

**Oral History Interview of
Albert Komatsu**

**Interviewed by: David Marshall
May 23, 2017
Fort Worth, Texas**

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Transcript Overview:

This interview features Albert Komatsu as he discusses his career in architecture. Albert describes the Japanese gardens in Fort Worth that he constructed, his enlistment in the Army, and his career after he finished college.

Length of Interview: 02:19:44

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David Marshall (DM):

The date is May 23rd of 2017, and this David Marshall interviewing Albert Komatsu. Right now we're at the Japanese Garden. So let's pause it for a bit. [Pause in recording] Okay. So can you tell me a little bit about the origins? I read your description of when you first arrived and what it looked like. Can we go from there?

Albert Komatsu (AK):

Well, yes. [DM picks up recorder] After a decision was made by the park's—Mr. Campbell, who was a director at the time, to purchase this abandoned gravel pit, so to speak. It belonged to Texas Electric. It was, what I call, an ecological disaster. It was nothing but refuse dumped into this abandoned gravel pit. The abandoned gravel pit had puddles of muddy water in it. Lots of weeds. It was a dumping ground for people who wanted to get rid of trash and be able to deposit that trash unseen. When I first came here, and I was asked by the park director, "Should the city buy this property? I said, "Indeed, yes." Because it was a—the topography—to the process of extracting gravel. The topography was ideal for a Japanese Garden. So they proceeded to—the city proceeded—to purchase this site. I think it's about a fourteen acre site, as I recall.

DM:

So that's very interesting. I didn't know if the city had already come up with the Japanese Garden idea, but that was you looking at it?

AK:

Well they asked me whether the park—since it's adjacent to the park—should the city acquire? And I said, "Indeed, yes." I said, "It looks like an ecological disaster, now. It's ideal for a Japanese Garden. The topography was already developed by the extraction of gravel." So the city proceeded to buy it. It laid dormant for probably about ten years. Then Ruth Johnson, who was a daughter of Amon Carter who was the publisher of the *Star Telegram* at the time, donated—I was acquainted with Ruth as a friend—so she donated the first amount of money to build a lower gate, and that gate still stands to this day. It's not the main gate anymore, but the gate is there as a reminder of the beginnings of this garden. Then it laid dormant for about ten years until fundraising began to take hold. One of the major additions was the main gate, which was very, very expensive, because we had to buy the tile from Japan. An interesting thing happened on the purchase of that tile. I had placed an order on behalf of the garden to purchase the tile directly from the Japanese in Tokyo. I talked to the gentleman, and I thought he had understood me, but apparently he didn't because I waited for about three months. I finally called and I said, "How come we aren't able to purchase this tile? The catalogue which I sent you?" And he said, "Well we have a middle man that you have to work through in Japan." I said, "Well where is that middle man?" He said, "Well he's located in California, Los Angeles." I said, "Why didn't you tell me in the first place?" He said, "Well I thought you knew how we did our merchandising through a middle man." I said, "Well I'm learning for the first time," but I said, "I will place an

order. Send you the money. But you tell me where that middle man is, where I can send the money.” So he did give me the address. We finally got the tile and then the process of design of the main gate began, and it was completed. My recollection of time is pretty vague, but I think it was about 1980 that the main gate was developed, and designed, and built. Well the gate really started the fundraising. It was on very solid ground and everybody joined in and contributed money and contributed services. The progress of the Japanese Garden took on a very rapid pace after the main gate was built.

DM:

Actually, when was the first time that you looked at the site, and said—

AK:

19—it was 1970—

DM:

Seventies.

AK:

--when I was asked to by the director of Parks and Gardens to let him know whether the site was usable, and whether it was possible for the garden to make use of that site.

DM:

But it was 1980—ten years later—when it really took off? When you got the gate?

AK:

It was about 1980 when the funds started really rolling in and interest from throughout the city took place to build a Japanese Garden. There was a—in the meantime the park director asked me to get a master planner. I got ahold of one from Austin who was the father of a director of—he was Japanese—and his son was a head of the architecture department. The name escapes me. I had him come to my house. He stayed over at my house for about three days to just appraise the whole project—fourteen acres. He said, “Mr. Komatsu, I would love to master plan this, but I’m eighty years old. You need a young man to master plan this Japanese Garden.” So I reported back to Mr. Campbell that I was turned down by this gentleman, but I said, “We still a master planner.” He got ahold of a professor—a Chinese professor—at North Texas University. The only problem was after he master planned it, he moved on out of the area, and so it fell to me to help guide the progress of the gardens, with the cooperation of the director of Parks to proceed on with the work.

DM:

Okay. When you first looked at the site you mentioned this design as, what, *Sansui*? *Sansui* the mountain and water gardens design? Did you see that immediately when you saw the gravel pit?

AK:

Fortunately, yes, because my sister-in-law taught English in Kyoto University. Kyoto is really the center of gardens and temples, and I got to visit other—recall to the Korean War. I serviced twice in the military. In the Korean War, I was recalled, and I was stationed in Korea. So I got to visit my sister-in-law and her house. And she had a beautiful garden. It was very small and compact. But she did do one thing for me that—every time I visited she took me through countless number of parks and temples. So I really got into the spirit of things when she took me through these—I would say maybe I visited her about a dozen times, and each time she—you know there's just countless number of temples and parks in Kyoto. You can't see them all practically in a lifetime, but I did see a lot of them. It really inspired me to see Fort Worth have the pleasure of enjoying a Japanese Garden.

DM:

How nice that those influences came together in the place where you lived and it came to fruition. That's just wonderful. That's good for you and good for Fort Worth that it happened that way. [Laughs]

AK:

Well I felt so fortunate to be at the right time and the right place where there was very much of an interest in developing a Japanese Garden. Not very many cities take on a task, because it's pretty expensive and pretty—it takes a long time. One of the most interesting things you might want to know is that the early period of the development of Japanese Gardens, there was a lot of—seven or eight year period—where it was required that city employees build whatever we designed. So there were times when I had to redesign something maybe two or three times where the head of the carpenter department of the city would say, “Well I think we can build that now.”

DM:

Oh, okay.

AK:

For instance, the pagoda [DM adjusts recorder] was designed—redesigned—three different times, because the fact that each time that it was rejected they said, “Well it's just too complicated for our carpenters to take on.” Well fortunately, that only lasted about seven or eight years until the parks director said, “Well we'll just break away from the city and contract us on a private basis.” That's when really the development of the Japanese Garden took hold.

DM:

Now are you talking about some of the joiner work and the wood?

AK:

Yes! Yes. They would continue to tell me, "Well we just can't. Our carpenters are just not understanding what you're trying to do." But fortunately, that ended after about a seven year period of having the city build it.

DM:

Right. Right. Okay. Can you just mention some of the standard—the motifs—that make this like the gardens in Japan? Maybe some of the plants as well. I don't know if there are plants here that are typical of what you find in Kyoto?

AK:

Oh yes. Yes. Yes. Fortunately, Fort Worth has the ecology to adapt many of the plants that are grown in famous cities like Kyoto. So we've been very fortunate that way. And of course we've been very fortunate to have very—extremely able botanists and heads of the garden who understood the [DM adjusts recorder]—and were sensitive to what a Japanese Garden was, and the makeup of plants, and stonework, and so forth.

DM:

Okay, okay. Do you know some of the—can you name some of the principal types of plants that would be found in Kyoto, for example, and also here?

AK:

Well especially the maple. You know that turns kind of reddish, and it's one of the most beloved trees because of the fact that it does change to a beautiful red color that contrasts with the rest of it. And it really also is a focal point of the planning.

DM:

Is that Japanese maple? There's a Japanese maple, I know, but it's mostly principal plant here?

AK:

Yes.

DM:

Okay. What about some of the architectural features in maybe the tea room or the gate?

AK:

We've adapted—well you know in Japan much of the structures were rebuilt every twenty years because that's how long the wood lasts. Here we found this ideal solution of Brazilian Ipe.

DM:

How do you spell that, by the way?

AK:

I-p-e. I'm sure there's a botanical name, but that's the way—that's how we purchase it from Brazil.

DM:

And you said it was a seventy year wood?

AK:

Yes. Yes. We learned through horticulture experts that that was the most commercially feasible and the longest lasting wood that was available to build a Japanese Garden without having to replace the woodwork every twenty years. In Japan that's what they do. Replace much of the woodwork. Now some of the Asian temples, of course, have lasted for centuries. But much of the woodwork there are replaced every twenty years.

DM:

So this Ipe must be a rainforest wood?

AK:

Yes, it is.

DM:

And you also mentioned that it's dowel work. It's joined with dowels, no hardware to snag?

AK:

No. Yes. Right.

DM:

Okay. I think that's interesting.

AK:

Particularly the boardwalks, which we have all around the park. We were able to select a system that there would be no nails or screw showing, but it's a very expensive system to install. It amounts to about triple the normal cost. But the park board was very, very sympathetic to the

idea because they knew that it could be some litigation if someone should get hurt. Since so many of these people in the summertime walk barefoot around the park.

DM:

Would a lot of this ever also because of ADA—American Disabilities Act?

AK:

That had a lot to do with it, too. Yes.

DM:

What year are we talking about that you started taking those considerations in regard to the park? In accessibility?

AK:

That started in the early eighties.

DM:

Right, okay. So not long after the gate was completed you started thinking about walkways?

AK:

Yes. Yes indeed. It was so expensive that it took up until about, oh ten, twelve years ago to complete the work. We had a very responsive movement—donors—who realized that it was very important that the people in wheelchairs get around to see the main aspects of the garden. So it covers the whole circumference of the park.

DM:

Really gets into every nook and cranny, I suppose.

AK:

Yes.

