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Palauan Children under Japanese Rule Thier Oral Histories

Maki Mita



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# Palauan Children under Japanese Rule

Their Oral Histories

Maki Mita

National Museum of Ethnology  
2009 Osaka

## **Senri Ethnological Reports**

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## **1. Introduction**



## 1-1 Perspective of this study

From 1914 to 1945, the greater part of Micronesia, including the Caroline Islands, the Marshall Islands, and the Mariana Islands except for Guam, was under Japanese colonial rule; and it was called ‘*Nanyo*’ (South Seas). Especially in Palau, where the Japanese headquarters of *Nanyo-cho* (the colonial government) was based, many Japanese immigrated to the islands, and this influx strongly influenced the lives of local peoples.

Even today, one can observe many Japanese influences in the daily lives of Palauan people; such as loan words from Japanese, the custom of eating rice, elderly people who understand Japanese and watch NHK international programs on TV, Japanese songs which have been arranged in Palauan, Japanese personal names and so on. From the Palauan perspective, Japan has remained a close presence for them to this day.

On the other hand, from the Japanese perspective, Palau is not well known. Only a few Japanese could say where Palau is located. Most Japanese tourists who visit Palau intend to enjoy scuba diving, or to pray for their relatives who died in Palau during the war. They come to Palau, and look at the beautiful underwater world or the wreckage from the war, but they rarely look at Palauan people. For the Japanese of today, Palau



*Nanyo-cho* Palau Branch Office in Koror (photo: Belau National Museum)

is a distant foreign island, imagined as a ‘tropical utopia’ or a ‘place of war memories’. This attitude of the Japanese stems from historical circumstances following the Second World War. Soon after the war the Japanese who lived in Palau were repatriated to Japan, and were prohibited from visiting Palau for some decades. Japanese people rarely discussed their colonizing past; and even in school history classes, *Nanyo* was almost ignored. The long absence of serious consideration of colonial history in *Nanyo* led to a strange lack of Japanese interest in this area.

This imbalance of interest reflects the power relationship between Palau and Japan from the colonial period. When I was staying in Palau as an anthropology researcher, I came to regard this ignorance of the strong Japanese relationship with Palauan history as a ‘violence’ to the Palauans who lived this history. Just at that moment, a chance to pursue this theme was given to me by Palauans. I was asked to create an exhibition on the Japanese colonial period of Palauan history, which would form a major section of the Belau<sup>1)</sup> National Museum’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary exhibition. In the process of researching the exhibition, I held several interviews with Palauan elders (M. Mita 2005, 2009). This experience confirmed my desire to learn the history of the Japanese colonial period in Palau from the perspectives of Palauan elders. Fortunately, I was able to conduct this study as a project of Belau National Museum. This book documents the interviews which I undertook on this project. The purposes of this study are described below.

Firstly, this study aims to pass on the colonial experiences of Palauan elders to the coming generations of Palauan people. In Palauan tradition, histories were passed on orally. Through the storytelling of their (grand) parents, and through learning the stories carved on the *bai*, Palauan children have learned their history from legendary times to today. However, these customs are fading, and the elders’ memories will be buried with them as they pass away. These interviews will aid their descendants to learn their own history, enabling them to look at today from an informed and critical viewpoint.

As citizens of a small island country under the strong influence of the United States, Palauan children need to cut their own path to the future. This can be assumed to be a difficult task, but their grandparents’ experiences might give them bearings to place themselves in the flow of history, and in the map of the world system. Each elder’s story is very personal, but each reflects the wider theme of being colonized and made subordinate in the world system. To date, there are several valuable works conveying the modern history of Palau (e.g. Palau Community Action Agency 1976; Rechebei and McPhertres 1997; Micronesian Area Research Center 1986), and the exhibit at Belau National Museum supplements these. Together with these works, this study is intended to provide further understanding of colonial history from personal experiences.

A second objective of this study is to increase Japanese awareness of what happened in Palau during the Japanese era; to provide a resource to promote consideration of Japan as a colonizer, from the perspectives of those who were colonized. As mentioned, Japanese knowledge of *Nanyo* is very limited. This lack of knowledge has led

to two simplistic and opposing opinions regarding Japanese colonization. One is that the Japan of those days was just ‘wrong’ and ‘guilty’ in its subordination of subject peoples to the national will; the other is that Japan was in essence a benevolent guardian which did ‘good things’ in its colonies (Kobayashi 2005). In the latter view, which is growing in influence in Japan, Palau is often used as an example to justify Japanese colonization; for Palauans are regarded as ‘pro-Japanese’ compared, for example, with the peoples of Korea and China.

However, both opinions oversimplify reality; and it is doubtful that these opinions are based on concrete knowledge of Japanese colonization. The reality is always very complex. It is hard to conclude from the evidence either that ‘Japanese soldiers were evil’ or ‘Japanese soldiers were kind’, for example. Some soldiers took food from Palauan people, and some refused to accept food from them even when pressed. We need to become familiar with various aspects of the reported events and try to discern the feelings underlying the statements of the Palauan elders. Even when they say, “The Japanese time was good”, they rarely fail to state exceptions. Most experienced discrimination as ‘islanders’, and they were fully conscious that the war was brought to Palau by the Japanese (M. Mita 2008). To build a better relationship with Palauans, we Japanese people must learn what happened in Palau, and weigh the reports and sentiments of the Palauan elders with careful sensitivity. This study, which will be rewritten in Japanese, aims to contribute to addressing the imbalance of awareness between Palauan and Japanese, and to better our understanding of each other.

The third objective of this study is an academic one. In recent years, the claims to authority of ‘Histories’ written by men in power have wavered, and ‘histories’ consisting of lay people’s perspectives have drawn increased attention (Terkel 1985, Nakano and Sakurai 1995, Thompson 2002). In Micronesia, several works have been completed in this field.<sup>2)</sup> Especially in Palau, where the main administration of the *Nanyo-cho* was based, a number of studies have researched colonial experiences by collecting oral histories (e.g. Abe 1985, Fukuda 1994, Higuchi 1991, Morioka 2006, M. Mita 2008, T. Mita 2000, 2002, Nero 1989, Shuster 1982). Compared with these studies, this project concentrates more on the recording of oral histories, rather than on analysis.

There are other studies which contain substantial personal historical documents (Micronesian Area Research Center 1986, Yamamoto 2003). In the Micronesian Area Research Center 1986 project, most informants were older than those in my study. In my work, many informants recount the experiences of their childhood or early youth, because they were still very young in the Japanese time. This underlines the fact that this research represents almost the last occasion to hear first-hand experiences of this period (in fact not a few informants of this study have passed away in the years since their interview). In Yuko Yamamoto’s work, written in Japanese, several informants are shared with this study. However, the focus of topics and the method of description are different. In Yamamoto’s work, eighteen people’s stories are re-told by the author based

on their interviews. Yamamoto's work is non-fiction reading describing the history of Palau from the viewpoint of Palauan people, rather than academic oral historiography. Taken together with these works, this study will form part of a collective body of Palauan oral histories regarding the Japanese era.

In addition, as an anthropological researcher who studies Palau, I would argue that the historical experiences of the people will help in understanding their social attitudes. In recent years, the border between history and anthropology has become vague (e.g. Kurimoto and Inose 1999, Hokari 2004). This might be because the ideas that society is a product of its history (Sudo, Yamashita and Yoshioka 1988), and that history is a product of society, began to be seriously considered. The description of Palauan colonial experiences opens a pathway to an understanding of the social attitudes of today; let's say, their attitude to foreign powers including so-called 'pro-Japanese' feelings, and so on.

This study aims to document Palauan colonial experiences in order to bridge the past and future (former and future generations in Palau), and the Self and Other (Palauan and Japanese). At the same time, this study has in view the potential for future ethnographic studies based on the valuable personal histories represented here.

## 1-2 Palau and its historical background

Palau is located between latitudes 6°54' to 8°12'N and longitudes 134°08' to 134°44'E (Freifeld and Demei 1997). It forms the western edge of Micronesia. (See Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 for maps of Palau)

Palauan society is characterized by a matrilineal clan system and strong emphases on reciprocity and competition (Rechebei and McPhetres 1997: 36). Each person belongs to his or her mother's *kebliil* (clan), and performs services for, has obligations toward, and assumes a title and land within the *kebliil* (Palau Community Action Agency 1976). Each hamlet might have seven to ten *kebliil* (Palau Community Action Agency 1976). The male leaders of the *kebliil* are called *rubak*,<sup>3)</sup> and they hold meetings (called *klobak*) in a *bai* (meeting house). Each *rubak* assumes a title. Even though the *rubak* are men, those who select them are the women of the *kebliil* to which the title belongs. In addition to this, there are titles for women which are parallel to men's titles.

Palau is a highly stratified society. *Kebliil* are ranked in each hamlet, and the titles which belong to the *kebliil* are also ranked. Those who were born in a high-ranked *kebliil* are candidates to be a high-ranked *rubak* who would lead the hamlet. Once someone is chosen as a title holder, especially of a high-ranked title, this person is required to assume major responsibilities for the people in the hamlet.

Groups of hamlets form villages, which historically competed for power through warfare. Two villages eventually became pre-eminent; one was Melekeok in Babeldaob



**Fig. 1** Map of Palau

(literally, upper sea) and the other was Koror (Oreor) in Eouldaob (literally, lower sea) (Rechebei and McPhetres 1997). The highest chief of Melekeok is called *Reklai*, and the highest chief of Koror is called *Ibedul*; and these two have wielded the strongest power in Palau.

The first time the people of Palau met a colonial power in earnest was in 1783, when the English vessel *Antelope* went aground on a Palauan reef (Rechebei and McPhetres 1997). In those days, the north-eastern village alliance led by Melekeok, and the south-western village alliance led by Koror, were in strong competition. Captain Wilson and the crew of the *Antelope* were taken under the protection of *Ibedul*, the high chief of Koror. In return for his assistance, *Ibedul* asked Captain Wilson to join in the battle with Melekeok. The power of the guns brought by the English astonished the

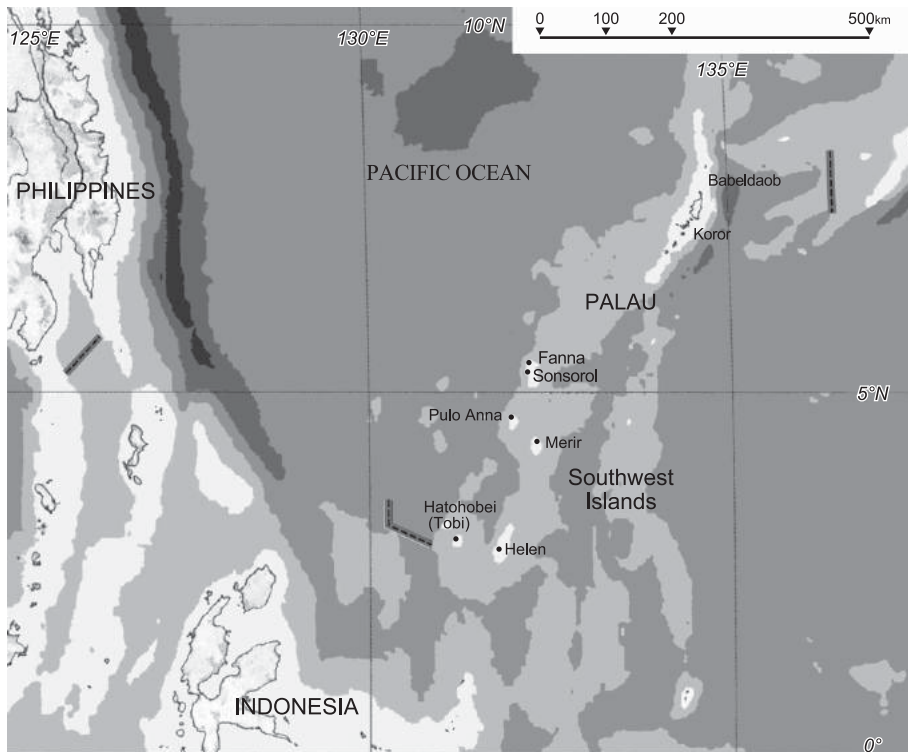


Fig. 2 Location of Palau

Palauans. Koror defeated Melekeok easily in this battle, and the incident made Palauans eager to help foreign vessels, to enlist their strength.

After this early incident, Palauans had sporadic contact with Westerners through visits by trading vessels and whalers. In 1885, Palau was colonized by Spain. The main purpose of the Spaniards was to propagate Christianity. They built Catholic churches, and several priests engaged in missionary work. Catholic priests set up the first school in Koror (*Nanyo Gunto Kyoikukai* 1938).

In 1899, Spain sold its Micronesian territories to Germany, after losing their war with the United States. Germany was interested in developing natural resources. Germans cultivated coconut plantations and started to mine phosphate on Angaur Island. German missionaries also came to Palau, and they ran the school for Palauan children.

In 1914, Japan joined the First World War, and occupied German territories in Micronesia. At first, the military governed this new possession, but in 1918 it was succeeded by a civilian government. In 1919, by the Treaty of Versailles, German Micronesia became a Japanese mandate under the supervision of the League of the Nations (Office of Court Counsel 1995). In 1922, Japan established the headquarters of the *Nanyo-cho* (South Seas Government) in Koror. Even though Japan left the League





*Bai* (meeting house) in Melekeok in 1932 (photo: Belau National Museum)

of Nations in 1935, it continued to govern Micronesia, leading to the entanglement of Micronesian peoples in the subsequent war. The years from 1914 to 1945 are referred to as the ‘Japanese time’.

In this period many Japanese emigrated to Palau, and in Koror the infrastructure of a town was created; from electricity to public transport. The Japanese population in Palau equaled the Palauan population in 1935 (*Nanyo-cho* 1935), but by 1938 the Japanese population (15,669) was more than double that of Palauans (6,377) (*Nanyo-cho* 1938). There was strong immigration from Okinawa, where standards of living were low. Okinawans accounted for almost half of the Japanese population. Many became involved in fishing, farming and commerce. Several industries were established by the Japanese in Palau: the dried bonito industry in Malakal, the aluminum industry in Ngardmau, the canned pineapple industry in Ngeremlengui, and others. In addition to this, they took over phosphate mining from Germany.

In 1947, Palau and the other Japanese Micronesian possessions came under the control of the United States of America, as the United Nations Trust Territories (Office of Court Counsel 1995). In 1981, the Constitution of Palau came into effect, and constitutional government was instituted (Office of Court Counsel 1995, Rechebei and McPhetres 1997). In 1994, Palau gained its independence as the ‘Republic of Palau’; however it continued to have a strong tie to the United States of America through the Compact of Free Association (Davis and Hart 2002).



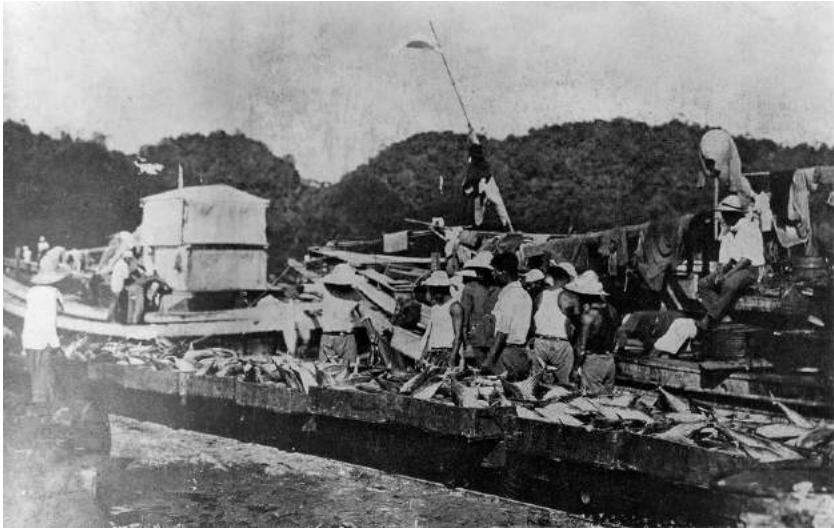
Downtown Koror in the Japanese time (photo: Belau National Museum)



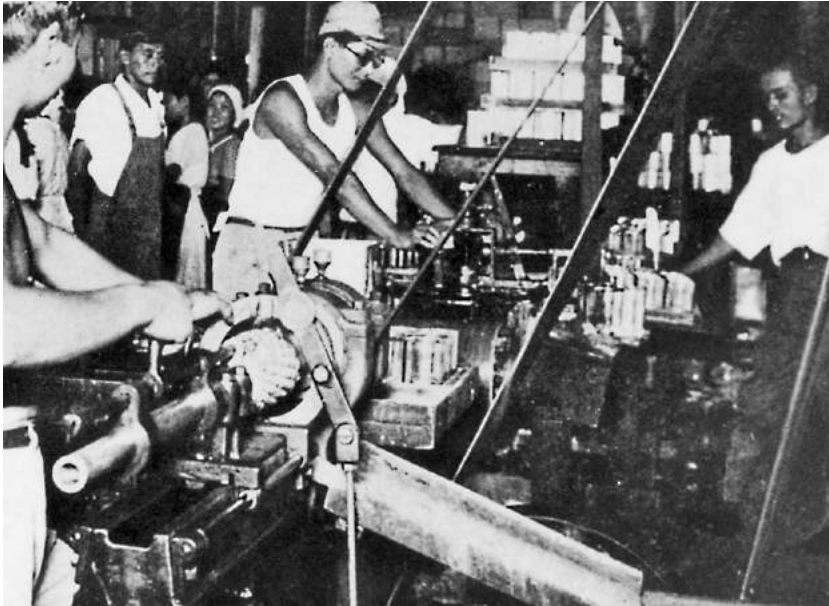
Nanbo Department Store (photo: Belau National Museum)



Taiyo Liquor Store (photo: Belau National Museum)



Bonito fishing boat in Malakal (photo: Nanyo Gunto Bunkakyokai 1938)



Pineapple Cannery in Ngeremeskang (photo: *Nanyo Gunto Bunkakyokai* 1938)

### 1-3 Outline of Japanese colonial rule

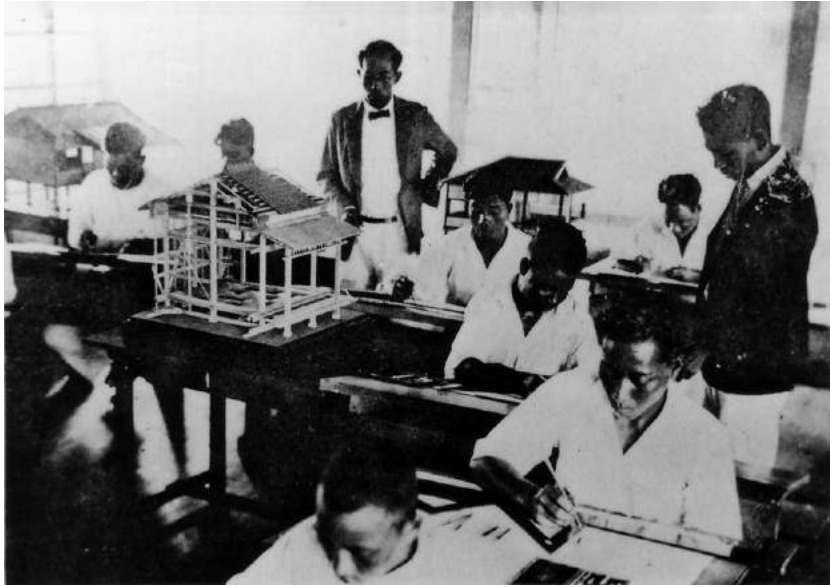
#### Education

In 1915, the Japanese military government set up their first school in Palau. This school offered four years' education for Palauan children between eight and twelve years old. In 1916, a second school was opened in Melekeok.

As part of a planned transition from military to civilian administration, a new educational system was set up in 1918. This was structured as three years compulsory education in the *honka* (basic course) and for qualifying students, two years further education in the *hoshuka* (advanced course). By 1918 there were five schools for Palauan children, located in Koror, Melekeok, Peleliu, Angaur and Ngaraard. The first school for Japanese children in Palau was established in 1919.

In 1922, the *Nanyo-cho* (South Seas Government) was inaugurated and Japan started to govern ex-German Micronesia as a mandate of the League of the Nations. From this time, the schools for 'those who speak Japanese as a second language' were called '*kogakko*', and they continued the *honka* and *hoshuka* curriculum structure. Children had to attend school from the age of eight. By the time the war reached Palau in 1944, there were *kogakko* in Koror, Melekeok, Peleliu, Angaur, Ngaraard, and Ngardmau.

In addition to this, *Mokko Totei Yoseijyo* (carpentry apprentice school) was established in Koror, and boys who graduated from *hoshuka* with outstanding records studied



Class in Mokko (photo: *Nanyokyokai* 1932)

there. Every year, about fifteen students from all over Micronesia were selected as the students of ‘*Mokko*’.

*Nanyo-cho* was eager to provide education to children in Micronesia. In fact, the number of Palauan children attending school in 1935 was 410 boys and 404 girls. This number shows that 97.72 percent of Palauan children were attending school (*Nanyo Gunto Kyoikukai* 1938).

The stated purposes of education under the *Nanyo-cho* regime were to provide the islanders with the general knowledge and skills required to improve their standard of living; to take care of their health; and to provide them with moral education (*Nanyo Gunto Kyoikukai* 1938). However, it is apparent that an unstated purpose was to make children obedient to the emperor and Japan. Through morning assembly, textual studies, and other teachings in everyday life, Japanese educators taught the Palauan children to be devoted to the Japanese emperor. This tendency increased after the Sino-Japanese war in 1937 (Yazaki 1999).

The *kogakko* curriculum in 1928 is shown in Table 1. From this table, it is evident they gave high priority to language education. Many informants mentioned that they were prohibited from speaking Palauan in school after the second grade. It was apparent in the interviews for this study that many of the informants, especially those who had more than five years’ education, had attained a high degree of skill in spoken Japanese.

Through the school curriculum, we can see that practical education such as handi-crafts, agriculture, and home economics were also emphasized. It can be said that Japa-



Morning Assembly in Koror *Kogakko* (photo: Belau National Museum)

nese education focused on the enhancement of practical skills which would be useful in the daily life of Palauan children. This principle can also be seen in extra-curricular education. Some of the students went to a Japanese house as a *renshusei* (trainee), and did domestic chores. From this work, they were expected to learn the Japanese way of living and to become familiar with Japanese culture. They earned a small wage through this work, and they were told to deposit some of the money they earned in the post office. The balance was spent on purchasing daily needs or treats. This *renshusei* system might have been intended to make the children familiar with a cash economy.

The Japanese educated Palauan children in Japanese language, practical knowledge and skills, the way to live in a Japanese society, and the Japanese moral and value system. The Japanese thought that they were civilizing a primitive people through education. In fact, the legal status of Palauans and other Micronesian peoples remained ‘*tomin*’ (islander), and they were treated and discriminated against as ‘primitive islanders’.

### Religious beliefs in the Japanese time

#### 1) *Chelid*

Traditionally, Palauans believed in deities called ‘*chelid*’. There were several kind of deities in this category; *chelid* in the legends, *chelid* of the hamlet, *chelid* of the *kebliil* (clan), and *chelid* of the house (Aoyagi 1985, Hijikata 1991). There were shamans who communicated with the *chelid* of the hamlet or *chelid* of the *kebliil*. The shamans were

Table 1 School Curriculum in Kogakko (1928)

Subject	First Grade contents		Second Grade contents		Third Grade contents	
	class	values	class	values	class	values
Character Education	1	values	1	values	1	values
Japanese	12	pronunciation/speech/Japanese syllabary/reading/writing/composition	12	speech/Japanese syllabary/reading/writing/composition	12	speech/reading/writing/composition
Mathematics	5	counting from 1-100/spelling numbers/calculation	5	counting from 1-1000/spelling numbers/calculation	5	calculation by whole number
Science			1	observation of the natural things and phenomena	2	plants, animals, minerals, natural phenomena/physics/science/sanitation
Art	1	sketch/copy	1	sketch/copy	1	sketch/copy
Handicrafts	1	handwork	1	handwork	1	handwork
Music		chorus	1	chorus	1	chorus
Physical Education	3	gymnastics/military drill/dance/competitive sports	2	gymnastics/military drill/dance/competitive sports	2	gymnastics/military drill/dance/competitive sports
Agriculture			1	agriculture	2	agriculture
Home Economics			1:girls	housekeeping/sewing	2:girls	housekeeping/sewing

**Hoshuka (Advanced Course)**

Subject	First Grade contents		Second Grade contents	
	class	values	class	values
Character Education	1	values	1	values
Japanese	10	speech/reading/writing/composition calculation by whole number/calculation by decimal numbers/abacus(soroban)	10	speech/reading/writing/composition calculation by fractions/percentage/abacus(soroban)
Mathematics	4	geography of Micronesia/ geography of Japan	4	geography of the world
Geography	1	plants, animals, minerals, natural phenomena/physics/science	1	plants, animals, minerals, natural phenomena/physics/science/human body and sanitation
Science	2	sketch/copy	2	sketch/copy
Art	1	handwork	2	handwork
Handicrafts	2	chorus	1	chorus
Music	1	gymnastics/military drill/dance/competitive sports	2	gymnastics/military drill/dance/competitive sports
Physical Education	2	agriculture	4	agriculture
Agriculture	4	housekeeping/sewing	2:girls	housekeeping/sewing
Home Economics	2:girls		2:girls	housekeeping/sewing

(Source: Nanyo Gunto Kyoikukai 1938)



Kamata-sensei and his students in *kogakko* (photo: *Nanyo Gunto Bunka Kyokai* 1938)



Post Office in Koror (photo: *Belau National Museum*)



from specific *kebliils*, and they spoke the messages of the *chelid* in several manners (Aoyagi 1985). People would ask the deity the reason for a sickness, for predictions about specific events, and other things. The colonial government did not normally interfere with this belief but there were some exceptions.

## 2) *Modekngai*

In Japanese Palau, there was a recent and rising religious belief called *Modekngai*, still an important feature of Palauan culture. Based on Machiko Aoyagi (1985), I will briefly outline this belief.

*Modekngai* began when a deity entered a man by the name of Temedad in 1914. From this time, he started to speak loudly, and sing songs. Two years later, his brother-in-law Ongesi started to act in the same manner. Within a few years they began to preach about the deity. They healed sicknesses with herbs, forbade several specific foods as taboo, and foretold the future. This religious belief started to attract many Palauan people, and increase in influence. They congregated to pray, sing chants, purify themselves with traditional medicine, and raise money.

The Japanese government tried to control their activities. Temedad and Ongesi were jailed several times, and also exiled to remote islands. Before exile to Saipan in 1941, Ongesi was reputed to have said, “When I leave here, I take rice in my lunchbox, but when I come back, I will bring bread with me.” This was believed to be a prediction of the end of Japanese control and the coming of the Americans. During the war, the number of *Modekngai* believers was increased by fear. The believers carried the charms of *Modekngai*, typically a piece of wood in a red sack, in order to avoid danger.

Arthur Vidich argued that *Modekngai* was a political movement against the Japanese rule (Vidich 1949). However, Machiko Aoyagi denied this assertion, after intensive research (Aoyagi 1985).

## 3) Christianity

From the Spanish time, Palauan people were familiar with Christianity. The Japanese government allowed Spanish Catholic and German Protestant missionaries to work in Palau. Later, the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Japan also sent missionaries to Palau. (See stories 22, 36)

## 4) Buddhism

*Honganji* temple was built in Koror in 1926, and according to my research, there was a second Buddhist temple named ‘*Palaoji*’ in Koror. These temples were largely for the immigrant Japanese population, although *Honganji* also operated a kindergarten open to all.

## 5) *Tenri-kyo*

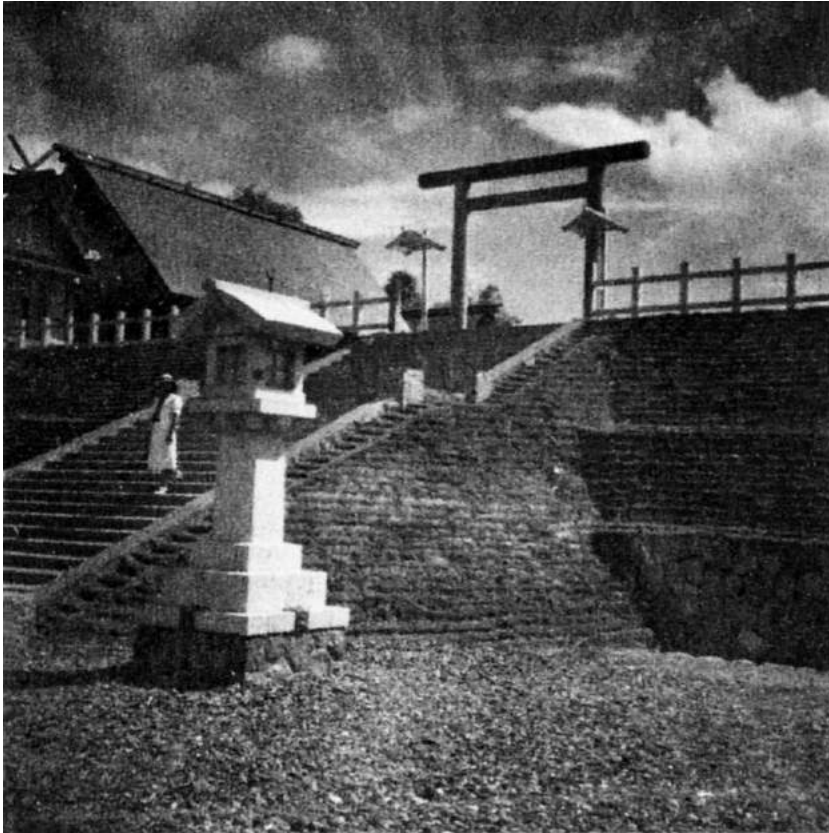
*Tenri-kyo* also proselytized in Palau, but succeeded in getting only a few Palauan believers.



Catholic Church in Koror (photo: Belau National Museum)



Kindergarten in *Honganji* (photo: Belau National Museum)



*Nanyo-Jinja* (photo: Belau National Museum)

#### 6) *Shinto*

*Nanyo-jinja* (South Seas Shrine) was built in Palau in 1940. This introduced the Japanese state religion to Palauans and other Micronesians. In my research, many Palauans spoke of visiting this shrine from school. This shrine was strongly related to the Japanese national policy which was eager to unite all the peoples in the Japanese colonies.

#### **The war**

The beginning of the war in Palau was at the end of March, 1944. On this day and the next, American aircraft attacked Palau. In this attack, Koror was severely damaged. The Japanese who had stayed in Palau started to evacuate to Japan in April.

In June, the Japanese military in Saipan surrendered, and from July the attack on Palau began in earnest. Most Palauans took refuge with relatives in Babeldaob, and those from Koror made a new hamlet in Aimeliik. This hamlet was named Daini-Koror (Second Koror). In September, Peleliu Island and Angaur Island became battlefields. Most Palauans in these islands had already been sent to Babeldaob by the Japanese



Ruins of *Nanyo-cho* Palau Branch Office (photo: Belau National Museum)

military; however, in Angaur more than a hundred Palauans remained. They wandered in the forests amidst the intense battle between Americans and Japanese.

While these battles were taking place in Angaur and Peleliu Islands, in Babeldaob, where most Palauans had taken refuge, lack of food was a serious problem. Even though Palauans had their own taro-patches and gardens, their shelters were deep inside the forest. Because the American airplanes patrolled in the daytime, they harvested crops at night. Sometimes, they were prohibited from taking coconuts or crops from areas controlled by the Japanese military.

As time passed, the situation grew increasingly desperate. Palauans resorted to eating *denges* (very bitter mangrove fruit) and *belloi* (bitter and poisonous fruit) which were only eaten in times of famine. Some Palauans died of illnesses in the forest, and some were shot dead by the American aircraft, especially when they were fishing.

Starvation also befell Japanese soldiers and civilians. Because they did not have the local knowledge of the Palauan natural environment, many died of hunger. Sometimes they received food offered by Palauan people.

Many Palauans worked for the Japanese military. Some went to New Guinea to research natural resources but were instead given dangerous military tasks. Palauan boys who graduated from school were required to do military work; carrying loads, constructing air fields, carrying messages, catching fish, and other tasks. Some were even enlisted as members of the Palauan troops, and trained as associate members of the military. Palauan girls also sometimes worked for the military on domestic tasks

such as food preparation, and clothes-mending.

When Japan surrendered on August 15, 1945, the ‘Japanese time’ in Palau came to an end.

## 1-4 Methodology

The research for this study was mostly conducted between 2005 and 2007, as a project of Belau National Museum. Fifty-eight people (twenty-four men and thirty-four women) kindly recounted their experiences to me. Most interviews were conducted in Japanese; mainly because the researcher’s skill in Palauan was at the time inadequate to the task of recording their life histories. However, Palauan elders schooled in the Japanese time could speak Japanese, and those with five years’ education spoke Japanese very well. When the informant had limited Japanese, we communicated in English. In one case where the informant had poor hearing, I asked her daughter to translate my English into Palauan, and the informant’s Palauan reply into English.

Interviewing in Japanese had several merits. Firstly, through the style of the informants’ language, the interviewer learned what kind of Japanese people they had interacted with. Some informants spoke very noble Japanese, and others a frank and broken style which might be used by working Japanese people. Secondly, from the vocabulary which the informants used, the interviewer learned which Japanese concepts they were familiar with; *yamatodamashii* (spirit of the Japanese), *kuronbou* (black people), and other concepts. These nuances could be lost in translation if interviews were conducted in another language.

At the beginning of the interview, I told them that I worked for Belau National Museum and was conducting research on Palauan elders’ colonial experiences to create a historical record. The topics of the interviews were: 1) what they had learned from their parents in their childhood; 2) their experiences in school; 3) their experiences after graduation; 4) their experiences during the war. Though I had several prepared questions, I let the informants speak freely and made minimal interruptions. The shortest interview was about thirty minutes, and for those who were most communicative, I arranged several interviews lasting two to three hours each. Interviews were recorded with the permission of the informant.

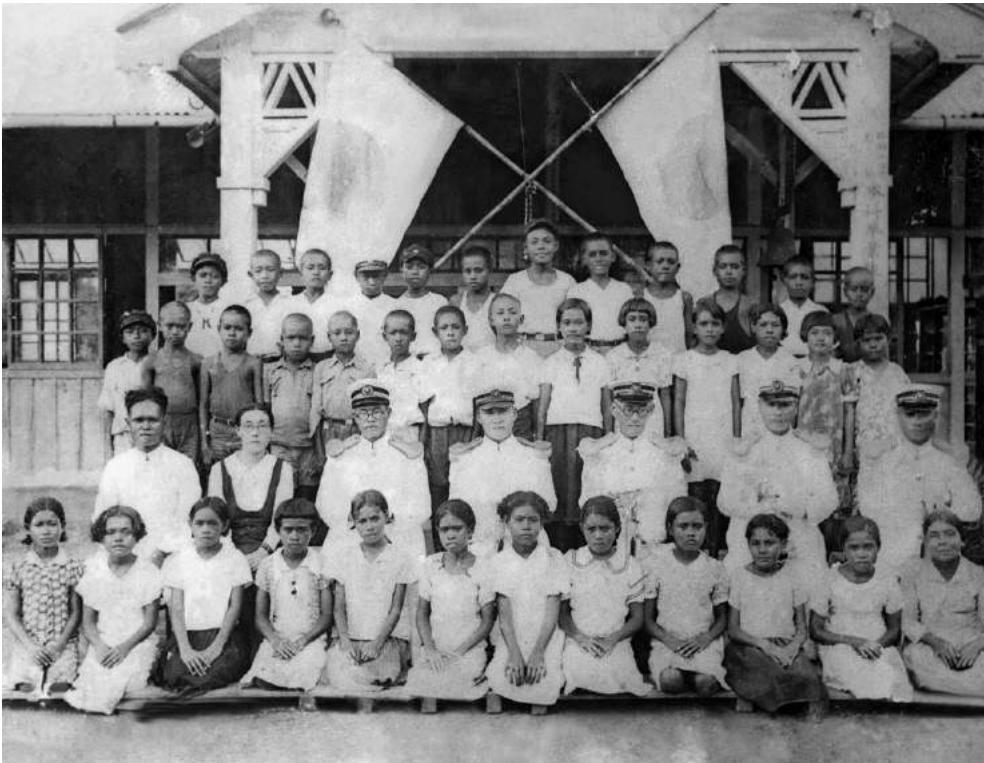
Though I did not choose informants based on their language skills, many of my informants were good at speaking Japanese. This was partly because I did not sample, but found informants through contacts and acquaintances. As a result, those who were most willing to talk with a Japanese researcher were selected. My informants ranged in origin from the Southwest Islands (the southern limit of Palau) to Kayangel Island (the northern limit of Palau), and in years of birth from 1915 to 1936. I have sequenced their life stories from the oldest to the youngest. The informants are listed in appendix A.

For Palauan and Japanese terms, I have added an English translation in brackets ( ).

Unclear spellings are indicated with a *[?]*, unclear meanings with a *[?]*. Other interpolated information is in square brackets *[ ]*. Non-English terms that occur frequently are not translated every time, but when they have not occurred in recent text.

Place names mentioned in the text are listed in appendix B.

## 2. Oral histories of Palauan elders



Graduation photograph from *honka*, Koror *Kogakko* [in 1937?] (photo: Belau National Museum)





## Story 1

Mechas<sup>4)</sup> Ngemelas Tomiko Kitalong  
Born: 1915  
Adoptive father<sup>5)</sup>: from Ngchesechang,  
Airai  
Adoptive mother: from Ngetkib, Airai



Mechias Ngemelas Tomiko Kitalong (2005)

### My background

My father graduated from the German school. During the Japanese time, his job was to mark safe channels in the sea with buoys. My father had a Japanese friend named Kitano. My father was given his name, but Palauans pronounce ‘Kitano’ as ‘Kitalong’. So, my father’s name became Kitalong. By the way, Mr. Kitano introduced to Palau a carpentry tool for marking lumber. It consisted of an ink bottle and string. We call this tool a ‘Kitalong’ after him.

I was named Tomiko by a Japanese man named Sakuma. When I was a baby, Mr. Sakuma visited each house and allocated numbers as their addresses. He looked at me, and gave me a Japanese girl’s name, Tomiko. I guess that I was the first Palauan to have this name. Six months after my birth, I was adopted by a family in Airai. It was a very good family. My adoptive mother’s name was Kilengei. I guess that she was half Spanish. They called the land of my mother’s relatives, ‘Spaniol’. Her skin was white, and she was tall. In our house in Airai, there were big trees such as mango and apple. I climbed them and picked the fruit.

### Memories of school

Children in Airai went to *kogakko* (school for Palauan children) in Koror. I went to school from my house by canoe every week, and stayed in the dormitory until the weekend. The Japanese government was very strict, and made every child go to school. One child ran away from school again and again, but if the child was not returned to school, the father could be jailed.

I remember Miyamoto-sensei<sup>6)</sup>, Sugawara-sensei, Okada-sensei and Nomoto-sensei. The Palauan assistant teacher was my relative, and he slapped me if I behaved badly. One day, I ran away from school because he had slapped me. The *Nanyo-cho* (South Seas Government) sent a letter to my father. I was later told that they said to make me go to school, and progress to the next stage of education, because I was bright. When I told my mother that the Palauan assistant teacher had slapped me, my mother

went to the school, and berated him. After that, he asked me, “Why did you tell your mother?” He respected and feared my mother. My mother never slapped children. Once I hit my brother Akio, and my mother said, “What a bad girl!”, but she did not punish me physically.

I performed very well at school, so I went on to the *hoshuka* (advanced course) and got further education. If a student got poor grades, he or she had to do the same class again. I was selected as a class president several times. One boy and one girl were selected as class presidents, and another boy and girl were selected as vice-presidents. The class presidents supervised other students. I said to the students, “Come together! Number off!” and when we cleaned the school, I instructed them, “You should clean here, and you should clean there.” I was also a housemistress of the dormitory. I took care of the others, and watched them working and studying. I rang the school bell. In the dormitory, we helped each other. If a first grade student did not understand her text, a student of the *hoshuka* helped. In the first grade, we learned “*hata, hana, tori ...* (flag, flower, bird ...)” and so on. There was a dormitory for boys, and a dormitory for girls.

In those days, sticks of bamboo were put over the beams in the dormitory, and we put our food on them. On a very stormy day, the bamboo fell off, and a student was caught between the bamboos. We were surprised and called the teacher immediately. On another day, we climbed on the dormitory roof, and played around. We were scolded severely by a teacher.

Some of the Japanese teachers beat students when they fought or did not work. I liked Okada-sensei. He was from Saitama prefecture, and he was very nice. He was my teacher when I was in the *hoshuka*. He taught me how to read Japanese, and how to do multiplication. I was quick to learn multiplication. In the Japanese school, one teacher taught all subjects.

## After Graduation

After studying in *kogakko* for five years, I worked as an assistant teacher in Koror *kogakko*. At this time many Japanese soldiers started to come to Palau. Some of them were just disembarked here before going to outer parts of the *Nanyo* (South Seas). The Airai *bai* (meeting house) was occupied by soldiers. The military taught us *Kyujoyo-yohai* (a greeting to the palace), and we taught this to the older Palauans who had not been to Japanese school. We said, “We are the children of the emperor!”, “We will be splendid Japanese!” and so on. And then we bowed to the north. I had not learned this as a student, but I learned it after I started to work as an assistant teacher. In those days, we used Japanese often in Koror and Airai. But the older people had not been to Japanese school, so they did not understand. My mother could say, “Thank you” and “Congratulations” in Japanese.

After many Palauans took refuge, the school was closed. So I started to work at the

*Nanyo-jinja* (South Seas Shrine). When visitors came, I greeted them, saying “Hello”, and “Thank you”. I wore a uniform, a brown dress with buttons. Not many Palauans worked there; only a few as translators. I was one of these. My father was ordered to come to Koror and work for the *Nanyo-cho* (South Seas Government), but I went in his place. Many people visited the shrine. Not so many Palauans, but people from Truk, the Marshalls, Ponape and Yap came. In the shrine, they bowed again and again!

