -- let me see if I can remember it right now -- “They too, have much wisdom. In this we’re not alone. To teach them, we must understand their ways, and not magnify our own.”

It’s the whole idea, after they finish the program, to be able to say to each other, “I love your difference. Because your difference has made a difference in my life.” And equity is not the product of similarity, but it is the joyful discovery of difference -- the fact that we learn more from those who are different, than those who are like us. And so these are some of the things that were imprinted on me, indirectly, by being here at the East-West Center.

CLI and Japan’s Hideko Takamine

My only regret is the fact that I didn’t speak the languages that were spoken in the Pacific. One time -- and this is later on, at my end in CLI -- Hideko Takamine is an actress from Japan who had the same reputation in Japan as Shirley Temple had here. And all the older people in Hawai‘i knew of Hideko Takamine. She came here with her

husband, who is a writer, film writer. His name was Zenzo Matsuyama.

And they came here, and Verner Bickley asked me to be responsible for them. But I said, "I don't speak Japanese." He said, "Well, do your best." So what I did -- before they came -- I went to the University and I started taking Japanese. There was a Japanese lady teaching it, but she was in linguistics so she wasn't really teaching Japanese language, she was teaching about the language. And she was doing a contrastive analysis between English and Japanese. And I wasn't interested in contrastive analysis, so I bought a tape. And driving back and forth from Kaneohe, I'd just listen and repeat, and listen and repeat, and filled up my head with Japanese.

So when she [*Hideko Takamine*] came here, I tried my best to speak Japanese, and she was trying her best to understand my Japanese, and when she didn't, she'd actually help me out in order to understand, so we became friends. And she came to our home, she gave my wife a smoking jacket. And I didn't know what a smoking jacket was -- I said it's a jacket that you wear when you smoke. And one day she came over to ask me to help her with a speech she had written when she was getting ready to leave -- she'd been here three months.

She had this speech, and she said, "Please help me with the pronunciation of English." I said, "Hideko, you speak English, don't you, for writing all this?" She said, "Yes." I said, "Why the heck didn't you tell me that you spoke English?" "Because you were trying so hard to speak Japanese, I didn't have the heart, so I wanted to help you learn Japanese."

Baron Goto

Dr. Goto was very well-known throughout the Pacific. He was the one who introduced

coffee, because he grew up in Kona. And he introduced coffee to the highlands of New Guinea.

He didn't have a Ph.D., but he had a doctorate -- he was an honorary Ph.D., because of what he did in the Pacific. He was a short Japanese man, but he was very proud of a big picture that he had in his office, because he posed with all the New Guineans, who were all naked, you know. But he was very proud, because he was right in the middle, and he was taller than all of them. (laughter)

He thought that was the best picture. He had a real heart for the community. He knew Governor Burns very well; that's why things worked out back in those days in the beginning. He was the interpreter for Governor Burns when Governor Burns was trying to establish a union in Hawai'i, and so he would go with John Burns, at that time, he would go to all the plantation camps, to get the union going. So they were "bosom buddies," so to speak.

His responsibility as a vice chancellor for ITI was to find out what type of training was needed, or what type of exposure people needed, throughout the Pacific, as well as the countries that we worked with.

He would actually go there. He would go there and find out and would come back. But here's the neat thing about it: The fact is we sometimes didn't have the money to bring the participants. So we started working on the basis of, if you can pay the transportation, we'll do the rest. The Micronesians, let's say, they wanted to have a school administrator, principal's program. Then we'd write and tell them, "This is the type of program we're going to have. And here is the contract that you can fill out with us."

And the contract would include: You pay the round-trip transportation, and also any other

expenses -- like some of them we used to take to the mainland, museum management for example -- and keep them on salary, because they'd be here for three months. We'd take care of them over here, as far as their per diem, food and the program itself, when we get the program. So this was actually working out beautifully, so we were partners in this. Well, that actually spilled over to when we became CLI. And we did that for quite a few years.