DM:

Do you mind if we stop this now, but to continue with this and walk around a bit and maybe you can point out some of the key features as we go? [Pause in recording] Okay, so the recorder is back on and if we can just wander around and you just show me some of the key features.

AK:

This is the pavilion area. This is where the parties and weddings take place. This is the big—this facility is the biggest fundraiser in the whole garden because they charge two thousand dollars per wedding to use this facility. It's in demand all year around.

DM:

Oh, I'm sure.

AK:

This was replaced once already. This is all but Ipe wood now, but we had to completely tear it down about ten years ago because it was of cedar and redwood, and it lasted its natural life of twenty years.

DM:

Are the trunks also Ipe?

AK:

Pardon me?

DM:

The trunks used as posts?

AK:

Yes. Yes. So the posts are Ipe. The only thing that's not Ipe is the shingles.

DM:

Is it cedar shingles?

AK:

Yes. Uh-huh.

DM:

Okay. A lot of walkway.

AK:

Yes, this is all—this walkway surrounds the whole park.

DM:

And it's Ipe all the way now?

AK:

Yeah. This is a little place where food is prepared, because there's a lot of parties here, including virtually almost a wedding a week as I understand it.

DM:

Mr. Komatsu did you design all of the pavilion and the buildings?

AK:

This is one of the few that I didn't design. It was—I think—the Chinese architect had designed it. And then, of course, there were some modifications made when I took over the rebuilding of it by having to tear it all down. There were a few minor changes made to it.

DM:

Okay. And also when you were talking about working with the Chinese professor from North Texas—

AK:

Well unfortunately, unfortunately I only met him. We never discussed anything.

DM:

Oh! Oh, oh, okay. I was just wondering what the differences in design would be between Chinese and Japanese?

AK:

Well, there is a major difference. Apparently, he did study Japanese architecture and Japanese garden design, because he was able to master plan. And of course, we used the master plan as a guide, but we, of course, over the past forty years we've had to adjust to our own ability to provide the carpenters, the plants, and so forth that were native to—our could be acquired. But it did serve as a guide overall for the development. Now this walk, as I said, continues all the way around. We'll walk around, first, around it, and then we'll get down into the pool. The ponds and pools.

DM:

Okay.

AK:

There was some interesting things that happened. One year—about every so often they have to drain the ponds to clean out the—

DM:

Really?

AK:

Because there are a lot of people who come here. They inadvertently throw things in the pond.

DM:

Oh, I see.

AK:

We have to clean it out every so often. I don't know how often, but whenever it's required.

DM:

Is it a wintertime project?

AK:

Yeah.

DM:

Okay.

AK:

One of the interesting things that happened was we have had to put these goldfish—we're going to be down there seeing the goldfish—were put in these tanks. Well somebody forgot to check the cleanliness of the tanks, and apparently had some residual chemicals in use before, and every one of the goldfish died.

DM:

Oh no.

AK:

So there was a tremendous amount of expenditure.

DM:

Oh, I'm sure.

AK:

Now, we're going to take you to something interesting here. It's the Mikoshi, which was donated by the Japanese.

DM:

Oh this is the sisters—

AK:

I designed the housing for it.

DM:

Okay, okay. This is the sister-city?

AK:

Yes.

DM:

Okay.

AK:

And this has about three major places where weddings take place. This is one of the smaller weddings. The reason why they like that is extremely nice, interesting background.

DM:

Right. And then that waterfall, as well. So acoustically—I mean with the sound adds to it. The sound of the waterfall. How about the acoustics in the design? I mean, here you are close to the interstate and close to the center of the city.

AK:

Well I think it's because we were careful to put the—this used to be a stand able—by the way, bamboo. And it's starting to grow back again. But most of the area we purposefully tried to dampen the sound with vegetation, you know, trees and bushes.

DM:

You do have some—

AK:

Around the perimeter.

DM:

--you have very thick stands of bamboo around part of the perimeter.

AK:

Yes. This object was—gift—was carted around by the Japanese people who donated it—on foot—all around the downtown area before they came here.

DM:

Oh, really? Oh.

AK:

It was a ceremonial process.

DM:

I wish I had known.

AK:

Oh they closed that darn thing. I guess it's because they open it at nine. They'd be opening it in about twenty minutes.

DM:

Right. Okay, okay.

AK:

But it's kind of an interesting thing to take a picture of.

DM:

I have pictures of it, in fact. You had mentioned in some of your writing that there are places that you can look down—the bird's eye view concept of looking down on a miniature world, so when we come to some of those vantage points, or some of your favorite vantage points, let me know. But we always gravitate to this little place because of the waterfall and the nice look. The nice perspective down this way.

AK:

It's a very—for photography and especially for small weddings—it's an ideal setting background.

DM:

Beautiful little island. A miniature again.

AK:

Yes.

DM:

In fact this is nice vantage point right here.

AK:

Oh yes. That's another place where they kind of stand. To see that little platform there.

DM:

Right, right. [waterfall sounds]

AK:

One of the few structures I didn't design was a gift shop.

DM:

Okay.

AK:

Most of the other structures I had a hand in the design of. That's the pagoda that I had to design three different times until the city could build it. [laughter]

DM:

Okay, that's one of the examples.

AK:

I think I got some sympathetic people who finally decided that the—instead of trying to save money they were going to contract it out so that we could get more authentic.

DM:

Sure, sure. How did you find people who could do it? Did you have to bring--?

AK:

Well we had to look hard, but we did find people who were extremely sensitive to joinery and so forth.

DM:

Were they local or did you have to bring them in?

AK:

Yes, they were local.

DM:

Good! Good. What are some of the elements here that you would not find in Kyoto? Some of the plants, for example?

AK:

Now I'm not a botanist, but I would say this has more deciduous trees than evergreens. Japan has both, but they're—well I've been able to discern most of their planting is not deciduous, but more or less evergreen.

DM:

Right. Right. Okay. Because I'm seeing, for example, magnolias and I'm not sure if magnolias are in Japan or not. I just don't know.

AK:

I think there are a few, but magnolias are very, very difficult because they're so messy. They shed so—and their leaves are hard to—you've got to be harvesting them some way.

DM:

And there's that fabulous gate. Where did you find the metal roofing? Or are they individual tiles?

AK:

They're individual tiles—yes. We ordered them through a catalogue—a Japanese catalogue. But that's the first element. That stood there for about ten years—that one gate.

DM:

Okay, the small gate near the gift shop is the original gate? That's the Ruth Carter? She was instrumental in that—getting that gate there?

AK:

Yes. She gave the gardens a financial lift by not only contributing herself, but she was very influential in kind of sort of twisting arms and getting interest toward people contributing to this garden.

DM:

How about volunteer work as far as the gardening itself?

AK:

Very fortunately during most of the period we have a lot of volunteers—retired people, particularly—who gave their time just endlessly toward—Because there's so much manicuring that is required.

DM:

So that must be a continuing thing? A large corps of volunteers?

AK:

Yes.

DM:

I know there's a Botanical Society. Is there specifically a Japanese Garden Society?

AK:

No, but the Botanical Society enlists volunteers constantly.

DM:

This is really a beautiful shady area right here. And quite a few pines.

AK:

Yes.

DM:

Little pine forest.

AK:

One of the most interesting—we don't have that here, and I thought of incorporating that but we haven't done it yet—in Japan, in Kyoto, there's a very famous garden with a small Buddhist worship temple on the knoll. The interesting part of that is this garden is developed in four different sections where these removable panels at once—For instance, summer. The panel for this little temple is removed so that they can constantly look out and see that part of the garden developed for summer. The same thing goes for spring, and winter, and fall. It's extremely interesting temple. I've never seen anything like it in all my travels.

DM:

Oh, golly.

AK:

Excuse me, I've got that—mixed up. That was the first.

DM:

Oh, okay. So it's the small gate that's a bit inside the large gate. It's inside and to the right as you're coming in the main gate.

AK:

That was the first structure ever built. It just stood by itself for about ten years until fundraising really took hold.

DM:

Okay. Okay.

AK:

But it did serve as a symbol of what's to come. I guess it must be closed on Mondays.

DM:

Oh, I don't know. I hadn't thought of that. It is locked up still. Are these—the hills that we see here—is this part of the contour that you saw when you first came to the gravel quarry?

AK:

Yes. Much of the contours were present because, as I say, this was a huge abandoned gravel pit.

DM:

Right. Okay. So there was not a lot of earth moving that occurred to shape it the way it needed to be?

AK:

It was minimal, so to speak. Yeah.

DM:

Well it's just such a great success story. That it goes from a mess to something as beautiful as it is. The architectural features in these buildings—are they something that you would see in Kyoto, for example?

AK:

Yes, but that, for instance, is in Kyoto almost identically.

DM:

This serenity garden? Meditation garden?

AK:

Yes. Uh-huh.

DM:

Okay.

AK:

And this was donated from people from Japan. They came over to build it. This is a kind of a contemporary version of Japanese Garden. It's not a—what we call an ancient-type, but something that contemporary gardeners in Japan tackle.

DM:

And you're talking about the feature that's close to the—do you call this the Serenity Garden, over here?

AK:

Yes. Now, that's an ancient garden identical to the one in Kyoto.

DM:

But the one with the paving stones or the river walk?

AK:

This is a contemporary look toward Japanese Garden. They came all—the people and the material came over from Japan.

DM:

Well they make good accents. Here you have the—

AK:

The ancient and the contemporary.

DM:

--and the contemporary side by side. And then also in contrast to so much of the rest of the garden that is the mountain and water garden look?

AK:

Right. This is on a very—in Japan it's even on a very level plane.

DM:

I've always thought that this spot over here was a nice vantage point.