## My Religious Belief

I believe in Palauan deities. This village, Ngetkib, is a very sacred place. My mother prayed to the village deity. I have not stopped believing to this day. If I asked this deity for something, my wish would come true. I even visited Japan and the United States. I visited the Tokyo tower! The deity in Ngetkib is *Uchelsechal*. I just pray ‘Please protect us’, and sometimes offer food and money. Palauan deities enter certain people, who speak their messages. These speakers are from specific families. A woman in my house was a speaker. Her name was Siabal, and she was a daughter of my adoptive mother, Kilegei. After Kilegei died when I was fifteen, I lived with Siabal. Siabal means ‘Japan’, because when she was born the Japanese came to Palau. She was a good woman. Siabal spoke the words of the deity and she gave people directions. For example, she said, “Make the road here”, “Don’t go to Koror, stay here”, and so on. When the air raids began, the deity said through Siabal, “Take refuge on the rock island, and then go to Aimeliik”, and we did so. The *Nanyo-cho* did not prohibit this belief. If we wanted, we could go to the *Nanyo-jinja* (South Seas Shrine), but if we did not want to, we did not have to. After Siabal died, my brother’s wife became a speaker. But after she died, nobody took over the role. My neighbor did not want to be a speaker, so instead she joined the Protestant church. These days, nobody listens to the words of the deity in our hamlet. If you want to pray to our deity, you just pray. If you wish to visit somewhere, this wish may come true. Even though I was from the speaker’s family, I did not feel any problem with working at the *Nanyo-jinja*. If Palauans came to the shrine, I was told to talk to them. But not so many Palauan people came.

## Memories of the War

One morning, when I was staying at my home in Ngetkib, my brother came running from Koror. Someone from Airai had been shot dead. The villagers in Airai took refuge on the rock island, and then the deity directed them to flee to Aimeliik, so they did this. They went there on foot. My sister Ibau went to Aimeliik with her husband’s mother. I did not go to Aimeliik, but because I thought that the soldiers would come to Ngetkib, after dark I went to my father’s house in the interior of Airai. I stayed in that hamlet until the war was over.

Americans came to Koror in big boats. Three M-boats were there in front of Airai. The Americans attacked the Japanese ships, and killed Japanese soldiers. Their bodies were scattered in the sea. On the Airai road, many Japanese soldiers died. We were very scared. They dropped bombs ... a Palauan was also killed on this road. We were in a panic. I was terrified by all this killing.

During the war, we planted taro, tapioca and sweet potato at night. In the daytime, we stayed in our dugout. Sometimes, those who worked for the Japanese military, from Korea, the Marshalls, Yap, Truk and other islands, stole our plants. I don't think they knew which were good to eat and which were weeds. Like other people, we ate *belloi* (bitter fruit which looks like potato) and *denges*. *Denges* is the fruit of the mangrove, and its shape is long. We boiled *denges* and after soaking it for three days, we ate it. It tasted terrible! But if we did not eat it, we could die. Because my brother caught fish for the Japanese military, they gave us some rice. He caught fish using poison. During the war, we could do almost nothing but look for food. At night, we cultivated the garden, and in the daytime, we hid ourselves and slept. Because we could gather coconuts at my sister's place, we could survive. The coconuts where I lived were all taken by the military. At night, when we lit a fire, we carefully hid it. We could endure the situation because it lasted for only a year. If it had continued for another year .... If we heard the airplanes, we hid the small children. But fortunately, I did not lose any of my family during the war.

*Interviews: 15 April 2005, 2 August 2006, Airai. Conducted in Japanese and English.  
Interviewers: first interview Maki MITA, Nasuhiko YAMAGUCHI, and Yuko YAMAMOTO;  
second interview Maki MITA.*

## Story 2

Mechas Ibau Demei Oiterong  
Born: 1917  
From: Ngerechemai, Koror<sup>7)</sup>



Mechas Ibau Demei Oiterong (2006)

### Memories of childhood

I was born in Koror, and grew up there.

When I started school, the Japanese population in Palau was not so large. Later, many Japanese emigrated to Palau, and around my house, there were many Okinawans. Most were farmers, and I heard them playing the *sanshin* (traditional Okinawan stringed instrument) every night.

I started to go to school at the age of nine. At first, the school was located in Medalaii, but it moved to near the dock. I went to school on foot with a basket of lunch. At that time, we usually ate traditional food. But sometimes, we ate canned sardine. It was very tasty! Even though the Japanese used chopsticks for eating, our teachers did not force us to use them. When I was a child, I ate with a spoon and my hands. Spoons were introduced to Palau in the German time. I remember that for a big feast, chopsticks were laid out on the table.

Because I was eager to learn Japanese, I did not find the class difficult. The Japanese language textbook started with easy phrases like '*hana, hana, akaihana* (flower, flower, red flower).' The last section of the first grade textbook was *Momotaro* [a Japanese fairy-story, of a boy who was born from a peach]. In second grade, we memorized whole sentences of *Momotaro*. I also learned Japanese songs, which the older students taught me. At that time, I wanted to learn everything. Of the school subjects, I liked mathematics the best. I memorized multiplication tables in the second grade.

There were strict teachers and gentle teachers. If the children were noisy and did not listen to the teacher, they would be called to the front and if the teacher was strict, the students were beaten with a cane. But I did not think this was excessively strict, because our parents were also strict. If a child did not listen to his or her parents, or if a child stole something, this child would be thrashed. I did not do anything to be beaten when I was a child.

In Palau, the most important thing is respect for elders. If you respect elders, you will be respected when you get old.

I had eleven siblings. Because the children of my older brothers and sisters stayed in my parents' house in Koror to go to school, the house was like a dormitory.

## Days after marriage, and Palauan customs

I married my husband when I was nineteen. He was one year older, from my neighboring hamlet. When we were children we knew each other, but when we grew up, we did not see one another for a while. But when we met again in our adolescence, we decided to get married. His name was Ngiraingas Oiterong.

When we were young, young men belonged to the *Seinen-dang* (Young Men's Association). My husband was a member, and before the sports competition, they stayed in a *bai* (meeting house) to prepare. They stayed in the *bai* for about three months, and their wives brought food. It was hard but I felt that it was for the community.

When I was young, we had *mesei* (taro-patches) but we did not have *sers* (gardens for tapioca and other plants). Tapioca was only introduced to Palau in the German period. When I was young, it was still not common to raise tapioca. *Chemutii* (sweet potato) was also introduced from somewhere else. Rice was introduced in the Japanese time. When we had money, we bought a straw rice bag. But when we did not have enough money, we bought only a small portion of rice from the store. At that time, our principal food was *kukau* (taro). These days, Palauan people mainly eat rice, and don't eat *kukau* as often as they used to.

We also changed the dishes by introducing new ingredients. For example, when I was a child, we used to cook *brak* (giant taro) with syrup, mince it with a mincing machine, and pour coconut milk on it. We called this dish *chelbaki*. But when tapioca became popular, we started to make *chelbaki* with tapioca. These days, those who make *chelbaki* with *brak* are rare.

I prefer *brak* (giant taro) to *kukau* (taro). Traditionally, *kukau* was a dish for the high-ranked people. We used to eat fish as *odoim*.<sup>8)</sup> On special occasions such as the visit of a high-ranked person, we cooked wild chicken. When we had a party, we cooked a pig. Basically, cooking was the women's job, but the men cleaned the fish.

My parents told me that when I visited another hamlet, I must act in their manner. Sometimes, we had different customs. Traditionally, we could travel in Palau without bringing food or money. Whether they knew me or not, they would feed me and let me stay in a *bai* without payment. Normally, there were two *bai* in a hamlet, one for the meetings of *rubak* (high-ranked men), and the other for general purposes. The latter was also used as guest house. This custom is fading now. These days, we need to pay for everything!

In the old days, when young men from Ngeremlengui visited Koror, they stayed at a Koror *bai*. The men from Ngeremlengui offered their food to the young men in Koror, who offered the Ngeremlengui men their own food in return. This mutual help was very common in Palau. This custom is still active; if a Koror women's group visits another women's group in Aimeliik, they will take care of us. But generally, it is more common to stay at relatives' houses.

In Palauan society, there are several associations. When I was young, there was an association for children, an association for youths, an association for the middle-aged, and old-age associations for both sexes. My husband belonged to the *Seinen-dang* (Young Men's Association), and they earned money through working for others. For example, they might say; "We need money. Well, let's go to the harbor and earn money loading cargo." I belonged to the *Joshi-seinen-dang* (Young Women's Association). We danced at the festival and we worked together in each member's taro-patches.

After the war, *Ngaraiek*, the middle-aged women's association in Koror, built their own *bai*. They raised money for construction in their group, and commissioned some men to build a *bai*. This *bai* was called '*Bai er a Ngaraiek*'.

### **My religious beliefs**

When I was a child, I believed in *Modekngai* (Palauan religious belief), the faith of my parents. But after my marriage, I became a Catholic in 1939. At that time, many Palauan people believed in *Modekngai*. Sometimes they met together, and they prayed and sang songs. They also drank herbal medicines. Some of the *Modekngai* leaders were exiled to another island. In the time of the air raids, many people wore *Modekngai* charms. It was a piece of tree branch. I did not wear it because I was a Catholic, but even many Catholic believers wore *Modekngai* charms at that time.

### **Memories of the war**

At the end of February 1944, we left Koror for refuge in Aimeliik. One month later we had the first air raid, on March 30.

In the middle of the night of March 29, which was a very dark night, a messenger ran through Aimeliik, shouting, "Get up and take refuge as soon as possible! The American army will arrive tomorrow morning. Take care!"

We woke up, prepared to carry our things, and fled into the hills, the middle of the jungle. I was with my children, one of two years old and another of four months; and my husband's father who was blind, his wife, his two sisters, and their children. I carried my two-year-old on my back, held my baby in my arms, and brought a bag with a blanket and underclothes for my children. We walked for two or three hours in the hills. My father-in-law, who was blind, knew this area very well, because he often walked there when he was young. So we followed his suggestions as to where to go. At last, we came across a river. There was a taro-patch beside the river. This taro-patch was for *brak* (giant taro), and the soil was dry. My mother-in-law said "Let's rest until dawn, and find a better place in the morning." So, we had a nap in the taro-patch. For our children we laid out blankets, but we slept on the ground.

The next morning, while it was still dark, my mother-in-law woke us up. "Get up,

everybody. Go to the river and wash your faces. Prepare to carry our things.” As I was getting up, I heard the sounds of airplanes, “Uooooooooonn!!” and the sounds of the bombs, “Bon! Bon!” I was upset, and my heart began to beat so hard. Everybody was shaken, and no-one could even speak.

We took refuge under a big tree by the river. I just stayed there and listened to the bombing. There were other groups of people who joined our refuge in the morning. Everybody was very disquieted and confused. Still now, when I remember this day, I almost begin to cry. Aimeliik was not attacked that time, but Airai, the neighboring village, was attacked. We listened to the bombs, and we could not move. We spent that day just waiting there. We did not eat anything, and we did not even drink water. We were near the river, but we did not go to the river to get water, because we were so scared. When one of our children cried, others scolded us for making noise. We were very troubled.

One of our relatives arrived, and reported what had happened in Airai. He said that many people had been shot dead at Airai airfield. Most of them were Japanese, particularly the Okinawans constructing the airfield. Because he said that the American tanks would come, we took refuge in the valley. After staying one night at the foot of a hill, we moved to an open space in the valley, and we built a hut. Other villagers also fled to this place. We spent four days there.

After that, we moved to the foot of the mountain [big hill] in Aimeliik. At first, there was still taro and tapioca in our gardens, so younger people went back to the village and got them. But when it was all eaten, we began to eat *keam*, wild nuts. There was a *keam* forest in the mountain, so we gathered and ate them.

At that time, we were separated from my sisters and their husbands. I was with my husband’s father who was blind, his wife, my sister’s child, and my two children. My sisters brought us food. But the food they could supply became less and less. Finally, we started to eat *belloi*. *Belloi* is a fruit which looks like potato. It is bitter and poisonous. Some people ate *denges*, mangrove fruit, after *belloi*. Fortunately, we did not eat *denges*. I’ll tell you how to prepare *belloi*. Before it can be eaten, it must be peeled and sliced, boiled, and soaked in the river for two or three days. Otherwise, this fruit is poisonous, and very, very, very, very bitter. If you eat it without removing the poison, you might die. The Palauan people have known how to prepare *belloi* for a long time. It was a food eaten only in famine. Without *belloi*, the Palauan people might have died. And if the war had continued one more year, we could not have survived.

Japanese soldiers also starved. They became only skin and bone, and died while sitting under trees.... However, I have heard that there was a lot of hardtack remaining at the Japanese base in Ngatpang after the war.

My older sister, Ucheliou Brobesong, became a friend of a Japanese soldier named ‘Shitti’, and sometimes gave him food. After the war, this soldier visited my sister several times. He said that he owed his life to my sister. When he could not visit Palau,



he sent her money. He was a good person, wasn't he? There are also ungrateful people in the world. There are good people, and bad people. Some Palauans hate Japanese soldiers. But not everybody was bad.

During the war, I visited one of my sisters who lived in Melekeok. In Melekeok, there was taro, sugarcane, bananas, papaya, coconut, and other foods. So, I brought my younger baby to Melekeok, and placed it in my sister's care. The war ended in August, and my baby passed away in October. I think that my baby died from diarrhea. In Aimeliik, my baby ate only soup, but in Melekeok, there was more food and they let my baby eat something harder. I still regret taking my child to Melekeok. But at that time, it seemed the best thing to do.

In Aimeliik, there were plenty of coconut trees. But it was forbidden to take coconuts from these trees, as the Japanese army claimed them as their own. But Palauans would go to their own trees, and take some coconuts at night.

There were many Japanese civilians in Aimeliik. They also fled into the mountains. Some died of starvation. It was very hard for them to find food. I have heard that some Japanese asked Palauans to give them food. I was told of a Japanese baby crying beside the body of its mother who had been killed by the bombing. A Japanese came and took care of this baby.

I myself took care of one Okinawan boy, who was eight. My husband's sister's husband was asked to take the boy by an old Okinawan woman, near today's Airai causeway. His mother was sick and semi-conscious, and the boy's grandmother pleaded for help for the child.

This boy grew up in Palau after the war. My sister lived in Ngarchelong, so I took care of him in Koror when he went to school. His name was Ken-ichi, so we called him 'Kenbou'. He had a good character, but was not so smart. His teacher said to me, "He is very honest, but not suited to office work. I recommend him for fishing or cultivation work." I also thought so. After graduating from school, he worked as a boat operator for the church.

When he was seventeen, we got a telegram from his real mother in Okinawa. She said that she wanted to take care of him there; so my sister's husband took him to Okinawa. His family in Okinawa welcomed him warmly, and his mother expressed their sincere gratitude to my sister's husband, and gave him a lot of money.

In the 1980s, my brother had a chance to visit Okinawa, and he visited Kenbou. He worked tending chickens, and when he saw my brother, he was very pleased. I wish him every happiness in Okinawa. He must be more than sixty years old now.

*Interviews: 16 March and 13 July 2006, in Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA.*

## Story 3

Rubak Sebastian Koichi Oikang

Born: 1917

From: Ngarchelong



Rubak Sebastian Koichi Oikang (2005)

### My school days in Japan

I studied for three years in Ngaraard, and then in Koror for two more years.

After graduating from school, I went to Japan, and studied at *Tokyo Furitsu Nougei Gakko* (Tokyo Agricultural School). In 1930, I left Palau for Japan, and when I arrived in Yokohama port, Viscount Mishima welcomed me. He was my patron and I stayed at his house. Viscount Mishima and I took a train, and went to his residence. I felt as if I were Urashima-Taro [a young man in a famous Japanese fairy-story, who traveled under the sea on the back of a sea-turtle]. Viscount Mishima also took care of Franz Polloi, another Palauan student.

In the first two weeks, I did not go out at all. On the first day when I went to school, Japanese students were discussing what language they should use to talk to me. I greeted them with, “*Ohayo Gozaimasu*” (Good morning). They were very surprised and we became friends at once. When I told them a Japanese fairy-story, they were pleased. They asked me where Palau was. In this school there were also students from Korea and China.

It was hard for me to read Japanese texts, so I asked for some advice from Mr. Masao Marumoto, a university student who was also staying at the house of the Viscount. My results were in the middle of the class, but I failed Chinese literature. It was too difficult for me to understand the Chinese texts.

In school, I learned how to raise vegetables. We students went to the farm at least once a week. We raised radishes, green vegetables, Chinese cabbage, carrots and other vegetables. In the hothouse, there were several coconut trees. Looking at them, my friend joked to me, “They are your friends, aren’t they?”

Japanese people were kind. They are also a Pacific people. The pronunciation of Palauan is similar to that of Japanese. I liked Japanese food also. I loved to eat fish, and rice was tasty. But I did not like vegetables or yellow pickled radish. I had Japanese tea, but I did not like it very much. I preferred something sweet. I could use chopsticks, and they let me sit how I liked. Sometimes, I ate meals with the Mishima family, but usually I ate with other students staying in the Viscount’s house.

In the morning, one of the students woke me up at 6:00. I ate breakfast, which the

house maids prepared, and left for school at 8:00. I took the train to get to school. After becoming accustomed to the railway services in Tokyo, I traveled everywhere on my vacations. After school, I went home and studied.

In the summer vacation, I was allowed to sleep until 10:00. I went out to wherever I wanted. I remember that Yutaka Mitsui, Kinjiro Umeda, and I went to see a parade at the military school in Yoyogi. They were my friends. We went there by bike, and after watching the parade, we ate lunch at a restaurant. At that time, we also went to see the imperial palace. On another day Yutaka Mitsui and I joined in with boy-scout activities, and went to the beach in Kamakura or Zushi for camping. When I swam in the sea, they said that I was the champion of Palau. Someone else called me ‘a fish of the south sea’.

I also traveled to Nagoya, Kyoto and Osaka. It was a school trip, and I was given 50 yen from Viscount Mishima.

When the Micronesian people visited Tokyo as *Kankodang* (a cultural tour to Japan arranged by the Japanese government), I guided them in Tokyo. I was a little proud of myself.

I had a Japanese friend who used to live in Palau. His name was Yukio Sakurai. When we visited an office of the *Nanyo-cho* (South Seas Government) in Tokyo, we spoke in Palauan, “Ke mor ker?” (Where are you going?) and laughed.

Mrs. Mishima told me, “If you need money, please don’t hesitate to ask me.” But it was hard for me. Mrs. Mishima sometimes bought me storybooks. My one major difficulty in Japanese life was the cold. It was hard to wake up in winter, and I did not want to go to school. One day, I pulled my blanket over my head, and held a *hibachi* (charcoal brazier). Then, Mrs. Mishima was surprised and made me stop. I burned my face a little. After this incident, Mrs. Mishima made me a padded room-coat.

After graduating from Tokyo Agricultural School, I went back to Palau. I started work as a translator at the Palau Branch Office of the *Nanyo-cho*. As a translator, I accompanied land surveyors and attended the meetings of chiefs. In these meetings, Palauan chiefs from each hamlet got together in the buildings of the *Nanyo-cho* and listened to the Japanese officers. Because I did not know about Palauan customs, I learned about them from Mr. Oikawa, the chief of the Palauan police officers.

After that, I worked at the Association for Production as an accountant. My knowledge of bookkeeping, which I had studied in Japan, was useful. My knowledge of agriculture was not used in Palau.

I visited Japan 55 years later. It was a totally different world!

*Interview: 27 April 2005, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewers: Maki MITA, Nasuhiko YAMAGUCHI and Yuko YAMAMOTO.*

## Story 4

Rubak Singeo Techong

Born: 1920

Father: from Sendai, Japan

Mother: from Airai



Rubak Singeo Techong (2006)



Singeo in the 1930s [?]  
(photo: courtesy of  
Singeo Techong)

### My father

My father was Japanese, and his name was Shigemitsu

Shoji. He was relocated by his work from Palau to Jaluit while my mother was pregnant with me. So the only thing he left me was my name. He said to my mother that if the baby was a boy to name him Shigeo [pronounced in Palau as ‘Singeo’], and if a girl to name her Shigeo.

I met my father three times. Our first meeting was in 1932. In that year, he came to Palau and told my grandfather that he wanted to take me to school in Japan. But my grandfather refused his request and said, “I have raised him and educated him to this day. So you should not take him away from me.”

My father did not give up, and again he visited me in 1934 when he was transferred to Rota because of his business. Again, my grandfather would not agree to let me go to Japan.

The third time I saw my father was in 1939. I was now grown up, and had made my own decision to study in Japan. On my way to Japan, I visited Saipan and met my father, who came from Rota to see me. He was Postmaster of the Rota post office at that time. My father told me that the war situation was worsening, and that most young Japanese men were being taken into the army, so it was not the right time to go to Japan. Taking his advice, I went back to Palau.

### What my grandfather taught me

I was raised by my grandparents on my mother’s side, in Airai. Because my grandmother died when I was five or six years old, it was my grandfather who actually raised and educated me. My mother-tongue was Palauan, and I did not learn Japanese until I went to school.

When we were children, we learned many practical things through playing. For example, we used canoes and bamboo rafts for transportation, and sometimes we were thrown into the sea. So, mastering swimming skills was necessary.

When boys turned thirteen years old, we learned how to use a *biskang* (spear). We competed by throwing a *biskang* as far as possible. We also caught fish with a *biskang*. My grandfather was very good at *biskang* fishing. I learned from him how to catch fish.

In Palau, we have men's work and women's work. Fishing is men's work, and cultivation is women's work. So, boys do not work in taro-patches. If a boy works in a taro-patch, people will say that he is a girlish boy. When we cook, men collect firewood, make a fire, clean their catch, and wrap the fish with leaves. For their part, women clean the taro and tapioca which they raised in their gardens, and cook fish and other foods.

We Palauans have rules in each hamlet. When we are in the village, we must follow these rules. I will give you some examples of Palauan ethics.

- (1) Until some decades ago, if you lived by the entrance of the hamlet, you had to prepare a torch at night in case someone visited the hamlet. If the visitor walked around the hamlet at night without a torch, it was not good. The guest should have a torch when walking through the hamlet. We also preserved food for visitors. Everybody in the hamlet kept extra food, but especially those who lived by the entrance of the hamlet were strictly required to be prepared for visitors. In Palau, travelers did not have to bring their own food. Even now, it is Palauan customary practice to invite visitors to come and eat.
- (2) In Palau, we should not call people who have a title by their given name. It is impolite to do so. If I meet somebody I do not know, I say, "Excuse me for asking, but do you have a title?" It is also fine to call somebody by the name of the land where he or she lives. In my case, my house is on the land named '*Elilai*', so they can call me '*Ngira Elilai*'. For women, we put '*Dirra*' before the name of the land.
- (3) To give food to elders is to show them proper respect. When I was young, there was a *diangel* (canoe house) at the wharf. If an old man was sitting in the *diangel*, we would give him some fish. In such an situation, we would say, "*Temam*", which means, "I am sorry not to be able to give you more fish, but our catch is small."
- (4) In Palau, we should listen to what people say until they have finished speaking. If I start to talk while somebody is still speaking, I won't find out what this person wanted to say. After listening to their opinion, I state my opinion. If I don't have any opinion to state, then I say, "I don't understand enough about this matter to state an opinion." In addition, when someone comes to me I don't ask them, "What's up?", I just keep silent and wait for them to start talking to me. This person is coming to me because they have something to say. So, it is impolite to ask them about their business. And when younger people talk to their elders, they should keep their distance, and look up at the elder by stooping down.

## My school days

In 1934, I lived in Ngerekebesang for three months. There was no *renraku-doro* (causeway) between Koror and Ngerekebesang at that time, so we had to go across the sea. We students had our own bamboo raft, but sometimes we could not use this because adults were already using it. On these occasions, we had to walk through the sea. When the tide was low, it was fine. But sometimes the water level was high, and we had to swim. We took off our clothes and carried them on our heads as we swam to Koror. But we could not help being late to school when we had to swim. Our teacher scolded us at first, but after hearing the reason, he understood. After swimming across the sea, we would bathe with water from the school tank. It was about an hour to the wharf in Meyuns from my house, and from Meyuns we walked through the sea, and after that we still had to walk to Koror *Kogakko*. Even though we did not have a clock in our house, we guessed the time by the songs of the birds. When birds started to sing, my mother told me that I should leave for school. The Japanese teachers were strict about the time, but we Palauans were also punctual at that time.

## Japanese friends

When I was a child, I did not have Japanese friends. If Palauan children were with Japanese children, we got into a fight. This was because Japanese children called us ‘*tomin*’ (islanders), and we felt a sense of disdain from them. The word ‘*tomin*’ itself might not be a bad word. It just means ‘islander’, and we actually live on islands, so it is not a problem. We did not know the meaning of the word, but we felt that we were looked down on when Japanese called us ‘*tomin*’.

The fact that I am half Japanese is not a big problem. Since Palau is a matrilineal society and my mother is Palauan, I am thought to be Palauan. But sometimes some people say to me, “Why is your skin white?” or, “You’re not Palauan. You should go home!”

During the period of the Japanese administration, Palauans were not treated equally with Japanese. That is the way things are. Especially, Palau is a very small group of islands and it is not very well known to outsiders. I heard that some Japanese thought there were ‘man-eaters’ in Palau. But these people didn’t even know where Palau was. I think that the Japanese did not know very much about the world. This might be because they have lived by themselves for a long time. Americans are open to differences between people, but the Japanese were not.

## After my graduation

I lived with my grandfather for a year after I graduated from school in 1934. He taught

me how to catch fish with a *biskang*. At that time, we did not rely on money, so we depended on our own skills. One day my relative, Oikawasang, visited me. He said to my grandfather, “How about letting Singeo work in Koror?” My grandfather agreed, so I came to Koror and started to work for Hashida *tofu* store. Mr. Hashida, the owner, was in Japan, and Oikawasang managed the store. I visited customers’ houses and took their orders, delivered *tofu* to them, and took orders on the telephone. The hardest task was taking orders by telephone. Oikawasang taught us how to do that. If I answered the phone, I would say, “Hello. This is Hashida *tofu* store. May I help you?” Then the customer would say what he or she wanted. Communicating with customers was difficult, and nobody wanted this task. We took turns in one-hour shifts. I was there until 1936.

In 1937, I started to work as a tea-boy in the agricultural division of the *Nanyo-cho* (South Seas Government). I prepared tea for the workers, cleaned the office, went on errands, and did other tasks. I also went to the post office for the workers, and sent their money to their families in Japan by telegraph. I also went to the bank in *Nantaku* (South Seas Colonization Company) to withdraw money for the office.

Every June, the agricultural division became busy, because the office would sum up the reports from Yap, Ponape and other islands to make an annual report. Three typists typed the draft, and we printed them out. We were very busy for fifteen days. We worked from the morning until late at night.

One day, when I was dirty with ink, I was ordered to go to the bank and withdraw money for the head of our office for his business trip. I remember the amount of the money was about 700 yen. I asked the officer, “I am dirty with ink. Isn’t that a problem?” He said, “It doesn’t matter. You should go now to get the money from the bank.” So, I went to the bank with soiled clothes and hands dirty with ink. Then, the bank clerk went to his boss with the check. The chief manager came to me, and asked, “Where did you get this check?” I was offended and said, “Why should I tell you that? It is not your business.” Then, he asked me again, “This is a lot of money. Why do you have this check?” I said, “You should not ask me such a question. This is my check, and you should give me the money.” We argued for about twenty minutes. I said, “I am very busy now. Give me the money.” He said, “You stole this check, didn’t you?” I replied, “Don’t be so insulting. How could I steal so much money?” He said, “Which office do you work for?” So I said, “I work for the agricultural division of *Nanyo-cho*. Call Mr. Shimamura of my office.”

A bank clerk called my office, and Mr. Shimamura, my boss, said to him that he wanted to talk with me. I told Mr. Shimamura, “They are suspicious of me and will not give me the money.” Mr. Shimamura told the chief manager of the bank that I worked for his office, so he should hand me the money. I had such an argument, because I was very busy and was offended by their condescending attitude.

In July 1939, I quit the job in the agricultural division of *Nanyo-cho*, because I

wanted to study to be a mechanic in Japan. At that time, the pay system was hierarchical by race. The pay for Okinawans was less than 40 yen a month, and the pay for Palauans was less than 20 to 25 yen a month, I remember. But if those people were skilled in a specific field, their pay increased to the Japanese level. Carpenters, mechanics, and drivers got good salaries. My pay when I worked as a tea-boy was only 12 yen a month. So, I wanted to study to be a mechanic.

On my way to Japan, I stopped in Saipan and I met with my biological father who worked in Rota. But my father said that it was not the right time to go to Japan. I gave up on going to Japan, and came back to Palau.

Subsequently, I started to work for the engineering division of *Nanyo-cho*. My section dealt with waterworks. I drove a three-wheeler to carry the workers, and drove a car to carry cans of oil, and I also operated a boat. I learned how to operate the three-wheeler, car and boat by myself. My pay was 45 yen a month. The pay of Okinawans who worked for the waterworks section was 40 yen a month, so I thought my pay was not bad.

There was a water supply system by 1929. Running water was not yet used in households, but the water line went to Malakal and there was a water supply at Malakal *hatoba* (dock).

## My experiences during the war

One night in March 1944, a group of the *keibo-dan* (civilian patrol team) walked all over Koror with megaphones announcing, “The Americans will attack Koror tomorrow. Please take refuge.”

Hearing that, we were very upset. We had never experienced an air raid, and we did not know how to prepare for it. My family and I went to Ngesachaol, a hamlet at the edge of Koror Island. We thought that we should stay far from the center of Koror. But nothing happened the next day, and most people went back to their homes around 4:00 p.m.

At night, the *keibo-dan* again told the people in Koror, “The Americans surely will come tomorrow. Please move to safer places.” But the people were too tired to move again, and most of them stayed in their homes.

The next morning, the air raid started around 6:30 a.m. At first, they attacked the Airai airfield, and ships in Malakal harbor. There were about sixty ships, including transport ships, oil transport ships, small warships and other ships in Malakal harbor. Because the Americans attacked mainly the airfield and ships, they did not attack downtown very severely in the first stage of the air raid. Everybody ran away from Koror. My wife and I went to Airai.

After several days’ attack, the Americans went away, so I started to work for the waterworks again in Koror, but the Americans launched the second air raid in July.



At that time, workers of the engineering section and I were at Koror *hatoba* (dock) to get food for the workers. When the boat carrying vegetables from Babeldaob approached the dock, the Americans began to shoot everywhere. I told the workers, “It’s safer to swim to a shelter than to take the road.” I went to Aimeliik and stayed there after that.

### **My life in Aimeliik**

In Aimeliik, I worked milling timber. The Japanese cut down the trees, and brought them to us; we milled them, and then the Japanese army came and carried them away. Because we worked in the daytime, it was dangerous. When we ran the machines to saw the timber, they made smoke. If a lookout saw an airplane, he put a coconut leaf in a holder, and ran away to take refuge. We often looked up at the place where the lookout was sitting, and if there was a coconut leaf, we stopped the machines, and took shelter. The people who worked there were mostly Palauans, except for a Japanese man named Mr. Aizawa.

There was no food supply from the army for this job, so we had to find our own food. There were coconut trees around my house in Aimeliik, but the Japanese military claimed that these coconut trees belonged to them. So, we had to take food from other people’s land.

### **Violence by the Japanese**

The hamlet where I stayed after the air raid in July was called Ngerberruuch. Mostly people from Meyuns fled to this place. At night, men went fishing to get something to eat.

One day, after fishing, we went back to the village, but I came back a little bit after my buddies. When I arrived at the village, I saw my friends getting beaten and kicked by Japanese soldiers, who belonged to the Adachi troop of Ogino party. I was also kicked and seriously beaten, and after that, I could not even walk by myself. But I did not know why this had happened, and I asked my friends, but nobody knew why. In this incident twenty-nine Palauans were injured, especially the chief of Meyuns who was tied up and beaten so seriously that he lost his hearing.

I still wonder why the Japanese soldiers were so violent with us. This is one of the worst things that the Japanese did in Palau. I think that I must make allowances for that episode because it happened in wartime .... Wars brutalize people whenever they happen. It was a bitter experience, and I have not told others this story until today.

## **Foreign influences**

I think that the Japanese were too selfish. Every foreigner who has come here was also the same. They don't respect the Palauan people very much, and they just do anything they want to do, and say anything they want to say. For example, liberalism is an American notion. This idea might work in the United States of America because that country has a variety of people. But Palau is different from America. We have lived by our own rules. Since Americans introduced liberalism to us, we have had a lot of problems. Palauans do not fully understand what 'liberalism' is, and some people enjoy their own liberty, but they don't allow others that liberty.

I don't think that we should follow the American way. We Palauans have our own country. We have lived by our own rules and customs. So, I believe that we should keep to our way of life from now on too.

*Interview: 17 July, 11 and 15 August, 26 September 2006, Koror. Conducted in Japanese.  
Interviewer: Maki MITA, except fourth interview, Junko NISHIDA and Maki MITA.*

## Story 5

Rubak Toshio Kyota

Born: 1921

Father: from Kanagawa, Japan

Mother: from Ngeremlengui



Rubak Toshio Kyota, with his wife Mechas  
Sutella Kyota (Story 33) (2006)

### About my father

My father came to Palau as a trader working for a company named ‘*Koshinsya*’, in the time of the German administration. He traveled all over Palau, and traded rice, kerosene oil, lamps and clothes for coconuts. The company extracted copra from those coconuts. Soon, he got married to a Palauan woman, and settled in Ngeremlengui, which was his wife’s village.

When I was a child, I lived in Orull [?] of Ngermetengel. This place is at the foot of the hill on which the Japanese later placed the cannons. Because my father was Japanese, he could not own land in Palau. So, he held some land in the name of his son. The traditional chiefs of Ngeremlengui discussed my father’s right to the land, and they decided to allow my father to use some of the land of Ngeremlengui.

At that time, there were still very few Japanese in Palau. My father became friends with Palauans. My father spoke the Palauan language, even though his pronunciation was very bad. But we spoke mostly Palauan at our house, so I learned Japanese mostly at school.

Later, my father started to collect sea cucumbers, especially the *chesobel* species, then dried them and sold them to Chinese merchants. My eldest brother Tatsuo worked with my father.

### At school in Koror

When I started at the elementary school in Koror, my father brought me to Koror in his boat. I stayed at my auntie’s house in Ngerbeched in Koror, and went to school from her house every day. I think that my teacher’s name was Hattori-sensei, but I am not sure. My favorite subject was mathematics. When my wife entered school, some years later, speaking Palauan at school was strictly prohibited except for the first grade students. But when I was at school, we were allowed to speak in Palauan even after the second year, I think.

We also had a farming class from third grade. We cultivated our gardens, and

raised cucumbers, green vegetables, green onions and other vegetables.

My father visited Koror every Saturday, and gave me some money for my daily needs. Using this money, I sometimes went to the movie theater, and bought some snacks and drinks. My father also bought me shirts and pants. At that time, my father worked collecting sea cucumbers, raising pineapples, and fishing in Ngeremlengui. He was not so rich, but he took care of his children very well.

## Life after graduating from school

After studying in Koror *Kogakko* for three years, I helped my father and worked for a pineapple cannery in Asahi hamlet. I planted coconut trees, and collected coconuts to sell. I also went fishing with my brothers. During the Japanese time, *Nanyo-Aluminium* Company mined aluminum in Ngeremlengui, and I also worked there for a while. In the early 1940s, we formed a cooperative for those who grew vegetables in Ngeremlengui. Such cooperatives were created all over Palau at that time. We bought vegetables from the people in Ngeremlengui, and sold them in Koror. When I worked there, I weighed fruit and vegetables such as sweet potatoes, bananas, and papayas, and calculated the prices, and paid money to the farmers. There was a central office for all the cooperatives in Koror, and each district cooperative brought the vegetables there. The central office sold the fruit and vegetables to the retailers, I guess. When I worked in the cooperative, I heard an announcement recruiting young Palauan men to go to New Guinea with the Japanese army.

## Wartime experience in New Guinea

I volunteered for the second group of *Chosa-tai* (research party)<sup>9)</sup>, and so I became a civilian war worker. I was willing to be a member of this group because many other young Palauans had also volunteered for the job. I didn't think it was risky. In May 1943, I, along with other members of *Chosa-tai*, departed from the port of Palau. From Ngeremlengui, Rudimch, Mers and I joined this party. The leader was Mellil.

We went to New Guinea to investigate the natural resources there. However, when we arrived, the war had worsened; so we had to work to help the Japanese soldiers. For example, four of us together carried a bomb by hand to Nongos [?] Island. We also grew vegetables for the army, went fishing, and hunted wild boars in the mountains.

During our duties there, some members of the party, Mers, Aigel [?], Ngirklsong [?], Ongino, and Rudimch, died because they drank methanol instead of potable alcohol. I also drank methanol, but I was fine because I did not drink a lot. We buried them in Manokwari in New Guinea. Another member named Yada became sick, and I took care of him until he died.

After the war, some members, Ubal, Johannes, Simon and Katosang, came back

to Palau via Japan and Taiwan. I came back to Palau by a different route, and I arrived in Angaur in May 1946. When I arrived in Koror, I could not believe that it was Koror. There was almost nothing there, and I felt as if Koror had shrunk.

### **My father returned to Palau after the war**

Because my father was Japanese, he was sent to Japan by the American army in 1946. I wrote a letter to the American government, and I asked Remengesau to translate it into English, and I sent it. Because my father had lived in Palau much longer than other Japanese, the Americans approved my request. At that time, many Japanese worked at the phosphate mine in Angaur. My father came to Angaur by a Japanese vessel, and soon after that he came back to our place in Ngeremlengui in 1948. He lived there for the rest of his life.

*Interview: 26 July 2006, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA.*

## Story 6

Rubak Chiokai Kloulubak

Born: 1921

Father: from Melekeok

Mother: from Ngaraard



Rubak Chiokai Kloulubak,  
with his granddaughter (2006)

### My background

I was named Chiokai by a Japanese policeman whose name was Oshima. It spells ‘*tori*’ (bird) and ‘*umi*’ (sea) in Chinese characters. This policeman traveled around Melekeok, Ngiwal, Ngaraard and Ngarchelong. I don’t know why he named me that.

My father was a traditional carpenter. He knew how to make canoes and how to build traditional Palauan houses. My mother raised taro, tapioca, and other vegetables in her gardens. Neither of my parents understood Japanese because there were few Japanese in Ngaraard at that time.

### My school days

I was educated in the *honka* (basic course) at Ngaraard *Kogakko* for three years, and then I proceeded to the *hoshuka* (advanced course) at Koror *Kogakko* and studied there for two years. When I was in Ngaraard, I went to school on foot. It was about a thirty-minute walk from my hamlet, Chelab, to Ulimang where my school was. I liked to go to school because I wanted to learn Japanese. But I did not have a chance to practice Japanese often, because only a few Japanese lived in Ngaraard and in Ngarchelong.

When I came to Koror for the *hoshuka*, speaking Palauan at school was strictly forbidden. It was hard for me. I also studied mathematics, Japanese reading, Japanese composition, singing, and other subjects. I liked science, but I don’t remember what I studied at school. I think that what I learned in school proved to be useless in my life. I even forgot how to speak Japanese because I did not use it for a long time.

In Koror, I lived in the dormitory. I ate rice and canned salmon or sardines every day. I was not used to eating rice before I came to Koror. In Ngaraard, we ate rice only once in a while, with coconut syrup. We bought rice at *Nanyo-boeki* store (South Seas Trading Company) in Ngaraard. We got money by selling vegetables from our gardens to the Japanese. Sometimes my parents came to Koror to see me, and they would bring some food like *billum* of tapioca (tapioca cake wrapped in leaves) for me.

## After graduation

After graduating from school, I worked as an errand boy for Koyama the dentist. I cleaned the rooms and did other chores. After working there for a year, I began working as a boat operator for *Nanyo-kisen* (South Seas Liners), and traveled from Kayangel to Angaur. The company had three boats, and each could carry thirty passengers. This boat did not travel on a set schedule. The system was that if there were three people who wanted to go to Ngeremlengui, we ran a boat there. I worked there for three years. The pay for a boat operator was higher than I was paid by the dentist.

After working as a boat operator, I became a *mura junkei* (village policeman). A Japanese policeman named Harashima suggested that I become a *junkei*. We called Palauan policemen '*junkei*', and Japanese policemen '*junsa*'. *Junkei* took care of Palauan traditional matters, while *junsa* took care of Japanese matters. Because *junkei* wore smart uniforms, everybody wanted to be a *junkei*. Before I could become a *junkei*, I was investigated to make sure that I had not done anything criminal. Those who belonged to a high clan were more highly evaluated than others. Speaking of the uniform, we had to buy it for ourselves. It was better to wear shoes, but being barefoot was also allowed. The pay for a *junkei* was higher than that for a boat operator.

I worked as a *junkei* for six years in Ngarchelong and Kayangel. If I found somebody doing something criminal, I would send him or her to the *kelebus* (jail) in Koror. The chief of the offender's village prepared the boat to send the offender to Koror.

## The war

After the first air raid in March, my wife and I took refuge in Ngarchelong. But in Ngarchelong there were many Japanese soldiers. The Japanese army ordered us to take refuge in Ngaraard. In Ngaraard, not only were there people from Ngarchelong, but also from Peleliu, Angaur and Kayangel. If they had relatives there, they could borrow the taro-patches. Later, everybody started to clear the land for farming.

After the war, an American vessel brought 68 Palauans to Kayangel. I heard that the chief of Kayangel asked the American army to bring people back to their homeland. I also went to Kayangel on that occasion.

*Interview: 5 July 2006, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA*

## Story 7

Rubak Ichiro Belesam  
Born: 1922  
Father: from Japan  
Mother: from Peleliu



Rubak Ichiro Belesam, showing an old scar  
on his arm (2006)

### My background

My father is Japanese, and my mother is Palauan. A few months after I was born, my mother died, and my father went back to Japan. All I know of my father is that his name was Miwa, and his face which was in a picture, and that he was a merchant selling and buying coconuts. I was raised by my mother's mother and her sisters.