Cost-sharing, exactly. Until about the -- almost '80s, this is about two or three years back in the late '70s -- when all of a sudden, somebody came here and said, "No, no, we can't do that. We have to do it on the basis of their GNP." Gross National Product, the GNP. And then they told us we can't do that anymore. Something that was working, you know, kill it, because the other problem-oriented institutes were not doing it. You know, when we work with India, they were not allowed to actually send any money here, you know. The way we worked it out, is that, you give us credit, so if we want to do a follow-up on this program in India, you have the money to help us do it over there. But anyway, that's one feather for us that was good, but I feel bad that it was stopped.

EWC Staff

Baron Goto retired. Dai-Ho Chun took over after Dr. Goto retired. Harold Ajirogi was the program officer for health projects in ITI. Horace Clay was involved in agriculture projects. Bea Billings was in charge of women's interests, at that time -- nutrition and human development.

Dr. Shinoda was the vice chancellor for IAP, Institute for Advanced Projects. He was from the University of Hawai'i, but he's the one that would take them [*the scholars*] every Friday, and they'd interact, and say, "How far are you in your book?" "What did

you find out?" There are books that were written called *The Asian Mind*, one of them is *The Japanese Mind*; another one was actually *The Indian Mind*. Huge books. And these are the guys that worked together. You probably have them in your library.

CLI Acting Director

I moved from being program officer to assistant director, and I was assistant director almost the whole time Dr. Bickley was here. He left in 1981. And then I became the acting director, and thank God for that, because my salary went sky high. And the good part about it is, I stayed with the State as far as my retirement is concerned. And with the State, they look at your highest years of income for retirement. And it's a blessing -- the East-West Center has been very good to me.

I look back, and I remember how we used to talk about establishing better understanding. And I remember somebody asked me one time, "How long have you been here?" I said, "Well, 13 years." But of course, that was in the beginning.

And he said, "Have you learned to understand all those cultures?"

I said, "No way! I can't even understand my own culture! But," I said, "you know what? Here's Yoshi over here." And I said, "He thinks completely differently from the way I think, and we've been working together now for the last year. But I love him anyway." That's the main thing, is not to understand how he thinks. It's just -- all of a sudden, you have that personal relationship with people, you know, and that's what cross-cultural understanding is all about.

Then CLI and CI combined and became ICC. And I turned over the keys from being the acting director to Mary Bitterman. And I remember at that time, [President] Victor Li told me, he said, "You know, I really would love to keep you as the director, but you

don't have your Ph.D." But I had a lot of *aloha* for Victor Li. And Mary Bitterman came after. I'm still in touch with Mary Bitterman.

Traveling with Goto and Hewett

Bob Hewett was the director of Public Relations. He's Karen Knudsen's predecessor. He and I and Goto, we traveled together. We were traveling throughout the Pacific and we stopped in American Samoa, then went to Western Samoa. In Western Samoa, we went someplace, and a lady by the name of Fanate Larkin, Director of Education at that time, went with us. And so, to honor her, they gave her a pig. Well, it was a 300-pound pig but it was slaughtered already, and we had a station wagon. And so we're driving and Bob Hewett got very sick, and I looked behind me, and there was Bob Hewett lying down in the back, using the 300-pound pig as his cushion. (laughter)

I never forgot that one. And then from there, we went to Tahiti. And we're going around -- I remember that Baron Goto was riding up front with the driver, and Bob Hewett and I were in the back. And we stopped some place, and Goto picked up some starfruit, you know they call it "five fingers" or something like that. And he started eating. And pretty soon, the driver, in French, was talking. And Goto says to me, "What is he saying?" And I said, "Say it again," because my French is almost dead now, you know. And he said, "*Ne mange pas! Ne mange pas!*" He said, "Tell him not to eat it."