AK:

They kind of typify these waiting stations for—in the ancient times they used to have waiting stations for the horse-drawn carts and so forth would pick them up.

DM:

Um-hm, okay. So at the end of the day you made it to the next station?

AK:

Yes.

DM:

There are a lot of nice limestone shelves in here also. Are those pretty much in the—they weren't brought in, I guess.

AK:

No, they weren't. They were here. And some of the trees like that, that was here originally because it was an area that was completely ignored. So some of these trees started tilting like that.

DM:

You're talking about that big cottonwood over there? Yes, it really is.

AK:

Yeah. Yeah. It was there in the original pit.

DM:

Okay, okay. So there was not an effort to remove everything and start from scratch?

AK:

Oh no. Something like was wonderful to have.

DM:

It is. It really is.

AK:

When can you get a tree that's bent like that? That was just a gift.

DM:

It's kind of nice, too, to have these trees that are—they are Texas, but here they are working very well in a Japanese garden.

AK:

See the reason why that was tilted is they had extracted the gravel and they weakened the foothold of the trees. But it turned out to be such a wonderful addition to the garden. I mean it was just magical.

DM:

I guess they had to pile some dirt around it, though, to keep it from continuing to fall?

AK:

Oh yeah, they had to kind of—once they got into to the site they had to do some doctoring. But it was just a gift, I mean, to have this site already with the topography already existing.

DM:

It couldn't have been an incredibly expensive piece of land either for the city.

AK:

I think they gave it to us.

DM:

Oh, okay, wonderful. Fourteen—

AK:

Well we took off—well see, we took the responsibility off their hands. They needed to clean the trash off, and it would have been very, very expensive to go through all this cleanup. But the city took over because they got the—I think, if I'm not mistaken—it was either just dirt cheap or they were gifted with it. See this is what happens if it's not Ipe.

DM:

I see! A little rot on top.

AK:

See if that half—if that was Ipe they wouldn't probably have to replace for another thirty/forty years. See how it's deteriorating?

DM:

Out on the end. Sure is.

AK:

In fact, in the main gate after about—let's see—forty years, they asked me to come look at the measure poles. They were deteriorating, but we were able to get a wood expert to say, "Well we

can impregnate that with some chemicals to give you a few more years of life without having to replace it.” So we took that option of impregnating some of that old, deteriorated timber so that it would be safe enough for maybe another ten to twelve years. We’re constantly trying to find ways of preserving—saving money.

DM:

Sure. Sure.

AK:

Because everything here is expensive.

DM:

There’s a nice pink granite accent. It’s also very Texan. Another example of a little Texas influence in there.

AK:

Much—some of that came from Japan, of course.

DM:

I don’t know what kind of ground cover that is, but it just works so well here.

AK:

Oh it does.

DM:

I guess it just doesn’t grow much higher.

AK:

We were very, very fortunate to have this gentleman—and the name escapes me, but it’s in that little catalogue—a botanist who was very sensitive to Japanese Gardens, and who also was sensitive to the idea that we had to minimize, as practical, the cost of maintaining this garden. So he was very, very good in selecting the plants for the minimal upkeep of this garden. Although when I say “minimal” it’s still a tremendous job.

DM:

I’m sure. I’m sure. But that groundcover grows right to the edge of the limestone slabs. It’s really beautiful. And these other Japanese features—are these mostly from Japan?

AK:

Yes.

DM:
Okay.

AK:
Now there's one feature, I think it's of more or less of Chinese inspiration. That's called a moon-deck over there. I don't ever recall in Japan—although they may be. I may be wrong. But I've never seen that one feature that was going to. They do a lot of performance around them—dances—around that moon deck. At least I'm not familiar with that feature in Japan.

DM:
There's another nice vantage point up here.

AK:
Yeah.

DM:
I'd really never thought about the small mountain concept here. But yeah, the miniature world. I had never really thought of it that way, but that is. It is like you're in a little mountainous area.

AK:
In Japan, when they say "mountain" they're talking about really high knolls. [laughter]

DM:
Right, right. I've been curious before about the three monkeys, as well; the hear no evil, speak no evil, see no evil. Is that a Japanese concept or is that more Western?

AK:
I'm just trying to think of whether it's of Buddhist origin. I think it's Buddhist origin. Yeah.

DM:
Okay. Okay.

AK:
Which, of course, I've met some priests from Sri Lanka, which is the old Ceylon. They come through my office to visit quite often, and they wear orange robes. They're trying establish their cultural center—a Japanese culture center—and they're trying to raise funds. I helped them design, and sketched them a proposed temple just so they can show contributors.

DM:
Okay.

AK:

There's a hundred and thirty-six Japanese corporations in Plano and Irving.

DM:

Really? Golly. Another great spot.

AK:

Now that it a very valued fish—the koi—in Japan.

DM:

Another list—

AK:

Actually, it's a carp, you know. [laughter] But it's a very decorative carp. There's two types of carps in Japan. The koi, and then they raise carp for eating. It's a very, part of their staple diet, just like salmon is to us.

DM:

Right, okay. Didn't know that. Another picturesque island.

AK:

Yeah. [thunder] That's kind of unusual. I see so much stuff on top. They used to have feeding stations for little children, but I think they kind of quit that.

DM:

Yes, okay.

AK:

Oh, they still have them.

DM:

There's one. Okay.

AK:

They put the coin in there and they get some feed.

DM:

Oh, I used to bring my kids here. They're all grown now, but they used to love—

AK:

Oh, is that right? Did you live here?

DM:

I'm from Fort Worth.

AK:

Oh.

DM:

I live in Lubbock now, but I come here—so my parents live in Aledo, so [thunder] anytime I come here I have to come over to the Japanese Garden.

AK:

I dated a lady who originally was from Lubbock, because she came here. Her husband died. Her husband and I were kind of partners on ventures. Business ventures. So I dated her for awhile and then she became sick. I used to go all the way to Lubbock to visit her. This is about five years ago. And then, we did some work. There's a town this side of Lubbock—East of Lubbock—I'm trying to think of it to where [DM laughs]—I had a very interesting experience. We appeared—uh oh—for selection to remodel their courthouse.

DM:

Oh, that's Crosbyton. Karl was telling me about that yesterday. Crosbyton?

AK:

Yeah, and it was interesting. When we went to the—excuse me—we'd better find some kind of a shelter. [thunder and wind] It's about ready to snow.

DM:

It's about to do something.

AK:

I think we'd better get up there just to wait out the splash.

DM:

Sure. I think someone's been feeding the squirrel.

AK:

Yeah. I think he's kind of waiting for us to—We'd better head for that.

DM:

One of the pavilions?

AK:

Yeah.

DM:

I'll go ahead and turn this off a minute. [Pause in recordings] So if you don't mind, could you tell me your full name and the meaning of your name? I ask because Karl had mentioned that, but I want to get it straight from you as well.

AK:

My name is Albert *Shigeki*—S-c-h—S-h-i-g-e-k-i—Komatsu. *Komatsu* means, literally, “small pine tree”.

DM:

And *Shigeki* means something as well?

AK:

My parents one time told me that, but my memory is—I lost it.

DM:

Okay.[DM adjusts recorder] So this was—your family is from Honshu, near—

AK:

Wakayama Ken [Wakayama Prefecture].

DM:

Wakayama Ken, Okay. And, so this is a orange-producing area?

AK:

Yes.

DM:

Okay. How about lacquer? Is it a lacquer producing area as well, or—

AK:

It was more agricultural. The artistic end usually came from areas where they had shrines, and more religious content.

DM:

Oh, okay. Now can you tell me a little bit about your mother and father? Your father was born there, correct?

AK:

My father was born in Japan, and came over here in 1900. He very wisely, learned the English language while—by spending his funds, initially when he landed here, by hiring an English tutor. And, as a result he was able to advance very rapidly as a construction foreman, because he was an extremely capable bilingual—being a bilingual interpreter.

Waitress:

Want more coffee, sir?

AK:

Yes, please.

DM:

And—

AK:

My mother came here in 1920 as a—

Waitress:

More water for you, sir?

DM:

Oh, yes please. Thank you.

Waitress:

I'll be right back.

AK:

--as a bride-to-be of my father, which was arranged by their parents in Japan.

DM:

What are their names, by the way? What were their names?

AK:

My mother's name is Kofusa—K-o-f-u-s-a, Honda, H-o-n-d-a. And she was a relative—a close relative—of General Honda, who was executed during World War II as a person who committed atrocities.

DM:

Okay.

AK:

My father's name was Hisakichi Komatsu. He came of very humble background, but he—and he traveled the world as a cabin boy in a clipper ship before he—So he was very well grounded on cultural aspects, having traveled the world before he married my mother. My father, having spoken English so well—during World War II my mother was interned for the rest of the war. My father did not spend one day in internment, because he was so capable as a railroad construction foreman, that the government decided that he should be exempted from internment. So he used to visit my mother in internment camp in Idaho as a most strangest bureaucratic—

DM:

Why would they send the wife and children if the father wasn't?

AK:

This was the most strange way. That was the part of the World War II in the beginning when things were so irrational. For instance, this general committed an unconstitutional act when he interned me as a citizen—sixteen year old citizen—because it was soon determined by the Supreme Court that my internment was unconstitutional, so I was released.

DM:

But you weren't.

AK:

But, I was.

DM:

Oh you were? At that time.

AK:

After the edict was issued by the Supreme Court that the government will no longer intern any citizens of Japanese extraction if there is no cause. Well there was not one case of cause for internment by any of the Japanese in the camps. So they were all—But since they were—their

homes were taken away, many of them remained in camp just because they had no place to return to.

DM:

Oh, good grief. When they released you—

AK:

I went to Saint Paul, Minnesota to finish my high school.

DM:

Right.