### In *kogakko*

When I turned eight years old, I started to go to *kogakko* in Peleliu. To go to school, I walked for forty minutes through the hills with bare feet every day.

I did not like school very much. One of the teachers made students take care of pigs and chickens, and tend the vegetables in the garden. We had to change the hay in the pigs' cage, and we used the dirty hay as fertilizer. We also used human feces from the toilet as fertilizer. I hated doing this job. And worse was that when my turn came, I had to go to school on Sunday to take care of the animals.

The teachers were strict. If a student lost things repeatedly or if he came to school late, his teacher would scold him and make him stand in the hallway for a while. If a student did not come to school, the teacher reported this to his parents or just beat him.

In Peleliu *Kogakko*, speaking Palauan at school was allowed. But when I proceeded to the *hoshuka* (advanced course), and moved to Koror, speaking Palauan at school was strictly forbidden. So, I just remained silent. The children of Koror were very good at speaking Japanese.

When I went to Koror *Kogakko*, I stayed in the school dormitory. In the dormitory, we ate steamed rice and fish. If we did not have fish, we ate *miso* soup with seaweed. Sometimes, Okinawan fishermen brought *meyas* (rabbit fish) to school. On such occasions, the students felt very happy and became cheerful. The rice we ate in the dormitory was called *nankin-mai*; it was tasteless. Some Japanese said that this rice was of poor quality. In Peleliu, we ate rice once a week, but in Koror we ate it every day.



Because of that, I got tired of eating rice in the end.

After school, I went to the house of a Japanese family, and worked for a while. The students got 1 yen 50 sen every month. I worked at Mr. Fukushima's house. Mr. Fukushima was a chauffeur for the South Seas Government. He and his wife were good people. I mowed the grass, and sometimes I planted papaya. It was easy for me.

On Sunday, I went to the Evangelical church in Koror. I had been brought up a Christian since I was an infant. After church, I played with my friends. We sometimes walked through the stores in Koror, and looked at what they were selling.

### **After graduating from school**

After graduating from school, I went back to Peleliu. In Peleliu there was a small hospital which belonged to *Nanyo-kohatsu* (South Seas Development Company). I distributed medicines to the patients according to the instructions of the doctor. I liked this job, but the problem was that the pay was too low.

Then, I started to work at the airfield construction site in Peleliu. There were Koreans, Okinawans, Palauans, and other people working on site. The pay there was 70 sen per day, but if I did a special job, the pay was increased. Working at the construction site was very hard. There were plenty of mosquitoes, so we burned wood to make smoke. There was an accident, and several people died when the dynamite used for the construction exploded. We built the airfield very quickly, because the war was coming.

As a result of the airfield construction, two hamlets had to be moved because they were too close to the airfield. The names of these hamlets were Bukl ra Beluu and Ngerekiukl. They discussed moving to Babeldaob, but the chief of Ngerchol, another village in Peleliu, stopped them. He said, "You should not go to Babeldaob. We should be in Peleliu together until we die." So, Bukl ra Beluu consolidated with Ngerdelolk, and Ngerekiukl consolidated with Ngerchol.

After working at the construction site, I started to work for *Nanyo-unyu* (South Seas Transportation Company). This company brought fruit and vegetables from Babeldaob to Koror. They also produced *awamori* liquor from tapioca. I watched over this company's warehouse. After that, I went to Makassar in Indonesia to be trained as a sailor.

### **Memories of the war**

I trained to be a sailor in a school in Makassar for several months, and after that, we sailed for Palau. On March 30, we had almost arrived in Palau, and we could see Angaur. On the morning of that day, we had the first air raid by the Americans. I saw multitudes of airplanes in the sky. At first, I thought that they were Japanese airplanes. But they started to shoot at us. Oh my goodness!

I jumped into the sea. Some of the crew took a life boat, and headed for Angaur. Two of my buddies and I swam to Angaur. It was a tough experience! Fortunately, on that day the sea was very calm; the sea around Angaur is usually very rough. I started to swim at around 7:00 in the morning and I arrived at Angaur around noon. After that, my two friends and I walked on the island and arrived at one of the villages at 8:00 or 9:00 at night. Those who took the lifeboat had already gone to an air raid shelter with the police. We also went there. After that, I went to the hospital because I was injured. I had been shot in the arm. Can you see this scar? Because my bone was not broken, I was able to swim for five hours. I also had a fragment in my waist. One of the crew died on the ship in this attack.

I was treated in Angaur at first, and then I was moved to Koror for further treatment. One day when I was still in the hospital, a government official visited me and told me that I must join a vessel as a crewman to go to New Guinea as soon as I recovered. I answered, "Yes sir!" But I escaped to my home in Peleliu.

Some months later, the security of Peleliu was more and more threatened. Because of this, we took refuge in the rock islands, and then moved to Babeldaob on the orders of the Japanese army. While we took refuge, I worked for the Japanese army in Ngchesar. My task was to boil the sea water to get salt. Several months later, the war ended.

After the war, we went back to Peleliu. We were appalled to see how terribly our island had been changed. Our villages had vanished. Even the hills had become flat. There were no Palauan houses at all, but instead of them, there were many Quonsets which the Americans had built.

*Interview: 3 July 2006, Koror. Conducted in Japanese and English. Interviewer: Maki MITA.*

## Story 8

Rubak Sato Remoket

Born: 1922

Parents: from Ngarchelong



Rubak Sato Remoket, with his wife (2006)

My father named me ‘Sato’ after a Japanese friend. My father was a traditional carpenter, and he was skilled in building Palauan canoes and houses.

My mother worked in her gardens and taro-patches.

### My memories of school days

When I was an infant, I lived in Ngarchelong. But there was no school in Ngarchelong, so we went to the *kogakko* in Ngaraard. I stayed at the house of a relative in Ngaraard, and went to school. On holidays, I walked through the hills for three hours and went back to Ngarchelong. Palauan children of the time had to go to school whether we liked it or not. My parents told me to go to school and to study well. At the school in Ngaraard, there was one Japanese teacher and two Palauan teachers. I remember we learned words such as *hana* (flower), *akai hana* (red flower), and *shiroi hana* (white flower) in Japanese class.

After three years education in the *honka* (basic course) at Ngaraard *Kogakko*, I went on to the *hoshuka* (advanced course) at Koror *Kogakko*. In Ngaraard, we were allowed to speak Palauan even at school. But when I went on to the advanced course at Koror, speaking Palauan at school was prohibited; so sometimes my friend and I would leave the school to talk in Palauan. My teacher was Kamata-sensei. He was very strict but at the same time he was a very good teacher. He told us to study hard. I still remember whole sentences of one story which I learned at school. It is interesting, isn’t it?

After all the classes finished around 2:00, I went to a Japanese house to work as a *renshusei* (trainee). I went to the house of Mr. Kaneko. I mowed the grass, and wiped surfaces in the house, and I got some money. With this money, I bought a shirt, pants, *anbang* (bean-jam buns), and donuts. There was a restaurant right across from today’s KR store, and I looked forward to eating *udong* (Japanese noodles) there.

I lived in a dormitory in Koror. In the dorm, we woke up around 6:00 or 7:00 in the morning, and ate breakfast together, and then went to school before 8:00. Cooking was a student’s job. We usually ate rice and canned *iwashi* (sardine) at the dorm. At night, we lay down to sleep around 8:00.

At that time, two boats, *Chichibu-maru* and *Midori-maru*, regularly navigated around Palau. One of them went eastward around Babeldaob, and the other went westward. Both boats left Koror once a week and carried both passengers and cargo. When the boat arrived at the wharf, we went to see if our parents had sent us something. I would ask the captain of the ship, “Is there anything for me?” Sometimes, my parents sent me dried fish, *billum* of tapioca (tapioca cake wrapped in leaves), and taro.

## After graduation

I took the entrance examination of *Mokko* Vocational School, but failed. I remember a question asking how to read a Japanese word written in Chinese characters. I am sure that I made a small mistake on this question. Because I could not go on to *Mokko* School, I went back to Ngarchelong after graduating from Koror *Kogakko*, and became a member of the *Shonen-dang* (Boys Association) of my hamlet. The *Shonen-dang* worked for the village; for example we collected coconuts from the trees and sold the copra inside the coconuts. Members of the *Shonen-dang* had uniforms.

## My memories of the war

I experienced the first air raid in Ollei, Ngarchelong. Because there were many Japanese airplanes in Ollei, a lot of American airplanes came and attacked them. I saw the American airplanes flying all over the sky! At that time, a Japanese seaplane came back to Ngarchelong. The pilot made a signal to ask me to prepare the buoy. Seeing that signal, I went to the buoy to help him. This seaplane went up once, and came down again. I threw the pilot a piece of rope to tie the plane. A Japanese soldier who came out of the seaplane asked me if there were still (Japanese) airplanes. I answered “Yes, there are still many airplanes.” Just at that moment, we heard a big explosion in Ngardmau. We ran as fast as possible to the shelter.

When my family and I took refuge, my wife had just had a baby a week before. When the situation worsened, we moved to Ngaraard on the orders of the Japanese army. We walked to Ngaraard carrying our baby, food, clothes, and rugs. The condition of the passes was not good. It was a big effort for my wife to keep walking. We named our baby girl Hatsuko (first girl).

In Ngaraard, we built a hut in the forest, and my parents also lived with us. From 7:00 in the morning to 4:00 in the afternoon the American airplanes flew around, so we could not move. We went to Ollei at night, harvested taro and tapioca, and came back to Ngaraard. We also cultivated gardens in Ngaraard.

## Good soldiers and bad soldiers

I experienced some unreasonable violence from a Japanese soldier. When we worked for the Japanese navy at the wharf of Ollei, we sometimes carried the supplies of food for soldiers to the storehouse. But until being ordered, we were not allowed to touch the supplies. One day, one of the soldiers looked at the bags still there and shouted, “Why are you not carrying them?!” Then he beat me, and two of my buddies. Because this was senseless, we reported this incident to the military police in Koror. One policeman came with us and he called the soldier who beat us. The policeman berated him, and beat him. In addition to that, he imprisoned this soldier for a week. I have heard that the military police sent an official who was responsible for that incident to Tobi (Hatohobei) Island.

During the war, some soldiers were mean to us, but some soldiers became our friends. For example, one night we went fishing and on our way back home we came across some Japanese soldiers, who took all the fish we caught. In contrast, there was a captain of the navy who was a good person. One day, he told us, “Please don’t come here to work tomorrow, but take refuge.” So we went to the shelter that night. The next day, there was an attack by the Americans. Two Japanese soldiers, Mr. Nishino and Mr. Saito, died in this attack. We buried their bodies in Ollei. Nobody ever came to take their bones to Japan.

*Interview: 6 July 2006, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA*

## Story 9

Rubak Kazuo Miyashita

Born: 1922

Father: from Japan

Mother: from Koror



Rubak Kazuo Miyashita, with his sister Mechas Keiko M. Cho  
(Story 21) (2005)



Kazuo in the 1930s  
(photo: courtesy of Keiko M. Cho)

## My childhood in Palau

My father's name was Juichiro Miyashita, and my mother's name was Aiko. Aiko's father, Yoshitaro Ichikawa, had a high position in Edo-period Japan, but he lost this after the Meiji Restoration [in 1867]. So, he came to Palau and started his own business as a merchant. He married a beautiful Palauan woman, whose name was Urrimech, from a high clan of Koror. Aiko was their daughter. Juichiro Miyashita came to Palau as a sailor, when the administration changed from Spanish to German. He left his vessel, and started to work under Yoshitaro. Yoshitaro liked Juichiro, and allowed him to marry Aiko. Yoshitaro's business was amalgamated into *Nanyo-boeki* Ltd (South Seas Trading Company), and Juichiro Miyashita, my father, became the manager of the Palau branch.

I was raised as Japanese, and went to *shogakko*. Because my mother was half Palauan, the children of the officials looked down on me. On November 3, there was a sports festival in Medalaii field. At that time, officials and their families took their place under the tent, but we ordinary people sat on a sheet in the sun. I felt the existence of social class strongly. At that time, Japanese were called 'First People', and Okinawans and Koreans were the 'Second People'. Even among Japanese, officials had higher

status than normal citizens.

Okinawans were poor. I remember the scene as Okinawan immigrants came down from their ships. They carried their belongings, but it was only a bundle of clothes tied with a string, and a box with a few items. I cried to see this, because I felt sorry for them.

I had many Okinawan friends in school, and sometimes visited their houses. They ate *aburapan* [in Palauan pronunciation, *aberabang*] (oil bread), *tama* (donut balls), and bonito heart. I liked to eat *aburapan*, but at home, I was told not to eat this kind of food. It is a pity that there was discrimination in Palau. Even my relatives on my mother's side felt diffident with us. When they brought something to us, they usually entered the house from the back door.

I was in Palau until I was twelve, and after graduating from *shogakko* (school for Japanese children), I went to school in Japan.

## Social classes

In the Japanese time, government employees were strictly forbidden to marry a Palauan woman. [If they did,] their children were not admitted as Japanese, and were sent to *kogakko* (school for Palauan children). On the other hand, ordinary people were free to marry Palauan women. If the Japanese father acknowledged paternity, the child was treated as Japanese, and went to *shogakko*.

I have heard that in the earliest stage of Japanese emigration to Micronesia, in the Meiji era (1868–1912), the government recommended marriage with local women. It was the policy of the government to have Japanese emigrants marry locally and to work within the local community. My mother's parents were an example of this.

But by the Japanese time in Palau, we were discriminated against as *ainoko* (half-castes). The officials did not acknowledge the efforts of the general Japanese immigrants, who had worked hard within the local community, and simply applied their authority. For example, schoolteachers wore white uniforms, swords, and decorations. The *chokan* (chief officer) of the *Nanyo-cho* (South Seas Government) had a great authority because he was appointed by the emperor. We could not even see his face because he rode in a coach.

My father wanted me to become a government official, because he strongly disliked being treated as someone of lowly status. *Nanbo* (South Seas Trading Company) supplied the navy, carried cargo, and worked as an agency of the post office. My father had strong power and influence in Palau, but still, he suffered discrimination from officials.

After the war, for a time I became a government official. But I quit this job because I could not put up with the internal discrimination, based on the universities from which officials had graduated. My father was very disappointed with my decision.

## **My effort to bring my mother back to Palau**

After the war, the American government prohibited the Japanese from returning to Palau for some decades. Because my mother and her children were legally Japanese, we could not go back to Palau. Sometimes, our Palauan relatives and friends visited us in Japan.

In the 1960s, I was eager to take my mother to Palau. She was sick, and I believed that she wanted to return to Palau before dying. I tried many things: surreptitiously booking her on a ship with other Palauans; submitting a petition to the American headquarters in Hawaii to allow my mother back into Palau; asking American officials; but all were in vain. Advised by *Ibedul* Ngoriakl who visited us in Japan, I decided that I would go to Palau to provide a basis for acceptance of my mother. I left for Palau in 1967, and started to work as the general manager of the Royal Palauan Hotel. Soon after that, I called my wife and one of my sons to Palau, but unfortunately my mother passed away three months after they left.

Because my nationality was Japanese, it was hard to find jobs in Palau. After working at the hotel, I worked as a taxi driver. Now I think that I should have come back to Palau later!

*Interviews: 17 March 2005, and 10 June 2006, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewers: first interview, Maki MITA and Nasuhiko YAMAGUCHI; second interview, Maki MITA.*



## Story 10

Rubak Masao Franz

Born: 1922

Father: from Ngeremlengui

Mother: from Ngeremlengui



Rubak Masao Franz (2006; photo by Takashi Mita)

### When I was a child

I was born in Ngeremlengui, and went to Koror *Kogakko*. I stayed at Mr. Sugiyama's house because Mrs. Sugiyama was one of our relatives. On Saturday, my father came and took me to Ngeremlengui by boat.

We took care of our garden in school. When we needed fertilizer, the teacher told us to go into the toilet. We took out the feces, and cleaned inside the toilet. After that, we were stinky and dirty from head to toe. They sprinkled powdered disinfectant on us by the water tank.

### Before the air raids

After graduating from school, I worked at a restaurant which belonged to Mr. Sugiyama. After that, I returned to Ngeremlengui and worked as a *mura-junkei* (village police officer). *Mura-junkei* were intermediaries between Palauan villagers and Japanese officials. I did many things when I was young.

For example, I and five Palauan girls mended the road from Imeong hamlet to Ngermetengel hamlet [both hamlets are in Ngeremlengui]. We pulled weeds, and fixed the damaged parts of the road. At that time, I helped a Japanese man to survey land in the daytime, and mended the road at night. Mr. Ishihara, the Japanese surveyor, asked me, "Why do you mend the road? It is such hard work." I replied, "Young people in the hamlet don't want to do this, so I do." Our road-mending work was reported in a newspaper article.

Another example; one day, I was asked by Palauan *rubak* (male elders) to accompany them as they travelled all over Babeldaob, to instruct the people to cultivate the land and raise vegetables for the soldiers. This was in preparation for the war, and they were ordered to do so by the Japanese government. After visiting every hamlet in Babeldaob, they arrived at Ngetkib in Airai, the last hamlet of their tour. That night, they had a feast, and drank whisky. I gathered their bags and put them in the car for security. In the morning when they awoke, they asked me where their bags were; so I returned them. After that, they prepared themselves, and visited the *Nanyo-cho* (South

Seas Government) Palau Branch office. I went with them as a translator. They reported to the government that they had directed the people in Babeldaob to raise vegetables for the soldiers.

When I was young, a speaker of the deity lived in Ngeremlengui. This old man talked with *Uchererak*, a deity in Ngeremlengui. One day, we members of *Seinen-dang* (the Youth Association) asked *Uchererak* if we would win the swimming competition in Koror. The old man asked the deity, and said, “*Uchererak* tells me to let you go because you will win.” At the competition, we actually did win our events. After that, we visited the deity with the championship flag and offered our thanks. After the death of this old man, this belief began to decline.

## March 1944

One day in March 1944, I went with a Japanese police officer to Ngatpang to attend a public meeting. At the meeting, Captain Morikawa said to the Palauans who had gathered, “From today, you are under my command as the captain of the Palauan people. You must cultivate the land all over Palau and raise vegetables for the soldiers.” At the end of the meeting, American airplanes flew overhead. Those who took fright ran into the betelnut trees, and trembled. The soldiers watched outside, and said that there were no more airplanes coming. Then the Palauans returned to their home hamlets.

At that time, most of the young men in Ngeremlengui were working in Malakal. They unloaded coal at Malakal dock for the military. So, I was concerned about what I could do if an air raid struck Ngeremlengui. A Japanese policeman told me, “If the airplanes come, you should report it to the army.”

In Ngermetengel hamlet, there was a bomb magazine, with a Japanese soldier on guard. As I was talking with him, the airplanes came! “Which side’s airplanes are they?” I asked. “Has the war begun?” “I don’t know.” Then, the airplanes attacked the Japanese guard ships. The soldier said, “Masao, you should go home and prepare to take refuge.” I told him, “No, I need to go and warn the people in Ngeremlengui about the American airplanes!”

I ran to the *bai* (meeting house) in Ngermetengel hamlet, and said to the boys staying there, “Take refuge! There is an air raid!” Then, I ran to Imeong hamlet, and told the people. “Take cover! The American airplanes have come!” The sky was filled with airplanes. From there, I saw big palls of smoke from Malakal. Then, I went to Ngchemsed, the other hamlet of Ngeremlengui. In Ngchemsed channel, two Japanese destroyers fired at the airplanes; but they could not hit them, they just flew away. The destroyers had hidden themselves by mooring against the rock, camouflaged with branches and leaves.

When I arrived at Ngchemsed, I was told to go inside the dugout. I talked with someone there about how long the air raid would continue. Then, we heard a very loud

explosion. We climbed the rock, and we saw one of the destroyers had been bombed, and many objects were scattered in the sea. These objects were being carried out to sea beyond the reef by the current. After that, the other destroyer was also attacked. At night, a Japanese boat came and gathered the objects from the destroyers.

I remember I ran along this road at the time of the air raid.... The Japanese airplanes also came to fight. From my hiding place, I cautiously watched the air battle. The American airplanes dived at the *hodai* (battery) of Ngermetengel. The Japanese cannons fired, but they missed the Americans. I saw an American plane shot down by the guns in Yamato hamlet. This airplane crashed down into the hillside.

### **People who died in the war**

I lost some of my family during the war. In the first air raid, my grandmother and her child died because a bomb hit their dugout. After coming back from Ngchemsed, I turned over the wreckage of the damaged dugout, and dug out their bodies. I dug graves and buried them.

I also lost my father. He was shot dead early in the morning when he went fishing to feed his children. He was shot in his neck, back, and a leg by an American airplane. After hearing of his death, I went to look for his body, walking through the mangroves. At the entrance of the channel, I saw a floating pole, which was split into two pieces. I swam into the channel, and found my father's body caught in the trees. I tied the body to a tree so that I could get it during the high tide.

At that precise moment, I saw an American airplane coming. Maybe this airplane came to check how things were going. But this airplane flew too low, and hit a tall tree. A wing and a propeller broke off, and the airplane crashed. The American pilot's body was caught in a tree, and the tree which the airplane hit was broken and the top fell off. It was a terrible spectacle.

[On another day,] when I was in my dugout, my friend told me, "An airplane crashed, and paint spilled from it." When I investigated, I found that the 'paint' was blood; the airman's blood had stained the white body of the airplane red. I called Captain Shiraishi, the head of the troop in Ngchemsed. He told me to search the pockets of the dead airman, so I did. First I found an American sweet; when I put my hand deeper in the pocket, I touched a piece of paper. It was a map of Ngchemsed. This map was very detailed, and we learned that the Americans knew every lane to Ngchemsed. Seeing that, Captain Shiraishi told me, "Don't come to Ngchemsed anymore. There is nowhere to hide ourselves in this place." After that, I buried the body of the American. I have heard that it was the leading airplane [i.e. the most successful fighter; an 'Ace']. They learned this from a number on the plane.

## Working with Japanese troops

During the war, I worked for a time at the lighthouse by the *hodai* (battery). Sometimes I worked as lighthouse keeper, and with some Palauan women I built a concrete fortification for one of the cannons. There were four cannons, but only the one which I had fortified with concrete was used. The other young men in Ngeremlengui were working in Malakal. One day, when I went to the lighthouse to work, a guard stopped me, saying, "Where are you going?" I said, "I am going to my work." Then, he said, "OK. Thank you." When I was leaving, he was friendly and said, "Are you going home?"

From Ngchemsed, I saw the lighthouse destroyed. An American airplane came from the north, and it tried to shoot the cannons. But it hit the lighthouse, and with the sound like 'piiiiin!!!', the lighthouse was destroyed. The lighthouse keeper told me, "Don't come here anymore, because it is dangerous." I responded, "Yes. But I want to man the gun. Next time an American warship comes into the channel, I want to fire the cannon."

Then, I got an order from the military to watch the Ngardmau channel from the hill in Ngardmau and report on ship movements. One morning, I spotted a Japanese airplane flying around the Ngardmau channel, looking for an American submarine. A Japanese soldier asked me, "Do you see the submarine?" I replied, "Not yet." Then, the airplane dropped a bomb. "Do you see anything where the bomb dropped?" "No, nothing is visible." "Do you see something like a board?" "No, I don't see oil either."

## Departure of the troop at *hodai*

After the war, the Japanese troops went home one by one. The naval unit stationed at the *hodai* also prepared to leave for Japan.

Before they left Palau, we had a feast. I was cooking doves for the soldiers. Beside me, there was a pile of powder. Then, a man came and stubbed his cigarette in it, not realizing that it was gunpowder. When the powder exploded, I could not see anything. I felt my way along the floor, escaped from the house and jumped into the sea. This quickly soothed the pain. When I got out of the sea, I saw they were trying to rescue the people inside. One woman was burned all over her body. Two children were also burned. I told Dr. Nakanishi I would like to go to the hospital in the base by the *hodai* [to help].

After he examined the soldiers, he called me last. Looking at me under the light, Dr. Nakanishi said, "Poor Masao. You are most seriously burned." I was burned on my head, my back, everywhere. Dr. Nakanishi wrapped me with bandages and I had to stay in the hospital under medical care. Next morning, water leaked from my injured body and I could not even raise my arms. My burns had been coated with castor oil. By the evening, my whole body was swollen. The skin began to peel off, and it even filled a

washbasin. Dr. Nakanishi told my wife and me that he would inject me with an anesthetic, and while I was unconscious, he tended to me. The hypodermic was very big. It was called no. 606.

While I was still in the hospital, the *hodai* unit left for Japan. They came to my bed, and said goodbye with a salute. Because I could not yet stand, I said goodbye while sitting on the bed. They left me medicine and a storage battery to operate the electricity in the hospital. Dr. Nakanishi told me, “Under the pandanus tree at the *hodai*, the soldiers’ uniforms are buried. You can dig them out and use them.” He also told me that I could take food from the soldiers’ shelter.

I asked them to come back to Palau, but I don’t know of any who did, to this day. Even though I have forgotten the names of most of the people in that troop, I remember Dr. Nakanishi. I appreciated his care very much.

## Departure of the Ngchemsed troop

The other unit I worked with, Captain Shiraishi’s army troop, also prepared to go to Japan. They decided to have a party before leaving. Captain Shiraishi told Mr. Naka, an Okinawan soldier, to go fishing with me [some months after the accident].

Mr. Naka and I made four explosives, and went to the sea. When we threw the bombs, many fish floated to the surface. I jumped into the sea, and collected them. Then I noticed something black moving under the water. I dived and saw a big *temekai* (grouper). I told Mr. Naka, “Look at that.” Mr. Naka said, “That is a *temekai*, isn’t it?” “Yes, it is.” I said, and we caught it. Our boat was almost sinking because we loaded a lot of fish. So, we tied the fish we caught, and swamped the boat intentionally. When the boat floated to the surface, we bailed out all the water. We loaded the fish back on the boat, and we went back to Ngchemsed. Mr. Naka told me, “Masao, take the *temekai* to your home.” I said, “No, I don’t want it. The *temekai* is yours.” Instead of the *temekai*, I was given about ten fish.

When we came to the shore, the soldiers gathered around us. “What a big *temekai*!” they said. After that, I went home to sleep. Then, my daughter woke me up; my friends of the troop were there and they had brought me a sack of sweet potato, a sack of watermelon, and a sack of cucumber. It was a present from the Shiraishi troop. During the war, I told the people of Ngchemsed to give food to the Shiraishi troop. I was helpful for them, I guess.

## After the war

After the war, I visited Yamato hamlet. I was surprised to see there was a lot of food there. I even found a pot filled with rice which was already cooked. Crops in the gardens were ripe, and Palauans harvested them.

The bones of the Japanese people were left in Palau. I found the bones of about eighty people buried in a small area in Yamato. They were the remains of the Japanese soldiers. In Yamato hamlet, both Japanese soldiers and civilians were buried.

One day, I was asked to guide someone to the grave of a soldier. They said that they had put a seed of hibiscus on his grave. While we were looking for his grave, a hibiscus flower fell in front of us. We prayed for him there.

*Interviews: 20 July 2000, 6 February 2005, and 23 July 2006, Ngeremlengui. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA.*

## Story 11

Mechas Gabriela Ngirmang

Born: 1922

Father: from Airai

Mother: from Koror



Mechas Gabriela Ngirmang, with her daughter  
Ms. Elicita Morei (2006)

### At school

I was educated for five years in *kogakko* (school for Palauan children). We learned how to write *hiragana*, *katakana* and several simple Chinese characters. We also learned mathematics. I did not think that the teachers were strict.

Every morning, we bowed deeply to the north, Tokyo. And we declared with raised voices, “We are the children of the emperor!”, “We will be devoted [to Japan]!”, and “We will be splendid Japanese!” This started when I was in the fourth grade. The meanings behind these words are; “I now carry the blood of the emperor”, “I will do good deeds for Japan”, and “I am now a true Japanese”. I think that they wanted the people of Palau to know that they were now on Japanese territory.

We did this just because we were instructed to, by the teachers. The Japanese government administered the schools, paid salaries for the teachers, and bought all stationery; that is why we paid our respects to the Emperor.

When I was at fourth to fifth grade, I worked as a *renshusei* (trainee) at the house of a Japanese police officer after school. After I graduated from school, I continued to work there for a year and a half. I went every morning, and I would cook dishes, sweep the floor, rake the garden, and wash the laundry. Because there was no electricity, they used firewood for cooking and heating the bath. I used an iron which was heated with charcoal.

We were educated in a different school from Japanese children. We only had five years of education, but the Japanese children went to high school after elementary school. We were taught only a little Japanese language, and only basic things; how to tidy the garden, how to heat the bath, and so on. It was discrimination, I think.

### My religious belief

I was baptized in the Catholic church soon after I was born. When I was a student I went to the *Nanyo-jinja* (South Seas Shrine) from school. But I did not think that there was a deity in this shrine. In the shrine, I had heard, was a *magatama* (comma-shaped bead) which *Amaterasuomikami* [the highest Japanese goddess, goddess of the sun] had

brought back from China. She had also brought a sword, and a mirror; my teacher told us that the sword was in Japan, and the mirror was somewhere [that I don't recall]. At the time we were just schoolchildren, and though we did not know what was inside the shrine, we bowed to it. My Catholic Fathers told me not to go to the shrine. They said that it was wrong. Therefore, I did not go there privately, but when we went there from school, it was by order of the teachers. I had no choice.

## Memories of the war

When the first air raid happened in Palau, I was in Melekeok. This was where I lived, after my marriage. It was really hard because food was scarce and people were afraid. We heard bombing, airplanes.... The fear was the hardest part.

The first air raid was on March 29 or 30 in 1944, and the second was on July 27. The next one was on September 6, and the bombings continued for about a year. We took refuge in the forest, and it was very hard. Because we could not eat enough, all of us became skinny. My sister and I had babies, and we fed them giant taro and coconut. Fortunately, they survived the war.

Food was scarce, and some of the Japanese soldiers grilled lizard and snake to eat. I know how hard war is. Because nuclear technology is related to warfare, I protested against it after the war.

In my place, Imolch in Melekeok, Japanese soldiers did not take our food. They had their own garden in Ngkud. The Japanese civilians also cultivated a large field, and planted sweet potato and tapioca and other food in Mizuho and Shimizu. They distributed them to the people.

The Americans did not intentionally shoot at Palauans. They flew around spotting activity and dropped bombs where there were big guns and where Japanese gathered. I know a person who was injured by bomb fragments, and several Palauans in Ngeremlengui died because the roof of the cave in which they were hiding collapsed.

My husband worked on a boat as an operator. When a plane shot at the boat, he and another Palauan dived into the water and swam to shore as the boat went down. Two Japanese were hit; one who hid in the engine room was shot in the stomach, and the other was shot because he was standing on the boat and pointing his sword at the plane. Before this incident, a Japanese man had told my husband that if the boat were attacked, he should abandon it and jump into the water. So he knew what he should do when it actually happened.

## Working against the Compact

After the war, I worked against the Compact in order to protect Palauans' land and way of life. Because I was a *Mirair* [second-ranking women's title in Koror], it was my



responsibility to work for the community. It has been like that from a long time ago.

I learned about the Compact from a book which was translated into Palauan, and had very detailed explanations. When I worked against the Compact, some people threatened me. But I was absolutely unafraid. They sent police to collect payment for my medical bills. Next, they turned off my electricity and stopped my water supply. Finally, they bombed my home, but I was never afraid.

When I went to Hawaii to attend a conference, I saw people from the Marshalls, and Moritaki-sensei from Japan. Those who came from the Marshalls told me that they had babies who were born deformed because of the nuclear testing. Moritaki-sensei, an old lady of eighty, had a glass eye. When the nuclear bomb exploded in Nagasaki, she looked at the flash, and this eye was ruined. I did not want such terrible things to happen in Palau. Our island is small. There are only a small number of people in Palau. It was very hard to be against the Compact. But I believed that I had to help the people here. So we, a women's group, worked against the Compact. We visited the American Congress in D.C., and the UN. The name of our group was '*Otil a Beluad*', and it means 'anchor of our land'.

The primary reason I opposed the Compact was being anti-nuclear. But there were other reasons; one of them was the usage of the land. If we accepted the Compact, when the American soldiers wanted a large piece of land, they could just take it. They would not need to ask permission. If we had any problems regarding the land, we could only take it up with the Palauan government because we would not be allowed to confront the American soldiers. When they finished using our land, they would not clean it but just leave the lands as they were. I saw that these things would happen and it made me realize that the people of Palau were at a great disadvantage.

I really did not want Palau to be like the Marshalls. When someone is pregnant and gives birth to an abnormal child.... It is terrible to see this sort of thing. I knew it would be very hard for us, to be under the Compact. But the people of Palau just kept quiet, and began to favor the agreement. Some Palauans even favored Americans. This reinforced my determination to work harder at maneuvering around their thoughtless and stupid positions.

## **Traditional leadership in Palau**

I learned the conduct required of Palauan chiefs from my father. My father was from a high clan in Airai. He had a huge responsibility and I observed this. I liked how he conducted the duties of his position. And the clan on my mother's side had a major responsibility in Koror. *Mirair* is the second woman's title in Koror. The first title is *Bilung*. When I started to work against the Compact, we worked together. But she changed her mind and left me to work by myself.

The Japanese Government did not try to undermine the Palauan chieftainship

system. Every November 23, all chiefs gathered for a feast. Where the high school is now, there was a big building that belonged to the government. The Palauan chiefs went there to feast, and the Japanese had discussions with them.

These days, under the new way of governing, the influence of the traditional chiefs is weakening. At the same time, today's people want to get traditional chiefly titles. I think that it is because of money. These days, those who hold the high titles are compensated. It was not like that before. Traditionally, those who had a high title worked very hard at their obligations without being paid.

By the way, I did not get paid for twelve years for my work as *Mirair*. It was set in the Koror constitution that *Bilung* and *Mirair* should be compensated.

## Visit to Japan

In 1971, I visited Japan with my friends. We traveled in Japan for three weeks. We really wanted to see the *Kyujyo* (palace). We saw the *Kyujyo* but we could not get near it. It was surrounded by a *hori* (moat) and a big garden. In Kyoto, we visited a shrine, and saw *sabane* [?]. We were told that it came from China.

In one restaurant in Japan, everybody looked at us, and they whispered about us. "Their skin is very dark, isn't it?" they said. When they saw us read the menu, they said, "Look at that. Even though they can't read the menu, they are pretending to read..." Thinking that we did not understand what they said, they said many things about us. Finally, a Japanese spoke to us. "How is it that you are so black?" We asked this person, "Haven't you seen a black person before?" "No. This is the first time." So we asked, "Have you ever been to Tokyo?" "No, I have never been there." "If you visit Tokyo, you will see many varieties of people. Black people, red people, yellow people..." "Are there yellow people?" "Check it out in Tokyo." In Japan, people did not want to come close to us. They were scared of us because of our skin color.

## About the Japanese emperor

[The researcher talked about the Japanese emperor's visit to Saipan, and asked the *mechas* how she would feel if the emperor visited Palau.]

If the emperor visited Palau, how would I feel? What a big story it would be! I am not sure whether it could ever happen or not. If he visited Palau, it would make me feel as if I were dreaming. I have heard that the emperor met ordinary people in Tokyo soon after the end of the war. At that time, he wore *tabi* (Japanese socks). He wore a suit and *tabi*, I have heard.

*Interview: 4 December 2006, Koror. Conducted in Palauan, Japanese, and English.  
Interviewer: Maki MITA. Translator: Elicita MOREI.*

## Story 12

Mechas Rosang Kazuo

Born: 1923

Father: from Angaur

Mother: from Angaur



Mechas Rosang Kazuo (2006)

### My school days

I started to go to school when I was eight years old.

I had three years education in the *honka* (basic course) in Angaur, and continued to study for two more years in the *hoshuka* (advanced course) at Koror *Kogakko*. Angaur *Kogakko* was located in Ngaramasch. Every morning I went to school on foot, which took about thirty minutes. In our school, there were two Japanese teachers and one Palauan teacher. When we entered third grade, speaking Palauan in school was prohibited. If we spoke in Palauan at school, the teacher slapped our fists several times with a ruler. It was painful.

There were not many students in Angaur. In my grade there were only ten students, and three of them went to the *hoshuka* in Koror. I was one of them. When I was in Koror, I lived with my brother who lived near Koror *Kogakko*. Because I was with my brother's family, I did not feel very sad. I was called Sasako at school.

### About Angaur

Before the war, many Japanese lived in Angaur and worked in the phosphate mining industry. Most of them were men. People from Yap, Truk, Saipan and Okinawa were also working there. They lived together in large houses built outside the villages. After finishing their job, some Yapese would visit my house. They cleaned my house, and in return for this work, we let them take betelnuts from our garden. They liked chewing betelnuts very much. I also like betelnuts now, but when I was a child they were not allowed for children.

There were four Japanese stores in Angaur at that time. We could buy canned fish and rice there. We usually ate taro, tapioca, and sweet potato from our garden, and we sometimes ate rice which we bought at the stores. We steamed rice, and ate it with canned fish, or with sugar, or with soy sauce and oil. Sometimes we put copra on rice and ate it with soy sauce or *ilaot* (coconut syrup).

In Angaur, we had a Catholic church. Because both of my parents were Christian, I was baptized when I was an infant. My name 'Rosang' is the Palauan pronunciation

of 'Rose', my Christian name. The priest in Angaur was Spanish, and he spoke Palauan. We even sang hymns in Palauan.

My mother told me about the traditional beliefs in Angaur. According to her, there was a speaker who spoke the words of the spirit. But when I was a child, I did not see such a person in Angaur.

When a woman in Palau has her first baby, we have a celebration which is called *Ngasech*. In Angaur, the way of the *Ngasech* was different from other parts of Palau, and the woman who gave birth to her first child sat down on a platform. This tradition was continued even during the Japanese period.

## **The war**

After graduating from school, I went home to Angaur, and worked as a domestic helper for a Japanese family who worked for the phosphate mining business. This was not long before the war came to Palau. People in Angaur began to move to Ngeklau in Ngaraard, but very soon it became too dangerous to go out from Angaur by boat. So many Palauan people were left in Angaur when the Americans landed. My father took refuge in Ngaraard, but my sister and I were left in Angaur.

The situation in Angaur was terrible, very bad. I stayed in a cave with other Palauans and also with Japanese. There was not enough space to stretch my legs in the cave, and I curled myself up. I saw several bodies in the cave. Food was extremely scarce. I ate three pieces of hardtack, which the Japanese army distributed, in the morning, and ate two pieces in the evening. And I could get only a little rain water.

When I saw an American soldier for the first time, I was scared. But when we came out from our shelter, they had already prepared our tents. We lived in these tents, and we had enough food there. In the battle of Angaur, most of the Japanese soldiers and several Palauans died.

*Interview: 11 July 2006, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA*

## Story 13

Mechas Tokie Morei

Born: 1923

Father: from Angaur

Mother: from Peleliu



Mechas Tokie Morei (left), with her friend  
Mechas Ochob Giraked (Story 36) (2006)

I grew up in Ngesias, Peleliu. When I was a child, only a few Japanese lived there. They were teachers, policemen, and storekeepers. When somebody was born or died, we went to the police station and reported it. My name, Tokie, is my aunt's name. When I was born, my mother asked her sister to go to the police station and make a birth notification. But something went wrong; the police officer wrote my aunt's name as my name.

### Memories of my school days

The children from five villages in Peleliu came to the school in Ngesias hamlet. When we went to school, we did not wear shoes except for special occasions.

School started at 8:00. After the morning assembly, we went to the classroom singing multiplication tables. Because of that, we became fast at calculating multiplication.

In Peleliu *Kogakko*, we were allowed to speak in Palauan. We understood what our Japanese teachers told us, and we read Japanese in the text book, but we were not good at speaking Japanese. So, when we went on to the *hoshuka* (advanced course) in Koror *Kogakko*, students from Peleliu had difficulties with language, because speaking Palauan at school was forbidden. We kept silent at first, but we gradually became used to speaking Japanese.

I lived in the school dormitory. Food was supplied in the dorm, but sometimes I had Palauan food which my parents sent to me. When they did, I would ask my friends if any of them wanted to share the meal provided for me. They would say, "Yes, I do!" My parents sent me *billum* of tapioca (tapioca cake wrapped in leaves) and smoked fish, but after two days it would be spoiled.

After school, I went to Mr. Nakata's house as a *renshusei* (trainee). I handed a small notebook to Mrs. Nakata, and when I had finished my work, she wrote a circle in my notebook. If I was late, she wrote a circle with a slash. If I did not come, she wrote a cross in my notebook the next day. I cleared up the garden, washed the clothes, and cut banana leaves and fed them to chickens. I also learned Japanese from Mr. and Mrs. Nakata. I got 1 yen 30 sen from them at the end of the month. Mrs. Nakata gave me a

cookie every day when I left. I ate it on my way to the dormitory. If she ran out of cookies, she gave me a caramel or another 5 sen. Mr. and Mrs. Nakata were good people. They visited me in Palau after the war.

## My life in Peleliu

After graduating from school, I went back to Peleliu and helped my mother. In Peleliu, we rarely used money. I collected firewood and coconut leaves to make a fire. The coconut leaves were also used to make the head of a torch. When we cooked fish, we put it in sea water to season the fish. It was the children's job to collect firewood and leaves, and to draw sea water. Children also cleaned the lamp. When I was fifteen or sixteen years old, my mother worked in the garden, and I cleaned tapioca and cooked it.

When I was a teenager, I and other girls went to catch *ketat* (coconut crabs). In the daytime we collected coconuts, made holes in them, and hung them at the spots where we guessed *ketat* would come. Around 7:00 or 7:30 at night, we carried our sacks and small lights and went to check the traps. If a *ketat* was there, we caught it. But even if we could not find any *ketat*, it was fine. It was just for fun. We did not aim to sell the *ketat*, but we ate it together. We came back home around midnight. When there was a full moon, we went to catch *ketat*, and with the new moon we went to catch *rekung* (land crabs).