And then he gave me the word for it, and I didn't know what the word meant, and then he starts making hiccupping noises. So I said, "Dr. Goto! He says if you eat this stuff, you're going to hiccup a lot." "Oh, tell him I'm a Kona boy, I've been eating this all my life." And sure enough, he started hiccupping, and he hiccupped all night. Oh, it was bad. This was starfruit but it's kind of different from ours in Hawai'i. One that gives you

hiccupps, I guess. It was a memorable trip. So that evening, I said, "Dr. Goto, I'm going to go downstairs to buy something to eat, because this restaurant in the hotel is very expensive." And he said, "OK," so I went down, they had these kiosks, and there were teriyaki things and all that, so I bought some.

I brought it and said, "Would you like?" "No, no, no!" I said, "Have some!" "No, no, no!" He wouldn't eat it. So I ate it.

Then we went down in the morning to leave -- he would always go to someplace hours ahead of time -- we signed out, and paid our bill and then he says, "Ask him what you were eating last night from here." I said, "I know what I was eating. I was eating teriyaki and rice and macaroni salad." He says, "No, no, ask him." So I asked him. "*le chien!*" Which means I was eating dog.

Bob Hewett was a very good man. He became the director of CLI for a while and was my boss. Once he told me, "You're going to attend the South Pacific Commission Conference in New Caledonia, so send them a fax." I went back to my office and wondered, "What the heck is a fax?" Apparently they had his new invention on each floor in Burns Hall. Bob was a very kind and gentle man. He was well-traveled and informal. We had something in common: we were in Palestine during the Arab-Israeli war.

Hawai'i International Film Festival

The Hawai'i International Film Festival started during CLI times. It started actually, in the beginning of the '80s. Jeanette Paulson -- actually, that was her baby; she started it. And it was with us at CLI, then ICC. And the whole purpose was to establish better cross-cultural understanding using the films as a stimulus for after-film discussions.

Unfortunately this very successful venture was short-lived [*Editor's note: HIFF moved out of EWC but was continued in the community.*] The East-West Center decided to discontinue the HIFF.

Cross-Cultural Interaction

Cross-cultural understanding is difficult to quantify [*in publications*]. But if we told them stories about cross-cultural interaction and what happened, like, "This participant came from Korea, and another one from Japan, and when they were leaving, they were crying and hugging each other. They're two enemy countries!" They'll say, "So?" So it didn't work out; they wanted paper. They wanted products that they could see. So we were forced to produce products. We produced hundreds and thousands of books, you know?

One of the Research Fellows, Steve Bochner, was from Australia and he wrote a book -- I forgot the name of the title of the book -- he left, went back home where he was a professor. And he was traveling -- got some kind of a grant from England and he was traveling around the world -- and he said, "Greg, do you want to hear something that's absolute serendipity?" I said, "What is that?" He said, "Every place I went, I went to the library, and I looked to see if I could find my book." And he said, "It was so good to find it around the world!" And he said, "Do you know what hell is? When you turn to the back page and see the fact that nobody borrowed it."

You see, you can't measure human interaction and human understanding. How do you evaluate feelings? What kind of tests would you give these people? All you can say is there was a heart-to-heart thing that was going on. How do you evaluate heart-to-heart and basic cross-cultural attitudes?

I'm very glad to have spent a quarter of a century at the East-West Center. And I will never regret my experience. I learned how to differentiate between what is ideal and what is real in cross-cultural interactions. I am a much better qualified citizen of the world. Yeah, it was really great.

Life After EWC

Cross-Cultural Training for Teachers

[Editor's note: Trifonovitch retired from the EWC at the age of 55 in 1991.]

Well, everybody was saying, "Why are you retiring? You're too young to retire!" Yeah, too young to retire. Well, I could see things that were going to happen – it was pretty rough -- because at that time, we had the "reorganization." They said, "What are you going to do?" I said, "I'm not going to do anything." "Why?" I said, "I'm going to 'be'. Fifty-five years, I was a human doing. Now I'm going to be a human being."