AK:

And then, I was drafted in World War II as soon as I graduated.

DM:

That is another—so strange that you were interned.

AK:

And then, when I finished my college education as an architect, I was recalled in the service again, and I was sent immediately to Korea where I served two years. That's how I got to visit Japan. Because every three months I was given a three day leave, and I would spend it mostly in Tokyo and Kyoto.

DM:

Such an unusual chain of events. When you were released did they tell you not to live on the Pacific coast? Did they restrict where you could go?

AK:

Yes, they did. They "advised" me not to—I don't think they could—

DM:

Force you?

AK:

--prohibit me. But they said it was inadvisable, because since we were evacuated. For instance, I was delivering a newspaper route and the day of the Pearl Harbor, I had five cancellations. The reason that each of them gave was, "I don't want a Jap delivering my newspaper."

DM:

Oh really? Golly.

AK:

I was only a sixteen year old.

DM:

Sixteen year old boy. Good grief. Who had been born there!

AK:

Yes. But that was war.

DM:

That's hysteria.

AK:

Yeah. I don't think we'll ever have that period again.

DM:

I hope not.

AK:

Where they will push the panic button. What the general who commanded—who advised President Roosevelt for us to be evacuated—didn't realize was added his own army—two hundred Japanese were in the American Intelligence—Military Intelligence. But he didn't see that aspect that there were already people in the army who were serving the American Intelligence Corps.

DM:

Right. I guess people just get so blind-sided when something like that happens that they just react however—in sporadic ways.

AK:

For instance, my brother-in-law received the second highest military honor for going into a cave in Saipan. He was an Intelligence interpreter for the Pacific invasion of the 5th Marine division. In Saipan, he volunteered to go unarmed into a cave to convince the Japanese soldiers that the war was lost and that they shouldn't get involved with bloodshed because it would be futile and they would not be able to return to their families. He was able to convince approximately nine hundred soldiers to surrender.

DM:

Really?

AK:

And for that he got the Distinguished Service Cross. And one of the strangest things that ever happened was he said when he was the intelligence sergeant for the 5th Marine division, he had to act in ways that secured information from captured Japanese prisoners immediately. So sometimes, he exceeded things like using physical violence to get information. He was stopped one day in Saipan while he was interrogating a Japanese prisoner by a colonel who said, "What you're doing is against international law." And my brother-in-law told him to mind his business. He said he had a job to do and he's doing it. Well, he was reported to his commanding colonel, and the colonel said, "I don't know why you smarted off at the one particular officer, but I'm supposed to give you a little reprimand." He said, "Well what about?" He said, "That was Colonel Elliot Roosevelt, President Roosevelt's son who told you to cease what you were doing!" He said, "I just reprimanded you, now you go on doing what you're doing for us." [laughter]

DM:

Oh, that's great. What is your brother-in-law's name?

AK:

Hoichi Kubo—K-u-b-o. He was a very brash type of person, but extremely action-oriented.

DM:

Has anything been written up about that?

AK:

Oh there've been quite a few articles written.

DM:

I'll look it up.

AK:

When he died he had a ten gun salute. The military just appeared—we didn't get any forewarning—at the time of his funeral that I attended in San Jose. Ten soldiers showed up to—the military hadn't forgotten his deed—and they gave him a ten gun salute.

DM:

That is just a great story. Oh my. But so many paradoxes in this, you know? Starting with your father—

AK:

I could write a very interesting book about that.

DM:

You could. You could. You should.

AK:

Because here's my mother, who is just a harmless housewife.

DM:

And your sisters.

AK:

And sister being interned. And my father, who was extremely gifted in English, but not being interned.

DM:

Right. And the railroad system being so necessary.

AK:

Well they were so direly short of skilled people, because they had drafted everybody as a soldier.

DM:

And then you being drafted after being in internment camp!

AK:

Just shortly after, yeah.

DM:

And then, going on the G.I. Bill, right? [laughter]

AK:

Yeah. There was so many interesting contradictions, you know?

DM:

I'm just glad it turned out okay. [laughter]

AK:

That was a very interesting part of my life there, because here are all these contrasts. My father visiting my mother in internment camp. She was kept in internment for the whole length of the

war. My father and I spent—I spent four months, but he never spent one day. And he was not a citizen!

DM:

Well, you know that just reflects how un-thought out this whole thing was. It was poorly, poorly thought out.

AK:

Oh yeah. See my father could not be—he was very fluent in English, but he could not become a citizen—but had a federal law saying Japanese and Chinese cannot apply for naturalization at that time. Now they changed that immediately during the war, where the Chinese could become naturalized, but not the Japanese.

DM:

Really? Oh, because of the ally.

AK:

Huh?

DM:

Because they were allies.

AK:

Uh-huh. So here was all of these funny contradictions, you know. Believe it or not, most of the sons of these families were in the service. [laughter]

DM:

Golly. Well and then toward the end of the war you were in the service, and you were—what—helping out with the books? Correct? Because of your math skills?

AK:

Yeah. I was taken out of the infantry, after I finished infantry training, because I had extremely high math scores. So they didn't want me to be in the infantry. My group went overseas during the Battle of the Bulge, and here I was sent to finance school in Indianapolis, because they felt that my talents—

DM:

I'm glad you had those talents because those guys that went to the Battle of the Bulge, they lost a lot of men.

AK:

Oh yeah. They got pretty bloody.

DM:

Right. Right. This math aptitude went back to your childhood, as I—

AK:

Yes. Yes, I was very—I got perfect grades all the way through high school.

DM:

And then, Karl said—

AK:

I mean college.

DM:

Oh, okay. And then Karl said that you liked to build models as a child?

AK:

Oh yeah.

DM:

What kind of models did you build?

AK:

Planes, and ships, and so forth.

DM:

Yes. Okay. You liked to build things. Did you ever think about architecture when you were a child?

AK:

Interesting enough is, when I was a sophomore in high school we were asked to write a theme about any subject and I chose gothic architecture. And the reason why it intrigued me—even as a youngster—was the fact that there was so much dedication to gothic architecture. Some of these churches took two hundred years. The architects and people who realized it, they were so possessed with their worship of God that they dedicated themselves for the rest of their life, even though they would never see the church. That intrigued me. That dedication was so profound. So I said, “I’m going to go into architecture.” Just by accident. I was pretty mature on my reading, and so I was determined that as a second sophomore that I would become an architect.

DM:

Okay. And I understand that MIT offered you a place in their grad school, or in their school?

AK:

Yeah. The only problem was I couldn't—my tuition at the University of Minnesota would cost seventy dollars a year. MIT wanted a thousand dollars a year. And a thousand dollars was a person's salary during that time.

DM:

Right. Yeah.

AK:

I said, "Well I'd love to go to MIT, but I don't have that kind of income."

DM:

Um-hm. But G.I Bill helped you with Minnesota?

AK:

Minnesota paid all my expenses.

DM:

There you go.

AK:

Because that tuition of a thousand dollars—it took less than a thousand dollars to pay the tuition and board and room, whereas MIT's thousand dollars was just tuition.

DM:

How was your experience at Minnesota?

AK:

Wonderful.

DM:

Did you get into a good architectural program?

AK:

Yes. Yeah, it was very good. Yeah.

DM:

What year?

AK:

So I have no regrets.

DM:

What year did you graduate from Minnesota?

AK:

Nineteen fifty-one. And a week later, I was in the service. [laughter] I was on my way to Korea!

DM:

Fifty-one was a—

Waitress:

Do you want more coffee, sir?

AK:

Yes, please. Just a little warm-up. Thank you very much. You're very kind.

Waitress:

Okay. Yeah I got you. There you go.

AK:

Would you like another?

DM:

I'm fine—well if you want one, let's get you another. You want another?

AK:

Yeah, I'll have—

Waitress:

I'm out of the apple.

AK:

Well, whatever.

Waitress:

Whatever I've got? I've got apricot and then—that'll work for you?

AK:

That'd be fine. [laughter]

Waitress:

Okay.

DM:

Fifty-one was a hard time to—maybe not a great time to get out of school.

AK:

Well unfortunately, I had married and the baby was on the way. So when I got overseas the baby was born. Karl.

DM:

Oh, really? Is that right? Oh my. But you were still doing some—you were able to apply some of your architectural skills there?

AK:

Oh yes. I became an Army engineer, and because the Air Force had just become a branch of its own, they didn't have any engineers. So they solicited me to be attached to them. I was more than glad to be attached to the Air Force because that meant that I wouldn't be on the battlefield. So I did a lot of construction work for them. Air fields, small chapels, all kinds.

DM:

Were you designing runways and this kind of thing, or the buildings associated with it?

AK:

Both.

DM:

Both? Okay.

AK:

Runways and buildings.

DM:

What kind of runway construction was going on?

AK:

Well interesting enough, I had a responsibility of designing landing fields all along the Pacific—the Caribbean. What happened was, they had these guide stations for these missiles being shot down the Caribbean for two thousand miles. This was where the astronauts would fly short distances. As the technology improved, they flew more and more. So they would fly maybe five hundred miles. Then the next improvement missile system, they would land a thousand miles. Eventually they were landing two thousand miles down the Caribbean, and I built these strips for them.

Waitress:

Here you go, y'all.

AK:

Thank you.

Waitress:

Yeah, these are the apricot ones.

DM:

Thank you. Perfect.

AK:

Thank you.

Waitress:

Yeah!

AK:

And that was a very interesting thing because the Caribbean at that time was extremely unpopulated, and where there were populations, there would be natives scantily dressed putting things on their heads to carry. [laughter] Now, it's nothing but vacation spots—tourist spots—now. But at that time it was virgin territory.

DM:

Oh golly. Don't you wish you had invested in a little bit of land at the time?