## Religious belief

When I was an infant, I believed in *Modekngai*, Palauan religion. My mother was also a *Modekngai* believer. When we prayed, we boiled herbs from our gardens and made soup. We also baked coconuts, and ate some of them.

There was another traditional belief in Palau. In this belief, some people spoke the words of the deities. When we became sick, we visited them. For example, in Ngerdelolk, a hamlet in Peleliu, the highest chief, *Obak*, could listen to the words of spirits. But today's *Obak* does not do this.

Furthermore, some Japanese propagated *Tenri-kyo* in Peleliu. When I was a girl I went the church of *Tenri-kyo*, but it was not because I believed in this religion, but because they gave us biscuits and other novel foods. Sometimes, we donated papayas and bananas. While praying, I just gazed at the biscuits and other foreign sweets which were offered to the deity. Because we did not have money, we could not buy it.

German protestant pastors also came to Peleliu during the Japanese period. I was converted to Protestantism when I was at the school in Koror. But when I turned eighteen, I converted to Catholicism because my fiancé was a Catholic.

## The Japanese in Peleliu

After the *Nanyo-kohatsu* (South Seas Development Company) started their business in Peleliu,<sup>10)</sup> many young Palauans started to work for this company. A lot of people, including Japanese, Okinawans and Taiwanese, came to Peleliu to construct an airfield.

When the war came to Palau, thousands of Japanese soldiers came to Peleliu. We could see them everywhere in Peleliu. Some of them became friends with us. When they were off-duty, they visited us and we talked and danced. We looked forward to seeing them. Sometimes, they gave us a cake of soap or pictures of actors. We gave them papayas and bananas. It is a dear memory of mine.

## The war

I got married in January 1944. My husband was supposed to go to an outer island with the Japanese army soon after that. But in the first air raid in March, the vessel which my husband was supposed to board was attacked and sunk near Angaur.

I remember the air raid in March vividly. I was in Koror to see my husband off. We were informed that there might be an air raid. The next day, nothing happened. But two days later, at 6:30 in the morning, a lot of airplanes came. Someone said that they were Japanese airplanes, but they began to fire at us. We ran away into the mangroves. When I looked up, many airplanes were filling the sky. We were just trembling with fear among the mangroves, and the tide came up to our necks. Fortunately, American airplanes went back to their base around 9:00, so we came out from the mangroves and moved to one of the rock islands. After several weeks, my husband and I went back to Peleliu.

Soon after we came back, Peleliu began to be attacked and Palauans took refuge in the rock islands. Every night, around 2:00, we heard the loud noise of the airplanes. After the Japanese army evacuated all the people from Peleliu to Ngaraard, the Americans began to attack Peleliu even in the daytime. In the battle of Peleliu, most of the Japanese soldiers died. I guess the soldiers who became our friends also died.

We stayed in Ngaraard for several months, and then we moved to Ngiwal, relying on our relatives. We knew which people were our relatives very well.

I lost my mother a month after the war. There were some Japanese remaining in Palau. I asked a Japanese doctor to examine my mother. He said, "Previously, I would have sent your mother to the hospital in Koror. But here in Babeldaob, it is hard to give her enough treatment. I recommend that you ask an American doctor to examine your mother." An American doctor gave my mother medicine, but I guess it was too late. My mother's feet were already very swollen.

After the war, we went back to Peleliu. But I could not find any familiar places. It was not the Peleliu that I knew. It was VERY different. We found a lot of food in the

place where the Americans lived. Chocolate, cheese and other things were there in big square cans. Because we were not familiar with American food, we opened the package, smelled it, tasted it, and judged if it was edible or not.

*Interview: 27 June 2006. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA*



## Story 14

Rubak Santos Ngirasechedui

Born: 1923

Father: from Melekeok

Mother: from Airai



Rubak Santos Ngirasechedui (2006)

### What my father taught me

My father taught me the history of our hamlet, and Palauan customs. My father was from the second *kebliil* (clan) in Melekeok. My mother's mother was from the first *kebliil* in Melekeok, which appoints *Reklai* (the highest chief of eastern Palau).

My father taught me how I should act as a man from a high clan. For example, if the dock of our hamlet was broken, we would repair it collectively. My father told me, "If our dock needs to be repaired, you should go there earlier than any others, and start to work. If a person from a high clan starts to work, the other people will also work. If you don't start to work, the others will not work. And you should be the last person to stop working."

There was a road between Melekeok and Ngiwal, and this road became muddy after rain. We, the men from twelve years old to sixty years old, cleaned it once a week. My father told me, "You and the young man from the first *kebliil* must go there earlier than others, and work in the muddiest place." I asked him, "Why should I go there earlier than others?" He said, "If you are there, those who intended to wait for the others will also start to work."

My father told me that to be a leader I must experience hard work. This is an old Palauan tenet. These days, under the influence of the American notion of 'freedom', these customs are fading. In Palau, there are high clans and common clans. Today, in the democratic system, people from the common clans are able to become president. Those who should not touch political matters have entered politics, and those who have the right to be involved in politics are being kicked out. I think that in the U.S. democracy works well, but this notion doesn't fit the Palauan traditional system.

My father also told me, "If you do community labor, and there is insufficient food to go around, you should not eat. If you hear somebody talk ill of you, you should do something good for them. Then, they will respect you. And after getting people's trust, you should act modestly and always care about others."



Kinrohoshi in Melekeok, 1936 (photo: courtesy of Ubal Tellei)

## Palauan and Japanese rules of conduct

I was educated for three years in Melekeok, and after that, I studied at Koror *Kogakko* for two years.

My teacher's instructions were similar to those from my father. Like my father, the Japanese teachers told us to work for others. We learned '*bakudan sanyushi*' [a Japanese story of three brave soldiers who dived into an enemy's base with a bomb, dying for the sake of Japan and its people]. Our teacher told us that it was the highest virtue to devote ourselves to our country, Japan. I interpreted this story to match it with Palauan society. I did not think that I would devote myself to Japan, but to the people in my hamlet. But my teacher taught that we should contribute to Japan someday. We were taught to be 'splendid Japanese', not Palauan. We declared, "We will be splendid Japanese!", every morning after I reached fifth grade.

I also learned that '*yamatodamashii*' is the spirit of the Japanese. If you had that, you would die for Japan. I thought that I had '*yamatodamashii*'. I wanted to be Japanese. Even though my skin was dark, my spirit could be Japanese, I thought.

My father also said, "If you stay in a *bai* (meeting house) with your friends, you should get up early to take care of betelnut trees and to warm fish in the pan, and go back to the *bai*. Your friends should not even know about it. It is very important to get up early to do something good for others." My teacher told us, "Get up early in the morning, and work for the family before coming to school. It is a basic principle in life."

My teacher told us, “Don’t do something wrong and embarrass your parents.” My parents told us, “When you leave home, you should look back at the house from ten meters away. What does your house look like? If you picture your family and house, you will not do anything wrong outside them.”

We call branch lanes to each house ‘*redth* [?]’. My parents told me, “After being educated at home, you will go into society. There is a code of behavior in society that you must abide by. It is like you go out from the *redth* to the main lane.”

## Palauan chiefs and the Japanese government

In the Japanese time, the first chiefs of every group of hamlets were called for meetings with *Nanyo-cho* (South Seas Government). This meeting was called ‘*Soncho Kaigi*’ (meeting of the first chiefs). But in some cases, it was proxies for the first chiefs who attended the meeting. It was not *Ibedul* Tem, but *Ngiraked* who attended from Koror, and not *Reklai* Rruull but *Tellei* from Melekeok, and not *Ngirturong* Sulial but *Malsol* from Ngeremlengui. Tem, Rruull, and Sulial believed in *Modekngai* (Palauan religious belief), and they were not liked by the Japanese government.

## Discrimination

Even though we declared, “We will be splendid Japanese!”, there was discrimination. Japanese children studied in *kokumingakko*, and Palauan children studied in *kogakko*. But we Palauan children were never defeated by the Japanese children in sports festivals. Our teachers were excited to watch our performance. We were faster at running, and stronger in *sumo* wrestling than they were. We trained our bodies through working; whereas Japanese children whose fathers worked for the government did not work very hard, and were physically not so strong. When we were young, our parents made us work. We helped to construct the road, to repair the roof of a *bai*, or just to carry things. In the Japanese time, the strongest children were Palauan, followed by Okinawans, and third were the pure Japanese. The Japanese children had a good standard of living, but Okinawan children were poor and they had to help their parents to survive like us. At that time, I walked from Melekeok to Ngeremlengui and came back the same day. It took six hours, each way. Palauans in those days were much stronger than the Palauans of today.

## School life

When I went to Koror *Kogakko*, I lived in the dormitory. I sometimes missed Melekeok, but there was no means for me to get there. I went to Melekeok by boat in the New Year holidays.

In the dormitory, we ate meals together. Sometimes, students had their own food

which was sent by their parents. My duty was to count the number of students who would be eating the dishes prepared in the dormitory. Every night, I asked the students, “Will you eat or not?” and recorded the number. From this number, the teacher calculated the supplies that were needed, and took them out from storage.

One day, one of my room-mates caught amoebic dysentery. We were prohibited from leaving the dormitory for three or four months [weeks?]. When I started to go to school again, I couldn’t understand mathematics very well. After that, I gave up studying mathematics.

My favorite subject was Japanese reading. When I was in the fourth grade, I played in a drama entitled ‘The Mother of the Sailor’, a story set in the Russo-Japanese war. I played the sailor. After that, I was always asked to play drama. I think that I was funny, as a boy.

## Working experiences

After graduating from school, I went back to Melekeok. I worked at the store in Melekeok, which was owned by Mr. Asai. Mr. Asai came to trust me, and he wanted me to work at his main store in Koror. He thought that after training in Koror, he would let me manage the Melekeok branch. However, my father did not want me to go to Koror, so Mr. Asai sent me back to my father.

After that, Mr. Ichimura, the person I used to work for as a *renshusei* (trainee) gave me a job at the telegraph station. Three days later, my father came and said that he needed me. So I went back to Melekeok with my father. After that, I was with my father until he died in 1941.

## Working for the military

From 1941 to 1943, I worked for the military as a civilian worker. My duty was to carry oil and coals, and it was very hard labor. People from Okinawa, Korea, Palau ... many people worked there. Those who supervised the workers were Japanese. Sometimes, Okinawans said, “We are the First people.” Then, Koreans said, “We are also the First people.” Everybody wanted to be ‘the First people’ [because they wanted a high status in the Japanese system of ranking ethnic groups].

In 1943 Mr. Azuma, who was an official of the South Seas Government, came to watch us. He was accompanied by my older brother. He was very strict, and did not allow laziness on the job. At that time I worked very hard, wearing only short pants, and I was smudged with coal. Mr. Azuma noticed me, and commented to my brother, “He is very young, isn’t he?” My brother said, “That is my younger brother.” Three days later, I was summoned by Mr. Azuma. My buddy asked me, “What did you do?” I felt a little nervous. Mr. Azuma asked me, “When did you start to work for the military?” I

said, "It will soon be two years." "Do you like this job?" To tell the truth I did not like this job, but I was afraid I might be beaten and said, "I like this job." He asked me, "Why?" I said, "Because I want to contribute to Japan." Then, he asked me, "Do you want to work as *junkei* (Palauan police officer)?" I said "Yes, I do." I was afraid, and I could not refuse him.

Next day, I was taken by Mr. Azuma to the judicial office. Before being appointed as a *junkei*, I was recruited as an office boy. This job was too sedentary, and after three months I felt pains in my body because I did not have enough exercise. When I asked my boss to let me do another job, he told me to put up with it until I became a *junkei*. While I was working there, the first air raid on Palau occurred.

In the air raid the Peleliu airfield was destroyed. I was sent to help reconstruct the airfield. At that time, those who had lived in Peleliu took refuge in the rock islands. We worked under the navy. I constructed the concrete base for the cannons. While working there, I had a fight with a Korean, so I was sent back to Koror. In Koror, I worked as a translator. I interpreted the words of Mr. Ono, a Japanese official, for the Palauan people.

In July, the second air raid began, and I took refuge in Melekeok. But when I visited my mother in Airai, I was instructed by a *junkei* to work for Sumida troop. This order applied to Palauans from Airai, so I told him that I did not want to comply because I was from Melekeok. He claimed he would send a replacement after a week. I told him, "If my substitute does not come in two weeks, I will escape." When I went to Sumida troop, many Palauan young men were there acting as porters. I worked there for two weeks, but my substitute did not come. So I asked my younger brother to visit me with a few mangrove crabs. When he came, I gave the crabs to a Japanese soldier, Tsuchiya; and said my brother had come to tell me that my older brother was injured, so I needed to go to see him. Tsuchiya allowed me leave from the troop for a set period. I left with my younger brother, but I did not return.

Two to three weeks later, when I was walking on the road, I saw Tsuchiya was there with several Palauans. I wore my cap down low, and passed by them. When I had walked on about 50 meters, one of the Palauans told Tsuchiya, "That was Santos." They chased me, and I was caught. They tied my hands with vine. I asked in Palauan that they tie my hands loosely. They were carrying coconuts to Ngchesar; the Palauans carried 50 coconuts, and Tsuchiya carried 25. On our way to Ngchesar, I said to Tsuchiya, "Let me carry your coconuts." They had to free my hands; I threw all the coconuts at Tsuchiya, tossed his bayonet out of reach, and beat him. I dragged him to the river, and put his head under. He said "Don't kill me, please!" I left Tsuchiya there, and escaped. The other Palauans also ran away.

When I went to my shelter, my uncle told me to hide, because the military policemen would come. At night, they visited my uncle and asked him where I was; he said he didn't know. The next day, my uncle hid me in a hut in the mangroves with his son. We stayed there, and sneaked out at night to gather food.

I told Mr. Yaegashi, an assistant police officer, about the incident with Tsuchiya. I knew Mr. Yaegashi from when I worked in the court. He wrote a letter and told me, “Hand this letter to Mr. Matsumoto, an official of the *Nanyo-cho* (South Seas Government). We will make you a *junkeiho* (Palauan assistant police officer). Don’t show this letter to anybody else.” I brought the letter secretly to Mr. Matsumoto, and finally I was appointed as a *junkeiho*. After that, I met Tsuchiya. He said, “Did you become a *junkeiho*? Please work diligently.”

The reason I beat him was that he had kicked me severely. I had worked for the military from when I was sixteen years old, but he kicked me! I was very angry, but I did not intend to kill him. So I threw away his bayonet, and beat him. If we fight with our fists, it is a fight between two men. I still have a scar from being kicked by him.

After becoming a *junkeiho*, I worked in Mizuho hamlet. It was the middle of the war, and the office of the *Nanyo-cho* had moved to Babeldaob. The jail also moved to Mizuho. I met Pastor Yamamoto in Mizuho. He was a pastor of the SDA church, but he was in prison at that time.

When Christians indicate a chapter of the Bible, they write ‘Luke 2:15’, for example. The military suspected that it was a code. Pastor Yamamoto was investigated, and he was asked, “Do you believe in God?” He said, “Yes, I do.” The military policeman asked him, “How about the emperor?” The pastor responded, “I respect the emperor, but God is above the emperor.” The military police officer said, “You are not Japanese. The emperor is a living god.” So he was jailed for three years. Pastor Yamamoto told me, “Because I was in jail, I was well protected and had no trouble getting food. This was a blessing from God.”

There was another Pastor in the SDA church, Pastor Ochiai. I have heard that he said, “The government does not trust the church. We are treated as foreigners”, and he returned his license [as pastor?] to the government. He thought that he would not be drafted because he was over thirty-five years old, but the Japanese military changed their policy and began to draft those who were below forty years old. Pastor Ochiai was drafted and sent to Peleliu.

## The military and the people

When the war became severe, food was scarce. Maybe after the lepers were killed by the Japanese military, a rumor spread among Palauans that the Japanese military would begin to kill other Palauans. Those who were sick and old would be killed first, then women and children, because they were useless for the military. The rumor was that the Japanese would make a big shelter, make Palauans go inside, and kill them.

But actually, things went a different way. Captain Morikawa told the military, “Don’t kill the Palauans. It is better to have them raise vegetables.” He visited every hamlet to tell the people to cultivate the land and raise taro and other vegetables. One

day, I went from Ngchesar to Melekeok with Captain Morikawa and a man from Angaur. On our way, an American airplane flew above us. Then, Captain Morikawa took off his shirt, showing his white undershirt, and walked out from the forest. I was surprised and I was going to run away. Then, Morikawa told me, “It is all right.” The Palauan also said, “You don’t have to escape.” The airplane circled twice and went away without attacking us. Later, the Palauan told me, “Captain Morikawa helps us.”

I also remember the prisoners from India or somewhere. When I worked for the military in Ngermid, I worked with them. I think that they were from Java, India, and other places. There were hundreds of them, but most did not speak Japanese. When the Japanese gave them rice balls, one of the Indians threw it on the ground and said, in English, that it was food for a bird. A Japanese soldier, who used to be a headmaster of the school, picked up the rice ball from the ground and slapped him. This Indian also said that Japan would be defeated in a month. Hearing that [through a translator], we were very surprised and became angry. We never imagined that Japan could be defeated. After working there, they were sent to Aimeliik. When I worked in Aimeliik for Sumida troop, I supervised them. At that time, there were only about thirty of them. They also ate wild edible plants. I think that most had died from lack of food. I remember that some wore a white turban every day.

In the last phase of the war, many people were killed by the military. One day, I heard gunshots, and I saw two people dead on the road. On both sides of the road were fields of sweet potato. They had tried to steal some sweet potato that grew by the road. They pretended to fall to their knees, and when they stood up, they tried to conceal some sweet potato. I think they were Koreans. In those times, a person could be killed for a potato.

## My religious beliefs

When I was a child, I was a Catholic. But when I was in Koror *Kogakko*, I went to the Buddhist temple every Sunday, and learned the teachings of Buddha. There was a model elephant, and we pulled it on a cart. There was a small hut on the elephant, and in the hut was a figurine. When I went back to Melekeok after finishing school, I attended the German church. The name of the pastor was Herr Löhenge.

During the war, I met Mr. Seiichiro Yamamoto, a pastor of the SDA church. At that time, I was a *junkiho*, and he was a prisoner. I had many opportunities to talk with him. Pastor Yamamoto told me the teachings of the SDA. After the war, Pastor Yamamoto returned to Japan with the other Japanese, and Toribiong and other Palauans, including me, who were influenced by him started SDA activities. I was baptized in 1957 or 1958.

*Interviews: 29, 30 November 2006 and 13 July 2007, Koror. Conducted in Japanese.  
Interviewer: Maki MITA.*

## Story 15

Mechas Losau Ngotel

Born: 1924

Father: from Melekeok

Mother: from Ngchesar



Mechas Losau Ngotel (2007)

### Palauan life

When I was a child, my parents taught me many things. For example, I was told to collect dead leaves from coconut trees while I was playing, and bring them home. We used them as kindling to start the firewood burning. I also drew water from the tank in the hamlet. I had to carry water in a bucket again and again, because my bucket was small.

I also learned Palauan manners from my parents. For example, if male elders were in the *bai* (meeting house), women and children should not enter. And if an elder was walking towards me, I should step aside and bow.

If I have a guest, I should give him or her the best food I have in my house; for example, a big fish wrapped in banana leaf and boiled. I should give the head of the fish to the guest, because this part is tasty. If you travel in Palau, you don't need to be concerned about where you will stay. Somebody will prepare nice a meal for you, and lend you a blanket and pillow for sleeping.

### My school days

I went to Melekeok *Kogakko* from eight years old, and after three years I went to Koror *Kogakko* to further my education. Those who went to the *hoshuka* (advanced course) were selected by examination.

When I entered the school, the girls wore dresses, but the boys still wore loincloths in Melekeok. When the teacher gave a warning to a boy, the teacher pulled his loincloth. When I was in the *hoshuka* at Koror *Kogakko*, boys wore shirts, pants, caps, and shoes.

After school, we played tag and swam in the swimming pool at the dock. We competed with each other. I liked sports competition in school. I was a very fast runner.

Fukuoka-sensei gave me the Japanese name 'Sachiko'. He was my class teacher for fourth and fifth grade. He was very nice. I remember seeing him dancing in jest on the street. I asked him, "What are you doing, Sensei?" He said, "I am performing a Palauan dance!"



When I was in the fifth grade, I worked as a *renshusei* (trainee) after school. I worked for Mr. and Mrs. Nakamura. Mr. Nakamura was a government official, and they lived beside the house of the chief director of the South Seas Government. Mrs. Nakamura was very kind to me. I washed laundry, and took care of their child. They gave me 7 yen a month, even though the salary for *renshusei* was set at 1 yen 50 sen a month. She also gave me a skirt and shoes. When I went on a school excursion, she prepared my lunch. I kept working for them after graduating from school.

### Japanese people who were close to me

I had a Japanese friend whose name was Chiyoko Ozawa. She was much older than I, and she worked as a bus conductor. One time when I rode the bus, I gave her some fruit, and we became friends. When I went to the house to work as *renshusei*, she let me ride the bus. She paid my fare!

Sometimes, I played with Japanese children. I had some conversations with them, and we naturally became friends.

I remember Mr. Makino, a handsome young Japanese man. He was my neighbor, and when he saw me, he said, “Losau-san! You are a good girl!” I said, “No, I am a bad girl.” Then, he said, “Why? You are good!” He played harmonica and danced nicely.

Hattori-sensei was also my neighbor. She had a son, and sometimes I took care of him. When I visited her in Mie prefecture several years ago, she was over ninety years old but still fine. We both cried when we met. I also saw her son at that time. He joked, and told me that I should stay with him in Japan because I was his second mother.

### Memories of the war

After graduating from school, I worked for the Nakamura family for about a year. When the war came to Palau, they left for Japan. Mr. Nakamura advised me to go to Ngchesar, my home, because it was dangerous to be in Koror. So, I went back my home hamlet.

When the situation became serious, we took refuge in the forest. Because it was hard to find food in the forest, we went to our hamlet to harvest the crops in our gardens and taro-patches. A soldier on guard asked us, “Where are you going?” We said, “To our garden.” He said, “No, not now. The American airplanes are flying.” So, we went there at night. After we learned the patrol schedule of the Americans, we went out to harvest tapioca after 4:00 p.m., and went back to the shelter as soon as possible.

The air raids were severe. They would even shoot a dog! Many people died during the war. In Shimizu hamlet, many Japanese civilians died and were buried. I lost my mother and two of my sisters. It was cold in the forest, and they became sick. My sisters died from tuberculosis.

The Japanese troop in my hamlet had a good relationship with us. They did not

take food from us. When we met a guard, he said, “Where are you going?” We said, “To our garden.” He said, “Take care of yourself!”

I was close to an army troop led by Captain Yuki. We cooked breadfruit with coconut and brought it to the Captain. When we were returning to our shelter, he sent a Japanese soldier to accompany us as a guard. We sometimes brought food to him. One day, we had a party at night, and Palauan children danced for the soldiers. Captain Yuki gave Murako and me hardtack. Murako was his mistress.

When the war privations became severe, the soldiers began to starve. I saw two starved soldiers sitting on the ground, and I brought them to my shelter to give them taro and coconuts. One of them was named Mr. Yanagi. They were weakened and it seemed hard for them to keep standing. They might have died after that .... They did not come to us again.

In our shelter, we gave food to the soldiers who visited us. They were also humans, with blood. I felt sorry for them, to be apart from their homes and brought here because of the war. We ate *belloi* (bitter and poisonous wild fruit) and *denges* (bitter mangrove fruit). Both of them contain poison, and if you eat them without extracting the poison, you would throw up. We gave soldiers better food. They might have had diarrhea if they ate them.

After the war, a soldier gave my grandmother a blanket. She said, “See? If you treat others kindly, they will not forget it.”

One day, I picked up a flyer dropped from an airplane. It said that the war had ended on August 15. We went up a hill, and there was no shooting. So, we were convinced that the war was really over. We cried. I don’t know if it was because we felt sad or because we felt relieved. Anyway, tears welled up. We had a hard time in the forest.

*Interview: 27 March 2007, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA.*

## Story 16

Mechas Katalina Katosang

Born: 1924

Father: from Oikull, Airai

Mother: from Ngeremlengui



Mechasa Katalina Katosang (2006)

### Palauan customs

We Palauans don't have written *siukang* (custom). For example, there were several entrances in Palauan houses. If somebody visited the house, he or she could enter only by particular entrances. The house of a high-ranked person would have five entrances. The first and second door from the left were used only by the family of the house. It was prohibited for visitors to use these doors. The third one was used for general purposes. The fourth was used by children. Children didn't use the first, second or third door. The fifth door was not used by high-ranking people. Behind the first and second door was an open space in the house. Usually, this space was closed, but when they made an offering, they opened the space. The fifth door led to the cooking area. There was an extra door in the kitchen used to carry in taro and firewood. Behind the third and the fourth door was a space for general use. Seating positions in the house were roughly by rank.

In Palau, there were customs like that. These customs were not written down, but everybody knew them because they had learned them. If children acted inappropriately in another's house, they were judged ill-mannered for lack of home training. But in fact, children were taught not to enter houses of people to whom they were not related. It was not good if they got into the house and handled other people's property.

I learned Palauan customs from my mother. We passed them on from generation to generation. My mother taught me Palauan customs before I went to bed and while eating. Palauan customs are very good. We worked together, we called it *kinrohoshi* (community work), and we did not spend money on hiring workers. For example, when women of the village weeded along the street, men caught fish, cooked them and brought them to the women. If a family didn't join *kinrohoshi*, some villagers would visit and dance until they donated some food. *Kinrohoshi* was done between villages. If there was a task in Ngaraard, people from Aimeliik would go there and work. Ngaraard and Aimeliik had a historical relationship. They were like relatives. Even though Aimeliik people brought their own food, Ngaraard people would prepare food for them. Sometimes, Aimeliik villagers visited Ngaraard for dancing, and later, Ngaraard villagers would visit Aimeliik for dancing. Ngeremlengui, Koror, Aimeliik and Melekeok are



Palauan house in the old days (photo: from a post card)

‘the children of Milad [a goddess in Palauan legend]’. So, they helped each other. We had very good *siukang*. But now, these customs have been lost. The Japanese came, and the Americans came .... I saw these customs with my own eyes. For example, we didn’t have homeless people, because we helped each other.

We also learned about our kin’s members. For girls, it was not good to be too close to boys from their own kin. Usually, we married the person recommended by our parents. The rank of the family was important, but it was not the only factor in choosing a spouse for children; personality was also important. Palauan people knew each other very well, so if the parents chose a person of bad reputation without realizing, others would advise them to change their choice.

In my case, my first husband was Japanese. To tell you the truth, this marriage was a mistake. My first husband was not a good person. His mother was very hot-tempered, and if her husband said something that irritated her, she would pick up a knife. I was very scared. I was nineteen years old; I trusted anybody at that time. My mother did not know about the Japanese. In addition, my mother was divorced from my father, so I could not get any advice from him.

## At school

I went to Koror *Kogakko* after I turned eight years old. I lived in Koror with my relatives. My teacher in the *honka* (basic course) was Hattori-sensei, and the assistant teacher was Yohei-sensei. In the *hoshuka* (advanced course) I learned from Kamata-sensei. I have heard that Hattori-sensei is still alive in Japan. I visited her when I went

to Japan with my friends. After graduating from *kogakko*, I learned dressmaking from Hattori-sensei. Among the teachers, Kamata-sensei was sometimes the most strict. If a boy did not act properly, he shook his fist. But he did not do that to girls.

When I entered the *hoshuka*, I started work as a *renshusei* (trainee) after the class. I often worked at teachers' houses: Yoshino-sensei, Nomoto-sensei, Ishizaka-sensei and Honma-sensei. When the teacher I worked for went to Japan for the holidays, he introduced me to another teacher to work for while he was in Japan. But when he returned, the second teacher also kept me on. They trusted me. I also worked for an officer of the South Seas Government, but I have forgotten his name. Because I worked for the teachers, I could not be lax. But Nomoto-sensei, the headmaster, was very kind. He was never critical, but was just happy with my work. After working, I would tell him, "Sensei! I have finished the job. Can I go home?" Then he would say, "Yes, you can go home."

Before Nomoto-sensei, Izuchi-sensei was the headmaster. But he retired because he was disliked by *Nanyo-cho* (South Seas Government). Izuchi-sensei loved Palauan children, and advised the officials to let some talented Palauan children study with Japanese students. But the officials replied, "We don't allow the *tomin* (islanders) to study with the Japanese." The teachers treated Palauan children well. We said, "We will be splendid Japanese!" every morning. I felt ashamed to say that because I knew that I was a *tomin*.

While we were in school, we did everything ourselves. Boys cleaned the lavatory, and girls cleaned the grounds. It was not so hard.

In this picture [page 14, above], the students have a very good posture. I remember when this picture was taken. This is my class. The girl who stood up and read the book was very beautiful. She dressed nicely, but she was not bright. Because she was pretty, the teacher made her stand up and pretend to read a book for the picture. She did not read the book, she just pretended. She was our classmate.

Students from Melekeok could not pronounce syllables very well, and pronounced 'ji' as 'shi'. They said not '*jibun*' (myself) but '*shibun*', not '*onaji*' (the same) but '*onashi*', and not '*ojiisan*' (old man) but '*oshiisan*'. When they first arrived in Koror to study in the *hoshuka*, their pronunciation would be strange, but with study they would soon lose this accent. One day, a student from Melekeok was selected to read the text aloud. When this student read, "*Oshiisan, oshiisan, naze nakuno?*", the Japanese teacher, Kamata-sensei, could not understand what the student said, and said, "Pardon? What did you say?" The other students burst into laughter, and said, "It is *Ojiisan, ojiisan, naze nakuno?*" (Old man, old man, why do you cry?) Then, Kamata-sensei understood. It was funny. Everybody from Melekeok was like that.

I liked reading and writing. In the writing class, I wrote what I saw and what I experienced. Sometimes the teacher corrected the sentences, and sometimes he just graded my essay. I did not like mathematics. I did not study very hard at what I didn't

like. But when I was in the mood, I put effort into studying mathematics. Then, Kamata-sensei said to another student, “See? Even Katalina studies math diligently, why don’t you?” I felt bad about that.

One day, my friend whispered to me, “Nina, look at the teacher.” So I looked at him and saw that he was touching the face of a girl while he taught. Back then, I was very active and mischievous.

## Japanese policemen and Palauan girls

When I was in Ngatpang after graduating from school, a Japanese policeman asked several Palauan girls to help him to carry his luggage. I didn’t go with them. When the other girls came back, I asked them, “What did you do?” My friend said, “We helped a policeman to carry his luggage.” I said, “Was there anybody from Okinawa?” She said, “No, nobody was there.” I said, “Really? That is fine.” She said, “It is not fine, Nina.” She told me that the policeman did not even thank them, but just gave them something to eat. Several days later, this policeman came to us again. At that time, there were many Japanese soldiers in Palau, and we were asked to dance and talk with them. The policeman told his colleague, a policeman in Mizuho hamlet, that Ngatpang was just countryside, but the girls there were very good at Japanese, and intelligent.

Several weeks later, a Japanese policeman (*junsa*) and Palauan policeman (*junkei*) from Mizuho visited us. I said that I didn’t want to go with them, but other girls agreed to go. I was curious, and followed them. Then, unfortunately, we five Palauan girls were scolded by the Japanese policeman (from Mizuho). He told us, “I have heard that you didn’t obey the orders of the Japanese policeman. Why not?” One of my friends said, “Why don’t you listen to our side? We helped the policeman and went to Shimizu carrying his luggage.” The policeman responded skeptically, “Oh really?” Another girl said, “That policeman [in Ngatpang] is a liar!” The policeman added, “I also heard that you were consorting with soldiers”. One of the girls replied, “Well, Mr. Policeman. You are from Japan, right? In Japan, there is an old saying that ‘there is no border in love’.” The policeman said, “Oh dear, you are never at a loss for words! The [Ngatpang] policeman felt ill because you were too talkative!”

It was funny. There were five small houses amongst big trees in Ngatpang. It was a remote place, but the girls there were very impudent and disobedient. That policeman asked me, “Do you have anything to tell me?” I said, “No, not especially. I was just asked by a Major to cook something to eat. And I didn’t take the food to him, I asked someone else. I did nothing wrong, but if you want to ask anything more, please call me. I live in a house below.” The policeman said to us, “These days, soldiers are nervous because the war has broken out. Don’t visit them. If you visit them, they might cut off your head.” Then, we all laughed so much. Poor policeman! He looked disappointed. Even when he scolded us, we just laughed at him. He said, “You are all so smart. How

did you learn such proficient Japanese, living out here in the countryside?” It was fun. The policeman [in Ngatpang] was angry with us because we caused him concern. When he married a Japanese woman, he told us, “Please don’t act as you used to, next time you visit my home. It might make my wife feel uncomfortable.” But we did not listen to him. We visited his house and went in without his wife’s permission, and even helped ourselves to some food. We did not respect his wife, and treated her as if she were just his friend or someone unimportant. But this woman was very quiet and could not rebuke us.

### **Memory of a young Japanese man**

I have a beautiful memory. When I was fourteen years old, I went to Ngaraard by boat. After attending the Christmas Mass, I rode a boat from Koror dock with my girl friend. In the boat, I noticed a young Japanese man sitting on a box beside me. While I was reading a Bible, he slightly knocked at the box by his feet. I thought that he was strange, and without looking at him, I moved away from the box, little by little. I told my friend, “See? That man is knocking at the box to attract our attention.” “Oh, yeah”, and we did not even look at him.

Finally, he talked to me. “What kind of book are you reading?” he asked. I told him, “This is a book of the church.” After that, we talked pleasantly. He was a student of Waseda University in Japan, and he was on the way to Ngarchelong to attend a baseball game. When the boat arrived at Ngaraard dock, he took a picture with me. We were side by side in that picture. He said, “After the game, we will go eastward back to Koror, so I will wait for you on the east coast of Ngaraard.” But when he went to Ngarchelong, the ground was wet, and they could not play baseball. Because of that, he went back to Koror that day. I waited until evening but I could not see him. But while we were still on the boat, he had asked me, “May I have your mailing address to send a letter from Japan?” I told him, “Please send me a letter care of Nomoto-sensei, the headmaster of the *kogakko* in Koror.”

Actually, he sent me a letter soon after he returned to Japan, which was delivered to Nomoto-sensei. When I was at the home of my sewing teacher, a *kogakko* student summoned me to see Nomoto-sensei. My sewing teacher was worried that I had been summoned, and did not let me go. I went home on Saturday to attend Mass on Sunday, and I visited *kogakko* on Monday. When I went into the teacher’s office, there were many teachers there. I saw Kamata-sensei, who had been my teacher. I was a little scared to go to Nomoto-sensei, a headmaster. Nomoto-sensei asked me, “Nina, do you know this Japanese man?” I said, “Yes, sir. I met him on a boat.” He had already opened the envelope. He asked me, “Can you read it?” I said “Yes, I can.” Nomoto-sensei asked me the same thing several times, but every time when he asked, Kamata-sensei stood up and said, “Yes, I can vouch for her.” Nomoto-sensei knew the Japanese man because

they used to be at the same institution.

In the letter, the Japanese man said, “I was called up for military service, and I am away from home. My mother is waiting for me alone. So please come to my home in Japan, and wait for me with my mother.” But war had already broken out, and I had no chance to visit Japan. I have forgotten his name. I guess that he died in the war . . . . If he was fine, he might have written to me again. But it was the only letter I got from him. At that time, I was only fourteen years old. Even now, when I hear ‘Waseda University’, I remember him. Now, my grand-daughter is studying there. But she does not know my story. I felt that he was a reliable person. Because I was young at that time, I trusted anybody. I remember that he was reading a book in English.

### **Those who were executed during the war**

I could read the alphabet because I went to church from my childhood. I learned ‘A, B, C’ in Spanish pronunciation at first, and in the American time, I just changed how I read them. My Bible was written in Palauan using the alphabet.

I miss the Spanish pastors very much. After the war, I heard from a person who stayed in Ngatpang during the war that the Spanish priests, Father Elias, Father Marino and Padre Elmano<sup>11)</sup> were brought to Ngatpang by a military boat. They were taken to the inner part of Ngatpang wearing black clothes and taking a black umbrella. After the war, we Palauans utilized what the Japanese left; pans and plates, for example. Among these things, I found a black umbrella. When I held it, there was a faint smell of the Spanish pastor. I kept that umbrella carefully with my luggage. It made me remember my dear Fathers. They were treated badly, and taken to the other place, and the umbrella was left. I am very sad about them.

There is a bridge in a place called Kokusai in Ngatpang, and by the bridge, there was a hut. The Spanish Fathers were imprisoned in that hut. During the war, a Palauan woman stopped by the hut and looked in the window. Father Elias was there, and he said, “Don’t stay here. The Japanese will come back within fifteen minutes. We have given up on our lives, but you should not be captured.” At that time, Father Marino was lying down from starvation. So, Father Elias told her to go to a Palauan man named Rudimch and ask him to bring fish and taro. I don’t know if they could eat fish and taro.

After the war, a Palauan woman and I went to the place and found the graves. There were several graves there. Three of them were the Spanish pastors’, three were for Japanese soldiers, two were for people from Saipan, and two were for children. I could tell which graves were the pastors’, because they had crosses. For the soldiers, there were only sticks. It is said that their heads were cut off, and they were buried in the foxhole.

Close by the graves, we found a hut. The woman said, “Let’s go to the hut to see



what is inside.” She went in, and quickly came out saying, “It stinks!” But she went back in. After that, she came out and said to me, “Nina, there are a lot of rakes inside. Why would they collect such a thing?” I thought that they might be bones of the people who were brought to Palau from India. They were tall, and had long legs. But I did not tell that to the woman. I told her, “They might not be rakes. Rakes are made of bamboo, and there is no need to collect them. We should check them again.” The woman went inside the hut, and after a while, she came out. She said, “Yes, they are human bones.” So, we prayed for them and went home.

There were many people from India in Palau in the wartime. Maybe two thousand of them were there. But most of them disappeared. I had met the people from India when they were alive. They were staying in a place named Kokusai in Ngatpang, and we sometimes had sports meetings together. They were very tall and thin. When a Japanese soldier brought them left-over food, they threw it away and gave it to dogs.

One of them spoke Japanese, and he told me that he was captured by the Japanese military when he was in Singapore for his business. He said, “They made us drink ‘the last cup of *sake*’, so I guess that they will kill us soon.” He told me that the Japanese captain kicked his knees, and took his watch and clothes. I remember that he told me he had a son in his country. I think that the Japanese at that time were bad.

After finding the graves of the priests, I went back with Americans, and found them again. I have heard that the remains of the priests were dug up by the Japanese, and burned by the river, to destroy the evidence. When I went there with the Americans, there was no more hut, and no more bones of Indian people. The woman who looked in the hut said that there was a pile of bones there.

The Japanese military also killed those who had leprosy. I know of a man from Ngeremlengui who was killed because he was a leper. On the orders of the Japanese, a *junkei* (Palauan police officer) went to call on him. The man with leprosy asked the *junkei*, “Will they kill me? I am not afraid of being killed, but I want to know whether I will be killed or not.” The *junkei* said, “They will not kill you.” The man told his wife, “I will go with him, but I think that I will not come home again.”

I didn’t hear the rumor that the Japanese military would kill many Palauans in a big hole. Where could they dig such a big hole?

## Taking Refuge

During the first air raid in March, I was on one of the rock islands around Koror. I came to Koror to deliver my baby, and took a refuge in one of the islands near Koror Island with my mother and others. When I gave birth to my baby, a Japanese midwife helped me. The baby boy’s father was Japanese, my first husband.

After the first air raid, we moved to Ngeremlengui, and stayed there until the war was over. When I saw a B-29 flying around, I knew that the fighters would come in an

hour. The fighters separated into two groups, and one group dived and bombed, and then the other group. When the bombs dropped, they looked like pencils. They were zooming, more and more, and exploding. A broken fragment of a bomb stuck to my younger sister's bag. It was as large as a hand. Stones, roads and everything were blown away. The Americans burned the trees and bush around the Japanese cannons, and then, the Japanese tried to grow plants there. After two weeks, the plants had grown, and the Americans burned them. It happened again and again.

Because we were from Ngeremlengui, my mother had gardens and taro-patches. She planted sweet potato, tapioca, and taro, and we could eat them. Sometimes, we found the soldiers had taken tapioca from our garden. My mother said, "How poor of them. Do they even know how to cook it?"

I breastfed my baby. One day, a Japanese soldier passed by, and he asked me why my baby's skin color was lighter than ours. A woman standing with us said, "The seed is different." Finding that the baby was half Japanese, the soldier gave us some sugar and rice. I appreciated it so much. He said, "Don't worry, please eat it." My Japanese husband was not called into the military. He went to Japan after the war, and came back to fetch me, but by that time I did not want to be with him anymore.

## **Memory of a Japanese soldier from New Guinea**

One day, I met a Japanese soldier who moved to Palau from New Guinea. At that time, I sometimes visited one of the Japanese units with my girlfriend, who had a friend in the unit. The Japanese soldier from New Guinea said to the soldiers at the battery in Ngeremlengui, "Please don't fire the cannons. Certainly, Japan will be defeated. There is no point in firing." He told them his story. "Firing these cannons will achieve nothing. In New Guinea, the Japanese soldiers who went into the forest from the front were all killed. Some of my fellows and I went into the forest from the rear, and survived. But when we fled across the river by clinging to a raft, some of my fellows were taken by crocodiles. It was terrifying, and very sad.

After landing, we walked carrying food on our backs, but we did not know where to go. We went into the forest, but there was nobody there. No river, no sound. Finally, we ate all the food we had carried and had nothing left to eat and drink. But fortunately, we found a palm tree; and took all the coconuts, drank the juice, ate the flesh and started to walk again. But we did not have any hope. When one of us climbed a tall tree, he saw a bare mountain ahead. We decided to go to the top of the bare mountain, to be killed by the Americans. It seemed better than dying one by one while walking. So, we climbed the mountain. Then, an American airplane came, and it dropped a box of food. They took us for an American unit! So we took the box and went back into the forest."