And so I went to the Big Island, where I decided, OK, I'm just going to have this time to myself, but I was invited to join a cross-cultural organization to help train Hawai'i State Department of Education teachers. So for about four years I was conducting seminars for these teachers all over the islands. Almost like CLI. But then this federal program ended. Then, again the DOE, I was involved with in-service teacher training until George Bush became president. He cut all teacher training and established the "No Child Left Behind" era.

And now I am involved with DOE again in teacher education and affiliated with City University of Seattle. I will be, in fact, starting a seminar next week for four weeks. Well, the first one I taught, it was actually cross-cultural education in the classroom. The students were teacher's aides pursuing a college degree in special education. But they get

their degree from the City University of Seattle. Now, this program has been going for several years now; this is our fourth cohort. And that's what I've been doing.

They're all here. But the hardest part about it is that I have about eight of them right with me in the classroom, and then in addition there are -- one in Kona, and four in Maui, and five on this island [*Oahu*]. And it's one of the most difficult ways to run a seminar.

They are all on video. And I've never done that -- I'm an old man, you know, I know that. I like to look at people, and talk to them, and interact with them. But here, I have to look there, look there, but I'm getting used to it. (laughter) And it's working out except when we do something that we want to interact, and they can't, you know?

Starting the 15th of May, I'll be teaching English as a second language -- the techniques and so forth. And the way I do it, I teach them another language, and put them in the shoes of those immigrants that come to America and can't speak English.

Hobbies

I [*also*] still fly. I'm a pilot, yeah. So I fly them over the volcano in a fixed wing. And I am a bowl turner. I turn calabash bowls, you know. Koa's part of it. Kamani, Koa, Milo, whatever it is. Mango, yeah. I've got a whole bunch of stuff right now. And I'm a gardener. I decided that we're going to eat most of our vegetables except carrots and cabbage, because that's cheap. And so everything is growing in our back yard, so I'm dying to go [*home*], because I've been away now for four days and I want to talk to my plants again. So I do that.

I'm in construction, I built an extra bedroom and a bathroom for our son who lived in Kaneohe. But they sold that. Now they live in Manoa over here. And I added to our house, and I put an office, and lanai and all that, so I do a lot of woodworking.

Ties That Last

They asked me to be the keynote speaker -- Gordon Ring did – for the ‘60s [*alumni conference*]. They remember me. Ask Gordon, or ask Larry Smith, and they probably can tell you better -- I don’t want to brag about myself, it just won’t come out right. What would I want on my headstone? “He enjoyed doing what he did.” (laughter) Everything I did here, and everything I’m doing now, is just a wonderful thing, you know. But the East-West Center taught me a lot. Gave me an opportunity. Whenever we had the students come in, I always tried to welcome them in their own language. They always remember me from that, you know? Anyway, most of that is gone now. I’m a people person. Ask Gordon. Ask Larry Smith. Ask Karen [*Knudsen*] in Public Affairs.

Karen, yeah, she was in the Peace Corps training. Yeah, before they came over here, in the island of Chuuk, on a place called Udot. Udot, that’s where we had the training.

The Mission /Morrison Presidency

I still hold to the fact that the East-West Center’s basic mission was to bring people here, so that they can understand each other, as well as understand us. And the three avenues were IAP, ISI and ITI. But I say that when they started going into research institutes, and the researchers came, the whole thing changed. And frankly, it started going downhill. And the reason I left at the age of 55 is because I wanted to keep the wonderful memories.

On the other hand, I think that President Charles Morrison was the best pick of all the different presidents that we had before. Why? The reason is because he was home-grown. He was with us here at the East-West Center for many, many years. He knew

what the mission of the East-West Center was all about.

Before, we'd just bring people who were talking heads, who were researchers in their own right, who were educators in their own right, but they didn't know exactly what the mission of the East-West Center was all about. They thought it was -- like I said in the beginning -- a think tank or a research institute, and there are a lot of those.

But they don't have the uniqueness of what the East-West Center had.