AK:

Oh! Oh my goodness, yeah! [DM laughs]

DM:

And so this is while—this is during the Korean War?

AK:

Yes, uh-huh.

DM:

That you were going to the Caribbean to— isn't that interesting? I didn't know that.

AK:

For instance, Commander Shepard—while I was designing these things—Commander Shepard flew one thousand miles down the Caribbean and landed about a thousand miles from the Florida airfield.

DM:

Right. Right. [laughs] Golly. Well after Korea you stayed in the Reserves for a while? In fact, you became a major, right?

AK:

Yes. I was due to become a colonel in about a year's a time, attending what they call Commanding General Staff School. The only thing is, I saw Karl—I gave him a car, and he was not very—should I say—careful about who he would—you know he was a kind of a guy who wanted to be a good fellow, and so there were all kinds of characters wanting a ride from Karl. And I saw that there were some people that were going to get him in trouble. So finally, I said, "I've got to decide to stay in the Reserves or make sure that Karl doesn't get into trouble." Well, I'm going to tell you a little secret.

DM:

You want me to stop—

AK:

About Karl.

DM:

You want me to stop the recorder or—

AK:

Well, whatever you want to do.

DM:

It's fine. I don't mind running it, but if you want me to pause it I will.

AK:

The reason why I quit the Reserve—I only had two years to go and get a pension. But Karl got into a little—he gave a ride to a very unruly gentleman, and he did something—this gentleman—did something that was completely—well, surprised Karl. He asked to be taken to a put-put golf course. So he wanted to be a good fellow, and took him to the put-put golf course. As soon as they got there, this rider he gave started cursing the owner of—the proprietor of—the golf course. Karl got scared because he didn't know what was going on, so he drove away. He copied his number down, and the next day I get a letter from the police department saying, “Mr. Komatsu, there's a truant officer here that would like to speak to you.” I said, “Okay.” The truant officer said, “Mr. Komatsu, your son got into a little trouble, and I need to have an interview with you. I want you to be at my office at nine o'clock in the morning tomorrow.” I said, “Certainly. I'll be there.” I go over there, and he said, “Let me tell you this story.” He said, “Your son—your license number was taken—copied—by the proprietor and reported to the police as a person who had a occupant who insulted not only the proprietor, but he did a very bad thing. He shouted curses to the proprietor and people around him at our golf course.” He said, “Mr. Komatsu, I was a truant officer in California—Los Angeles, California—for twenty years. There are lots of Japanese children there. I never had one enter my office.” He said, “I come to Texas. My first month, I get a Japanese child in my office.”

DM:

Huh.

AK:

He said—reported—to me. He said, “You're the first Japanese person that I've ever had in my office.” He said, “In the Pacific coast they're all well-behaved. But there was a proprietor that reported your son as being extremely unruly.” Well, it wasn't Karl, but it was his occupant.

DM:

Oh, yes. Right. Right.

AK:

I said to myself, “I don't want to get him in any more trouble. I'm quitting everything and spending my full time on him.”

DM:

It was either your children or the military.

AK:
Yeah.

DM:
So you had to make a choice.

AK:
Yeah, and the military was inconsequential at that time, because I was a practicing architect.

DM:
Well, that's another interesting twist to your story. That you were interned, you were drafted, you were on the G.I. Bill, you became almost a colonel. You became a major in the—It's just an amazing story.

AK:
But I also had the distinguished experience of having the first Japanese that this truant officer ever—[laughter]

DM:
Well that was just kind of accidental, though.

AK:
Well, I think Karl learned a very valuable lesson, too, about that he has to be a little bit selective in giving rides. [laughter] He tried to be a jolly-good-fellow, you know?

DM:
It's just part of the growing up process. You were at Fort Walters for a while?

AK:
Yes.

DM:
That's my neck of the woods. You know, it's out toward Weatherford—Aledo, Weatherford, but I have family in Mineral Wells, also.

AK:
I've got an interesting story. I was there for about eighteen months awaiting my discharge after returning from Korea. I said to my wife, "I don't want to stay in Mineral Wells coming out of a military town. I'm going to go get our family into Weatherford." Well I kind of liked that. It's a very—the people are—it's like an ordinary city, whereas Mineral Wells is like a military city. So

I moved our family over there. I get this call from the colonel saying, “Mr. Komatsu—Lieutenant Komatsu, I want you to come to my office at nine o’clock in the morning tomorrow.” I said, “Yes, sir.” He says, “Lieutenant, I got a report that you’re living in Weatherford.” I said, “Yes, sir.” He said, “You do know your part of your duties assignment is being head of housing in Fort Walters?” I said, “Yes, sir.” He said, “That being the case you will move from Weatherford to Mineral Wells.”

DM:

Oh, really?

AK:

“Within the next thirty days.” I said, “Yes, sir.” [laughter] That’s the military for you.

DM:

Well that’s another unusual thing. Here you are, an architect already, but you’re placed in charge of—you’re a housing officer instead of designing something or helping with the facilities on the base.

AK:

Well, see, the military was getting—they don’t have that program anymore, where civilians entrepreneur—with the sudden influx of military at different bases they needed immediate action on housing. So they would employ civilian entrepreneurs to build immediately—within, say, six months—housing for their families. Like Walters. We had three hundred houses built for enlisted people, big families in the military, and officers. It no longer exists because, I think they’re probably owned by civilians now. But it was designated for the military usage. Because there are a lot of things during the recall—like the Korean War—where they had to do things immediately. So what they do is hire civilians—entrepreneurs—to get quick action.

DM:

Sure. Sure. Okay.

AK:

So we would get, for instance, three hundred houses in a matter of five months. If they made a lot of money, they acted quickly. [laughter] I mean during a military crisis, the military doesn’t spare expenses. They make it so attractive for all these opportunists.

DM:

So they’re ready to jump on it?

AK:

Yeah.

DM:

When did you end up moving to Fort Worth?

AK:

In 1954 I finally was released from the military. And before I was released I had three calls—I don't know where they got my name—I had three firms in Fort Worth offer me. So I was in uniform one day, and the next day I was in their offices. [DM laughs] I mean my transition was so wonderful.

DM:

Well, what was the earliest? I know you worked for Wyatt Hedrick, but you also worked for Bell and GD? General Dynamics?

AK:

I did a lot of their work overseas.

DM:

Right, in Iran?

AK:

The Bell telephone work was just remarkable. I designed a whole town for three thousand Bell workers and their families. You know that meant—

DM:

That's something.

AK:

They probably had about five to six thousand people and immediately needed housing. So when I was in Iran I designed this town for them. Post office, shopping center, chapel.

DM:

Just from scratch?

AK:

Scratch. The only problem was the construction was about thirty percent done when the revolution began. But in the meantime there were early people from Bell living in some of the townhouses. This chapel—I can see the turning of the military taking over, because they

commanded—the Iranian army commanded that the chapel be a mosque instead of a chapel. The chapel was already done. They said, “We’re going to assign an architect to you that will make some changes to this chapel.”

DM:

Like a minaret and things like that, huh? [laughter]

AK:

Yeah. And I wasn’t going to argue. By that time, the army had taken over. I could sense that there was going to be a revolution because they were doing things on that kind of basis that you could see that turnaround. I don’t think the Shahs saw it.

DM:

Okay. That kind of affected your design, anyhow. [laughter] Well what an opportunity to be given the chance to design a town.

AK:

It was quite an experience because I spent the better part of two and a half years going back and forth. There was some of the Iranians that were very hospitable to me. For instance, when I first got there they said, “Mr. Komatsu, we want you to take yogurt every day in the morning. A bowl of yogurt.” I said, “Why is that?” They said, “Well yogurt has a way of insulating you from diarrhea.” They said, “The westerners, when they come here—” because the sanitation is so bad—see a town of three million in Tehran doesn’t have a sanitary system. It all goes in the ground.

DM:

Golly.

AK:

Can you imagine? Three million population.

DM:

So you ate your yogurt, I guess.

AK:

Yeah. And it did insulate me. There’s something about yogurt that fights harmful bacteria.

DM:

Right, okay.

AK:

I didn't know it back then. The natives do.

DM:

Good advice, anyhow. Well this idea of planning a town reminds me of something that you did later on, and that was planning a college campus. The master-plan.

AK:

Yeah, UT. I master planned Tarrant County College. I master planned the Northeast Campus, which by the way has about twenty thousand students now.

DM:

Really?

AK:

And then, UTA, which has probably fifty thousand students now. I was very fortunate to—and then Howard Payne College.

DM:

Oh yes, I'd forgotten about that.

AK:

I master planned four campuses. Howard Payne, Parker County, and then—Oh, by the way, what's that A&M campus in Stephenville?

DM:

Tarleton.

AK:

We master planned Tarleton.

DM:

So five actually? Okay, so Weatherford College—

AK:

It's called Parker County, I think.

DM:

Parker County, TCJC Northeast Campus—the original campus, UTA, and Tarleton. Am I missing one? Oh, and Howard Payne in Brownwood. Oh, how nice.

AK:

That was a very interesting experience. Now the UTA really paid the bonuses because we followed up later on with doing the engineering school, and the math and language school, and the business school. All three schools. And they were major projects.

DM:

Oh, golly. I can just imagine. You do the master planning, you do most of the buildings, as well.

AK

Yes.

DM:

Design most of the buildings. How nice. Are there particular architectural elements that people can look at and say, "That's Albert Komatsu"?