He told this story, and one soldier responded, "Are you saying we should die without firing a shell, even though we have the cannons here?!" And he tried to uncover

the cannon. The other soldiers stopped him, and said. “Don’t do that! Please.” The soldier from New Guinea said, “It is meaningless to fire this cannon. It will be our victory to lose the war and go back to Japan alive.” He told the soldiers to imagine how many bombs the Americans had. Even when they saw a piece of cloth in the forest, they would bomb it. “We are in a hopeless situation. Don’t fire. If the Americans are drawn to us, we will be all destroyed.” This is why the soldiers who defended the battery in Ngeremlengui survived.

*Interviews: 27 December 2006 and 12 July 2007, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA.*

## Story 17

Rubak Ubal Tellei  
Born: 1924  
From: Melekeok



Rubak Ubal Tellei, with his wife  
Mechas Basilia Tellei (2005)

### Japanese Education

I was educated for three years in Melekeok, and two further years in Koror. We spoke only Japanese in school, but in the hamlet we spoke in Palauan. Even though Japanese schooling was only for three years or five years, we learned Japanese language effectively. It is quite different from the education of today.

The best thing about education during the Japanese time was that it gave weight to good morals. Honesty was valued above all. Punctuality and industriousness were also emphasized. I believe that people should work to develop themselves.

### The Palauan way and the Japanese way

Some Japanese customs were similar to Palauan customs; for example, respect for elders was very important in both societies. In Palau, if an elder was walking toward you, you would be expected to step aside and make way. Also, in Palau everybody respected the chief, and would follow his direction. There were few people who would go against the chief's orders.

During the Japanese time, people functioned on the basis of orders from government officials or Japanese military officers. When I was young, the high chief *Reklai* was Tellei, my mother's father. And *Reklai* Tellei had a son whose name was Oikawasang. Oikawasang was the chief of the Palauan police officers, and he mediated between the Japanese colonial government and *Reklai*. Sometimes *Reklai* was called to the *Nanyo-cho* (South Seas Government) [in Koror], to receive orders from the Japanese.

The Japanese way was somehow different from the Palauan way. Japanese leaders rather forced their will on the people, and all the people could do was to obey orders. Palauan custom was not like that. Palauan chiefs would order villagers to do some task, but at the same time the chiefs usually served the welfare of the village people; for example, by preparing food while villagers were doing cooperative work. In Palau, the people with titles would do the harder tasks, and the lay people would do the easier jobs.

When I was young, we constructed the road between Melekeok and Ngarchelong as a community initiative. We decided to do this by ourselves, and we bought picks for construction work. When we needed money for the community, we sold coconuts.

These days, Palauan customs are changing. I think that the American way of democracy does not fit the Palauan way. Now, people will not work for the community, but only work for money. In addition, it used to be that when we saw children doing something wrong, we used to scold and punish them. And those children would never say anything about it to their parents. If they said something, their parents would scold them as well. Nowadays, if we scolded the children of another family, they would report it to their parents, and their parents would get mad at us.

### **Memories of the war**

During the war, I applied for *Teishin-tai*, a troop of Palauans, and went to New Guinea.<sup>12)</sup> We did not fight, but we worked for the Japanese military. We did dangerous tasks; for example, we carried bombs for three days. I applied for *Teishin-tai* because I believed that Japan would win the war and New Guinea would be a part of the Japanese empire. When the war was over, we were in Taiwan. When we were asked if we wanted to be sent to Palau, we told them, “We want to go to Japan, because we are Japanese.”

When we were in school, we said, “We will be splendid Japanese!” I think that I believed that somehow.

*Interview: 7 May and September 2005, Airai. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewers: first interview, Maki MITA, Nasuhiko YAMAGUCHI and Yuko YAMAMOTO; second interview Maki MITA and Nasuhiko YAMAGUCHI.*

## Story 18

Mechas Michie Sugiyama

Born: 1925

Father: from Shizuoka, Japan

Mother: from Ngeremlengui



Mechias Michie Sugiyama  
(photo: Belau National Museum. n.d.)

### My father's businesses

My father came to Palau as an officer of the *Nanyo-cho* (South Seas Government). It was at an early stage of Japanese administration and no formal education system was yet set up. He started a private school for Palauan children.

At that time, Palauan children dressed in grass skirts or loincloths. My father taught them Japanese language and other subjects. My mother was one of his students. My father said that my mother was very smart from when she was a child. I always admired my mother for her intelligence. I think that my mother's Japanese was better than mine, even though I am a native Japanese speaker. I was brought up only in Japanese, and learned how to speak Palauan from listening to people's conversations.

Several years later, the government started *kogakko* (school for Palauan children) so my father closed his school, and started businesses. He had scribes' offices, a café, a bar, and a confectionary company.

Eighty workers, including Palauans, were working for my father's businesses, and my mother cooked for them. There was a big table in my house. My mother was good at cooking, and she knew how to cook Japanese food very well. One of the popular dishes amongst the workers was curried rice. She also cooked Palauan food.

My father built five houses across from the *Honganji* temple, and he rented them to unmarried Japanese workers. Sometimes, the workers would come to our house with ingredients for a meal, and ask my mother to cook them.

My father had two scribes' offices in Koror. At that time, not many Palauan people could write or read Japanese. When many Japanese came to Palau, they rented land from Palauans. My father drew up the legal documents for this. My mother helped my father by doing translation between Palauan and Japanese. My father taught Palauans how to make seals of their names, because the Japanese used seals when they made official documents. There was a kind of tree which was suitable for carving letters on it. My father taught some Palauans from my mother's village how to carve letters in reverse.

My father also took care of the people who came to *Honganji* temple. My father had first shown the Buddhist priest the land in downtown Koror, and he asked my father to make legal arrangements and also to build the Buddhist temple there. Then he went back to Japan. When he visited Palau again, the temple was almost complete! He was very happy about that. I saw that some Japanese people visited *Honganji* temple in the morning and in the evening. In the daytime, the temple was used as a kindergarten. The children in this kindergarten were mostly Japanese. I think that this was because most Palauan people did not understand Japanese, and they did not want to make their children go to a Japanese kindergarten.

My father had a small souvenir shop in the scribes' office. At that time, Palauan people started to carve their legends on boards, as *itabori* [introduced by Hisakatsu Hijikata]. My parents knew Mr. Hijikata very well. My father hired two Palauan carvers to carve the Palauan legends which my father heard. Palauan people were very good at carving pictures. They had carved their stories on the *bai* (meeting house) from a long time ago. My father also sold other Palauan crafts; ashtrays made from coconut shell, for example. When Palauans brought their handiwork, my father offered it for sale. If it was sold, my father paid the makers. My father did not take a margin at all, and he always told them, "Please feel free to bring your works."

My father also had a confectionary company near *Honganji* temple. There were two Japanese craftsmen in that company; one made Japanese raw sweets, and the other made cakes and biscuits. About fifteen people, including Palauans, worked there. If they got an order in the morning, they delivered it by bicycle.

## Our family and Palauan society

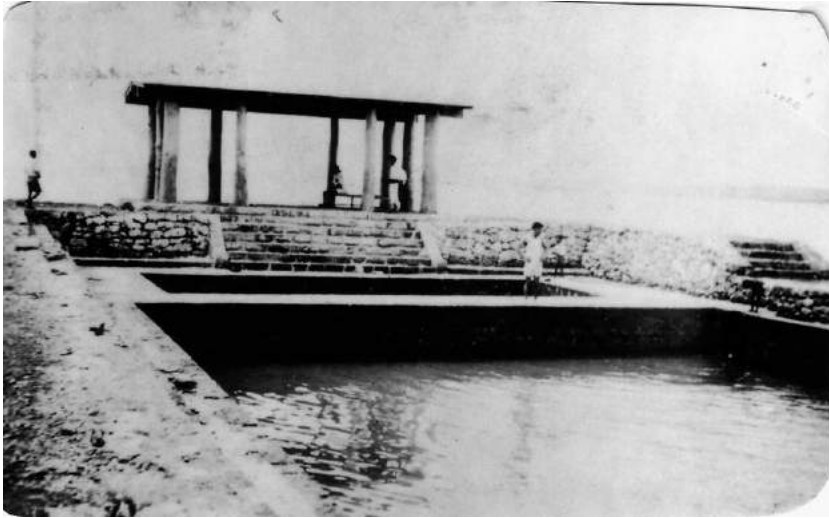
My parents were kind to Palauan people. When somebody asked my parents to loan money, my parents gave them the money and did not require repayment. Sometimes, Palauans brought fish and fruit to us.

My father was popular amongst Palauans. When my father came to Palau, there were not many Japanese. I remember that Palauans sometimes visited our house at night and played mah-jongg with my father. When I looked inside the room, my father said that it was not a game for a child.

My mother was from Ngeremlengui, so we went there often. The first chief of Ngeremlengui was my mother's eldest brother. My mother fulfilled her obligations as a Palauan. She paid money for Palauan customs, and also visited her relatives and helped them.

## My school days

I went to *kokumingakko* (school for Japanese) in Koror. I had a small red bicycle, and



Swimming pool in Koror (photo: Belau National Museum)

I rode this to school. A bicycle was expensive at that time, so everybody envied me. Sometimes I let my friends ride my bicycle.

When we had a swimming competition at the pool in T-dock, I won the races. I was very good at swimming. Many Palauans in the audience cheered me. It was because I was close to Palauan people. Even when I walked on the street, my Palauan friends called my name, “Micchan!”

## **My high school life in Japan**

After I graduated from the *kokumingakko* in Koror, my father brought my sister and me to Yokohama, Japan. There was no high school in Palau at that time, so my father sent us to study in Yokohama Girls’ High School. We stayed at a relative’s house, and went to school by train. It was my first experience of riding in a train.

Sometimes, Japanese people asked me what Palau was like. I told them, “Palauan women dress in grass skirts, and Palauan men dress in red loincloths. But they have started to dress in western clothes recently.” They also said to me, “Did you come from Palau? Your Japanese is very good.” So, I told them, “My father is Japanese, and my mother speaks very good Japanese even though she is Palauan.” Then, they asked me, “Oh, is your mother Palauan?” I said, “Yes.” Then, they asked me again, “And is your mother married to your father?” “Yes.” When I showed them a picture [of my family?], they were very surprised.

During the school holidays, I came back to Palau with two Japanese teachers and my sister. Hearing that the school principal had a strong interest in Palau, my father had



invited our teachers. I remember that I called my father in Palau from Japan, and said, “We will leave for Palau the day after tomorrow.” One of the teachers was named Haruko, and she said to me, “Your mother is very good at cooking.” My parents welcomed the teachers.

We were two sisters and six brothers, and my father let six of us study in Japan. The younger two brothers did not have chance to study in Japan because of the war.

### **Again, in Palau**

After graduating from school in Japan, I went back to Palau. I was surprised to see that many Japanese were now living there and there were many stores along the street. Palau had changed in only a few years.

I was asked to teach dressmaking to Palauan students. Sometimes, there was a student who could not buy cloth, so I would buy a piece of cloth for her with my pocket money. I would say, like a joke, “Don’t worry about it. It is your wish to learn dress-making. You should learn it to be a good wife.” We started by learning to handle a needle. I also taught the girls embroidery. I prepared white cloth, and drew patterns on it. I saw some of the students in recent years. Now, my students have become old women.

After staying in Palau for some years, I went to Japan and stayed for a short while at my relatives’ house. It was a rural area, and I was very bored. When I was going to do something, they said, “No, you don’t have to work. You should do something fun.” When my father called me from Palau, I said to him that I wanted to go back to Palau.

I came back to Palau, and helped my mother. Sometimes, Palauan students visited me and asked me to sew their dresses or gymnastic wear or pants. I sewed these clothes for them, and they paid me. But I did not want to take a lot of money from the students, so I did not charge much.

When I became a young woman, several young men asked me to go out with them. But I never went with them. I married a man from Peleliu after the war.

*Interview: 15 December 2006, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA.*

## Story 19

Mechas Tomomi Watanabe

Born: 1925

Father: from Ehime, Japan

Mother: from Airai



Mechas Tomomi Watanabe (2006)

### My family

Palauans did not have family names before the war. We had only first names. After the war, it became common to have family names, but we don't have a rigid rule. So, some Palauans use their father's names as family names, and some people use any name which they like.

I started to use 'Watanabe' as my family name when I came back to Palau from Japan after the war. Watanabe is my real father's family name. He was Japanese, and used to be a police officer in Koror during the Japanese administration. His name was Umataro Watabe, and he was from Ehime Prefecture. My mother said that his family name was Watabe, but the Chinese characters of that name can be pronounced either 'Watanabe' and 'Watabe'. So, our family name is Watanabe.

My father had a family in Japan. After he came to Palau, his wife in Japan died. So, when he married my mother, he summoned his Japanese daughter to Palau. My Japanese sister's name was Yukiko. And my father had two more girls, including me, and one boy with my mother. My mother also had a daughter with another Japanese man before she married my father. Her name was Katsue. So, I had three elder sisters and one younger brother.

We lived in Koror. We spoke both Palauan and Japanese at home. My father worked as a police officer, and my mother worked as a seamstress. My mother's mother cultivated vegetables in her taro-patches and gardens. But when I was three years old, my father's work transferred him to Saipan.

### My memories of school

I went to Koror *Kogakko*, and studied there for five years. In the morning assembly, we bowed to the north. But we did not make three declarations like the Palauan students some years younger than me. I guess that this started after I graduated from school. On special occasions, such as the emperor's birthday, we sang the Japanese national anthem.

Some Palauan students said, "Because you are half-caste Japanese, you are the

favorite of the teacher.” Actually, Kamata-sensei, who was my teacher, loved me as if I were his daughter. Both Mr. and Mrs. Kamata were very kind to me, and they even offered to adopt me as their child. They had two sons who were already university students, and they wanted to have a daughter. But I did not want to be adopted, so I refused their offer.

I also worked as a *renshusei* at Mr. Kamata’s house. Seeing other students working as *renshusei*, I became curious to try this myself. I asked Kamata-sensei to list my name as a candidate for *renshusei*. Then, he said, “Do you want to work as a *renshusei*? Then, why don’t you work at my house?” So, I went to Kamata-sensei’s house, and worked there. Mrs. Kamata taught me how to clean the house and the garden. Mrs. Kamata also treated me as if I were her own daughter. I deposited my pay from this work in the post office, and I used this money in Japan some years later.

I was short-tempered when I was young. One day, I had a quarrel with other Palauan students and cried. Then, Kamata-sensei scolded me, and whipped me. I got so furious with him, that I did not forgive him to the end. Some years later, when Kamata-sensei heard that I would be going to Japan, he sent a message to visit his house before I left. But I did not visit him, because I was still mad at him.

### ***Nanyo-shinpo* Newspaper Company**

After graduating from school, I worked at *Nanyo-shinpo* Newspaper Company. I picked each piece of type and arranged them for printing. Yoshiko [?] and I were the first Palauans who worked for this company, I guess. This job was not hard for me and the pay was good.

### **My life in Japan**

In 1941, my Japanese sister Yukiko and I went to Japan to see our father. Yukiko had gone to Saipan with my father when he was transferred to Saipan. After several years, my father returned to Japan, but my sister stayed in Saipan and married there. One day, my sister decided to visit her father, but she did not have enough money to go to Japan. So, she came to Palau, and asked me to go with her. Because I had not seen my father since I was three years old, I was curious about him. I thought that I wanted to see him. My mother paid the fare to Japan for me [and my sister?].

When we arrived in Yokohama harbor, the brother of Yukiko’s husband welcomed us. At first, we went to Tochigi prefecture, which was Yukiko’s husband’s home town, and after staying there, we went with him to Ehime prefecture to see our father.

It was very far from Tochigi to Ehime. Even though I was in Japan, I had to take a ship to go there. We traveled by train, ship, and bus. Ehime was rural, and it was beautiful. I remember a white road in Ehime. It looked like a road in Angaur.

Finally, I met my father. But I felt that he had a strange expression when I met him. So, I didn't want to talk with him any more. You know? I was very short-tempered. My father said to us, "Thank you for coming all the way to Ehime to see me. But Ehime is very rural, and there are not good opportunities to learn. I think that it would be better to learn weaving in Yukiko's husband's house, or to learn something else in the city." So, I went back to Tochigi prefecture and stayed there. Soon after that, it became dangerous to go back to Palau because of the war. I stayed in Japan until the war finished.

From my point of view, Tochigi was not beautiful like Koror. Tochigi looked old, but Koror was modern at that time. But after the war, *Ibedul* (High Chief of Koror) asked the Americans to remake Koror. Then the Americans destroyed most of the Japanese buildings. It was a great pity.

In Tochigi, I stayed at the house of my sister's in-laws and learned how to weave at the loom. There was a girl of my age, and I went to the movies with her at night once in a while. To tell the truth, I did not like watching movies, but this girl asked me to go with her. It was because she was not allowed to go to the movie theater if I did not go with her. On these occasions, they dressed me in a Japanese *kimono*. They were their daughter's *kimono*, but she preferred dresses. So, they wanted me to wear a *kimono*. It was exciting for me. This girl and I joined other friends, and went to the theater. When I was bored, I used my friend's cushions as pillows, and had a nap. When we came back to the house, they asked, "Tomo-chan, how was the movie?" Because I had not paid attention to the movie, I just said goodnight, and went to bed. Then, the family laughed. They knew that I had been napping in the theater.

## Wartime experience in Japan

After staying in Tochigi for three years, I went to Tokyo and stayed there with the other elder sister of mine, Katsue. She was a half-sister of mine. Her father was from Yamagata prefecture, and she was also my mother's daughter. Before the war became intense, we moved to Saitama prefecture. From Saitama we saw Tokyo being bombed, and burning.

My sister and I worked to make parts for military weapons with other women. Most of the young men went to fight, and women were working instead of men. Food became scarce, but fortunately we could get some rice from my sister's relatives who lived in the countryside. One of our neighbors envied us and said to us, "You are lucky to be able to eat good rice." Then, my sister gave her some of our rice. I said to her not to do that, but she said, "I am sorry for them. They have children."

I learned that the war had finished from the emperor's speech on the radio. Everybody got together, and listened to the radio quietly. It was disappointing, but I felt relieved. I knew that the Japanese soldiers had swords made from bamboo, in the last stage of the war. I hate war. Wars destroy people. I came back to Palau after the war.

## **My mother prayed to the Palauan deity**

After coming back to Palau, my mother brought me to the deity in Ngetkib. I did not realize it, but my mother had prayed to the Palauan deity to guard my sister Katsue and me in Japan. When she had visited the deity, my mother brought a red cloth. I think that when she prayed, the spirit entered the cloth. My mother brought the cloth to the house and kept it as a charm. Because her wish was granted and my sister and I survived the war, my mother and I visited the deity and returned the cloth.

Nowadays, not many Palauans believe in the Palauan deities like before. But even though many people converted to other religious beliefs, our original belief would not die out.

## **The home island of my sister**

My sister Katsue stayed in Japan, married there, and lived there for many years after the war. But several years ago, she called me and said, “Tomo-chan, do you have any place for me to stay in your house?” I said to her, “You can stay anywhere in my house.” Then she said, “I will soon die. I want to go home to Palau, and die in Palau.” My sister told her children, “I was born in Palau. So please bury me in Palau.” She came back to Palau and died. After that, I lost my younger brother and the other sister. Those were painful experiences for me.

*Interview: 24 November 2006, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA.*

## Story 20

Mechas Remusei Fumiko Tabelal

Born: 1925

Father: from Koror

Mother: from Koror



Mechas Remusei Fumiko Tabelal, with her husband  
Rubak William Tabelal (2005)

### My background

My biological father, Mariur, was the *Ibedul* (High Chief of Koror) during the Japanese time. His father was German, so he looked like a European. I was the child of Mariur and his wife Dirrutang. But soon after I was born, I was adopted by Dirrechong and her husband Timalong. But Dirrechong died when I was a child. So Kisaol adopted me and she became my mother. Kisaol was with a Japanese man named Horigome when I was young.

Dirrechong and Timalong taught me what was important as a Palauan. Respecting elders and chiefs was very important in Palau.

For example, when we pass in front of the house of the chief, we bend over a little. Also, women in high clans always tied their hair up. There were many rules in Palau. But my father Mariur was different from other chiefs. He did not make his wife cook his food, and he cooked his dishes by himself. He liked to have a cup of tea and to eat biscuits. He was like a German. So, my mother Dirrutang distributed the harvest from her taro-patches to others.

Sometimes, there was a call from the *Nanyo-cho* (South Seas Government), and my father attended their meeting. Palauan chiefs could not say everything they thought to the officers of the *Nanyo-cho*. The Japanese government forced the Palauan chiefs to do some things, but the Japanese officials still respected the Palauan chiefs. Even though the *Nanyo-cho* was set up in Palau, the Palauan political system did not change.

After my first foster mother Dirrechong died, Kisaol adopted me. But she did not teach me anything about Palauan customs. She was with a Japanese man, and she said to others, “My daughter is not physically strong, so I don’t make her participate in Palauan customs.” Even though Kisaol’s Japanese husband Mr. Horigome spoke to me in Japanese, my mother Kisaol and I used Palauan.

### In kogakko

I studied in Koror *Kogakko* (school for Palauan children) for five years. I liked music

class. Hattori-sensei taught us many Japanese songs. But I did not like mathematics.

We spoke only Japanese in school. If somebody spoke in Palauan, the student who monitored the student's language usage wrote his or her name in a small notebook. At the end of the month, we totaled the number of times Palauan was used by the students' home hamlets. Then, the group from Koror always won the competition [for the lowest total].

There was a sports event once a year and we played several games. For example, there was a game called the 'bottle-carrying race'. In this game, we ran while we balanced bottles on our heads. There was also a race to climb betelnut trees and put a flag in a hole on the top.

We played many Japanese games; *otedama* (beanbags), *Saipan-dama* (marbles), *ayatori* (cat's cradle), *sesse* (hand-clapping game), *nawatobi* (jumping rope) and other games. I don't know how we learned these games. These games were already popular among Palauan students when I was in school. I especially liked to play with *mari* (a beautiful bouncing ball). I asked my mother to buy a small *mari*, and I sang a song while making the *mari* bounce.

The boys grew vegetables in school. They went inside the toilets, and carried out the feces in order to use it as fertilizer. Soon after doing this smelly job, the boys jumped into the sea. The girls cleaned the classroom and the school grounds, while the boys worked in the gardens.

The school teachers and our parents said almost the same things to us. But sometimes, we kids did not obey them and they warned or scolded us. If a student did not go to school for several days without any explanatory note, the teacher would visit his or her house.

## Palau under the Japanese administration

In the Japanese time, intermarriage between Japanese and Palauans was not easy. Some Japanese married Palauan women, but Japanese officials never married Palauans. Marriage between Japanese women and Palauan men was very rare.

The Japanese said that the Palauans were '*dojin*' (indigenous primitives). Even Japanese children called us '*dojin*' or '*tomin*' (islander). '*Tomin*' was not a bad word, but we felt looked down upon when we were called '*tomin*'. We Palauans were offended to be looked down upon, but at the same time, we did not protest against being treated like that. Palauans were afraid of the Japanese at that time.

## Palauan culture and ethics

The Palauans spoke German when the Germans came, and spoke Japanese when the Japanese came. These days, many Palauan children only speak English.

The Palauans used to have good ethics. We respected each other, and when we entered a *bai* (meeting house), we bowed our heads. The Japanese people respected the emperor. When a member of the imperial family visited Palau before the war, we had to bow deeply, and we were not allowed to raise our heads and look at the person. I wanted to see him, but I could not. Some religious figures did not respect the Japanese emperor, but they pretended to respect him.

## **My life in Japan**

After graduating from school, I worked as a telephone operator at the bauxite company. My Japanese father, Mr. Horigome, also worked there.

After that, I worked for a short period as a domestic helper for a Japanese family named Okada. They were friends of my mother Kisaol. There was a small girl named Hiroko in their family, and she is the one who visited me in 2005.

In 1939, I went to Tokyo with Pastor Ochiai from the SDA church.

Even though I was a Catholic, I did not go to the Catholic church very often. When I met a priest on the street, he said to me, “You are a devil.” That was mean, wasn’t it? Because my relatives were the leading figures of the SDA in Palau, I went to the SDA church sometimes.

One day, Pastor Ochiai asked me if I wanted to go to Japan to study. He had already sent Maria and Sakuma to schools in Japan, which were managed by SDA. The school I studied at was Nihon San-iku Girls School. I converted to SDA and I was baptized in Japan. I studied mathematics, the Bible, and other subjects there.

At that time, I used my Japanese name, ‘Fumiko’, and the family name of the Japanese man who was with my mother. So, my name was ‘Horigome Fumiko’ in Japan.

But when the war came, our school was closed because it was managed by Americans. All the pastors were taken to the police station. I sometimes visited them with food.

Many Japanese people took refuge in the countryside, but I stayed in Tokyo, and worked at a hospital. The situation of Tokyo during the war was terrible. Many injured people were brought to the hospital, and I took care of them. Lice spread amongst the patients, so we had to cut their hair. A bomb dropped on our neighbor’s house, but our dorm was not hit.

I learned that the war was over through the radio. The emperor made a speech, and I saw many Japanese weeping here and there. My friend said to me, “Now you can go back to Palau. Good for you!” But, I felt very sorry for the Japanese who were weeping.

The American soldiers were kind, contrary to our belief. We were curious to see the Americans eating chewing-gum while walking. The Japanese did not do that.

Soon after the war, I went back to Palau as required by the order of General MacArthur.



*Interview: 24 August 2005 and 7 December 2006, in Koror. Conducted in Japanese.  
Interviewers: first interview, Maki MITA and Nasuhiko YAMAGUCHI; second interview  
Maki MITA.*

## Story 21

Mechas Keiko Miyashita Cho

Born: in 1925

Father: from Japan

Mother: from Koror



Mechas Keiko M. Cho, with her brother Rubak Kazuo Miyashita  
(Story 9) (2005)



Keiko in the 1930s  
(photo: courtesy of Keiko M. Cho)

### My background

My mother Aiko was half Palauan, but she was raised by her father as Japanese. She spoke both Palauan and Japanese, and also German, which was taught in the church. When I was small, I did not know my mother was half Palauan. She didn't speak Palauan at home.

It was my father's policy to raise his children as Japanese. Our guests were mostly Japanese, and when my mother's relatives visited my house, they only met my mother in the kitchen. It is customary for Palauans to raise money through relatives. My mother fulfilled her duty completely, and even more; she helped her Palauan relatives financially a great deal.

When I was in the first or second grade of *shogakko* (elementary school for Japanese,<sup>13</sup>) a Japanese woman asked me, "Your mother is a *tomin* (islander), isn't she?" Hearing this, I was very surprised! I ran home, and asked my mother, "Mom, is it true you are a *tomin*?"

My mother had a younger sister whose name was Sueko. After divorcing her Japanese husband, she married a Palauan. Sueko's daughter Nobuko was my cousin, and she was also a good friend of mine. Even though my father did not want his

children to visit the houses of Palauans, I sometimes visited my aunt Sueko's house, and my grandmother's house in Ngerkeseuaol hamlet in Koror. Palauans were afraid of my father, who was the branch manager of *Nanbo* (South Seas Trading Company), and very influential. So, when I visited a Palauan hamlet, some people would leave so as not to meet me. But most Palauans were very kind to me.

I had two older brothers and one younger sister. My oldest brother Yoshio often went fishing with his Palauan relatives. At that time, he wore a red loincloth, and was very manly. In his adolescence, he turned against our father. On the other hand, the younger brother Kazuo was very sensitive. He didn't swim in the sea because he didn't like sea grasses. He liked to dress up smartly, and he even wore a bow tie!

I went to the kindergarten in *Honganji* temple. There were about ten Japanese children in the class, and the monk and his wife were very kind. My brother Kazuo liked taking care of others. I did not like him telling me, "Keiko, a small girl like you should be at the front of the line!" I stopped going to the kindergarten because I did not like walking with the other children.

## My school life in Palau

At the age of seven, I went to *shogakko* (elementary school for Japanese children). As I grew older, the proportion of Okinawan students increased. When I was in the sixth grade, half of my classmates were from Okinawa. Most were busy helping their parents after school, so they did not play with others. I felt sorry for them, to see that some could not bring lunch boxes, but only brought *aburapan* (oil bread).

I had a friend from Okinawa. Her name was Yoshiko Higa. Because she was also busy, she could not visit my house, so I went to hers. Her house was in Ngerbeched, and there was a big garden. We went there to look at the fruits and vegetables. We ate watermelon at her house.

I always played after school. I liked to find edible fruits on the trees. I had some knowledge of wild fruits. I was taught which fruit was edible and which was not by my cousin, and by Palauan domestic helpers in my house. I sometimes visited Ngerkeseuaol, my grandmother's hamlet. Japanese rarely visited there because they were afraid to step into Palauan society. This hamlet was beautiful. The lanes were paved with stones, and it was not hot even for bare feet. I enjoyed looking for fruits, and I caught fish in a stream with my cousin. Sometimes, we went into the house of one of our relatives, and ate *kukau* (taro) from a pan. Old women in this hamlet cooked traditional Palauan sweets and let us eat them. For example, they made *miich* (Palauan nuts) with coconut syrup, *ureld* made from copra and coconut syrup, and so on. I enjoyed visiting the Palauan hamlet, but I was scolded by my father later.

In school, we half-castes were harassed by the children of the officials. When I was praised by a teacher, a boy told me "You *ainoko* (half-caste)!" I did not like the

children of the government officials. Among half-caste children, those who went to *shogakko* were rare. I know there were many half Japanese, half Palauan children in *kogakko*, and some of them were very smart.

When Palauan children passed by *shogakko*, they kept their distance. Even though I sometimes played with my Palauan relatives and other Palauan children, I was afraid to be spoken to by some of them in front of the Japanese students.

I liked the sports festival in school. I was a fast runner, and I liked the lunch which my mother made. My mother was very good at cooking. She could cook anything; for example, pound cake, or *taiyaki* (a fish-shaped pound cake stuffed with sweetened *azuki* bean). I wonder who taught her how to cook Japanese dishes. Was it her father? I am not sure. She also cooked Palauan dishes. Back then, we enjoyed a very high quality of ingredients, compared with today. In-season fruits and vegetables were imported from Japan. I ate cherries, loquats, apples, pears, and other Japanese fruits. Because I used to eat very good dishes in Palau, I was very surprised to see in Japan that people ate poorly, when I was a high school student there.

While I was at school, on Sunday I would go to the German Protestant church in Koror, with my mother. The German pastors spoke Palauan, and the churchgoers were Paluans. Because I did not understand what they said, I gave up attending. The German pastor and his wife were good friends of my mother. When we visited their house, they showed us inside. It was very tidy and clean.

## Days in Japan

After graduating from *shogakko*, I went to Japan to study at high school. I went there by ship. My father always said, “Even if parents have high status, their children do not.” So he bought me a standard-class ticket for my journey. I shared a cabin with other people, but it was fun and good for a young girl travelling alone. When my mother went on a trip, my father paid for the most expensive cabin. The guest in this suite ate meals with the Captain. Before disembarking in Japan, I had to throw away the oranges I had brought from Palau, because of the quarantine. I went on deck to discard the oranges, and I saw the sea in Yokohama port. What dirty water! This is what I thought at that time.

I stayed for three years in the house of an acquaintance of my father’s. The standard of living for most Japanese at that time was poor. When I was in third grade, my mother came to Japan with my younger sister, so we lived together in Tokyo. Sometimes, my father called us from Palau. Because we did not have a phone at home, we asked to borrow the phone of our neighbor, who ran a Japanese noodle restaurant. When my father called this restaurant, the owner came to fetch us.

Once or twice a year, my father visited Tokyo to attend head-office meetings of *Nanbo* Ltd. After the war broke out, my father’s vessel was bombed on his way to Japan. He clung to a suitcase until he was rescued. Even after such an incident, he had



Miyashita family. Rear, Standing L–R: Keiko, Keiko’s friend, Keiko’s cousin Nobuko. Front L–R: Aiko, Keiko’s sister Masae, Kazuo, Juichiro. (photo: courtesy of Keiko M. Cho)

to go back to Palau after the meeting. He took an airplane this time!

During the war, my brothers were drafted, and my mother, my sister, and I took refuge in Ibaraki with my mother’s father. At that time my grandfather, who used to live in Palau, was still alive.

When the war was over, my brothers came back. But we did not hear anything from my father in Palau. We were afraid that he would be killed because he was a key figure in Japanese Palau. Fortunately, later he returned safely to Japan.

Some decades later, my parents died in Japan. My father had eagerly wished to go back to Palau; it was the place where he made his life, his everything. But I think my mother did not have the same desire. She did not want to face her relatives after losing most of the property which our family used to have.

When I came to Palau in 1972, I brought the ashes of my parents. Our Palauan relatives held a funeral for my parents, and their ashes were buried in the grave of my mother’s mother. I met my aunt Sueko and other relatives, and their warm welcome to our family made me happy. On this occasion, I decided to move back to Palau; because Palau was my origin.

*Interviews: 17 and 19 March, 10 August 2005, 9 June 2006, 26 June 2007, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewers: first interview, Maki MITA and Nasuhiko YAMAGUCHI; subsequent interviews, Maki MITA.*

## Story 22

Mechas Ucheliei Malsol Toribiong

Born: 1925

Father: from Ngeremlengui

Mother: from Ngardmau



Mechias Ucheliei Malsol Toribiong (2007)

### Memories of my childhood in Ngeremlengui

My father was Malsol, former *Ngiraklang* [second-ranked traditional chief in Ngeremlengui]. I lost my mother when I was only three months old, so I was raised by my father's parents. I had one biological brother.

When I was a child, I would go with my grandmother when she tended the garden. While she was working, I would play by myself. One day, I told my grandfather I wanted to eat some round-fish (ray) eggs. My grandfather took me down to the sea, and said, "OK. If you go to the garden and climb the tree, you might fall and break your arm. But if you go to the sea and fall in, you will not be injured." We went into the mangroves, and found a round-fish under the mangrove tree. When my grandfather opened its belly, there were the eggs, which we cooked in a coconut shell. It was so tasty!

### Life in the dormitory

I went to Koror *Kogakko*. I lived in the dormitory, but sometimes went home in the weekend. I missed home very much. I would go to Aimeliik by boat, and then look for somebody to take me to Ngeremlengui. When I arrived at the Ngermetengel dock in Ngeremlengui, I would run to my hamlet, Imeong. Because my father had a boat, he took me to school on my way back. One time, I went home for a day trip, but my grandmother said to me, "No, don't leave. You should stay one night."

In the dormitory, we would wake up at 6:00. We folded our bedding, and put it back in the closet. The students on duty prepared breakfast. Other students took a bath by the wells or in the stream nearby. After eating breakfast, we went to school. We took care of ourselves in the dormitory. Every Sunday, my family sent me *billum* (tapioca cake wrapped in leaves), smoked fish and coconut oil. We put coconut oil on the *billum* and the dried fish. These lasted until Wednesday, and from Thursday I ate food provided by the dormitory. It was just rice and *miso* soup with sardines. I started to eat rice in school. In Babeldaob, eating rice was still rare. Rice had been newly introduced by the

Japanese.

Palauan people adopted many Japanese customs. In Ngeremlengui, we cooked a lot of *udong* (Japanese noodles) in each house, and when somebody came to say, “*Omedeto!*” (Happy New Year!) we would invite them in to share some *udong*. In the Japanese time, we made *udong* soup with dove, which was delicious. Ever since, Palauans have celebrated the New Year with *udong* and *oshiruko* (sweet *azuki* bean soup with rice cake).

## At school

At school, we learned reading, writing, singing and agriculture. In agricultural class, we collected sea cucumbers, and put them in an oil drum with water to make a fertilizer. We had two cows in the school. The students on duty would wake up at 5:30 a.m., cut some grass, and feed the cows. Cow dung was also used as fertilizer. I think that children nowadays should do this kind of activity. After the Americans arrived, children did not learn agriculture at school.

The Japanese teachers were strict. If anybody did something wrong, the teacher wrote what the student did on a board, and hung it around his or her neck. And the teacher took the student to each class, and had everyone read it. So the students did not do it again.

Speaking Palauan at school was prohibited, as was chewing betelnut. One day, a girl used a piece of broken glass to shave her eyebrows, which became swollen. The teacher asked her, “Why did you do that?” Maybe she was trying to imitate adult women.

I remember a story I read when I was a school student. One day, a child drew water from a well using a new bucket and poured the water into a washtub, which had a hole. Even though he kept adding bucketfuls of water, it all leaked out. The next day, he used an old bucket with a hole, but a new washtub. Because of the leaking bucket, it was hard to draw water; but after one day’s work, he had filled the washtub. This story tells us that if you do not waste money, you can save even on a small income; but if you spend money like running water, you will not save even on a high income. I liked this story. In Palau, if the wife wisely uses money, the family can save even if the husband’s income is small.

## Hattori-sensei and I

My teacher, Hattori-sensei, gave me a Japanese name, Keiko. I did *renshusei* (trainee work) at her house. I took care of her little boy. She taught me how to cook Japanese dishes. For example, I learned how to cook *torimeshi* (rice cooked with chicken and vegetables), *oshiruko* and so on. I remember that when I returned from Ngeremlengui

after the New Year holidays, Hattori-sensei called me to visit her, and she fed me *oshiruko*. She put ice in the *oshiruko*, and it was so tasty! In 1977, I met Hattori-sensei in Guam, where I was working at the Tokyu Hotel. When I knocked at the door, I heard her say, “Yes, Yes, Yes.” I recognized her voice, which I had longed to hear.

### **Working at the German priest’s house**

I graduated from the *hoshuka* (advanced course) there were about seventy graduates, the largest class that there had been.

After graduating from school, I worked at a German missionary’s house in Ngiwal for a year. I learned the taste of goat’s milk, how to arrange the cutlery, how to make bread using yeast, how to make soup, how to wash laundry, and so on. When I washed laundry, I separated the laundry by color, put it in a big pan and boiled it until it was clean. Then, I put it in a washtub, and washed everything by hand. It was hot and my skin on my fingers peeled, but I did not complain. After washing, I hung it out to dry on a line set between palm trees. The German pastors spoke Palauan, which they studied very hard.

### **Koror before the war**

I married Toribiong in 1940. Because he worked for the *Nanyo-cho* (South Seas Government), we rented a government house in Idid, Koror. Every morning, Okinawan women came to sell fish. They put a lot of fish in two boxes and carried them on a pole. They sold *meyas* (rabbit fish), fat meat of *katsuo* (bonito) .... In those days, a great variety of people lived in Koror; people from Taiwan, Korea, and China .... In Uradori (the back lane), there were many Chinese women who wore beautiful dresses and small shoes. I feel sorry to think that they worked for brothels.

### **Religious beliefs in the Japanese time**

I was Catholic when I was a child. When I was a student and lived in Koror, my aunt told me to go to church every week without fail. But because I was busy working as a *renshusei*, I did not always go to church. My aunt would be angry at me when she could not be given the sacrament because I had not come to the church.

There were Palauan deities in the hamlets. The deity in Ngerekngong, a hamlet in Ngeremlengui, punished those who took somebody’s belongings, or spouse. In that hamlet, the mouse and the eel were sacred. If we found a mouse, we would ask around, “Did anybody in this house steal something from Ngereklengon?” “No, we did not.” “Then, why is a mouse visiting our house?” If somebody did something wrong, the deity would make a member of their family sick. If this family paid money to the deity,



the sickness would go away.

The Japanese government prohibited *Modekngai* (Palauan religious belief), even though they did not interfere with traditional Palauan beliefs in the hamlets. My uncle was sent into exile because he was a one of the leaders of *Modekngai*. But, those who believed in *Modekngai* were good people! Before going to school, I went to meetings of *Modekngai*. They boiled herbs and made *osurech* [?], they drank the water of *osurech*, ate grilled coconut, and sang songs. I liked to sing Palauan songs, so that I joined their meetings even though I was Christian. The Japanese did not understand what they said and for what they prayed.

The Japanese also did not like the Christian church, I guess. One day, a Christian man was imprisoned under suspicion of spying. Christians write ‘John 3:6’ for example, to indicate a section of the Bible. This kind of writing made the Japanese suspicious.

There were two Japanese priests from the Seventh Day Adventist church in Palau; Mr. Yamamoto and Mr. Ochiai. One day, they were asked by the military, “Which is more important to you, the emperor or God?” Mr. Yamamoto answered, “God”, and Mr. Ochiai replied, “The emperor”. Mr. Yamamoto was arrested, and Mr. Ochiai was sent to Peleliu as a soldier and died there. Mr. Ochiai had to die because he ranked God below the emperor, I guess. Mr. Yamamoto was moved to Babeldaob when the *Nanyo-cho* (South Seas Government), which operated the jail, took refuge there. My husband met Mr. Yamamoto in Babeldaob, while working for the Japanese government as a *junkei*. Mr. Yamamoto wanted my husband and his friends to study the Bible. After the war we got back in touch with Mr. Yamamoto, and my husband went to Japan to study the doctrine of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, and became a priest. After that, my husband revived the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Palau.

## Memories of the war

In March 1944, I was in Ngeremlengui with my husband and two children. Because my husband was a *junkei*, we lived at the police station. He often talked with the Japanese soldiers who manned the *hodai* (battery) in Ngeremlengui. One day in March, a soldier on guard duty at the lookout was not relieved by a replacement. We asked what had happened, and he replied, “I have no idea. I have been here since last evening, but the relief did not arrive.” That was the day of the first air raid in Palau.

Knowing that the Americans had started to attack Palau, we took refuge in the forest. I had a two-year-old child and a three-month-old baby. I hid in a small stream with my children, holding a black umbrella. The stream was very shallow, only up to my ankle. I was in the stream all day long. I hoped not to be seen by the airplanes, but this spot was near the Japanese battery, and not so safe, I now realize. Fortunately, we were protected by God.