AK:

Well we used to have a—shall I say—imprint on the kind of work that was identified with our work. We also did the Tarrant County Administration Building, the city county Police and Power Station. They're all still up there. Then did we did all of Bell Telephone's work, which is now AT&T. One of the most interesting things about AT&T was, when I did a sixteen story tower for them, they said, "Now we've got one requirement. No windows in that building." I said, "What? No windows?" They said, "Yeah. We want to put all our switch gear—in the Pacific coast there are some revolutionary nuts that are throwing bombs into a communications building, and we're not going to have that experience in this building. So I said, "Well okay, but let me put a little band up on the twelfth floor." They said, "Well we're going to let you do that. They won't be able to throw a bomb up there." So fast-forward twenty years later, it took only about a five thousand square foot, or about a quarter of a floor to put all that equipment in because everything had been miniaturized by that time. All this switch gear, which aided in the transmission—all that heavy stuff just became extremely obsolete. So then AT&T said, "Mr. Komatsu, we're going to convert this whole building into personnel, because we have hundreds of personnel we need a home for." I said, "Now wait a minute. You guys told me 'no windows'. You realize there's no windows in it?" "Well yeah, we realized it, but we have a need for several hundred people to find a home, and that's the most handiest building." They said, "You change that into a personnel building." I said, "Well, okay." [laughter] So I did it. And the first person—we had a ribbon cutting and dedication of the building as a tower for personnel in the entire Dallas and Tarrant County area. The first guy who enters the building looks around like this—I was there for the dedication—and he said, "What crazy architect would design a building—sixteen stories for personnel—and not one window in it?" [laughter]

DM:

That's funny.

AK:

So that's some of the things that architects have to go through.

DM:

Oh my. Well, I'm sure there are a lot of things like that. Like budgetary issues. "Oh yeah, we have the money for it," but then they don't have the money for it. Or I don't know, maybe projects that fall apart because of lack of.

AK:

You know it's amazing. This transformation has taken place on a high tech basis, especially communications. I mean it takes probably one hundredth of the space now, one hundredth of the space that it used to take for all this equipment. For transmission? I mean it's amazing what technology has advanced.

DM:

Right, right. And you know a good telling sign of that are our little cell phones that take photographs, and videos, and we can access the internet. Oh my. But on the other hand now buildings probably require a lot more in the way of electrical outlets, and Wi-Fi capability, and all these kinds of things to support that technology?

AK:

It takes just a fraction of the space, but that fraction of the space costs as much as a big building because of the high cost of technology.

DM:

Right, right. I've heard a couple of things that are characteristics of your architectural style, so I'm going to toss them out here and get your reaction to them. Like Shady Oaks Townhouses? Your interior courtyards? The lighting? The interior lighting? The white walls that reflect lighting? Are these characteristics that you would say are typical of you?

AK:

I was kind of a groundbreaker for—for instance, Fort Worth never had—as you've probably seen, those white ones—never had a project that was all white. Inside and out. But it took hold very well, because all of them were immediately, "See ya." In their early stages, I had designed the first units. The banker says, "Mr. Komatsu, we know you just designed them, but we want you to be owners." I said, "Why is that?" They said, "Well we never—condominiums are new to us. We don't know anything about them. You do. We want you to be a part of the investment

group.” So I turned from a designer to an investor, because that was the only way that I could build those all white.

DM:

Okay. Okay.

AK:

I mean that’s the way that Fort Worth was. They were all married to all these traditional houses, and so when you design something like those white townhouses it was new to them, and they were very insecure about loaning money unless the designer had his money involved.

DM:

[laughter] Right. That makes sense. That makes sense. Over at the Japanese Garden I notice the buildings are—they have a white exterior, often, and then some natural wood—vertical pieces. Is that your design?

AK:

Um-hm.

DM:

Okay. So there’s that white again. It’s very nice. Also, something else that seems characteristic is—

AK:

See, except for the gift shop, and that rock garden shelter, most of the other work is our work.

DM:

Okay. Okay.

AK:

Those two were—it’s called a Ryo—it involves the very classic garden in Kyoto. The Ryōan-ji Garden. That and the original pavilion. That pavilion has been rebuilt, of course. Those are the two structures that this Chinese architect had done. We’ve done the gate and everything else.

DM:

Something else that I know is—I know when Karl designed the Southwest Collection out at Texas Tech he was interested—not just in the interior—but the exterior space as well. Is that something that you’ve emphasized also?

AK:

No. Karl had the most influence on that particular building, because they were trying to kind of capture not a very modern type of building, something that kind of fit into the campus. So Karl was a Johnny-on-the-spot on that one.

DM:

I'm talking about with other projects, though. Do you put a lot of emphasis into the outside spaces as well.

AK:

Oh yeah.

DM:

Okay. Well, I mean you designed five master plans for universities, so I guess you would have to.

AK:

Yeah, we were very interested in the spaces that these buildings form.

DM:

How about green spaces? Are there places where you want it lush, for example, on these campuses?

AK:

Yes. Yeah. Because sometimes they didn't follow through with it, because if they ever try to cut down on the cost the first thing that came around was their landscaping.

DM:

That's unfortunate.

AK:

Yeah.

DM:

They were looking at practicality, though. They needed building space.

AK:

Well, especially funds. They're always trying to stretch their funds for buildings and not the surroundings.

DM:

Right. Right.

AK:

That was the nature of campus, you know?

DM:

I think Texas Tech—this probably happens with other universities as well—I think Texas Tech has grown out of that because they've realized along practical grounds that this is what gets younger kids interested in coming to Texas Tech. The beauty of the campus itself.

AK:

Oh yeah. [laughter] That's right. I think Texas Tech is very careful on the form of exterior spaces that are developed by the buildings.

DM:

Right. It has become a very beautiful campus because of that. So back to early Fort Worth. You came to Fort Worth in 1954 as an architect. Were you working for Wyatt Hedrick pretty early on?

AK:

Yes.

DM:

Right away, or?

AK:

In fact he was—well actually the first three years I worked for a firm called Charlie Armstrong, because he was the first to offer me the job. But he didn't have—produce the architecture that I kind of liked, so I soon—after about five months—I left him and joined Wilson, Patterson, Sowden, Dunlap & Epperly, which was the second largest firm at the time. Well, I worked there for about a year and then I had a call from George Dahl personally himself. Said, "Mr. Komatsu, we want you to come to work for us." I said, "Well, you're in Dallas." And they said, "Yes, but we'll make it worth your while." So went there for about a year, and then I got tired of commuting.

DM:

Oh yes.

AK:

From West side Fort Worth. So I said—so by that time Wyatt Hedrick had offered me, so after a year at George Dahl's office I joined Wyatt Hedrick. By that time I had a person from Weatherford called—let's see—

DM:

Doss.

AK:

Doss. Yeah.

DM:

James Doss?

AK:

James Doss. Yeah, he was a banker. Very widely respected. Very religious man, by the way. He had me design homes in El Paso. He was a big investor. People didn't realize, but he invested in Oklahoma City, Odessa, El Paso, and—let's see, what else?—

DM:

I didn't realize that.

AK:

Oh yeah. He had big investments there. He was quite an entrepreneur. It all started by the fact that he came—he had me design these homes in El Paso, and he kind of liked us. He was in the development business, so he got me to design a little what they call the Presbyterian—it was a headquarters for the Presbyterians in Texas in Denton.

DM:

Oh, okay. Right.

AK:

And then, after that he was influential in getting me to design the Presbyterian Church in Weatherford. The very interesting thing there was, we put a statue of Mary Martin, because she was a native of Weatherford at one time, and she came for the dedication. She asked who the architect was, and then Doss pointed out to her. She comes over and gives me a kiss.

DM:

Oh, how nice.[laughter]

AK:

I didn't wash my face for the whole week. [laughter]

DM:

I know the statue. Yeah, Mary Martin, Larry Hagman—her son. Yeah, Weatherford people. Did Doss get you into the university planning over there in Weatherford?

AK:

He got me into Weatherford College. They had two million dollars' worth of government funds, five hundred thousand dollars' worth of Parker County funds, and we did a campus. Now I had to stretch out that campus because—in other words, I had to put air conditioning on top because they didn't have money for ducts and all the expensive air condition. James wanted the biggest amount of area, so I had a very untypical of a campus. I had to put rooftop air conditioning in order to get the space that he wanted. But it did one big thing. It got Parker County Junior College started to—on a growth basis, because we had enough space. If I had to go through the conventional construction, we would only have had half the campus. So it was very cheap buildings, but a lot of them.

DM:

What about the site choice? Was the site already secured when you put in to design it?

AK:

No, James took me around.

DM:

Really?

AK:

Yeah, different sites. He said, "I kind of like this site, Al." I said, "Well I do too, James. Let's get ahold of that one."

DM:

It's a good site. It's a very good site. People call it "Harvard on the Hill" because it kind of goes up the hillside.

AK:

So that was quite an experience, stretching two million dollars of government money for a campus.

DM:

Uh-huh, sure. It's amazing. [laughs]

AK:

James is pretty good at—he was a small-time banker, but he really made the dollar stretch. Now there's one thing that you out there—it's a kind of a comical thing. As my firm grew and his business grew, he decided to do a South Park. He saw that North Park was such a wonderful—you know that shopping center by Niemen's? You've been there. He says, "I want to build something like that on the South side of Dallas." So he bought two hundred acres at Route 12 and that main highway that goes across. And then he got his favorite clients like Montgomery Wards, and all these different people that were—He had two big shopping centers with all these big clients—JC Penny's and all. So he sent out notices to them. They sold him the site and so forth. He didn't get much of a response. So he finally kind of started badgering all these people that he'd been doing business with, saying, "Well, how come you guys are showing some resistance on this site?" They said, "Mr. Doss, we want to get together with you in a private meeting. Now it's only going to be the presidents of all these companies—nobody else. No secretaries. He said, "Well that's kind of strange, but okay." They all met together in a closed situation. They said, "Mr. Doss, we want to be square with you. You're wondering why we're resisting helping you build South Park in South Dallas." He said, "You know, we have to face hard realities. This is a predominately black area. A lot of our shopping extra properties made in the evening shops in a big mall. North Park makes a lot of money in the evening shoppers. This area that you picked we will not get hardly a soul shopping." He says, "Why?" He said, "Mr. Doss, this is a black area. We've had the experience in black areas, people are afraid to shop. This is a reality and that's why we're having this closed meeting that nobody else—Because we don't want you to know that we're not prejudiced, we just—we're facing reality of the times right now."