After that, my husband made an air-raid shelter. The next air raid happened in

November [July?]. At about 11:00 a.m., the first airplane flew over, dropped bombs, and turned back again. We moved to Ngaraard, where my grandmother was from. People from Ngarchelong also took refuge in Ngaraard, and when they visited Ngarchelong to harvest taro, my husband guarded them. They went there early in the morning or in the evening. Later, my husband moved to Ngatpang where the military headquarters and the *Nanyo-cho* (South Seas Government) were based.

My brother Mers went to New Guinea as a member of a non-combat Palauan unit. Before that, he had been abroad as a member of the other Palauan non-combat unit *Chosa-tai* (research troop), and had returned. Then, after the second recruitment he went again, and died. I have heard that he drank unprocessed methanol. Five or six Palauans died in this incident.

*Interviews: 19 June and 21 July 2006, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA.*

## Story 23

Mechas Kyarii Mellil

Born: 1925

From: Ngiwal



Mechas Kyarii Mellil (2005)

### My school days

I am from Ngiwal, and I went to Melekeok *Kogakko* for three years, and then to Koror *Kogakko* for two years. I was not one of the top students, but I was good at mathematics. Even now, I can calculate faster than my grandchildren.

In school, we learned Japanese language, art, mathematics, singing, gymnastics, handicraft, and other subjects. I remember that we learned *katakana* first, and then we learned *hiragana*, and then Chinese characters one by one.

The girls also learned domestic tasks. In the domestic studies class, we brought cloth, and learned how to make clothes using a sewing machine. After sewing a part of it, we showed it to the teacher. If it was not well done, the teacher told us to do it again. It was strict, but I think that it was good for learning.

In the handicrafts class, we wove cigarette cases and bags. The boys made ashtrays from coconuts. This class was taught by a Palauan adult. I also learned how to weave grass baskets from my mother.

In front of the school, there was a stone monument, with four words carved on it. The words were: diligence, honesty, obedience, and gratitude. One Japanese teacher told us, “Please never tell a lie. Telling lies will ruin you.”

### Memories of working

After graduating from school, I worked as a domestic helper for the family of Dr. Takeuchi. Actually, I worked at his house as a *renshusei* (trainee) when I was in school, and after graduation I continued to work there. Dr. Takeuchi used to work at Palau hospital, and later he opened a private hospital in Koror. They called me ‘Kii’. When they called, “Kii!”, I came to them and bowed.

At the house of Dr. Takeuchi, I learned many things. Mrs. Takeuchi and Dr. Takeuchi’s mother trained me. For example, Mrs. Takeuchi taught me that if I put clothes neatly under the mattress before sleeping, in the morning they would be ready to wear without using an iron.

Dr. Takeuchi’s mother taught me how to wash laundry. I learned that laundry made

from strong cloth should be washed with a washboard, but delicate cloth should be washed by hand. When I was washing clothes using a washboard, the doctor's mother asked me why I was doing so. I replied that because my hands were small it was difficult to wash by hand. She told me that some clothes should be hand-washed, especially those that I was then washing, no matter what size my hands were. Sometimes, after the doctor had been on a house call, his trousers were muddy; then I would use a scrubbing-brush. Some clothes were to be squeezed, others were not. If the laundry was slapped before drying, it would dry flat.

I also learned from them how to cook Japanese dishes. In the Japanese time, some ingredients for Japanese dishes were available even in Palau. After the war, when three Palauan men visited my house, I cooked *chawanmushi* (savory steamed egg custard) for them. Some of them were half Japanese, and they were very surprised to see *chawanmushi* served.

They also taught me Japanese manners; manners for welcoming guests, table manners, and so on. I always had meals with the Takeuchi family. They told me to eat a lot. I learned how to use chopsticks, and to not leave even a grain of rice on the plate. If I was feeling bad, I told them that I would eat later because I had a job to finish. Sometimes I ate alone, crying, outside the house.

Working at Dr. Takeuchi's house was sometimes hard, and sometimes made me feel happy. I believe that we should not give up on things easily.

Dr. Takeuchi's mother died in Palau. They took her ashes back to Japan. Because I lived in their house, I minded the house in their absence. When they came back to Palau, I went to welcome them. When I went to their ship by boat, they were watching for me from the deck. We had lunch onboard the ship, before going home.

After working at Dr. Takeuchi's house for several years, I was asked to work for the director of *Nantaku* (South Seas Colonization Company). Even though the Takeuchi family was good to me, the salary they gave me was 4 yen 50 sen a month. In contrast, the salary at the director's house was 45 yen a month! It was a very large sum. I cooked for the director, cleaned the rooms, took care of the guests, and did other chores. But in 1944, the war came to Palau.

## The war

In July 1944, I took refuge with the director, in Ngatpang. Soon after that, my father came to pick me up, and I went to Ngiwal.

Palauans had a good relationship with the Japanese troop in Ngiwal. When we gave the soldiers eggplant and pumpkins, they gave us tobacco, soap, toothbrushes, towels, and other things. When my grandfather took them some fish, they put rice in a sock, and gave it to him. Sometimes, I mended loincloths for the soldiers, and got some things in return. I remember a moonlit night, when we had dancing and singing with the

soldiers. Because I was very shy, I did not do anything. I regret that I did not sing even one song. Later, I heard that the director died in Ngatpang. I was very sorry for him.

### **Romance with my husband**

I was engaged to Mellil when I was seventeen. It was still in the Japanese time. I told him, “If you will stay with me until you or I die, I will marry you.” He was a good carpenter, and we were introduced by some other people. The first and the third Sunday were my day off from Dr. Takeuchi’s house. I met Mellil on these days. When I moved to the director’s house, I told the director, “I need to go out because a relative’s child is sick.” The director was not pleased, but I could go out for a while, and talk with my fiancé.

My husband was very good to me after we married. I also took care of him very well. One day, somebody commented to my husband, “Do you have an iron? Your shirt is very neat.” We did not have an iron, but I knew how to make the shirt smooth, as I had learned at Dr. Takeuchi’s house. I learned a lot from them and I appreciated them a great deal. When I was young, I was very shy and quiet. I did not like to play around, but I liked learning Japanese work.

### **Visiting Japan**

In 1970s, I had a chance to go to Japan, and I visited Dr. Takeuchi. Because I did not tell them I was coming, Mrs. Takeuchi was amazed to see me. I saw tears trickle down her cheeks. When she phoned her husband, Dr. Takeuchi told her, “Keep her right there at home. I want to see her too!”

*Interview: 3 September 2005, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewers: Maki MITA and Nasuhiko YAMAGUCHI*

## Story 24

Mechas Dirraklang Saruwang Merei

Ngirametuker

Born: 1926

Father: from Airai

Mother: from Airai



Mechas Dirraklang Saruwang Merei Ngirametuker (2006)

I was born in Ngchesechang hamlet in Airai. My father fished in the sea, and my mother cultivated her taro-patches and gardens. I had ten brothers and sisters. There were few Japanese in Airai when I was a child, so I did not have any Japanese friends before I went to school.

### My school days

I studied at Koror *Kogakko* for three years. I lived in the dormitory. Fifth grade students took turns preparing food. We ate rice and fresh fish, or rice and canned sardines. Once a week, my father brought me food, including taro, *billum* of tapioca (tapioca cake wrapped in leaves), fish and coconuts.

My teacher was Okamoto-sensei. He was strict, but Kamata-sensei was the most strict. Teachers scolded us when we had quarrels. Sometimes we girls had quarrels with boys.

I loved the dancing class of Hattori-sensei. She taught us how to dance, and I still remember the melody we danced to. Sometimes, we danced holding flags in our hands. I liked mathematics as well. There was also an agricultural class, and we cultivated green vegetables. We ate the vegetables in the dormitory.

When I was in the second grade, I went to a Japanese house and worked as *renshusei* (trainee). I was too young to speak Japanese well, but from the third grade, I did not feel any difficulty communicating with the Japanese. I swept around the house, and cleaned inside. I earned 1 yen 50 sen a month. I worked for a Japanese official and his wife, and they were good people. One day, when I visited their house, nobody was there. And I found a note which the wife left for me. She said that she had to go out shopping, so I just heated water for a bath, and went home.

With the money I got through this work, I bought Japanese sweets. I ate Japanese cookies with sugar named '*kinbisu*', and small blocks of black sugar. I also bought shirts with my money. We could buy a set of shirt and skirt for 75 sen. We also could buy some kind of cloth at 15 sen a yard. There were dress-making stores, and we could

order clothes made from the cloth we brought. Notebooks and pencils were provided by the school.

Sometimes I went to a barber to have my hair cut. Most girls cut their hair short, and boys were close-clipped. This was to avoid infestation by lice.

We went to *Nanyo-jinja* (South Seas Shrine) from school. I did not feel any problem with praying to the Japanese deity. I think that deities are all the same. Only their names are different, but they are the same deity.

## Life in Airai

After graduating from school, I went back to Airai, and cultivated taro-patches and gardens with my friends. We brought sweet potatoes, bananas, papayas and pineapples to the cooperative store in Koror *hatoba* (dock), and sold them.

At that time, there was no bridge between Airai and Koror, so we rode on a boat called a '*sanbang*'. It cost ten sen each way.

In Airai, we ate rice only on special occasions, such as New Year's Day. I liked Japanese rice. It was tastier than the American rice which we eat today. We ate rice with sugar. We also ate Japanese noodle, *udong*. When we ate *udong*, we cooked it and put coconut milk and sugar in it. In order to buy rice and *udong*, we earned money by selling bananas, soursops and fish to Japanese who visited our house.

We did not go to the hospital often during the Japanese time. In the first place, not many people got sick. Even when we got sick, we healed it with traditional Palauan medicine.

## The war

When the American airplanes came to Palau in March 1944, I was in Oikull hamlet in Airai. A Japanese soldier had said that these were Japanese airplanes which were practicing. But I saw that they were dropping bombs on the airfield in Airai.

In Ngetkib hamlet in Airai, there was a woman who spoke the words of the Palauan deity. When the war came, the Palauan deity in Ngetkib said that we should take refuge in the rock islands. So, we took shelter on the rock island beside Oikull hamlet. I was with my parents and brothers and sisters. At first, we brought only food, and we went home at night to get blankets, clothes and other food. When I landed on the rock island and looked back, Airai and Koror were being bombed. It was very scary.

We were on the rock island until July. In July, the Japanese military told us we should move from the rock island and return to Oikull hamlet. So, we moved to Oikull.

At first, we had enough food from our own cultivation. But as the war went on,

food became scarce. There were several Japanese military units in Oikull, and they did not have enough food. Because they took our taro and tapioca, we started to eat *belloi* (bitter and poisonous wild fruit) and *denges* (bitter mangrove fruit). After cooking, we soaked them in water overnight.

Japanese soldiers were very hungry. I felt very sorry for them.

*Interview: 10 August 2006, Airai. Conducted in Japanese and Palauan. Interviewer: Maki MITA.*



## Story 25

Mechas Belenges Oiterong and Mechas Yosko Oiterong

Belenges: born in 1920

Yosko: born in 1926

Their father: from Aimeliik

Their mother: from Ngermid, Koror

[This story was mostly told by the younger sister, Yosko. The older sister, Belenges, mostly listened to what Yosko said, and sometimes added information.]



Mechas Belenges Oiterong (2007)



Mechas Yosko Oiterong  
(photo: courtesy of Hisashi Endo)

### Our background

We are biological sisters, but we were adopted into different families. Belenges was adopted by our father's sister and her husband. And I, Yosko, was adopted by another sister of our father, but she was not married. I liked this aunt, and always followed her, so I was adopted by her.

Our father, Oiterong, was a great person. He wanted us to be educated, so all of our sisters and brothers went to the *hoshuka* (advanced course) of *kogakko* (school for Palauan children).

### Yosko's memories of school

When I turned eight years old, I stayed at my uncle's house in Koror, and went to Koror *Kogakko*. My teacher was Kamata-sensei. Once we entered our classroom, we put our hands behind our backs, and kept quiet. Even though Kamata-sensei was not a person

who hit students without good reason, he was a very strict teacher. My girlfriend was slapped by him because she chatted during the class, and talked back to him when he warned her. But usually, he was especially strict with boys.

When we spoke Palauan at school, a student who monitored the language use of the students said, “You spoke Palauan!”, and noted down names.

I enjoyed my school days. I liked Japanese class, but I did not like mathematics. My brother Alfonso always asked me, “Did you study mathematics?” Then, I would lie, and say, “Yes, yes!”

We were advised by the teacher to dress tidily. I had only two dresses which my aunt sewed for me. So, every morning I washed one of my dresses while I bathed, wore the other dress, and dried the washed one in the sun.

When I entered the *hoshuka*, I moved to Mr. Ueki’s house in Iyebukel hamlet, Koror. Mrs. Ueki was one of my father’s sisters. In the morning, I mowed the grass, and brought a pile of cuttings to school. We raised cows and goats at school, and we fed them with the cut grass. The siren blew at 7:30 a.m., and when I heard that, I ran to the school. The school started at 8:00 a.m.

Before the morning assembly started, the bell rang. Then, every student ran to the school ground, and we stood in lines and bowed to the north. Then, we made three declarations, such as, “We are the children of the emperor!” Then, we sang the Japanese national anthem. When the war came closer, we also sang ‘*Umiyukaba*’ [a song of soldiers who lost their lives in war]. We also did gymnastics to the radio in the morning. The Japanese flag was raised by a Palauan student every day.

I had a few Japanese friends. They were my neighbors, and most were from Okinawa. But we Palauan children did not play with Japanese children often, because we were separated into two different schools. When I was in the first grade of the *hoshuka*, there was a big fight between Palauan children and Japanese children. The Japanese students said to us, “*Tomin!*” (islander), “*Kuronbo!*” (blacks), and, “You smell of coconut oil!” So, the Palauan children got angry, and threw stones at the Japanese children. Then they threw stones back, and it became a big fight. After this incident, Izuchi-sensei, who was the headmaster of Koror *Kogakko*, resigned from the school. Now I guess that he resigned because he took our part. He often tried to protect Palauan students.

I worked for Mr. Takahashi as a *renshusei* (trainee). He was the head of the colonization division in the *Nanyo-cho* (South Seas Government). Several people were hired as staff in his house. A Japanese nursemaid took care of the child, and she also cleaned the house. A man from Okinawa mowed the grass. My job was to heat the water for baths, and to rake the garden. The Japanese nursemaid taught me how to do these jobs. She visited me in Palau after the war. I deposited the money which I got from this job in the post office, and I withdrew this money after the war.

All the members of our family were baptized when I was very small. I went to the

Catholic church every Sunday. When I was second grade in the *hoshuka*, *Nanyo-jinja* (South Seas Shrine) was set up. There was an order from the *Nanyo-cho* (South Seas Government) for children to visit the shrine from school. The priests did not want us to go there, but I went to the shrine because it was an order. The priests did not object to my doing *renshusei* work, or working for the Japanese company.

### **After graduation (Story of Belenges and Yosko)**

Yosko worked for a newspaper company, and picked each piece of type. Belenges took care of her adoptive mother at home. Belenges was a very good girl, and she fixed lunch for her father and brought it to him at the construction site at Koror *hatoba* (dock). Everybody admired her.

We were married to men whom our father chose. Our father chose men from high clans. In such cases, men and women were expected to come to love each other after the marriage.

Belenges married when she was seventeen years old. Her husband's name was Demei. She got married to a man whom our father chose, and she had good children.

I, Yosko, married a man from a high clan when I was seventeen years old, following my father's suggestion. But my husband had an affair with another woman, and I was very sad. Because my father told me that I should learn many things from this family, I listened to the stories from my father-in-law, and I tried to put up with having such an unfaithful husband. But when one of my brothers visited me, I cried and cried, and said to him, "I don't want to be here any more!" So, my brothers brought me back home.

After that, I fell in love with a man, but my father did not allow me to marry him. In the end, I married a friend of Belenges' husband. His name was Ngiratumerang. My sister Belenges told my father, "This person will be very good for Yosko to marry." And I made only one child with him.

### **The war (Story of Belenges and Yosko)**

On the night of the first air raid, I, Yosko, went to Aimeliik, and took refuge with my parents and family. My father had become blind, and my mother had asthma. When we saw airplanes, we hid in the forest and kept quiet. In recent years, I had a chance to ride in an airplane. And I found out that I could see even small passes from the airplane. I thought that there had been no point in our hiding ourselves during the war.

We got our food from our taro-patches and gardens. Captain Morikawa had told Palauans to cultivate the land and plant many new areas in case we would suffer from shortage of food. So, we had crops in Aimeliik even during the war.

But after I married my husband, I moved to Ngatpang with my husband. My sister Belenges was also in Ngatpang with her husband. There were the villages of *Shin-*

Ngatpang (New Ngatpang) and *Kyu*-Ngatpang (Old Ngatpang). In *Kyu*-Ngatpang was the headquarters of the Japanese military, and we lived in *Kyu*-Ngatpang. There was a naval unit in *Shin*-Ngatpang.

There were not many taro-patches and gardens in *Shin*-Ngatpang. So, we ate mainly *belloi* (bitter and poisonous wild fruit), *denges* (bitter mangrove fruit), and coconuts. There were many coconut trees in *Shin*-Ngatpang but the Japanese navy claimed that half of the coconut trees belonged to them. Belenges' husband worked for the Japanese navy. The navy collected the coconuts and made Palauan people squeeze the oil from them. The navy took the oil; and the copra, which had been squeezed for the oil, was distributed to the Palauans. Belenges' husband had the responsibility of distributing copra to the Palauans.

I guess the Japanese civilians ate anything edible during the war time. Soon after the war, my husband and I were invited to dinner by a Japanese couple. What they served were snails which were cooked with sweet potatoes. They said, "Please eat them. They taste like trochus shellfish. Don't worry. We cleaned them with ash, then washed them with pure water, and then washed them again with salt and water." I said, "I don't want to eat snails because I have never eaten them." Then, the wife said, "Try to eat it. They are truly tasty." But I did not eat them. My husband ate them, and he said that they were tasty. The Japanese civilians ate anything edible to survive the war.

One of our brothers went to New Guinea with the Japanese military and did not come back. He went to New Guinea twice. Another brother searched in New Guinea after the war, but was unable to find any information about him.

I have heard that some of the Palauans who went to New Guinea died because they drank methanol. My first husband was one of them. At that time, there were many accidents from drinking methanol. My second husband also drank it in Palau, and nearly lost his sight. He got injections of medicine from the Japanese, and was saved. Two children of my mother's sister also drank methanol; one died and the other survived.

During the war, Belenges and I dressed in Japanese trousers called '*monpe*'. If the siren sounded, we ran into the dugouts. We dug dugouts in many places by our houses and gardens. I saw the American airplanes shooting at the hamlet. If we heard the sound of the machine gun 'tatatatatatata ...',<sup>14)</sup> we jumped into the dugout. The Americans shot at *Nekken* (Japanese research stations) and *Kokusai* (radio towers). The radio towers in Babeldaob were pulled down by Palauans after the war. They intended to sell the metal, but it was too heavy. So, Palauans used the materials to make a bridge. I still keep my *monpe*, which I dressed in more than sixty years ago, as a memento.

*Interview: 12 December 2006, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA*

## Story 26

Rubak Marino Debesol

Born: 1926

Father: from Airai

Mother: from Ngchesar

[This interviewee was accompanied by  
his wife, Mechas Itei Marino.]



Rubak Marino Debesol, with his wife  
Mechas Itei Marino (2005)

## Deities in Airai

*Chai* (great barracuda) is the fish loved by *Medechiibelau*, the deity of Airai. If *chai* are caught and you are given one, you can eat it but you should take its bones to the sacred place where *Medechiibelau* is. In addition to this, people in Airai should not eat *matukeoll* [unidentified], the strongest shark. *Medechiibelau* sometimes played with this shark. One day, when *Medechiibelau*'s mother went to her taro patch, *Medechiibelau* filled the house with sea water for a *matukeoll* to swim in. Before his mother came home, *Medechiibelau* made the shark and sea water disappear back into the sea; but his mother said, "Why is this room so dirty?"

In the old days, if a person became sick, they thought it was caused by the deity. To cure the sickness, old men and women got together in the house of the sufferer, and they chanted and danced all night long.

There was a mediator who spoke the messages of the deity, and when the deity entered this person, they would start to talk very loudly, and scratch furiously at their body. When I was a child, I saw this in Airai. The deity of Airai spoke in contrary statements. If the deity liked something, it would say, "I don't like this", and if the deity told you to run, you should sit. We gave the mediator food and money for speaking the deity's message. It was their job. But in the Japanese time, the Japanese said that it was a fraud, and expelled the mediator. The deity went out from this person, and now there is no more house of the deity in this hamlet.

*Interview: 19 January 2005, Airai. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewers: Maki MITA and Yuriko IRIKEDAMOTO.*

## Story 27

Rubak Sngebard Lluul

Born: 1926

Father: from Kayangel

Mother: from Kayangel



Rubak Sngebard Lluul (2007)

### When I was a child

I grew up in Dilong hamlet in Kayangel.

*Dilong* means north. We used the ferry for transportation. From Koror, the ferry went up the west coast of Babeldaob, and on to Kayangel. The next day, it would return to Koror. On the way were stops where passengers got on and off.

When I went to Ngaraard for school, I moved there and lived in my uncle's house. Because my father was adopted from Ngaraard, he had family there. I went to Ngaraard *Kogakko* (school for Palauan children) from the house of my father's brother.

In the three years that I attended Ngaraard *Kogakko*, I visited Kayangel only twice, for the New Year holidays. We celebrated the New Year with special dishes, such as *oshiruko* (azuki bean sweet soup). *Mochi* (rice cake), which we ate with *oshiruko*, was brought from Koror by ferry. This ferry carried goods from Koror twice a month. There was only one store in Kayangel.

After three years education in the *honka* (basic course), I went on to the *hoshuka* (advanced course) and lived in the school dormitory in Koror. When I started to study in Koror *Kogakko*, I did not speak a lot, because I was not good at speaking Japanese. There was only one Japanese person in Kayangel, and five in Ngaraard. I did not speak to any Japanese until I came to Koror. My first teacher was Nakamaru-sensei. After he went back to Japan, Kamata-sensei took his place. Kamata-sensei was aged, and strict. The headmaster was Nomoto-sensei. But he was transferred to Second *Kokumingakko* (school for Japanese children).

In Koror, I did *renshusei* (trainee) work after school. Firstly, I worked for Mr. Nii, who worked for the government. After that, I moved to Mr. Okajima's house, and finally I worked for Mr. Ota. The civilian Japanese were not strict, unlike the soldiers. The *renshusei* system had an educational purpose. It was to increase our familiarity with Japanese culture. Those who hired us were only people of high status. I tidied the garden and cleaned the house, and I was paid for my work. I deposited most of the money in a bank, but sometimes I bought caramels and other sweets. I played with Japanese children who lived by my employer's house.

## Days in *Mokko*

I took the entrance exam for *Mokko Totei Yoseijyo* (carpentry apprentice school), and passed it. The questions in the examination were based on what we had learned in *kogakko*. For *Mokko*, every year fifteen students were selected from all over the South Seas. There were students from the Marshalls, Ponape, Truk, Yap, Saipan and Palau. Even though the *Mokko* education program took two years, some could stay in school as research students. After graduating from *Mokko*, I studied in this way for one more year.

When I went to *Mokko*, there was only a carpentry course, but later they added a mechanics' course and civil engineering. I learned how to build a house in the Japanese way. We measured using the Japanese unit 'sun', and we used Japanese carpentry tools. I still remember a passage about the *kanna* (plane) from my textbook.

In addition to learning carpentry, we also studied general subjects, such as Japanese history. Jinmu-tenno was the first Japanese emperor. We called the emperor of the time 'Kinjyo-tenno'. It means 'the emperor of today'. I thought that the emperor was distinguished, and I respected him. Did the current emperor visit Saipan last year? It might be some time before he comes to Palau .... If he visits Palau, of course, I want to see him ....

In the morning assembly, we said, "We are the children of the emperor!", "We will be splendid Japanese!" I am reluctant to talk about it to you, but there was discrimination at that time. We Palauans were called '*tomin*' (islanders), as distinct from '*kokumin*' (Japanese nationals). The word '*tomin*' means islander, so it is just stating a fact. It is not a bad word. But a Palauan male could not marry a Japanese female, even though Japanese men married Palauan women. If a Palauan beat a Japanese, this Palauan would be jailed. But if a Japanese beat a Palauan, the Japanese would not be jailed. Even between children there was this sort of discrimination, and as a result we had fights.

After graduating from school, I studied carpentry as a research student, and started to work as a carpenter. We built houses to order for both Japanese and Palauan people.

## Memories of the war

When the first air raid happened, I was in school. We took refuge on a rock island, and we watched the American and Japanese airplanes from there. Some of them were hit, and they crashed. On the first day, the airfields of Peleliu and Airai were totally destroyed; and the next day, the town of Koror was burned. When we went back to our school, our dormitory had been destroyed.

We had the second air raid in July. At that time, we were building a house for Captain Inoue. I told my teacher, "I want to visit Kayangel, to see how my mother is." The teacher said, "Because we are building this house, come back in one week." So, I

went to Ngarchelong on foot, and asked a *Chamorro* (Marianas islander) man to ferry me to Kayangel in his boat. I stayed in Kayangel for a while, and intended to go back to Koror. But by that time, the Americans had already started to bomb Angaur. A boat came from Ngarchelong, but my grandfather said, "Don't go." So, I stayed in Kayangel.

In Kayangel, only one bomb was dropped on the beach, and the stands for drying copra were all damaged. Because there were no Japanese in Kayangel after the one Japanese storekeeper left, the Americans did not attack Kayangel. The American airplanes took off around at 8:00 in the morning, and patrolled until 4:00 in the evening. So, after 4:00 we could go out fishing. In those days, there were a lot of fish in the sea, and we could catch enough fish in a short time.

From Kayangel, I could see many American warships. They anchored between Kayangel and Babeldaob. In the evening, the airplanes came back to the warships, and in the morning, they took off. I saw some airplanes which took off from the sea.

We Kayangel people did not know that the war had ended for one month after it happened. No one in Kayangel died in this war.

### **My religious belief**

My parents were *Modekngai* (Palauan religious belief) followers, but when I was a child, I did not have any particular religious belief. When I was a student, I went to the *Nanyo-jinja* (South Seas Shrine). I think that deity is deity. Anywhere in the world, you will find deities. After the war, I started to go to Emaus, a protestant church. I chose my religion myself.

*Interview: 9 July 2007, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA.*



## Story 28

Rubak Henry (Hainrick) Albedul

Born: 1927

Father: from Melekeok

Mother: from Ngchesar



Rubak Henry (Hainrick) Albedul (2006)

### Memories of my childhood

When I was a child, I usually played in the river or in the sea. I learned how to swim naturally while I was playing with the older children. I learned how to catch fish with a *biskang* (spear) from my father. At that time, boys learned fishing from their fathers, and girls learned cultivation from their mothers. Even when I went to the taro-patch with my mother, I just played around there; I made a hut from taro leaves, for example. And when my mother finished her work, I helped her carry the taro and we went home together.

In May, every Palauan went to the sea to collect *semum* (trochus shell). I also collected *semum* with my family. When the tide was low, women could walk to the reef and get *semum*.

### Memories of my school days

In school, every morning we had a *chorei* (morning assembly). When a teacher commanded, “Bow to the north!”, we bowed deeply to the north, towards the Japanese emperor. They called it ‘*Kyujyo-yohai*’ (a greeting to the palace). After that, we sang ‘*Kimigayo*’, which is the Japanese national anthem. We also said some words every morning: “We are the children of the emperor!”, “We will be splendid Japanese!” and there was another sentence we said, but I have forgotten it. Our teacher taught us the meaning of these words. The teacher told us, “All of you are the children of the Japanese emperor, so you can become real Japanese by saying these words.” After the *chorei*, we did gymnastic exercises to the radio, and went to our classrooms.

### What the Japanese teachers told us

In the ethics class, our teacher always advised us not to do anything criminal; not to drink alcohol and other things. Before graduating from the advanced course of *kogakko*, our teacher brought us to the *kelebus* (jail). He showed us the jail, and said to us, “Look at this. If you do something criminal, you will be forced to stay in such a small and

miserable space.” At that time, the jail was in the building of the South Seas Government. Nine prisoners shared one room, and there was no toilet there. The prisoners used an oil can as a toilet. One of the prisoners cleaned the can every morning. We were very scared to see this. In the jail, there were Japanese, Okinawans, Koreans, and Palauans.

In the school, of course we learned mathematics and how to read books, and other subjects. I remember old Japanese stories like ‘*Momotaro*’ and ‘*Morino Ishimatsu*’. What we learned at school was quite different from what we learned at home. My father did not know the Japanese language, so he did not read books. Meanwhile in school, we learned things through books.

### What my father taught me

My father taught me how to make a *biskang* (spear), *bub* (fish trap), a bamboo raft and a canoe. He also taught me the customs of Palau. I will give you some examples.

- (1) If you meet an elder coming along a path, you must make way. If the elder is carrying something heavy, you should carry it for him or her.
- (2) If a child walks between us while we are talking each other, we will ask the child, “Whose child are you?” If this child tells his father that he was warned by elders, then the child’s father will ask him why. After hearing his story, his father will tell him that he should bow when he passes between people who are seated.
- (3) At mealtime, the children bring dishes to their parents first, and after that, the rest of the family eats. After eating, the children wash the plates of their parents very carefully. Father and mother use their own plates. If they leave some food on their plates, then the children are allowed to eat it.
- (4) When a boy becomes a young man, he sleeps in a *bai* (meeting house), especially if he has sisters at his house. Many men will be staying in the *bai*, with elders staying on one side and youths on the other. When the younger men are too noisy, the elders clear their throats to make them quiet.
- (5) Until some decades ago, people married someone chosen by their parents. If you marry a person who belongs to a good family, then you will have a good baby, and also you will be wealthy. When we were young, it was hard to marry someone you chose without your parents’ permission.
- (6) In Palau, the daughter’s children always have a higher position than the son’s children in their family. The son’s children can have a higher position in his mother’s house. This custom is very different from the Japanese custom. In Japan, the sons are always given a higher status than the daughters. In Palau, the daughters are higher. That is because in Japan the sons take care of the family property, but in Palau it is the daughters who have this role.

## Life in the dormitory

In the dorm, the students took turns cooking meals. We cooked rice in a big pot, and *miso* soup in another big pot. We also washed our own clothes. I liked Japanese food very much. We Palauans started to eat rice during the Japanese occupation. Especially on New Year's Day, we ate rice and *azuki* beans. It is the Japanese tradition, isn't it?

There were two long school holidays. One holiday lasted about fifteen days in the winter season in Japan, and the other also lasted about fifteen days during the summer season in Japan. When the holidays started, my father came to Koror to pick me up by canoe. If he left Melekeok in the morning, he would arrive in Koror by the evening. When I went back to school, I used *Chichibu-maru* or *Midori-maru*, the Japanese ferries which went between Babeldaob and Koror. Because I had a lot of food on my way back to Koror, I needed a bigger boat than my father's canoe.

## About money

During the Japanese time, [in Melekeok] we did not use money very often because there were only a few things to buy. There were two stores in Melekeok, and in these stores we could pay with coconuts. We could buy a box of caramels for five coconuts. In Melekeok, toys for children such as *menko* cards [for a Japanese game] and marbles were popular items. Palauans did not buy Japanese food very often.

In contrast, we used money often in Koror. Because I worked as a *renshusei* (trainee) after school, I earned 1 yen 50 sen a month. In this trainee system, teachers introduced students to Japanese families who wanted to have a trainee. These Japanese were mostly high officials or those who had a high social status. After finishing school at 3:00, I went to the Japanese house, and tidied the garden and washed the clothes. At the end of the month, I got money from them, and brought it to the teacher. The teacher deposited 50 sen in my account at the post office, and donated 50 sen to the government as *Kokubo-kenkin* (Foundation for the National Defense), and handed me 50 sen. As I understand it, *Kokubo-kenkin* went towards helping the Japanese soldiers.

At this time, 50 sen was a lot of money for a child. We could buy a bowl of shaved ice with sweetened syrup or an *aberabang* (deep fried bread) for 5 sen, at the store beside the Koror *Kogakko*. We also bought pencils and notebooks, and bought a shirt once every three months. A shirt was 25 sen at that time, and pants which had a black stripe on both sides were also 25 sen. 50 sen was a lot of money for a child.

## Agricultural school

After graduating from *kogakko*, I entered an agricultural school in Mizuho hamlet in Babeldaob. It was a boy's school, and I studied there for two years. Six boys, including

myself, were the first students of the school. We learned agriculture, mathematics, Japanese and other subjects at this school. In Palau, farming is a job for women, but our teacher said to us that boys are suited to farming because they are physically stronger than women. After that, men started to farm in Palau. Because I was educated there, I know how to raise vegetables very well. Even now, I go to the garden with my wife and a helper from the Philippines, and I make suggestions to them.

My days at the agricultural school were very good. I lived in the dorm, and they provided us with clothes, hats and shoes. Even more, we were paid by the school. In the first year, the pay was 18 yen per month, and then in the second year, we were paid 21 yen a month. Because our school belonged to the Japanese navy, we produced vegetables for the navy.

After finishing school, I went to my village in Ngchesar. But soon after that, I went to Airai to work for the Japanese army. I was fifteen years old at that time.

## **My memories of the war**

After graduating from agricultural school, I worked in construction at the Airai airfield. I experienced the first air raid there in March 1944. There were some Palauans working at this construction site, but most of the workers were from either Okinawa or Korea. At that time, I was still young and I was not so strong, so my duty was to distribute cups of tea to the workers.

One day, when I went to draw water, many airplanes flew overhead. Some Japanese said that they were Japanese airplanes. But they began to fire at us, and we realized that they were American airplanes. Because it was my first experience of an air raid, I was curious, and I just watched the airplanes shooting. But suddenly, two Koreans beside me were shot dead. Seeing that, I was so scared, and I understood how much danger I was exposed to. But I could not even move for fear. Then, my brother ran to me, and grabbed my arm and we ran into the bush. We ran and ran into the hills, and we looked back from a high place. What we saw were lots of fires in Koror, and big pillars of fire from the oil tanks in Malakal.

## **The construction work in Peleliu**

A week after the air raid, I got an order to go to Airai. We, the young men from Ngchesar, were ordered to go to Peleliu and to mend the air field that had been damaged. After completing this mission, we worked on a small island by Peleliu. We cut the coconut trees, and built a wooden bridge between this island and Peleliu wharf. The Japanese attempted to construct a new airfield on this island. I worked there from April to June 1944, and then we went back to Babeldaob. That was three months before the Americans landed on Peleliu.

## **Working as a messenger**

After working on Peleliu, I worked as a messenger for the Yamaguchi troop in Ngchesar. I ran from Ngchesar to the central Military office in Ngatpang with messages from Captain Yamaguchi, and after getting a reply from the commander at Ngatpang, I ran back to Ngchesar. I wore an armband to show that I was a messenger, and I ran through the mountains at night without any light. It was about two hours from Ngchesar to Ngatpang. Sometimes, I made two roundtrips in one night. There were messengers for each route: a route between Ngatpang and Ngiwal, a route between Aimeliik and Ngatpang, and other routes.

If I returned late, I would be berated by a soldier. The soldiers knew how long it took for a roundtrip. So, when I was late he would say “Why were you late?!” and slap my head. For messengers, no food was supplied. I ate taro when I left my home, and I did not eat anything while I was working all night. At that time, the soldiers were also not supplied with adequate rations. But if I happened to be there when the soldiers ate, I could also eat the same things. They ate a gruel made from a little rice and tapioca which they took from Palauans’ gardens.

## **The soldiers and food**

During the wartime, soldiers suffered from lack of food, so most of them were not kind to others. They thought only about themselves. There were many soldiers who leaned against the trees and died while still holding their guns. Some of them held pictures of their families. Many soldiers died of hunger.

There were some mean soldiers in the Yamaguchi troop. People were frightened of them. On the way to our shelter, there was a gate guarded by Japanese soldiers. When Palauan women passed by there to harvest taro and coconuts, the soldiers gave them a piece of paper, like a pass. The women had to show the paper when they passed by the gate on their way back. If they had baskets, the soldiers ordered them to show what was inside. If there was something to eat, they took some of it. So, about the half of the harvest from the gardens was taken by the soldiers. I guess that such things happen all over the world when they have wars.

At night, Palauans secretly went to gardens that the Japanese soldiers did not know about, and harvested taro. We took care not to be found by the Japanese army. If they found us, they might take half of our harvest. Sometimes, Palauans found that someone had taken our taro from our gardens. But even on such occasions, we did not complain to the Japanese, because we were afraid of them. The Japanese army also started to raise their own tapioca.

## **The death of my brother during the war**

My family took refuge behind a big waterfall in the mountain which was called Rouis er a Kebees. This place was cold at night, and many Palauans got sick. We Ngchesar people also ate *belloi* and *denges*. *Denges* is a fruit of the mangrove and it is very bitter. We ate it with coconut. Some Palauans were shot dead when they went fishing. My brother was one of them.

It was March 1945 when my eldest brother was killed. He went to Melekeok by canoe at night, and the next day he tried to go to Ngerutoi Island, which is close to Melekeok beach, to gather coconuts. As he went across the sea, he was seen by an American airplane and shot. My brother lost his life trying to get food for us. Hearing that my brother had been killed, I went to Melekeok to look for his body. I searched among the mangrove trees at night for ten days, but in vain. I gave up and went back to Ngchesar.

On an evening a few days later, I was talking with a friend who was a Japanese soldier, at the Ngchesar beach. He said, "Look at that. A body is coming inside the reef from the channel." We went to see the body, and I said, "It's my brother!" My brother had a black birthmark on his shoulder, so I could see that the body was my brother's. The soldier called other soldiers to help, and they put my brother's body on a mat and carried it to the land. My brother's name was Marselus, and he was only 28 years old.

## **'The Spirit of the Japanese' and the war**

Because I was educated by Japanese and they tried to imprint 'the spirit of the Japanese' on our hearts, I wanted to work for the Japanese as one of them. My teacher told us that we had already become Japanese so we should work hard for Japan. I was very lucky to survive the war.

War is always terrible. Not only soldiers, but civilians too are involved in war. In Palau, there were many Japanese civilians, but when the war came there was no food supply, and they suffered from starvation.

After the war, I went fishing every day. I did not have to be afraid of the shooting anymore! Palauan women also worked hard at their gardens. We had enough food after the war. We also found food that the Japanese army had kept in their storehouses. Rice, sugar, soy sauce, salt, hardtack and other food remained there.

*Interview: 27 and 30 July 2006, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA*

## Story 29

Mechas Dilubch Rechebei

Born: 1927

Father: from Ngchesar

Mother: from Koror



Mechas Dilubch Rechebei (2006)



Dilubch in 1939  
(photo: Belau National Museum)

I was adopted by the sister of my biological mother, because my biological mother died after I was born. When my adoptive mother went to her taro-patches and gardens, I went with her. But I did not learn how to cultivate taro and vegetables at that time. I was just sitting in a hat, and chewing sugarcane.

When I was a child, we lived in Ngermid hamlet in Koror. I usually swam in the sea. My father built a canoe with other men, and at lunchtime my mother brought lunch boxes for us. The road to *Nanyo-jinja* (South Seas Shrine) in Ngermid was under construction. I remember the people in the hamlet worked with shovels to make the road.

### My school days

When I reached nine years old, I went to *kogakko* (school for Palauan children). My parents worried about me. Since they had not gone to the Japanese school, they were afraid of letting me go there. Even when I had something I didn't understand in my study, I could not ask my parents for help, because they also did not know about my subjects.

I spoke in Palauan at home, but when I went downtown for shopping, I used Japanese. If I wanted to buy something, I asked my father. My father usually fished for the family, but sometimes he had temporary paid jobs. Construction work on the road

to *Nanyo-jinja* was one of them. But unfortunately, my father died when I was still in school. When I was twelve years old, I moved to Ngerekemai hamlet in Koror.

The Japanese teachers were strict, from our point of view. There were teachers who were not very strict and treated us kindly, but on the other hand, there were very strict teachers who sometimes beat the students.

My teacher was Nakamaru-sensei. He gave me a Japanese name, 'Shizuko'. He told me, "I am sure that you will be a good girl. Shizuko was the name of the wife of General Nogi. She was a great woman." When I was attending the *honka* (basic course) of the *kogakko*, I was called by my Palauan name. But when I went on to the *hoshuka* (advanced course), my teacher gave me this name. I think that the teacher gave me a Japanese name because my Palauan name, 'Dilubch', was hard for Japanese to pronounce.

Not every student could go on to the *hoshuka*. There was an examination, and the teacher selected the students who would go on. There were eighteen girls in my class when I was in the third grade of the *honka*, but only eight went on to the *hoshuka*.

When I was a fourth grade student, naval officers came to *kogakko*, and they watched our class. I drew a picture of a coconut tree and a beach on the blackboard. One of my classmates, Jonathan, also wrote Japanese characters on the blackboard. The officers, who wore white uniforms, made a line at the back of the classroom, and they were watching us. I was curious, but at the same time I was afraid of them.

When I was attending the *hoshuka*, my mother bought me a bicycle. One day, I came home for lunch, and on my way back to school I fell off my bicycle. See? I still have the scar on my leg.

After finishing classes, students went to the houses of Japanese families and worked as *renshusei* (trainee). But I could not work as a *renshusei* every day, because I had to go to the Catholic church after school.

In the Catholic church, I learned about the Bible. Actually, I started to learn how to read and write in Palauan at the church before I entered the *kogakko*. The Catholic priests were good at Palauan.

The Catholic priest was not happy to let me go to a Japanese house as a *renshusei*. He said that I might learn something bad in the Japanese house. On the other hand, my teacher said that I could learn something good by working as a *renshusei*. It was hard for me to be between the Catholic Father and the school teacher. Sometimes, my teacher scolded me because I did not work as a *renshusei* every day. My teacher said, "Which do you value more highly, the teachings of the Catholic Father or the teachings of *kogakko*?" He also said, "Are you a bride of the Priest? Why don't you do *renshusei*?"

## **My life after graduation**

After graduating from school, I worked for Mr. and Mrs. Seigo as a domestic helper.



The teachers recommended jobs for the students who performed well at school, and my teacher recommended me for this job.

Mr. Yoshiro Seigo was a section chief of *Nanyo Takushoku* (South Seas Colonization Company). Mrs. Seigo was a gentle woman. She was not very healthy, and she did not have any children. Every morning, Mr. and Mrs. Seigo walked around to breathe fresh air. After having a walk, they enjoyed drinking coffee. There was a farm of the Japanese research institute in Koror, and there were coffee trees. So, even in Palau they could get some coffee beans. She roasted coffee beans and put them in a small cotton bag, and pounded on it. This coffee was very tasty.

I also drank a cup of coffee with Mrs. Seigo, sometimes. We enjoyed sponge cake with coffee. This sponge cake was made in *Nanyo* hotel, which was located beside today's Tree-D Motel. Sometimes I went to the restaurant of *Nantaku* (South Seas Colonization Company), and bought *egg-tofu*. Mrs. Seigo called the restaurant beforehand, and I just picked it up. I also learned from Mrs. Seigo how to clean the room. For example, when I swept the floor with a broom, it was good to scatter used tea leaves at the corner of the floor. The tea leaves were wet, and dust and small trash would stick to the leaves.

When the war was coming, the government began to control the rice. They distributed only a small amount of rice to the Japanese people. Mrs. Seigo gave me some of their portion of the rice.

When wartime conditions worsened, Mr. Seigo sent his wife to Japan. But I have heard that the vessel was sunk. I was so sad to hear that. She was a good person. But I am not sure if her ship was truly sunk or not.

There were servicemen who came to Palau from Manchuria. I saw them set up camps beside the road, and prepare food. They cleaned rice with water in the ditch, and cooked it with their portable rice-cooking pans.

I became friends with one of the Japanese soldiers who were staying near my house in Koror. His name was Eijiro Hisazumi, and he also came from Manchuria. One day, he walked to my house and talked with me. From the next time, he often brought a sock containing rice, which he would give to me.

## Palauans and foreigners

There are many Palauans who have a foreign father; not only Japanese, but also American. After the war, there were many American soldiers in Angaur. The chief of Angaur said, "Because our skin is black, it is good to have babies with white Americans."

Many Japanese men had Palauan wives, but the Japanese government strictly prohibited intermarriage between Japanese women and Palauan men. I know of only one case. The baby's name was Haruo Esang.

During the Japanese time, Palauan people got mad when the Japanese called us

'*tomin*'. I know that the word '*tomin*' just means 'islander', but we felt that we were looked down on when they called us '*tomin*'. Sometimes, Palauans got angry and threw stones at the Japanese.

Sometimes, the Japanese called us '*dojin*', but I think that it was not right. '*Dojin*' means 'people who live on the ground', doesn't it? We Palauans lived in wooden houses with nice bamboo floors.

I was Catholic from when I was an infant. The Japanese did not prohibit us from going to the church, but during the war, they killed the Spanish Father Elias, Father Marino, and Elmano.

There was also Japanese Buddhist temple, *Honganji*. I remember the festival of the *Honganji* temple. There was a parade, and I saw a [model] elephant on a trailer. I thought that it came from India.

When *Nanyo-jinja* (South Seas shrine) was set up, we visited there from school. The Spanish Fathers did not want us to go to *Nanyo-jinja*. Unlike the Catholic church, the shrine did not give us special teaching. But I learned that the Japanese goddess *Amaterasuomikami* was the ancestor of the Japanese emperor. And I also learned that we were in the year 2600 of the Japanese calendar.

Palauan people sometimes change their religious beliefs, or believe in several religions at one time. I have never changed my religious belief, and will not change it from now on either.

I remember Okinawan fishermen who caught bonito and brought them to Malakal harbor. After cleaning the bonito, Okinawan women walked through each hamlet and sold the *harago* (fish eggs) of bonito. Each of them carried two buckets of *harago* on a pole, and said, "*Harago, harago*". I have heard they used the heads of bonito as fertilizer, and they processed the meat into dried bonito. My mother sometimes bought *harago*, because we did not catch bonito by ourselves. I felt that Okinawans were a little different from other Japanese. Those who had stores in the center of downtown were mostly Japanese. Many Okinawans raised pigs, fished, or burned charcoal beside the mangroves.

## **My memories of the war**

Many Japanese people were drafted even in Palau. We went to *Nanyo-jinja* and sent the new military personnel off. We waved Japanese flags on these occasions.

My family and I moved to Ngerdobotar in Aimeliik at the end of 1943, at the order of the Japanese government. My father had already passed away, and I was with my mother and my younger sister. I went to Aimeliik in my uncle's boat. I was only seventeen years old, and I was strong. So, I cultivated the land all day long, and planted tapioca and other vegetables. Palauan men went to the sea at night to collect *kim* (clams).

But the war lasted a long time, and we gradually suffered from the shortage of food. We ate *denges*, mangrove fruit. It was very bitter. We cooked *denges* and soaked it in the river all night. After that, we put coconut on it, and ate it. But it had a very bad taste. We also ate *belloi*, an extremely bitter wild vegetable in the forest. Like *denges*, we boiled it and left it in the river all night. We knew how to eat them. But Japanese soldiers ... they were miserable. A lot of soldiers died of malnutrition.

We tried to make small children eat better food. Because my sister was only five or six years old, I gave her a little sugar and rice which we had saved. She was innocent, and played outside. So, when an airplane came, I took her into the shelter saying, "Come on, dear. An airplane has come. It is dangerous, isn't it?"

One day, the Chief Palauan police officer Oikawasang and his wife fled to the American vessel which was anchored near Kayangel. After this, the Japanese watched Palauans more carefully. But the Japanese military did not kill Palauans [except for some incidents]. Many Palauans died from being shot by American airplanes when they went fishing.

*Interview: 3 August and 27 November 2006, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA.*

## Story 30

Mechas Barbara Telams

Born: 1927

From: Koror



Mechas Barbara Telams, with author  
(2006; photo by Takashi Mita)



Barbara in 1939  
(photo: Belau National Museum)

### Memories of my childhood

I was raised by a sister of my biological mother and her husband. My adoptive father was one of the leaders of *Modekngai* (Palauan religious belief). So, many people visited my house which was located by the mangrove, behind today's Yokohama restaurant. Even though there were many Japanese people living in Koror, the residents of that area were mostly Palauans.

I remember there was a Japanese family living in that area. This Japanese man was a ship builder, and he had two daughters. I often played with them. But one day, there was an accident, and one of the girls died in front of me. I cried and asked God to make her come back. It is a sad memory.

Many Palauans who lived in that area believed in *Modekngai*. But the Japanese Government banned *Modekngai*, and when I was about seven years old, my father was exiled by the Japanese to the Southwest Islands. My mother and I also went with him.

It was a strange experience, like a dream. We navigated the vast ocean in a small bonito fishing boat. When I wanted to go to the toilet, my mother held me over the side.

The Southwest Islands were very nice places. On a full-moon night, many sea turtles came to the island to lay eggs. It was very beautiful! Looking at the turtles, I felt

as if I was looking at many human heads. I collected turtle eggs one by one. My mother said to me, “You might not be able to eat such a lot of eggs.” But I said, “Even if I cannot eat them all, I want to collect them, because I like them!”

The turtle eggs are tasty. They are better raw than boiled. Turtle egg shells are wet and soft. I would cut the shell and drink the inside. It doesn’t smell bad, unlike chicken eggs.

The birds brought the seeds of fruits, and there were various trees. The Southwest Islands are truly beautiful. The houses in Sonsorol Island had long roofs. In Tobi Island, people cultivated both *kukau* (taro) and *brak* (giant taro).

### **When I was a student**

After coming back from the Southwest Islands, I went to Koror *Kogakko* (school for Palauan children). My Japanese name was Haruko (spring girl). My teacher said, “You are always smiling and looking happy, so I name you Haruko.”

I had a Japanese friend who performed very well in her school and was a class president. Her family name was Kakimoto. She was my neighbor, and she kindly taught me Japanese. I was proud of her when I watched her carrying a flag and marching at the head of the students to see off the soldiers. Because my house was downtown at that time, not many Palauans lived around me. So, I played with Japanese children.

I did not work in the taro-patches and gardens when I was a schoolgirl. In Koror, young girls did not cultivate at that time. It was a job for adult women. Only Veronica, my friend, helped her mother with this work. My mother was impressed with her and said, “Veronica is a very good girl. She helps her mother very well, and works in the taro-patches.” Veronica’s mother was a traditional education-minded mother, and she trained Veronica to cultivate taro and to weave baskets. I did not like to learn traditional Palauan skills. Rather, I liked to do embroidery, and knitting. I learned how to do them from my teacher, and from books.

Veronica was very smart, and also a good girl. She was the top student in the school, and I was next.

### **Palauan customs in the Japanese time**

It was customary to bury the body under a stone platform at the front of the house. But the Japanese told the Palauans to dig up the graves and move the bones to the cemetery, which they made. This happened only in Koror.

Because my father was one of the leaders of *Modeknegi*, there were many traditional medicines in my house. They soaked stems of *siis* [sacred plant] in hot water, and used them to exorcise bad spirits. There was a room called ‘*aden [?]*’, and they kept two big candies inside. One was made from coconut syrup and *amiyaka* [plant], and the

other was made from coconut syrup and coconut meat. These candies, which were called *desongel*, were very big, bigger than small children. The shape was like the *desongel* (outrigger) of a canoe. These were the special candies for *Modekngai* believers. My brother and I took some pieces of these candies to school every day. They also kept traditional medicinal herbs inside the room, which made the room fragrant.

Because my father was a *Modekngai* leader, he had three mistresses. So, my mother's brother made my parents divorce in the end. To tell the truth, my mother and I were Christian.

## After graduation

After graduating from school in 1941, I worked for Watanabe bakery. I only made dough into balls. They did not make me cook *azuki* beans, because I might have burned my fingers.

While I was working there, *Nanyo-jinja* (South Seas Shrine) was set up, and there was a ceremony. A Palauan man who worked for the bakery bought me a beautiful red dress with white polka dots to wear for the ceremony, and said, "You can go and see the ceremony."

The Japanese put paper lanterns along the way from the *Jinja* (shrine). At night, they lit them all, and it was very beautiful! When I looked at them from a high place, they were like a shining snake.

I also worked in the *Nanyo-shinpo* newspaper company with my friends. I picked pieces of type, and arranged them for printing. I had to put each piece of type in reverse. A benefit of this job was that I learned many Chinese characters.

I wanted to learn more Chinese characters in school, but what we were taught was limited. Those who went to school earlier than us had learned more Chinese characters than we did. I have heard that the Japanese government decided not to teach Palauans many Chinese characters, because if the Palauans learned a lot of Chinese characters they would threaten the Japanese. I think that this is an appalling story! Some people said that some elder Palauans made codes using Chinese characters, and the Japanese became wary of us. It was disappointing for us not to be able to learn more Chinese characters.

I remember four Palauan girls and one Palauan man worked for the newspaper company. My friend Veronica also worked there.

Shortly before the war, I worked as a domestic helper for the Daido family. Mrs. Daido was a teacher at the *shogakko* (school for Japanese children), and Mr. Daido worked for *Nambo* (South Seas Trading Company). Because Mr. and Mrs. Daido went to work in the morning, I took care of their baby boy while cleaning the house and dishes, washing and doing other chores. One day, Mrs. Daido asked me to bring their baby to Babeldaob for a week to wean him. When I brought the baby to Ngiwal,



Barbara and Japanese baby Isao (photo: courtesy of Isao Daido)

Palauan women said, “Give me this cute baby.” They thought that the baby had lost his parents. The Daido family left for Japan because of the war, and I heard that their ship sank. So, hearing from you that they survived and their son will visit me in the near future, I am very happy.<sup>15)</sup>

## The war

When the Americans attacked Palau for the first time, I was in Koror. My brother was brushing his teeth outside, and he saw the airplanes. He hit the water tank and shouted, “Air raid! Air raid!” Everybody was very surprised, and came out. A Japanese got angry with him and said, “Why do you say that?” My brother said to him, “Look up at the sky!” Then, we saw airplanes coming towards us. Somebody said that they were Japanese airplanes. Three of the airplanes dived together and bombed, and went up again. Then, the next three airplanes dived to bomb. Seeing that, everybody ran away. We went to one of the rock islands to take shelter in a cave. We lived on the rock island for about a month. When we cooked, we washed rice in sea water, and used pure water only at the end, for cooking. But we mostly ate taro. Because our taro-patch was near the bay of Koror, we went there to harvest taro.

Sometimes, we went to Ngeremlengui to harvest taro. The boat we used was very old, and it was very heavy and waterlogged. When we were rowing the boat in the sea,

the boat began to sink slowly. We bailed the water out of the boat. This made the water shine in the moonlight. Someone said that we should tip the water gently.

My brother, who was my only biological brother, was a cook and he worked for *Nanyo* Hotel. He was the only Palauan who worked as a cook in this hotel. But he died in an accident. When he tried to get powder for fishing from a bomb, it exploded. It was a terrible shame. He was such a talented man.

During the war time, Palauans gave taro to Japanese servicemen. Palauans said, "Give them something to eat. They are in need." This was a virtue shown by Palauans.

*Interview: 17 June and 28 November 2006, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA.*



## Story 31

Rubak Ichiro Dingilius Matsutaro

Born: 1927

From: Peleliu



Rubak Ichiro Dingilius Matsutaro (2005)

### Memories of *kogakko*

In *kogakko* (school for Palauan children) we did gymnastics to the radio every morning, and then we recited the multiplication tables together while we walked to the classroom. It was like singing a song, and we soon committed it to memory. When I taught in school after the war, I taught this to my students. I think that they should introduce the Japanese method of learning multiplication tables in Palauan high schools. Then they will be able to calculate faster! When I was in the third grade at *kogakko* in Peleliu, sometimes the math teacher said that those who had finished solving their equations could go to recess. I finished quickly, and played tennis with Tsuruko who was also swift at solving problems.

While I was a student in the *hoshuka* (advanced course) I worked as *renshusei* (trainee) in the house of Mr. Tamura. He was an official, and wore white suits and a white hat. I went there at 2:00 and went home at 4:30. This job had an educational purpose. I cleaned the bath, put water in it, built a fire, and boiled water. I also tidied the garden and veranda. Mrs. Tamura said that I was a good boy, and she made clothes for me. I massaged her shoulders and feet. They lived by the *Nanyo-cho* (South Seas Government) Palau Branch Office in Medalaii. The coconut trees were beautiful in Medalaii.

I remember when the *kami* (Japanese deity) was brought to Palau to be placed in the *Nanyo-jinja* (South Seas Shrine) in 1936 or 1937 [? 1940]. We school students lined the streets to welcome it, and bowed deeply. The *kami* was carried by car, led by a motorbike ridden by Bismark, a Palauan police officer. Because we bowed so long, we did not even see it. On that occasion, stray dogs were cleared from the streets so they would not disturb the procession. We visited the *Nanyo-jinja* from school. The teachers told us the *kami* was very great. When the Japanese forces defeated their enemies anywhere, we marched to the shrine holding a Japanese lantern each, and offered thanks and prayers for the final victory of Japan. When I heard that Japan had attacked Pearl Harbor, I expected that Japan would win, and was excited.



Palm trees in Medalaai (photo: Belau National Museum)

## Days in Mokko

After graduating from *kogakko*, I was contacted by a Japanese man, who was a friend of the headmaster of the Peleliu *kogakko*. He was very rich. He asked me if I wanted to go to Japan to study. I answered, “Yes I do!” He took me to Koror, where I stayed with him, and he bought me clothing and a hat. I was so happy. This man departed for Japan by airplane. I thought that I could go with him, but *tomin* (islanders) were prohibited to ride in an airplane. So I would have to go to Japan by myself, by ship. The Japanese man said, “See you in Yokohama!” Several weeks before this, a Palauan girl, Remsei, left for Japan by ship, and she arrived safely. But soon after that, the journey became very dangerous. Passengers were issued with two coconuts and a dried bonito stick each, in case the ship was attacked and they were set adrift. I saw some people who returned to Palau because their ship was attacked. They were badly sunburned. I felt sorry for them. Then, my father said that this was my destiny, if I tried the same journey. So, I gave up on going to Japan, and instead I entered *Mokko Totei Yoseijyo* (carpentry apprentice school) in Koror.

In *Mokko*, I studied to be a mechanic. My teachers were Oyagi-sensei and Nitta-sensei. Nitta-sensei was Palauan. His Palauan name was Alfonso Oiterong. I have heard that Nitta-sensei mended the clocks in *Nanbo* (South Seas Trading Company), and became a teacher at *Mokko*. One day, he ordered us to take a broken-down car from the post office, dismantle the engine and clean each part. After that, Nitta-sensei checked,

fixed, and reassembled them. Then he asked us for a battery. When he connected the battery to the engine, it started! We were very impressed. After the war, Alfonso became a president of Palau. He was very bright, and he studied in Japan.

While I was in *Mokko*, I visited *Honganji* temple on holidays, and played ping-pong. Because some Japanese girls from junior high school would come there, I was happy.

In the Japanese period, there was *Taiiku-day* (sports day). People practiced for this for two months. Each district competed against each other, and Peleliu won many flags. There were athletic sports and water sports. The Japanese did not compete with us, but just watched. There was a *biskang* (spear) throwing event in which we competed to spear the largest number of coconuts in the swimming pool.

## **We became splendid Japanese in the war**

I graduated from *Mokko* on March 10, 1944. At that time, Okinawan people were referred to as ‘Second People’, and Palauans as ‘Third People’. But when the war began, we also became ‘splendid Japanese’. When we graduated, the chief administrator of the South Seas Government, Domoto, came to school on a horse. He told us to come to the South Seas Government Palau Branch Office at 8:30 the next morning. When I arrived, Okinawans and Koreans were also there. We were assigned our missions. We graduates of the machinery section of *Mokko* were dispatched to a base in Ngerekebesang, to repair cars. Two Okinawans worked with us, but our salaries were higher than theirs. The military tested us as machine repairmen. We repaired a car, and drove to the *Nanyo-jinja* (South Seas Shrine). But soon after the graduation, on March 29 and 30, we had air raids for the first time.

I was brainwashed in school. In the books, they said ‘Japan has never been defeated.’ And I learned a story about a Japanese soldier in the war with Russia. In this story, a soldier was crying as he read a letter from his mother. A petty officer stopped by, and asked, “Why do you cry for yourself, not for our country?!” Because I was educated in this way, at the first air raid, I thought that they were Japanese airplanes. Malakal Island and Meyuns in Ngerekebesang Island were bombed and burning, but the radio said, “We have suffered no damage.” This made me consider that Japan was strange for the first time.

After the air raid in March, I guess that it was in May, I was called by the Japanese military. They ordered me to join a Palauan troop named ‘*Kirikomi-tai*’. But my father was against this. He told me, “Don’t go. This is not the concern of Peleliu.” I told him, “My friends have joined, and I want to go with them.” So I arrived about four or five days late. Captain Koike shouted at me, “You! Why are you late? Are you really a man?” As a punishment, I was trained by him for several days. While others had finished their training and washed their laundry, I shouted in the forest, “Stand straight! Dress that

line!” I shouted very loudly. Otherwise, the Captain ordered, “Say it louder!!”

There was a simple examination in the troop. One question was, ‘What date is the emperor’s birthday?’, for example. It was easy to answer, because I had learned it in *kogakko*. The emperor’s birthday was April 29. I took the first place in the exam. Before we left Ngardmau, there was a moonlit night, and we and Captain Koike went to a grassy field in the hills. One by one, we sang songs. If anyone could not sing a song, he told a story instead. I sang a Japanese popular song; “I have to go to the army, leaving my love ...” After that, I was appointed as a porter to the Captain. During the special training, I had not complained. Maybe the Captain liked me.

Captain Koike was a skillful practitioner of *kendo* (Japanese fencing). One day, he put a knife on the tip of a wooden sword, gave it to us, and instructed us to stab him. We tried to do so one by one. I made a feint, but he just laughed and parried my attack. Even though his forehead was becoming higher, he was healthy. When he ran with us, he said, “Ei, O! Ei, O!” He was aged but very strong. We went to Ngeremlengui from Ngardmau, and then, to Daini Koror (second Koror) in Aimeliik. We were stationed there, and Captain Morikawa became our troop captain. There was another troop of *Kirikomi-tai* in Melekeok.

The objective of *Kirikomi-tai* was to fight in Peleliu. But on August 15, Japan surrendered. They said that they had not been defeated, they had just stopped fighting. I heard this news in Daini Koror, and I was very shocked. I had not even imagined that Japan would be defeated. Palauans in my generation were brainwashed by the Japanese. Japan had won the war with Russia, and the navy was controlled by Marshal Togo, and the army was commanded by General Nogi. We believed that Japan would never be defeated.

*Interviews: 31 August 2005, 26 September 2006, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewers: first interview, Maki MITA and Nasuhiko YAMAGUCHI; second interview, Maki MITA and Junko NISHIDA.*

## Story 32

Mechas Diraul Mokol

Born: 1927

Father: from Koror

Mother: from Koror



Mechas Diraul Mokol (2007)



Diraul in 1939  
(photo: Belau National Museum)

### Memories of my childhood

I grew up in Koror. Because there were many Japanese living in Koror, I played with Japanese children.

At the age of eight, I started to go to school. My teacher in the *honka* (basic course) was Hattori-sensei. She was very nice. When I entered the *hoshuka* (advanced course), my teacher was Nakamaru-sensei. Nakamaru-sensei gave me a Japanese name, 'Hanako'. He said that my true name was hard for him to pronounce. Mathematics was my favorite subject.

After school, I worked as a *renshusei* (trainee). I cleared the road with a rake, wiped the floor with a cloth, heated the bath, and drew water from the well or from the tank. When I did my work, Madam marked it in my notebook. The next day, I submitted this notebook to my teacher. I spent my earnings from *renshusei* work on pencils, notebooks and other things which I wanted to buy. There was a big store named *Nakajima*, and there was also a bookstore.

After finishing *renshusei* work around 5:00, I went to the Catholic church. So, when I came home, it was night. However, I was not so tired, because I was a child.

I really liked school. At the graduation, we cried so much. We did not want to leave school. Several years ago, Hattori-sensei visited us in Palau. We gathered in a *bai*

(meeting house), and waited for her. When she came out from the car, we all cried loudly. We said, “Sensei!” Hattori-sensei also cried. She was very, very old.

## **Life in Koror**

When I was a child, my father attended to fishing and my mother worked in the gardens and taro-patches. Because my father rented his land to the Japanese, we had cash income. In addition, in July all of my family went to the rock islands to gather *semum* (trochus shells) and sold the shells as a material for buttons. We could get a good cash income from this activity too.

I had my hair cut at the barber shop, and wore a dress from the dress shop. When I was in school, it depended on how I felt, whether I wore shoes or not. But after graduating from school, the road was paved with asphalt, and it became very hot from the sun. So, from this time I wore shoes. Back then, many people rode bicycles. I also had one, which my father bought me. I practiced riding in the school grounds. When I rode onto the street, a car was coming. I was very scared by this! In those days, cars were rare and the bicycles were common. There was a store that repaired bicycles.

## **Working experiences**

After graduation, I worked at *Nanyo-shinpo* Newspaper Company. Two of my friends and I visited, and asked them if we could work there. And they accepted us! That company was in Medalaii, and we worked there from 7:00 am to 5:00 pm. At that time, they picked each type, set them in order, and printed it. What I did was to put paper on the inked plate on which they had set the type. I printed the draft of the newspaper with a roller, and brought it to the office for editing. Several Palauans worked for this company. One Palauan man was making new type from lead. This newspaper was a daily, and they were delivered to the readers. I liked working there. One day, we Palauan girls had a picture taken with a Japanese man in this company. My friends wore grass skirts over their dresses, but I refused to do this.

## **War**

At the first air raid in March (1944), we hid ourselves in the mangroves. But the tide was rising, and we climbed the trees. At night, my family and I fled to one of the rock islands. We arranged a cave with branches and galvanized iron sheets, and made it a shelter. Two months later, we moved by canoe to Ngeremlengui, where my father’s brother lived. We stayed in the shelter during the day, and at night the young people worked in the gardens. Because we had tapioca, we did not starve. We dug a hole and covered it with woven coconut leaf mats. It became a shelter for five or six people.



Palauan girls and a Japanese man in *Nanyo Shinpo* Newspaper Company. The girls from right: Veronica (story 35), Diraul (story 32), and Barbara (story 30). (Photo: Belau National Museum)

Fortunately, I did not lose anybody from my family in the war.

One day, we members of the *Seinen-dang* (Youth Association) were assembled by the Japanese army. They made us stand in lines. Then, a soldier told us, “The American airplanes will soon be here, so we will swim to that island. So, stand by.” After a second, he said, “Relax, the war is over!” We all laughed. He had been joking with us.

During the war, the Japanese soldiers did not take food from us, but we gave them food. For me, the most terrible thing in the war was the air raids.

*Interview: 31 January 2007, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA.*

## Story 33

Mechas Sutella Kyota

Born: 1927

Father: from Airai

Mother: from Airai



Mechas Sutella Kyota, with her husband  
Rubak Toshio Kyota (Story 5) (2006)



Sutella in 1939  
(photo: Belau National Museum)

### Life in Babeldaob

In the Japanese time, we lived our lives with very little money. Even though there was electricity in Koror, we used lamps in Babeldaob. For laundry, bathing, and other purposes, we used the river. We got money by selling bananas, and bought kerosene, sugar, tobacco and other items. Everything was very cheap at that time. We also spent money on medical care.

### My school days

When I started to go to school, I lived at a relative's house in Koror. I got up at 7:00 a.m., bathed in the river, and ate breakfast. I had only three dresses, and I washed my dress every day.

When I was in the first grade, Hattori-sensei taught us dancing and singing. She was very kind and I liked her very much. Hattori-sensei and Yohei-sensei, who was a Palauan assistant teacher, taught first grade students. The Japanese teachers were strict when the students did something wrong, but usually they were not so strict. There was *kelebuse* (punishment) when the students were mischievous. I remember that two boys



were made to visit every classroom with their names on paper hung around their necks. They had sneaked into the girl's dormitory at night. At our school, there were gardens, pigs, and cows, which we tended. Boys cut the grass, and emptied the toilets. After this job, the boys would run into the sea. They put the sewage in a ditch and left it for one or two weeks, to make it into fertilizer. In the Japanese time, some people collected sewage from every house into large barrels, carried on an ox cart.

When I entered the third grade, I started working at Mr. Hirose's house as a *renshusei* (trainee). Mr. Hirose was a Buddhist priest of the *Palaoji* (Palau temple). The Japanese had funerals and weddings in this temple, located near Iddid hamlet in Koror. I swept in the house, and wiped the floor with a cloth. Sometimes, Mrs. Hirose sent me shopping with a list.

There was a big statue of Buddha in one room. Every morning, the monk recited a sutra, while he beat a wood block. When somebody died, the monk cut white paper and put it on the tip of a pole, and waved it as he prayed. After that, the visitors ate small dishes. I put their shoes in order at the entrance. Even though I was a Catholic, I worked at the Japanese temple every day. The money I earned from this job was 1 yen 50 sen a month, which I deposited in the bank.

Every Sunday, I went to the Catholic church in Koror. The names of the Spanish priests were Father Marino, Father Elias and Elmano. Elmano cooked for the Fathers. They spoke Palauan, and the services were conducted in Palauan.

I also went to the *Nanyo-jinja* (South Seas Shrine) from school. I remember the lantern parade. We made paper lanterns, put candles inside and went to the shrine with lanterns at night. There were many varieties of lanterns; watermelon lanterns, pineapple lanterns, eggplant lanterns, and so on. They were very beautiful. When we visited the shrine, we ladled the water, and cleaned our hands and mouth. We prayed in front of the small shrine, clapping our hands.

After five years education, I graduated from *kogakko* (school for Palauan children) in 1941. We sang '*Aogebatotoshi*', and '*Hotarunohikari*' at the graduation ceremony.

## Memories of the Japanese people

When I lived in Koror, a Japanese lady was very kind to me. She was around thirty years old, and she was a hairdresser for *geisha*. In the back lane of Koror, there were many restaurants and cafés, and many *geisha* worked there. They wore traditional Japanese *kimono*, and their hair was in the traditional style. They were beautifully made up, and perfumed. I watched my friend style a *geisha*'s hair. This lady lived near my house, and she sometimes invited me to her house. I ate dinner with her, and took a bath with her. Japanese people used hot water for bathing. She washed my back when we took a bath. In her house, her father bathed first, and then her mother. She and I were the last. In return for her kindness, I gave her bananas.

In the Japanese time, Palauan people were prohibited to drink alcohol. So, they sometimes handed money to their Japanese friends and asked them to buy liquor for them. They said that if Palauans drank alcohol, they might fight, or steal something.

After graduating from school, I worked as a domestic helper at the house of my brother's Japanese friend. The wife of my brother's friend was sick, and I accompanied her to the hospital. On our way home from the hospital, she said to me, "Let's go to *Nanbo* (department store)." We went to the cafeteria in *Nanbo* and ate *mitsumame* (iced dessert with fruits and agar cubes in it). Then we took a bus home. I also took care of their son. He was three or four years old and sometimes bothered his mother. So she gave me money and asked me to take her boy to watch the circus. Sometimes, a circus came to Koror! I saw a person walking on a rope, wearing Japanese wooden clogs and holding an umbrella.

## Memories of the war

I was in Aimeliik during the first air raid. When we saw so many airplanes, we said, "That might be a field practice", but when they shot machine guns, we realized that it was the real war. We cultivated gardens there, and raised vegetables. When I heard the American airplanes, I hid myself under the tapioca leaves.

Food was scarce, and we ate only twice a day. We cultivated new gardens in the moonlight, but it was hard to go fishing. We even ate *belloi* (bitter and poisonous wild fruit) and *denges* (bitter mangrove fruit). To eat *belloi* and *denges*, we needed to soak them in water for one day, after boiling them.

During the war, my birth mother died. She was an asthmatic, and it was hard for her to live in the forest, which was very cold. I walked to her place and took care of her. But after a month, she died. She died in February, and in April we went to Ngiwal with my birth family (I was adopted when I was a child). My mother's mother lived in Ngiwal. Thirty-four of us lived together in one house. Once a week, we went to gather food in Melekeok, and harvested ten baskets of taro. My birth father caught mangrove crabs. We also collected sea urchins. There were so many sea urchins in Ngiwal.

One day, when we went to harvest *denges*, we found a Japanese soldier sitting under a big tree. He said, "Help me, help me, please." But we did not have anything. An old man gave him water.

Another day, we met a Japanese woman who was very thin. She begged us, "Please give me food." She was only skin and bone. Looking at her, my mother's sister said, "Give her our food." At that time, we had *brak* (giant taro) and coconut, and we gave them to her. She said, "Thank you so much. Now I can feed my child ...."

## **Family separation after the war**

My mother's sister married a Japanese man, Mr. Azuma. They had seven children. After the war, Mr. Azuma was made to return to Japan, and he took four of the children. The other three, and my aunt, were left in Palau.

Several decades later, Mr. Azuma visited Palau. But his wife was already dead.

When he died in Japan, his family sent his bones to Palau. He had asked to be buried with his wife. So, they interred his bones in his wife's grave in Melekeok.

*Interview: 10 July 2007, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA.*

## Story 34

Rubak Mathias Toshio Akitaya

Born: 1928

Father: from Japan

Mother: from Angaur



Rubak Mathias Toshio Akitaya (2006)

### Life in Angaur

I was born in Ngaramasch [the Japanese name was ‘Nakamura’] hamlet in Angaur, and lived there. My father was Japanese, and I was told he fought in the war between Japan and Russia in 1904. Later, he came to Palau and worked as a boat operator for the phosphate company.

When I was child, many people lived in Angaur, because there was a phosphate mining business there. Not only Japanese, but also people from Truk, Yap, Saipan, Okinawa and Korea lived there. They numbered several hundred. Those who came from Saipan lived in ‘Saipan hamlet’, and Trukese and Yapese lived in big houses together. Okinawans lived independently in small houses. Japanese had their own houses which were built by the phosphate mining company.

The types of phosphate were different depending on the mining sites. There was red phosphate in Ngaramasch, and there was white phosphate in Kitamura. Red phosphate looks like sand, but white phosphate looks like starch or flour. It was hard to gaze at white phosphate, because of the glare.

There were four stores in Ngaramasch. I remember Yamada *shoten* (store), Marusan *shoten*, and Sawada *shoten*. Yamada *shoten* had a rice cleaning machine and they cleaned unpolished rice into white. They sold food and clothes. We bought rice, canned salmon, canned sardines, canned corned beef and other things there.

I ate Japanese sweets every day. My favorite sweet was *okoshi* (sweet rice cracker). My father said to me, “You will have decayed teeth if you eat sweets every day.”

I remember some Japanese customs in my house. For example, there were Japanese *tatami* mats inside the house. When we ate, my father used chopsticks, but I used a spoon. Because my father was Japanese, he could not stand to have a meal without steamed rice. So, we ate rice every day, when eating rice was not a common custom among Palauans. I myself like steamed rice, and even now I don’t feel full if I don’t eat rice.

My father understood some Palauan, but usually he spoke in Japanese. I spoke in Palauan to my father, while he spoke to me in Japanese. But we somehow understood each other.

## My life in school

I went to Angaur *Kogakko*. I did not like school very much, but I went to school every day except when I was sick. Angaur *Kogakko* was in Ngaramasch, and it was 400–500 meters from my house. When I was a child, I felt my school was far away. The way to school was narrow and winding. But when I visited after the war, it was only a short distance from my house to the school. Everything had been destroyed, so there was nothing to cut off the view. The number of Palauan children in Angaur was very small, with only about ten students there in each grade.

In the morning assembly, the Japanese flag was run up the flagpole. Then, we stood up straight, and bowed to the north. And we said, “We are the children of the emperor”, “We will be splendid Japanese” and “We will be devoted [to Japan].” I understood the meaning of these words because my teacher had taught us. At that time, I thought that the emperor was like a god. And I guess that Palauan students of those days identified with the Japanese, and wanted to contribute to Japan. I did not understand very clearly what ‘splendid Japanese’ meant, but when I listened to Okinawans and Koreans speaking Japanese, I thought they were not like Japanese, because their pronunciation was bad. The Japanese which Yapese and Trukese spoke was terrible. But I should not say that. I am afraid that I am too arrogant in saying that.

In Angaur *Kogakko*, speaking Palauan was prohibited from the second grade. If we spoke Palauan, the teacher smacked the tips of our fingers with a ruler.

There was also a *shogakko* in Angaur, and only Japanese children studied there. We Palauan children did not play with Japanese children. When they said to us, “You *tomin!*” (islanders), we were very offended. But we did not have a good word to retaliate with. If we said, “You Japanese!” it would not work to offend them, would it? I know that the word ‘*tomin*’ itself was not a bad word, but we did not like the way the Japanese used it.

After I studied in school for three years, my father wanted to make me go to *shogakko* with Japanese students. This was because my teacher and a Japanese policeman visited my house and said to my father that his son should go to the Japanese school. But my mother did not agree with this idea. She knew that Japan had started the war in China. She thought that if she allowed me to acquire Japanese nationality and let me go to the Japanese school, I might be conscripted by the Japanese military. So, she never accepted the suggestion of my teacher and the policeman.

My mother did not even let me go to the *hoshuka* (advanced course) at Koror *Kogakko*. She said she did not want me to eat poor food in the dormitory. So, I could not go on to the next stage of school. After the war, my mother said, “I am sorry I didn’t let you study more.” But when the war came to Palau, I was about sixteen years old. If I had acquired Japanese nationality in order to go to the Japanese school, I might have been taken into the military. My mother was right! Actually, when the war began, my

Japanese colleagues were drafted. Because my mother refused to make me a Japanese, I survived.

I just stayed at the Angaur *Kogakko* for two years and helped the teachers. My teacher ordered the text books for the *hoshuka* (advanced course) for me, and I studied it by myself. I asked my teacher when I found something I could not understand.

## Palauans and Japanese government

Palauan people have a ceremony when a woman bears her first child. We call it *ngasech*. *Ngasech* in Angaur is unique. The women who belong to high clans climb on a high platform. The women from the highest clan climb to the highest point of the platform, and the women from the second highest clan climb to the lower part of the platform. The Japanese government tried to ban the *ngasech* ceremony. When the *Nanyo-cho* (South Seas Government) indicated a policy, Japanese or Palauan police came to enforce it. The Japanese government policies were always given as ‘orders’. But I think that Palauans did not stop doing *ngasech*.

I don’t want to say this, but I recall a bad incident involving the Japanese authorities. One day, people from the government came to see my grandfather, who was the first chief of Ngaramasch, and they ordered him to move the Ngaramasch hamlet, as they wanted to mine phosphate on the site of Ngaramasch. I don’t know what my grandfather said to them, but they took my grandfather to jail, and beat him. I guess that my grandfather refused this order. This happened around 1937. After that, the people from Kitamura moved to our hamlet, Ngaramasch, and the people from these hamlets moved together to a new hamlet named Shinmura [‘Shinmura’ is Japanese for ‘new hamlet’]. At the same time, the *kogakko* was also moved to Shinmura.

## War on Angaur

After assisting teachers for two years, I started to work at the Angaur post office as a tea boy. I distributed cups of tea, cleaned the room, and also did other chores. Before March 1944, a lot of Japanese soldiers came to Angaur, and the workers in the phosphate mines left Angaur one by one.

When the Americans started to attack Palau in March 1944, I was working at the post office. Japanese people who worked at the post office looked out of the window. So, I also looked in the same direction. I could see many airplanes fighting above Peleliu. The postmaster said, “It is a field practice by the Japanese navy.” Soon after that, my elder brother who worked at the telegraph station came to me and whispered, “You should go now and take refuge. That is not a practice, but a real battle.” So, my brother and I went home immediately, but our family had already taken refuge in the hills.

When the American airplanes came to Angaur, we hid ourselves under trees. They shot at big structures including the telegraph station and warehouses and the office of the phosphate mining company. After this air raid, we started to make our shelters. We dug big holes, and put logs on them, and covered them with soil and grass. We did not go out to Babeldaob. One reason was that my mother did not want to move. I think that it was because of the incident with my grandfather. My mother was very upset that her father had been beaten by the military, so she would not obey the order of the Japanese. In the end, the war situation worsened, and no boats could travel to Babeldaob. More than a hundred Palauans were left in Angaur.

Every day we were shot at, but the most terrible experience was the bombardments from the warships. We hid ourselves behind rocks. In those days, we ate only a little. Sometimes, we slipped into the tents where the Japanese army had stocked their food. But the Americans had set wires around those tents, and if somebody touched them, a flare bomb would be set off, and he or she would be shot by the American soldiers. Sometimes, we could get rice from these tents. We roasted it over a very small fire in the middle of the night. Roasted rice tastes like corn. If there was food, we ate it, and if not, we did not eat anything all day long.

While we were in a cave with some Japanese, a cruel incident occurred. There was a woman from Saipan with a Japanese civilian man in our cave. One day, she went out from the cave, and she was seen by an American. She was shot at, and came back to our cave wounded. After that, the Japanese guy who was with this woman was summoned by Japanese soldiers, and was taken outside the cave. Soon after that, we heard gunfire. And this Japanese man did not come back.

At first, we Palauans fled by ourselves, but then we met some Japanese servicemen and went with them. Thinking that being with the Japanese was more dangerous than being by ourselves, our leaders told the Japanese colonel, "We would like to move back from the front line, so that we do not hamper you." Our request was accepted (we thought, "Well done!"), and we moved back from the front line. Soon after that, on October 8, some Palauans met the Americans. Because there was no other choice, they surrendered to the Americans.

At night, some of those who had surrendered to the Americans sneaked out from their tents, and came to our shelter. They said to us, "It is safe. So, tomorrow, early in the morning, you should come and join us. The Americans promised not to shoot early in the morning." So, other Palauans also went to the American base to surrender. Because I was injured at that time, I asked another person to carry my sister on his back, and I went with my father who was already old.

The American base was on a rocky hill. I wondered later how I was able to climb it. I climbed ahead of my father, and soon after I reached the top, my father showed his face. My father did not know that we were going to surrender to the Americans. So, when he looked at the Americans on the top of the hill, he said, "You bloody fool

Americans! Go to hell!” And he turned back. I heard what my father said, but I just went forward, and I asked my older brother to fetch my father back. Later, my brother brought my father to the American base. I still remember my father’s very sullen face at that time. Even though my father was pure Japanese, the Americans welcomed him. My father was very old, so the Americans were not concerned, I guess.

At the battle of Angaur, many Japanese servicemen died. But fortunately, most of the Palauans survived the battle. I remember that I felt almost nothing when I saw dead bodies while I was amidst the battle. It was a very common thing. I just thought, “There is someone’s body over there.”

The Americans were quite different from what the Japanese had told us. The Japanese army and teachers told us that if we were caught by the Americans, they would murder us cruelly. But, it did not happen. I thought that the Japanese army and teachers had lied to us.

I remember the last day of the battle of Angaur. It had rained during the night, and in the morning an American came to us, and asked some of us to come with him. Three Palauans followed him and looked at the body of a Japanese officer. The American asked them if it was Major Goto.

While we stayed inside the fence, there were Japanese prisoners of war in the next compound. One day, we noticed a familiar face among the Japanese. He was a worker of the phosphate mining company. But when we talked with him, an American stopped us.

When the war was over, we were still under the supervision of the Americans. At that time, I was working on the water tank. Then, I noticed that the Americans were excited, and some of them were even dancing. So, I asked them what was up, and they said that the war was over. My father was very unhappy to hear that.

After the war, all the Japanese had to go back to Japan. My father left for Japan around 1948, he was one of the last people who went back. He did not want to go, but *Ibedul* (High Chief of Koror) said that he also should leave for Japan. It was very sad for both of us, but my father had another family in Japan. So, we thought that we should give his Japanese family some time to be with our father. We heard that he passed away two or three years later, in Japan. I visited his grave after the war.