DM:

Well, what came of that?

AK:

He had to sell it at dirt cheap.

DM:

Really?

AK:

Oh yeah. But it's very interesting how things—now things have progressed a little bit differently.

DM:

Right, right, right. Yeah. You just never know then, do you? Never know how people are going to react.

AK:

No. Well you know, we have a situation out of South side, where only Hispanic's roles are. You know where that Felix Avenue, and I-35? That's ninety-nine percent Hispanic. There's not a—

DM:

So some of the dynamics that come into play?

AK:

Yeah.

DM:

You know what? I seem to recall you had some business dealings with the Leonard Brothers, didn't you?

AK:

Oh yeah.

DM:

Can you tell me about them?

AK:

I became sort of a favorite of Mr. Leonard. I did his home for him and his daughter's home. He liked it real well, that he got me involved in other things.

DM:

Now, which Mr. Leonard, because there were brothers?

AK:

Marvin. The Marvin. See the other Leonard, Obie Leonard, came along later. Here's what Marvin told me. He said, "My brother Obie had this little store, and I had bought six blocks of major stores. I said, 'Obie, I want you to join me and be my partner.'" And Obie told him, "No. I'm okay." But he said, "As we grew Obie finally said, 'Okay, I'll be your partner.'" [laughter]

DM:

What were they like? What was their personality like?

AK:

Obie was—both of them were very, very friendly to me. But Marvin somehow took me under his—and he had—country clubs were only for Caucasians, but Marvin took me under his arms and he said, “I want you to become a member of Shady Oaks Country Club.”

DM:

Oh, so glad.

AK:

He was old fashioned, but at the same time he was—

DM:

Progressive, in a sense.

AK:

Progressive. Yeah.

DM:

How nice.

AK:

You know at one time—and you probably recall—he had about nine blocks of enterprises plus that Subway. He even built the Subway.

DM:

Uh-huh. I remember. When did that come in, by the way? That little Subway?

AK:

That came in, in the seventies.

DM:

Karl and I were talking about that, because Karl's maybe five-six years older than me, but I remember being excited about riding that little Subway. For a kid that was—it's a small Subway, but it was—

AK:

You know it's almost by accident, but probably by fate, I was very fortunate in the early sixties. For instance, the Luthers developed Ridglea —the entire Ridglea area. Well Luther had a daughter named Nancy, who's now living in Tennessee, who asked me to design the chandeliers and the wall sconces for the newly-built Ridglea Country Club. She said, “Do architects”—I had

just opened my office, and hardly—except for Mr. Doss—hardly any other clients. I said, “Oh, I’ll try them.” Well she liked them so well, she introduced me to the who’s-who of the Westover Hills. I was very fortunate. And then Ruth Johnson, who was Amon Carter’s daughter, asked me to design a cover for the Chamber of Commerce magazine—monthly magazine. I’d never designed a cover before, but I knew who she was so I said, “Sure. I’ll take it.” I designed a cover, which featured all the arts. The symphony, opera.

DM:

Fort Worth arts?

AK:

Arts, yeah. She loved it so much that when she became chairman of the—can you imagine a woman become chairman of the Building Committee of the University of Texas system? The first thing she thought of was for me to get involved at the university. That’s why I got to be selected—as a young architect—to design the campus.

DM:

That’s amazing. So it’s a word of mouth thing?

AK:

Yeah.

DM:

It’s interesting that you’re a designer. So it’s not just buildings. It’s designing anything.

AK:

See the thing that was fortunate was, the who’s who of Fort Worth at that time—Amon Carter’s daughter, Marvin Leonard, Mr. Luther who developed the entire Ridglea area—by fate and accident they befriended me when I had a two room office, you know?

DM:

But it was also talent, and it was also your personality, I’ll bet. Because you have to be gregarious to get in.

AK:

But I was so fortunate that those three befriend me in my first five years of practice.

DM:

That’s wonderful.

AK:

Isn't that something? Yeah.

DM:

Uh-huh. Can you tell me a little bit about Wyatt Hedrick's personality?

AK:

He was a very, very interesting architect. Wyatt Hedrick—let me give you an idea. I had a nephew in Hawaii who had what they call "Orchids of Hawaii." He would make a lot of money during that time where service stations would buy his Orchids. On opening day they would have these little bands of orchids. They would pass them out in order to develop a customer contact. Well one day they send me a nice orchid plant, so I took it to Mr. Hendrick. I was in his employ at the time. Here's his mentality. He says, "Mr. Komatsu. I appreciate it. Let me pay you for them." [laughter] That's the kind of personality Wyatt Hedrick was. And another time it was reported to me by one of his employees that he had this huge ranch and a [inaudible] [01:54:00] or something. He saw this Mexican boy traipsing around his ranch, and he was capturing some kind of animal for the pelt. So he stomps over to this Mexican boy and he says, "What are you doing on my ranch?" He said, "Well, I'm trapping these animals." He says, "I'll tell you what. I'm going to buy all the traps you need, but you and I split it." [laughter] That's the kind of mentality he had. I mean I could write a book of all these comical things.

DM:

Very practical oriented, huh? Karl told me about you working late one night for him with your light on above and one on each side. Can you tell that story?

AK:

Oh yeah. See he was a politician, and he'd give clients to judges and all those people who he knew he would benefit from. So he had this famous judge in Austin that he befriended. So he wanted to kind of get on the right side of him. He said, "I'm doing this home, and I'm going to give it to him. But he's in an awful hurry and I want you to work until midnight." These were old times where you said, "Yes, sir." So I was working one night and it was about twelve o'clock. He was the kind of the guy who had his own two planes in the hangar, but he would ride—he was very economical—he would ride the train from his office in Houston to Fort Worth, arrive about midnight. He was a hard worker. One night he came up to the office, and it was at midnight, and he sees three lights up there. He said, "Mr. Komatsu, how are you doing with my plans?" I said, "Well, you know, I'm near finishing." He looks up, says, "Well I'm just going to go on home." Takes two lights off! [DM laughs] I mean I put three lights on so I won't have eye strain. Takes two lights off!

DM:

Right, right. He's going to save about three pennies. [laughter]

AK:

I mean I could write endless stories about these old-timers.

DM:

Oh, it's just great. [laughter] Oh! Someone else. Is it—I've got his name here. I can't remember—yeah. I want to call him Garrett Jenkins, but it's Jenkins Garrett. Jenkins Garrett. Can you tell about?

AK:

Oh. He was an attorney who was very sympathetic to the Japanese. It's just a wonder how—I mean it was just a blessing and a fortune, I guess, that I met people in Fort Worth, Texas that I never dreamed would—Jenkins Garrett was, during World War II, even though he was from Texas, was assigned on the Pacific coast to be involved as an FBI agent to investigate backgrounds of Japanese. As a lawyer he knew it was—that this general—what I call, “ordered” us to be interned—was unconstitutional, as a lawyer. But it was wartime. As an FBI agent he had to do whatever required. But he was very sympathetic to Nisei's. By good fortune his daughter came to my office one day and said, “I need to intern with you. I don't need any salary, but I've got to get that experience.” So I said, “Sure.” Well, he appreciated that, so his family and our family became very close. And again, he became chairman of the Building Committee of the Junior College System. Now remember Ruth Johnson was chairman of the Building Committee.

DM:

Right. On UTA.

AK:

You bet. No, not chairman of the Building Committee, but president of the Junior College System. You know, as a volunteer. So the first campus was the Northeast Campus. Guess who got selected? I mean just the fact that he and I knew each other, just by accident, by hiring his daughter as an intern.

DM:

Now was it years alter that you found out about his FBI days?

AK:

Yeah, yeah. Oh, yeah. He invited me over to his home for dinner, and that's when he told me about all of his connections with the—what we call—the Nisei's. The second generation Japanese who were citizens. He was very sympathetic to our plight, because he knew as a lawyer

that we were being illegally interned. But as an FBI agent he couldn't do anything about it. He had to do what he was told to do.

DM:

It's just so fortunate that the certain people that you came across in Fort Worth.

AK:

Yeah, it was just like I was blessed throughout the whole early career that I made all these influential contacts. As an architect, I had an unusual good fortune to—You take the who's who of Dallas—I mean Fort Worth—

DM:

Fort Worth.

AK:

--in that time.

DM:

That's it.

AK:

Jenkins Garrett, Leonard—

DM:

Ruth Carter.

AK:

Ruth Stevenson Carter, the Luther's and Amon Carter's. In Ruth's case, as I say, I designed a cover for her, because I never knew her from Amon. But she asked me—she heard about me, and the same thing with Marvin Leonard, and—well, Marvin came through me through Jenkins Garrett.

DM:

Oh he did?

AK:

Jenkins was his attorney.

DM:

Okay, so there's that word of mouth, again. Did you know Amon Carter, Jr.?

AK:

Yes. Yes. Very well.

DM:

What was he like?

AK:

He was a very, very friendly person. He was not aggressive like his father. He was kind of a—he enjoyed life. He didn't have to because by that—Channel 5 and the *Star Telegram* were goldmines at that time. So he—

DM:

Amon Carter, Sr. was the first president of the Board of Directors at Texas Tech.

AK:

Oh, is that right?

DM:

Before it became—before classes began—he was the leading person. So there have always been this Texas Tech-Fort Worth connection through the years. SO that was what was interesting—one of the interesting things about Karl coming out to do some design on campus.

AK:

Yeah. I have some pretty good contacts, although there were certain firms that had been Texas Tech's favorites over the years. It was hard to break into.

DM:

Well, right here in Fort Worth—in this area of Fort Worth-Dallas—what are some of your favorite projects that you were involved in?

AK:

I like the University Center—a Business Center—which is at University—those two towers. I did this Summit Office Park back in the—about 1970. That was one of my early towers. Then I did the University Center later on. I did those two on—I think the Beech Street—there's a couple of towers there. I did a lot of work in Arlington for a developer who used to be the heir to the Curtis Mathes fortune. Curtis Mathes was the TV king in the early years. Made a fortune. His daughter inherited the money, and she bought a very, very large tract and she hired us as their architect to do office building and so forth. What happened was, she stretched out so much that then around 1985 there was a very tragic downturn in business here. Banks went broke, all the savings, loans went broke, real estate, firms, and—

DM:

Was this because of the oil bust?

AK:

Yeah. It started with the oil, but it busted the banks. You probably heard about that.

DM:

Oh yeah. And it really affected West Texas, too. Midland, Odessa, oil places.

AK:

And our firm went from ninety people to about thirteen.

DM:

Really?

AK:

Yeah. Oh man, it was just—Well, I had so many go bankrupt on me. I mean right in the middle of the projects.

DM:

Tough times. I'm going to pause this a second. [Pause in recording]

AK:

--and the Iranian Revolution where the Shah was overthrown cost me probably a billion dollars' worth of work. I'll tell you the reason why: both Jim Atkins and Dick Adams—Dick Adams about General Dynamics, and—let's see—Dick Adams and Jim Atkins of Bell Helicopter. Both presidents whom I knew. Each of them had me designated to do about a billion dollars' worth of work in Iran. A new plant for Bell and a new plant for—

DM:

General Dynamics?

AK:

General Dynamics. It's a core production project. See both of them were interested in getting a friendly country to sell their products to the entire the mid-east, because they had tons of money. So I was designated as architect for each of them.

DM:

That could have been the rest of your career, actually.

AK:

Oh that would have—if I wanted to retire—which I wouldn't have—that would have been the highlight from a standpoint of dollar value, because both of them had huge—They were going to replicate each of their plants in Iran.

DM:

But I'm glad you stayed in Fort Worth. [laughs] For the sake of Fort Worth.

AK:

I'm glad that I wasn't there when the revolution began, because they imprisoned everybody.

DM:

That's right. So it could have gone bad?

AK:

I was lucky.

DM:

You're fortunate, yeah. Okay.

AK:

We entertained three of the generals who I was working with at Rivercrest Country Club—jointly with Mr. Atkins. We were entertaining these generals, and when the revolution began, each of them were beheaded. The very day of the revolution. People we entertained. Three generals.

DM:

Goodness. Well, that kind of gives you an idea of how—

AK:

Ruthless.

DM:

--touchy it would have been for you. Oh my.

AK:

So that was a—but that was the only—most of that revolution was the only thing that I was, say—

DM:

As a setback?

AK:

Disadvantaged me. Yeah. A setback.

DM:

Right, right. But otherwise things have clicked?

AK:

Everything else worked like a charm.

DM:

Some of these buildings that you mentioned as your favorites in Fort Worth, what are some of the architectural—are there certain architectural features that you like?

AK:

Well, of course, I classify them as contemporary work, which means that their work doesn't follow precedents of other work. Each of them are stand-alone designs.

DM:

Right, right. Well, that's an interesting thing that Karl and I were talking about yesterday. I asked if there were Komatsu features on these buildings, and he said, "We're more interested in finding out what people need and want, and it becomes their building rather than our building."

AK:

Exactly. I mean that's a very, very good explanation. That we didn't try to force them to accept our thoughts, but we would diligently interview them to see what their requirements are, what their likes and dislikes. Then we used our own artistic abilities to interpret their needs.

DM:

So it wasn't a monument to yourself?

AK:

No, no.

DM:

As it was what they needed? Okay. That's very very good.

AK:

Now there's certain architectural—like Louis Kahn and others—who had one style and you like it or not, you're going to have it. [laughter]

DM:

Right, right. Exactly. Exactly. Were there certain artists that affected you? The reason I ask is my colleague at Texas Tech who is Japanese American wanted me to ask if you had ever heard of this sculptor—a Japanese sculptor—

AK:

Noguchi?

DM:

Noguchi. Do you know Noguchi?

AK:

Yeah, in fact I met him.

DM:

Golly. Really? Can you tell me a little bit about him?

AK:

Well he was a very—what should I say—self-possessed person who had no—I would say he had no precedents. By that, I mean each project was one completely of his own imagination.

DM:

I see.

AK:

In other words Noguchi—You know, he did some work for the First National Bank?

DM:

I didn't know.

AK:

Yeah.

DM:

Oh really? Okay.

AK:

I think Anne Windfohr, who is now—she goes by—she's married an ex-gentleman who used to be head of a big auction house. The biggest auction house in New York. And she's married. But anyway, she had a Noguchi. Her mother was very contemporary and she would hire all these—I think she hired a Noguchi for First National Bank.

DM:

First National. Okay, but Noguchi didn't belong to a particular school?

AK:

No, no.

DM:

It was just "Noguchi"?

AK:

Yes, exactly. You never knew what he was going to come up with, but they were all extremely individual. What I call very good works of contemporary art. We had some old-timers here. Very wealthy people who were on bank boards and dictated for the banks what they should have. But they were extremely—see I've been on the board of the Modern Museum for fifty-one years, and I saw extremely wealthy people come and go who not only helped purchase things for our Modern Museum, but if they were directors of banks they would select the art for the banks.

DM:

Okay, okay. Well, I'm glad to hear that. You know Fort Worth has a reputation as a Western town, but I'm glad to hear that all the emphasis isn't just toward that idea. There's Japanese art, so there are some broad-minded people in influential positions.

AK:

I also was the president of the Modern—the Fort Worth Museum of Science History. During my presidency I and Bill Davis—you've heard of Ken Davis?

DM:

Um-hm.

AK:

Well his son and I helped bring the Omni Theatre. At that time, it was only one of five in the country. For about twelve years, we had the Omni Theater. Dallas didn't. So they used to bring busloads of people here. The board was so appreciative of my tenure as a president—help bring

in with Bill Davis, the Omni Theater that they gave me a gold admission card, and I can admit myself and one other person for the rest of my life.

DM:

Isn't that something?

AK:

And I've been using it! [laughter]

DM:

Oh, how nice. I remember when it opened and how big a thing it was and still is. Often we go.

AK:

My first Omni Theater operator was a fellow who was a band leader at Eddie V's right now. Ron—what was his name? Ron somebody. Anyway, he recognized me and he came up—and I didn't recognize him—and he says, "Remember me?" And I said, "No, I really don't." He said, "I'm Ron, and I was your first operator of the Omni Theater."

DM:

Oh, is that right? Okay.

AK:

About twelve years after we had it—the contracting firm was Henry Beck—the president called me and said, "Mr. Komatsu, we'd like to look at your plans on the Omni Theater, because we've been charged to design and build our Omni Theater for Dallas." And I said, "Not only will I have you look at it, but I'll give you a set of plans."

DM:

Really? [laughter] Okay.

AK:

But that was one thing that we were very proud of because we made a lot of money off of Dallas at the Omni Theater.

DM:

Oh, that's right. [laughter] One other thing I wanted to mention is interesting thing about Komatsu Architecture is the versatility of projects you guys have taken on.

AK:

We have.

DM:

Like the waterworks, for example. The way I heard it it was, "Hey, have you ever done of these?" "No, but I will learn."

AK:

Well here's the thing on that. It was designed by a very famous architect, but he died, and from time to time they needed consultation. We'd been their consultant on trying to preserve the—See we have a—what do they call that? Where they have a designation? Historical what do you call it?

DM:

Oh, like a historic designation?

AK:

Yeah. Yeah. We had that and so they want to be very careful. I remember one time there were three people drowned in that tank. There were three people who were occupying a hotel across the street. They came and their swimming pool was out of water, so they remembered, "Oh, there's a pool across"—they weren't supposed to. We have a sign there saying, "Entering this water is forbidden." They didn't read the sign and they got pulled, and they drowned. And so I was designated as a consultant to restore—maintain the historic designation—but do whatever was required. Well, I wasn't going to change it, so I said, "This is what we're going to do. We are going to put a sign saying"—because they were wanting to put railing down to the water, and I said, "No, we will lose our historic designation. So what we're going to do is put a sign up there. 'You enter at your own risk.'" And that's there during when it's closed. I said, "We can't change it." So we did sign work instead of a—because everybody wanted to put a railing down there, and do a lot of things that would prevent another drowning. But we went for forty years without a drowning, and it's just that these peoples' swimming pool was closed in that hotel.

DM:

I can't imagine, though, wandering over to jump in another pool of water somewhere.

AK:

Yeah. And it just pulled them down. They didn't realize.

DM:

It was a freak accident—it was a freak situation that you couldn't have anticipated.

AK:

So when Ruth Johnson was alive—because she donated the money for the garden from the Carter Foundation. She designated that I be—as long as I live—I be a consultant to anything in order to keep it. She passed away, but whenever they needed some kind of consultation, I get—

DM:

They just give you a call and there you are. I like that. Well I don't really have any more questions. Do you have something else to add? Something that I've forgotten to?

AK:

No. I'm glad I got to talk to you and to reminisce all my wonderful experience and—

[End of Recording]



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