I believe that we should not have wars. I experienced a very harsh time without water or food during the wartime.

*Interview: 16 August 2006, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA.*



## Story 35

Mechas Veronica Remeriang Kazuma

Born: 1928

Father: from Koror

Mother: from Koror



Mechas Veronica Remeriang Kazuma,  
with Mr. Nasuhiko Yamaguchi (2005)



Veronica in 1939  
(photo: Belau National Museum)

### My daily life in Koror

When I was a child, my father leased several pieces of land in Ngerbeched, Koror, to Japanese people. These were used for a fish shop, a grocer's shop, and *Nettai Seibutsu Kenkyusho* (Palau Tropical Biological Station). The Biological Station was next-door to our house. In those days, we adopted many things from Japanese culture. Japanese companies produced dried bonito in Malakal, and we used this to make soup. We used *miso* (soybean paste), *tofu* (soybean curd), and *konbu* (kelp) for making Japanese *miso* soup. We could buy them at the shops. Because my father leased land and worked for the government, we had cash. At the shops we would buy clothes, oil, rice, *shoyu* (soy sauce) and sugar, for example. When we needed clothes, we bought a ready-made dress, or bought cloth and ordered a dress to be made from it. It was not so expensive. We also bought oil for the lamp. Electricity had already been introduced to Palau by that time, but we used a lamp at home. We usually ate taro rather than rice. But when my mother was busy and did not have time to cook taro, we went to a grocer's shop in front of our house, and bought a pouch of rice. We steamed rice in the Japanese manner, but sometimes we cooked rice with *disech* (coconut milk) and sugar, and made sweet soup.

We did not buy salt and cooking oil, because we used seawater and coconut oil for

cooking. Basically, we did not have to buy food. My mother planted taro and other vegetables, and we had a share of fish as members of the hamlet. In those days, several elder men would go to check *bub* (fish traps) on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. They distributed the catch to the people of the hamlet according to the number of family members. My younger brother and I helped to distribute the fish. We had a torch made of coconut leaves, and we visited every house in the twilight. Thanks to this custom, those who were too old to go fishing could still get fish. After distributing fish, some of them were left at the dock. The chief of my hamlet had no children, so he said to my father to take as many fish home as he needed.

In the hamlets of Palau in those days, there were many shady trees, and it was not very hot. Every lane in the hamlets was paved with stone, so we did not get very dirty feet, even without shoes. There was a rag kept on a big stone in front of my house, and after washing our feet with water from a downpipe tied to a coconut tree, we dried our feet with this rag. The downpipe was woven from leaves of the betelnut tree. When I was in school, the Japanese government broke up the traditional stone pavements to surface the roads and lanes with asphalt. During the construction, the roads and lanes were so muddy, we had to wash our feet in a cask filled with water.

The traditional houses were made of wood, and their floors were made of whole bamboo. The doorway had a curtain woven from the leaf of the *buukch*, which slid along a bamboo pole. Even though it was easy for anybody to get into the house, there were no thieves. The houses were smoky from the *ab* (fireplace), so that mosquitoes did not come into the house. Before sleeping, we put a big piece of firewood on the *ab*. Traditionally, a Palauan house had several entrances, and the house was divided into several sections. The right part of the house was called *um*, and it was a space for cooking. This was an area for the women in the daytime. The left part of the house was called *uul orngodel*. This was a space for the family. And the central part of the house between *um* and *uul orngodel* was for visitors and general use.

## My school life

Japanese school teachers were strict when we learned the Japanese language. I think that they were strict for our sake. From the second grade, we were prohibited from using Palauan in school. There was a fifth grade student with a red sash, who noted whether anybody used Palauan, even during the recess. This student was called *kango-toban* (language watcher). In the recess, especially when we were absorbed in games, we would accidentally use Palauan. Then, *kango-toban* recorded the names of the students who spoke Palauan, and submitted the list to the teacher. Before the class started, the teacher said, "Those who spoke Palauan, come here." The teacher made them stand during the class. The punishments were different depending on the teacher. Sometimes, a student who spoke Palauan had to wear a board around his neck as a

punishment, on which was written what he had done.

I liked the singing class. When we were in fourth grade, Mr. Yoshino taught us a song in two-part harmony, and had us sing it at the radio station in Koror. This was broadcast even in Japan. In this song, the lyrics are, ‘Under the Japanese national flag, there is no enemy ....’

I was educated for five years in *kogakko*. From the first grade to the third grade we had only four classes a day. But from the fourth grade, we also had classes in the afternoon. We went home to eat lunch, and returned to class at 1:00. In the afternoon, we learned agriculture, sewing, handicrafts and so on. In the agriculture class, we took care of animals and plants. We had two cows and five pigs at school. We cut grass and fed it to the cows. We collected their dung and used it as fertilizer.

We also learned how to plant eggplants, cucumbers, beans, turnips, Japanese radish, green vegetables and so on. We worked in teams. We made ridges, and weeded out unnecessary plants. By doing so, we could raise better vegetables. Our teacher inspected the garden, and declared, “The vegetables of this team are the biggest, and this is the second ...” It was like a competition, and we enjoyed it very much. We sold the vegetables to earn money for our school.

Once a year we had a fair, and we exhibited what we had made in our classes; girls exhibited hats, and socks they had knitted or something they sewed, and boys exhibited ashtrays made from coconut shells, or vases, for example. We also exhibited tobacco cases and handbags woven from leaves. The income from this fair also went into the school funds.

There was a sports competition in *kogakko*. We were divided into two teams, red and white, and competed with each other. We had a relay race, an obstacle race, a flag dance and other games. In the obstacle race, we went through fishing nets and tires and over rudders. There was a race called *bin-tokyoso* (bottle-carrying race). In this game, we put a pop bottle filled with sand on our heads, and ran. In the tree-climbing race, we climbed betelnut trees, and competed to be first to put a flag at the top of the tree.

There were many competitions in the Japanese time. Even for adults, there were sports competitions such as baseball tournaments, track and field events, and water-sports competitions.

After school, we played together. I remember we did *saipandama* (Japanese tiddly-winks), *otedama* (throwing beanbags), *nawatobi* (skipping rope), *hanafuda* (Japanese card game), baseball, *keri* (football), *sesse* (Japanese hand game) and so on. But I was busy after school because I had to help my mother. My mother put a list of my daily duties on the lantern, and went to the garden with my younger brothers and sisters. I would join them there to help her after finishing my duties.

After graduating from *kogakko*, I worked at the newspaper company doing type-setting. The variety of jobs which Palauans were permitted was very limited at that time. My father once worked as a *junkei* (Palauan police officer), but because his younger

brother also became a *junkei*, he changed his job, and started work onboard the *Nanyo-cho* (South Seas Government) ship. He worked at setting buoys in the Ngeremlengui channel. He had to dive again and again, without any equipment other than diving goggles, and finally he became sick. The lower half of his body became paralyzed.

*Interview: 12 April 2005, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewers: Maki MITA, Nasuhiko YAMAGUCHI and Yuko YAMAMOTO.*

## Story 36

Mechas Ochob Giraked

Born: 1928

Father: from Koror

Mother: from Koror

I was born as a daughter of *Ibedul* (High Chief of Koror) and his wife, but I was adopted by William

Gibbons and his wife. In Palau, adoption was well regarded. Even though I was the only child of Ngiraked, *Ibedul*, I was adopted by William. William's father was James Gibbons, who came to Palau on a British ship. My father William spoke English, and he helped the Germans as a translator. He worked as a builder, and he also cultivated land and sold vegetables to Vinkerang Bingelang, a German merchant. Because I had two sets of parents, I was indulged, and I was selfish. My experience of the war, and of schooldays in Guam after the war changed my personality.



Mechas Ochob Giraked



Ochob in 1939  
(photo: Belau National Museum)

### My religious belief

When I was an infant, I went to a kindergarten in *Honganji* temple. There were few Palauan children in that kindergarten. Even though I and my parents were Christian, my parents sent me to *Honganji*, a Buddhist temple. In the kindergarten, we sang songs, chanted Buddhist sutras, and played around.

My foster father, William Gibbons, was the one who invited Japanese priests from the Seventh Day Adventist Church. According to my older sister Maria, William was a protestant, as his father was. One day, when he read the Bible after his father's death, he thought that the Sabbath day should be Saturday, not Sunday. He operated a small church, and he had a church service on Saturday. Then, a Japanese neighbor told him that there was a Christian group in Japan who held church services on Saturday. This was the Seventh Day Adventist Church. My father was happy to know that there was a group who thought the same way. My father wrote to the church, and asked them to send pastors to Palau. Several months later they responded, and subsequently did send pastors to Palau. Some years later, my sister Maria went to Japan to study, and after that, Remusei also went.

These days, I look at the sea from the window, and remember my father William. He trusted God deeply. I remember that when I was very young, my father, my mother

and I went to Airai by canoe every Saturday for missionary work. Because my father could not move his legs freely, he paddled the canoe while sitting. In this channel, the tide was fast, so he devised a way to use the current to his advantage.

*Nanyo-jinja* (South Seas Shrine) was built when I was ten years old. The pastors of the SDA church did not prohibit us from going to a Shinto shrine. Because I was a child at that time, I did not feel any difficulty about going there. And my parents said nothing about it. But my parents and I didn't hold traditional Palauan religious beliefs.

## A Japanese friend

When I was a child, I lived in Koror 5 *chome* (the fifth district of Koror). It was the center of town. At that time, the Japanese lived along the main street, and Okinawans and Koreans lived along a back lane. Near my house was Aoki store. A Japanese girl named Tokiwa lived there. She was a year older than me, and we were good friends. After school, we went to see my mother in the taro-patch. We took *wasch* [?] (nut) to eat, and when it rained, we took refuge under a taro leaf. We also caught shrimp from a stream, and cooked them by the taro patch. It was so tasty! I had forgotten this experience, but some years ago, Tokiwa came to Palau and she talked about it. At that time, it was rare for Palauan children to have Japanese friends. But Tokiwa and I went to the taro-patch to see my mother, and helped her to carry the baskets.

I did not see Tokiwa for many years after the war. But more than ten years ago, she visited Palau, and asked everybody, "Do you know where Ochob is?" So I went the hotel to see who was looking for me. It was Tokiwa! We hugged each other. She visited Palau so often after that.

## Memories of peaceful days

In the Japanese time, we wore Japanese *geta* (wooden clogs). If we walked softly, it didn't make a sound. In the evening of a full moon, we young Palauans went to the swimming pool at the Koror dock. When we sang songs and danced, the Japanese gathered to watch. We were told to dance by an older Palauan friend, and did so. The Japanese were pleased by our performance. Because I was very young, I was proud of myself.

Koror dock was animated in the morning, because boats would arrive from Babeldaob with vegetables. I remember the Okinawan women carried fish on their heads and walked into town to sell fish. Sometimes, they also carried children on their backs, and I was impressed to see this.

At the sports meeting between *kogakko* (school for Palauan children) and *shogakko* (elementary school for Japanese) some students were chosen as representative athletes. Even though I was not good at running, I was always chosen. I was a slow runner, and

I always finished last or second-to-last. My younger friend Maria was also chosen, but she was very fast. I wondered why I was chosen every year, even though I was slow. But if I didn't attend the sports meeting, they made me work. I had to crush cans with a hammer. The hammer was so heavy, it would almost make me fall over backwards.

It was fun to go to a store with my friends and buy sweets. We could buy two donut balls for 5 sen from an Okinawan store. There was a movie theater named '*Daini Wakabakan*' (Second Wakabakan) in Koror. Because it was my father's land, I did not have to pay. With my friends, I watched *samurai* movies and love stories and so on. Maria, my very young friend, fell asleep on my knees.

## Memories of work experience

After graduating from *kogakko*, I worked at *Nanyo-cho* (South Seas Government). I cleaned the rooms, and prepared tea for Japanese police officers. This job was arranged through my school's headmaster, and he said that I would be able to learn typing, and get work as a typist. But in the office there was a Japanese typist, and she lived in a house in the garden of my father. I was not kind to her, and I would not give her a cup of tea. She prepared tea by herself, and told me, "Keiko-san, I will make a cup of tea." They gave me a Japanese girl's name 'Keiko', because I worked for the *keimuka* (police office) of *Nanyo-cho*. The typist lady also cleaned her desk by herself. I did not do any work for her, because I was angry that they did not teach me typing.

The police officers were kind to me. I learned how to ride a bicycle, and went to buy Japanese sweets for the policemen by bike. One day, on my way back to the office, I tumbled and the sweets became muddy. When I came back, I said, "There are no more sweets!" "What happened?" the police officer asked. "I fell off my bike, and the sweets are now all muddy." But they did not scold me.

One day, I was asked to take cooked sweet potatoes to the office. But when I was walking by the *butokuden* (Japanese gymnasium) carrying sweet potatoes in a bucket, young boys teased me and called, "Keiko-san! Keiko-san!" At that time, I was thirteen, and I got angry, and I threw the sweet potatoes one by one. So, when I went back to the office, there were not enough sweet potatoes left.

Next day, I did not go to work. Then, a policeman came to my house. I hid under the floor. He asked my mother if I was at home. My mother said, "No! She is not here!!" She was scared of the policemen because they had swords.

After working at the Police Office in *Nanyo-cho*, I worked as a student nurse. I really wanted to be a nurse, because I liked the long white uniform and white cap of a nurse. I lied that I would move to Daini Koror (Second Koror), a new hamlet which was prepared for refuge in case of war, and I started work at the Palau Hospital. Its building is now used by Palau Community College. I was fourteen. I cleaned the rooms, washed medical instruments, and did other chores. And in the afternoon, I had classes. I learned

anatomy and other subjects. After working at the hospital for a year, the war began. While my fellows worked at army hospitals and navy hospitals, I did not. My mother told me not to go.

When I worked as a student nurse, I went to Ngerur Island several times with a doctor and nurses. Patients with leprosy were quarantined there. When we visited, we protected ourselves with long-sleeved shirts, and gloves. I was a little scared to look at the faces and bodies of the patients, but I did not worry very much about being infected, because I was protected. After visiting there, we removed our clothes, and were disinfected. I have heard that during the war, some of the patients on Ngerur Island were killed by the Japanese forces. Some survived, and are still alive even now. In those days, meningitis and tuberculosis were common. At the Palau Hospital, there were rooms for patients with infectious diseases. When we visited these rooms, we had to wear masks, and when we came out we washed our hands and changed clothes. But I did not fear these diseases very much. It might be because I was young. Even during the war, I did not worry about myself, though I knew that it was dangerous. I watched air raids with interest, while my sister Maria hid in a hole and trembled. I guess that when a person becomes an adult, he or she learns to be afraid of these things.

## Memories of the war

During the first air raid in March, we took refuge on one of the rock islands. We hid ourselves in a cave, but still feared stray bullets from the airplanes bombing Malakal Island. We stayed there for three months. At night, we moved to Koror by raft, and harvested taro from our garden. We cooked it in the cave. There was nothing sweet, but we had a small portion of rice. We cooked rice with leaves of sweet potato. In July, we moved to Daini Koror (Second Koror) by raft at night. I was with my mother, my sister, her baby who was three months old, and the baby's father. My father William had passed away before the war. Daini Koror was in the forest. Because I had grown up in Koror, I did not want to go to Babeldaob. There was not even electricity there.

In the morning, when we arrived at Daini Koror, a B-29 flew overhead. We panicked, jumped into the sea, and rushed onto the land. I did not know if I was swimming or walking. We went into the mangroves, and after that, moved to a hut which was prepared by the men. The baby was carried by his father. It was so scary. At that time, the airplane bombed Ngatpang. Daini Koror had been prepared as a refuge over three years by order of the Japanese government. The Palauans who already lived there had made gardens, and planted coconut trees. They already had something to eat. When we started to live there, my uncle Mariul and his wife gave us their food.

Even in Daini Koror, we did *Kyujyo-yohai* (a greeting to the palace), and we bowed deeply towards the palace of the Japanese emperor every morning. It was already our custom to do that. There were only Palauans in that area, but we did it ourselves.



At 6:00 a.m., each person went to the high place, and did *Kyujyo-yohai*. “We are the children of the emperor!”, “We will be devoted [to Japan]!” and, “We will be splendid Japanese!” Even though the adults were not educated at the Japanese school, my mother believed in Japan and continued to do this. Of course, we knew that the war was not about Palauans, but we were influenced by the Japanese. At that time, they said that if the American soldiers found a young woman, they would pull her legs [i.e. tie them to horses to pull them apart; cf. story 50] .... Because I was a child, I believed that. I believed in the victory of Japan. We identified with the Japanese, and I had not even seen the Americans. But my sister Maria did not trust in this. I once heard her say that Japan would be defeated. But at that time, it was hard to say such a thing.

At the SDA church, Pastor Ochiai put a Japanese flag at the front, and he did *Kyujyo-yohai* before talking about God. But Pastor Yamamoto said, “The emperor is a human and one of the creatures of God”. So he was jailed. After that, I was also questioned several times. I was asked, “Whom do you trust?” Of course, I answered, “The emperor”. I was told to say so by my mother. But Pastor Yamamoto did not hide his true belief, and he was taken to Aimeliik as a prisoner. He was forced to work there. Of course, I did not believe that the emperor was a god. But I could not say it. My sister Maria said to her friend, “If America is a lion, Japan is a mouse. Even though a mouse can scratch the foot of a lion, the lion can easily destroy a mouse.” I heard her say this to her friend, and in my mind I accepted her words. But I did not tell that to others.

## Life in the refuge

In Daini Koror we were hungry, but not seriously. I picked and ate fruit. Men caught fish using powder taken from torpedoes hidden amongst the mangroves. They put the powder in a piece of bamboo, and made explosives. So, in my house, there were a lot of fish. We ate *denges*, a mangrove fruit which we ate during the war. I suppose that *denges* contains protein, because I became taller and taller at that time. If I wanted to eat something sweet, I ate a tip of a *bouch* [?]; *bouch* is a tree, and its tip was sweet. We drank water from the streams. Because I could find something to eat, I did not feel very hungry. Those who lived in Daini Koror for several years also raised sugar cane, and cultivated gardens. Each Palauan family cultivated the land as ordered by a Japanese commander, Captain Morikawa. We raised sweet potato and tapioca. Sometimes we went to Aimeliik to harvest vegetables, and brought them back to Daini Koror. There were no air raids in Daini Koror, but we heard bombs from the direction of the high mountain in Ngatpang. In Daini Koror, there were only Palauans. No Japanese lived there. But sometimes Japanese soldiers came to boil sea water to get salt.

Sometimes, we visited an eastern hamlet to eat crabs. This was a good place to catch seafood, and we visited because the wife of my uncle was from there. It was a day’s journey. I went there with my sister, her baby, and the baby’s father. We walked

through the forest and mountain, and arrived at the hamlet at 6:00 in the evening. The father of my uncle's wife caught many crabs, and we ate our fill; and we took some home for my mother. On our way back, when we walked through Ngatpang, we saw several Japanese lying by the road. Some had big bellies from starvation. Their legs and arms were very thin. They were not soldiers but civilians. I was very sorry for them. Many were women. We made them drink coconut juice one by one. But we were afraid of being punished by the Japanese soldiers for doing so. The armed forces were very strict at that time, and we tried to avoid trouble.

One day, my sister and I visited the wife of a schoolteacher in a hut by the river. We found her lying down from starvation. She looked very tired, and she could not talk a lot. We left some coconuts and taro for her. As the wife of a schoolteacher, she had a good standard of living before the war. I was very sorry for her.

Because there were no Japanese soldiers in Daini Koror, they did not cause us any trouble. My sister and I, and other girls from Koror, visited the Japanese soldiers several times in Ngatpang to dance for them and provide comfort. At that time, the soldiers looked healthy, and they applauded us. I did not see the soldiers who starved. But I saw the people from Java and Indonesia, and tall black people from Africa or somewhere. They worked under the Japanese forces, and they were weakened by starvation. The Japanese imprisoned them in a stockade, and when we passed by, my sister and I threw taro into the stockade. The Japanese soldiers would have prohibited this. The people in the stockade took the taro. My sister's husband said, "Don't do that. Let's go." He was afraid that the Japanese soldiers might find out and punish us. They looked very weak ....

In my family, one of my uncles died because of the war, from the bombing. He was seriously injured, and was taken to Daini Koror by canoe at night. My mother and I visited him several times. Because he was lying in a mosquito net, I could not see him very well. But my mother said never to open the net and look inside, because his body looked terrible. At night, I could not sleep very well, because I was scared. He died in the forest. I also heard of a relative who suddenly disappeared because of an explosion. He was dismantling an unexploded bomb to get powder for fishing. He disappeared, and some pieces of his clothes were left on the tree.

## **The end of the war**

During the war, we would see an American airplane, a big and black one, flying around at 6:00 in the evening. But one day, it stopped. We wondered why, but we did not care. One day, in the morning, I was cutting grass in a garden with my friends. I remember that the tapioca grew high. We heard a motor sound, and thought that it might be an American airplane, and we took refuge in the mangroves. But some old men continued carving because they did not see any airplanes. Then, I heard somebody saying, "Come out! The war has finished!" So, we looked out from the tapioca plants. We saw a

Palauan man, named Itpik, whom we had not seen for several months, standing there. He used to catch fish with the Okinawans for the Japanese troops. He might have known that we were hidden in the tapioca garden. And we saw an American soldier beside him! He was very tall and his face was red.

Because we were taught that Americans were dangerous, we just stayed hidden in the tapioca, and looked out silently. Then, old men came out and said, "Come out! The war is over!" But we did not come out, from fear. Then, Itpik and the American walked toward the hamlet, and when they passed us, we were frozen in terror! We followed them quietly, and then Itpik intentionally stopped to trick us. Then, we dashed into the forest. Finally, he went into his parents' house. The old men and we gazed at Itpik and the American soldier. "This is an American!" I thought. What a long nose! What a red face! And he was so tall!! We heard Itpik saying, "The war has ended! Didn't you see the flier?" We did not pick up fliers. He continued to speak. The airplane which flew here around 6:00 would go to Kayangel. Kayangel was occupied by the Americans. The American army had also taken Peleliu and Angaur. We were very surprised.

The American soldier opened a box, and gave us chocolate, crackers, and coffee. But we refused to take them. Then, Itpik opened the wrapping, and said, "This is chocolate." Of course, we knew chocolate because we grew up in Koror. When we ate chocolate and crackers, we were so happy and thought, "Is the war really over?" But we still worried about what the Americans would do. Then, Itpik said, "What you have been told about Americans is all lies. Americans are good." Hearing that Mr. Oikawa, a famous Palauan, was already in Peleliu, I realized that the war had ended. I was so happy.

Itpik did not talk about what he did while he was absent, but we imagined that he went to Peleliu with his fellow fishermen from Okinawa, and surrendered to the Americans. We did not know that peace had already come to Palau.

I think that the experience of the war changed me. I used to be a selfish girl, but in the wartime, I went into the forest and looked for food. Because my sister's baby was still three months old, I had to collect nuts and other food for my family. I climbed mangroves to gather *denges* (bitter mangrove fruit). I got scratches all over my legs. I also gathered *belloi* (bitter and poisonous wild fruit) by myself in the forest. At night, we moved to the cave because the baby cried, but my friend and I went back to our hut and cooked. And in the morning, we brought food to the family. This was all hard work for a young girl. Now, I think that I was lucky because nothing dangerous happened to me.

*Interviews: 28 March and 2 April 2006, 4 January 2007, Koror. Conducted in Japanese.  
Interviewer: Maki MITA.*

## Story 37

Mechas Dilyolt Teruko Etumae

Born: 1928

From: Peleliu



Mechas Dilyolt Teruko Etumae  
(2005; photo by Takashi Mita)

I studied for three years in the *honka* (basic course) at *kogakko* (school for Palauan children) and after that, I went on to the *hoshuka* (advanced course) in Koror. I liked mathematics, and learned how to calculate with a *soroban* (abacus). If we spoke Palauan in school, we were struck with a ruler. I was given my Japanese name ‘Teruko’ by Nakaba-sensei.

In Koror, I lived in the dormitory. We prepared our own food; soon after we woke up, we cooked rice. Because I liked to study in school, I was not homesick for Peleliu.

While I was in the *hoshuka*, I worked at the house of Mr. Nakazawa as a *renshusei* (trainee). I did some domestic chores, such as cleaning rooms. Mr. Nakazawa was a photographer, and Mrs. Nakazawa was a dressmaker.

Mrs. Nakazawa talked with my parents about letting me stay with her to learn dressmaking after graduating from school. Because there were no jobs in Peleliu, my parents suggested to me that I learn dressmaking in Koror. So, after graduation, I lived with the Nakazawa family, and worked as an apprentice dressmaker.

Mrs. Nakazawa’s maiden name was Kato, and Mr. and Mrs. Kato (Mrs. Nakazawa’s parents) lived with Mr. and Mrs. Nakazawa. Mr. Kato had arrived in Palau on a sailing ship a long time ago, and he spoke Palauan. He helped me by translating into Palauan what I did not understand in Japanese. Mrs. Kato was a *kimono* maker. I learned dressmaking from Mrs. Nakazawa, and how to sew a *kimono* from Mrs. Kato.

I learned many things from Mrs. Kato. She taught me how to cook Japanese food such as *miso* soup, and how to eat Japanese food, amongst other things. The family told me, “Eat anything, and learn about Japanese food.” At first, I was scared of eating something new, but I would try to eat it. *Sashimi* (raw fish), *tsukudani* (food boiled with soy sauce), and *natto* (fermented soybeans), *tofu* (soybean curd) ... and so on.

I stayed with the Nakazawa family for about four years. Because I was an apprentice, I was not paid. But they gave me some money for daily needs. I used this money for getting my hair done, buying new shoes, and so on. There were also three Japanese girls staying there and learning dressmaking, and we shared a room. We talked together at night, and it was great fun. I was not even interested in going out for entertainment. Mrs. Nakazawa told me, “Teruko, please make sure the other girls do not go out from

the house at night.”

Mrs. Nakazawa sold the dresses she made. The customers visited her house to place orders. Most were Japanese. They decided on cloth and chose the style. Sometimes, Palauans came there too. Palauans liked small *kimono* for children. Some of them asked me to sew one, but I told them, “I can’t do that because I am still a trainee. Please ask Mrs. Kato.”

Mrs. Nakazawa and Mrs. Kato taught us how to sew. Their way of sewing was very exacting even in the smallest detail. It was quite different from Palauan people’s casual sewing. When I sewed something incorrectly, they told me to do it again. They were strict when they taught us sewing.

After my apprenticeship with the Nakazawa family, I opened my own dressmaking store in Peleliu. But the war broke out, and I could only get work mending soldiers’ clothes. Before the Americans landed in Peleliu, I was evacuated to Babeldaob with the others. After the war, I resumed working as a dressmaker, in Koror.

*Interview: 8 August 2005, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewers: Maki MITA and Nasuhiko YAMAGUCHI.*

## Story 38

Rubak Wilhelm Rengiil

Born: 1928

Father: from Airai

Mother: from Aimeliik



Rubak Wilhelm Rengiil, with his wife  
Mechas Kiyoko Kawai (Story 40) (2006)

I grew up in Koror. I learned many things from my father; how to catch fish, how to extract oil from coconuts, how to collect *semum* (trochus shell) and other things. The Japanese bought the *semum* shells from us, and we ate the meat. I also learned about planting bananas and pine-apples in the garden from my parents. When I went to my mother's hamlet, I learned the lore of my mother's hamlet; and when I went to my father's hamlet, I learned the lore of my father's hamlet.

### My school days

I remember Hattori-sensei, Miyamoto-sensei, Kamata-sensei, Nameta-sensei,<sup>16)</sup> Yokoi-sensei, and Mochizuki-sensei. I was a class president from the first grade to the fifth grade. When the teacher left the classroom, I always gave the students the command, "Stand up!" I also supervised the students' cleaning work.

In the morning assembly, the teacher instructed us, "Stand straight!" and we bowed. We bowed to the *Kyujyo* (the Japanese palace), and said several words. Because these words were difficult, we repeated them after the teacher. Honestly speaking, I did not clearly understand the meaning of these words. After the war, I visited the palace in Tokyo.

We raised pigs and domestic fowls in the school. We students took care of them. We also planted tapioca and other vegetables in the school garden.

I did *renshusei* (trainee) work from the fourth grade. I worked for the teachers. At first, I worked for Hattori-sensei, and next was Nameta-sensei. And when I was in the fifth grade, I worked for Kamata-sensei. I tidied the garden, cut the grass, and mopped the floor. I worked very hard. The fact that I worked for the teachers was an added pressure for me.

After graduating from *kogakko* (school for Palauan children) I went to *Mokko* (carpentry apprentice school). In *Mokko*, I studied with the students from other islands, including Yap, Truk, the Marshalls, and Saipan. I learned carpentry there. But when I was in the third year, the war came to Palau.

## Life in Koror

There were several Japanese children around my house in Koror. On Sundays, we played together. We played baseball and tennis. But usually, Palauan children did not play with Japanese children, because our customs were different. But in *undokai* (sports meetings), we played sports together. I was a competitor in short-distance running and the long jump. At the sports festival, Palauan children always beat the Japanese children.

When my father went fishing and caught a lot of fish, he sold some to the Japanese. But on windy days, we bought fish at the store. My mother raised taro, tapioca and the standard vegetables, but we bought other vegetables at the store. Rice was very special. For us, it was a food for holiday celebrations. We bought rice at the store.

In the New Year, we went to our own hamlet. The special dishes were prepared there. The chief of the hamlet directed the people as to what kind of dishes they should cook. In the Japanese period, we ate *oshiruko* (sweet *azuki*-bean soup with rice cake) on New Year's Day. We danced in a *bai* (meeting house) on the New Year Holiday.

There were many differences between Japanese and Palauans. For example, the Japanese raised a wide variety of vegetables in their gardens; whereas Palauans raised only a limited variety such as sweet potato, taro, and tapioca. After the Japanese came, we started to use human manure in our gardens. Our diets were also different. Palauans principally ate taro, tapioca and fish; the Japanese ate rice and *miso* soup.

## My religious beliefs

I believed in *Modekngei* (Palauan religious belief) before going to school. In the *Modekngei* church, I learned obedience to and respect for Palauan culture. They said to respect our parents, to not walk in front of the elders, to eat only local food, and so on.

After entering *kogakko*, I became a Catholic. On Sunday, I went to Catholic church, and I learned math, science, English [?], social studies, and Catholic religion. The Spanish pastors spoke both English [?] and Palauan. The bible was written in English [Rubak Rengiil may have meant Spanish in these statements].

## The war

In the air raid in March (1944), I took refuge in Aimeliik with my parents, brothers, and sisters. We left Koror for Aimeliik by canoe at night. It took two hours. We moved to the house of my mother's brother in Aimeliik. It was a big house, and there were gardens and taro-patches.

The Japanese soldiers did not come to our place often. I went fishing with my father, and worked in the garden with my mother. We worked very early in the morning or late in the evening. We did not have trouble getting food, such as the others had.

Fortunately, we did not meet any danger. Nobody amongst my family or close relatives died in the war. My grandfather directed us appropriately; such as where we should take refuge. Under his guidance, we moved here and there in Aimeliik. When the airplanes came, we took refuge in the forest. Because our house was in an open space, it would have been dangerous to stay there.

*Interview: 9 January 2007, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA.*



## Story 39

Mechas Tengranger Oiterong

Born: 1928

Father: from Koror

Mother: from Peleliu



Mechias Tengranger Oiterong (2007)

### Memories of kindergarten

It is customary in Palau for a woman to give birth at her parent's house. So I was born in Peleliu, but grew up in Koror. When I was small, I was noisy and careless, and I always played around with boys.

I went to the kindergarten at *Honganji* temple. I remember that there were two teachers; one was Japanese and the other was Palauan. We sang songs, danced, and played. There was an elephant in the kindergarten. It had some stuffing inside, and a doll of Buddha riding it. We pulled the elephant here and there. In April, we ate *sekihan* [rice boiled with *azuki* beans to make the rice red; a Japanese dish for celebrations] in the kindergarten. The teacher told us to use *hashi* (chopsticks). I could use *hashi*, but those who couldn't tried to eat *sekihan* holding a chopstick in each hand. Some of my friends stopped going to the kindergarten, but I continued to attend.

### Memories of school

I went to Koror *Kogakko*. In the morning, the Japanese flag was raised, and Yohei-sensei rang a bell. We stood straight, and said, "We will be splendid Japanese!" and "We will be devoted [to Japan]."

I liked Hattori-sensei. She was gentle, not rough like the male teachers. Kamata-sensei was the strictest. When I was in the first grade, my teacher was Yohei-sensei. He was a Palauan assistant teacher. When I was in the second grade my class teacher was Hattori-sensei, and in the third grade I was taught by Yoshino-sensei. He was strict. When I wrote, I always hunched over the desk. One day he put a bamboo rod down my back, without saying anything.

Because I was too mischievous, the other children did not want to play with me. For example, I took their toys and ran away. When they said they wouldn't play with me, I took their beanbag when they tossed it to catch. On that occasion I was scolded by the teacher, and made to stand during the class.

I also played with Japanese children. It was fun to play with them, but again I was

mischievous and annoyed them.

### After graduating from school

I went to school for only three years. My grandmother said that I need not go to the *hoshuka* (advanced course), because I was a girl and would just be somebody's wife.

Though I did not go to school after graduating from the *honka* (basic course), I studied by myself through books. I liked reading, and went to the bookstore in Koror to buy books. When I was very young I read picture books, and when I grew older I read books written in Japanese. Some books show [a syllabic] reading of the difficult Chinese characters beside them, so I could read them.

Several years after graduating from school, I gave birth to my boy. We named him Benjamin. When he was very small, I had an Okinawan friend whose name was Mrs. Miyashiro. She also had a boy, Yukio. Sometimes we were invited to her house for a meal. I did not like to eat *konnyaku* (jelly-like food made from starch) at her house, because somebody said it tasted like cat. When we let our boys play together, Yukio called Benjamin, "*Tomin!*" (islander). Even though I did not know that '*tomin*' meant 'islander', I felt offended to hear this. Feeling that we had been insulted, I told my son to reply, "*Ryukyujin!*" [Ryukyu was the old name for Okinawa when it was a kingdom. Ryukyujin means Okinawan.] Then, the boys said to each other, "*Tomin!*" "*Ryukyujin!*" "*Tomin!*" "*Ryukyujin!*" Then Mrs. Miyashiro said, "He called your boy *tomin*, because you are actually *tomin*. Why do you get mad about that?" I replied, "Why do you get angry when we call you *Ryukyujin*? You are actually *Ryukyujin*, aren't you?" She responded with something in Okinawan dialect. I did not understand what she said, but they were swear words, I suppose.

### Memories of the war

During the first air raid, I was in Peleliu. My father had a Japanese friend in the military, and he told my father that the American airplanes would come on 29 or 30 March. They actually came, and bombed Airai, Ngerekebesang, and downtown Koror.

After a while, we were made to move to Babeldaob on the orders of the military. We went to Ngeremlengui in a military boat. We stayed in a cave at the foot of a high hill in Ngeremlengui. People in Ngeremlengui allowed us some of their taro-patches. In the old days, Palauans helped each other like this.

Because it was dangerous to go out to fish in the sea, the men could not fish. At that time, I ate freshwater eel for the first time in my life. The Japanese military took over our coconut trees, and they would beat us if we collected coconuts. We had to harvest our crops during the night, as if we were stealing them. However, we had relatives in Ngeremlengui, so they gave us some food. We did not have serious problems

getting things to eat.

During the war, I saw Japanese soldiers cooking rice gruel, but it looked like just hot water with leaves of sweet potato.

One time as we Peleliuans walked to Imeong hamlet in Ngeremlengui, we saw a Japanese soldier standing. I said hello to him, but he did not reply. He did not even blink his eyes. He was still alive but he was starved and could not speak. He was standing with a gun with a mounted bayonet. At his back was a wall of soil to lean on, and he was supported by that. I heard somebody who came after me say that there was the body of a Japanese soldier. I thought that it was him.

My brother who stayed in Melekeok had a Japanese friend. He was a soldier, and sometimes my brother gave him taro and other food. One day, this soldier came to my brother with *denges* (bitter and poisonous mangrove fruit) and three lizards in his pocket. He asked my brother to let him use the fire. He grilled the lizards and ate them. This is what I have heard from my brother.

Even though many soldiers starved, we foundhardtack which was already spoiled lying scattered around the Japanese base after the war. Why didn't they eat it before letting it spoil? I think that the Japanese commanders were not good. It is impossible to fight without eating.

Civilian people also starved. I have heard that some Koreans ate snails. They said it was hard to make snails edible.

I have heard that the Catholic Fathers were executed. I don't know the reason. Was it that their religion was bad? Japan might have been defeated because they killed the Fathers. They were punished by Heaven!

I also heard that a Palauan from Angaur was executed because he told somebody that he wished to escape to the American ship. He just said this, and because the person he spoke to reported it to the military, he was killed.

In addition to that, several old Palauans died from sickness. The life in the shelter was hard. There was not enough food, and it was cold.

I learned that the war was over from a newspaper. I don't know who brought this newspaper. I heard that the Americans had dropped atomic bombs and that many people died.

## **Palauan deities who protected Palauans**

In Palau, there are many deities. I know someone who was protected by a Palauan deity. His name was Shoichi Ueda. His father was Japanese and his mother was Palauan. He was drafted into the navy, and ordered to do a suicide attack with his airplane. For these attacks, they carried only enough fuel for one way, and would dive into the enemy's base. Before joining the military, Shoichi and his mother visited Ngiwal, where his aunt gave him a sacred red cloth. It was a protective charm of the Ngiwal deity. Shoichi kept

this cloth at all times, and attached it to the front glass of the airplane when he flew on his suicide mission. On his way to Saipan it became very cloudy, enough to lose visibility. He was ordered to return to base. The second time he went, a thunderstorm developed. He had to come back again. And the third time, he left for Okinawa; again, the weather deteriorated and he came back. Soon after that, the war ended. There was another young half Palauan and half Japanese man; his family name was Higa, I think that his first name was Shinichi. He also went on a suicide attack, but he was with Shoichi, so he also survived the war. Palauan deities used a red cloth as a charm.

### **Palauan ethics and their decline**

When I was young, Palauan society was well managed by Palauan ethics. If a man fell in love with a woman, he would tell the woman, and if she agreed to marry him, he would discuss it with his parents. Then the man's father would visit the woman's house, and ask permission from her parents. If they agreed, the man's father would give a piece of Palauan money to the woman's family, and the woman's parents would bring food to the man's family in return. This is the Palauan form of marriage. Having a child outside marriage was thought to be improper behavior. When we were young, men and women did not converse in public unless they were husband and wife.

Nowadays, young people don't talk to their parents about their marriage. They watch TV, and learn the American way. They think that America is a country of 'freedom'. Now they think that they can do anything freely. They don't even care about doing things that are wrong.

In the Japanese time, we lived by strict rules. Now, they smoke tobacco, and drink alcohol from the age of thirteen! Young Palauans like [the idea of] America, because they would be allowed to act freely. The Japanese time was strict. If we did something bad, we would be caught and jailed. At that time, they used an oil can as a toilet in the jail. Nowadays, jail is like a house. There is even a store in the jail!

When I was a child, Palauan ethics were still alive and we lived in an ordered society. But these days they are declining.

*Interview: 5 July 2007, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA.*

## Story 40

Mechas Kiyoko Kawai

Born: 1929

Father: from Tokyo, Japan

Mother: from Ngeremlengui



Mechas Kiyoko Kawai, with her husband  
Rubak Wilhelm Rengiil (Story 38) (2006)



Kiyoko in the 1940s  
(photo: Belau National Museum)

### My father

My biological father was Japanese, and his name was Yoichiro Kawai. He raised pigs in Ngeremlengui, and then he went to Saipan to do another business. I have heard that he died in Saipan during the war. I don't remember him very well, because I was raised by my mother's parents. They educated me in Palauan customs, and I only spoke the Palauan language.

### My life in Ngeremlengui

My foster father was Sulial and he was the first chief of Ngeremlengui, *Ngirturong*. When I was a child, people in Ngeremlengui followed traditional ways, and the traditional chiefs and their wives were highly respected. When the people met and ate together, they would not start to eat before *Dirturong*, the wife of *Ngirturong*, said, "Let's eat."

The food for *Ngirturong* was prepared only by his wife or the wives of his sons. It was not special food, but they kept *kukau* (taro) for the chief in a basket and nobody but the chief ate from this basket. When the villagers went fishing, they gave the biggest

fish to the chief. When we ate a fish together, the head of the fish was for the chief.

When I was an infant, I went everywhere with my father. Even when he had a meeting at the *bai* (meeting house), I went with him and stayed beside him.

There were only a few Japanese in our village, Imeong. But in Ngeremeskang there were many Japanese who worked for the pineapple plantation and cannery. Sometimes the Japanese people came to our village, and some of our villagers went to Ngeremeskang to work for the pineapple cannery. There were comings and goings between Japanese and Palauans.

## My life in Koror

When I turned eight years old, I came to Koror to go to school. I lived in my relatives' houses. When I was in first grade, I stayed in my uncle's house, and a year later I moved into another relative's house. I lived there with five or six other children. They were my relatives and they also stayed at that house to go to school in Koror. It was like a dormitory. I was educated for three years in the *honka* (basic course) at Koror *Kogakko*, and after that I studied the *hoshuka* (advanced course) for two years.

At that time, there were both traditional Palauan houses and Japanese-style houses. Some houses had high floors, and some houses were made from concrete. In our custom, there was a space in the house only for elders, and children were not allowed to enter this space. Even when Palauans lived in Japanese-style houses, they maintained this custom. The house I lived in when I was in first grade was a new-style house. There was a kitchen inside the house. And the house where I lived after entering second grade was also in the new style, and it had four rooms.

After coming back from the school, I did my homework, and I also did some domestic work in the house. For example, I cleaned the house, or washed the clothes. Even in the morning, the children staying at the house worked before going to school. I tidied the garden, and threw the trash away into the sea. At that time, the trash from the gardens was only leaves and other natural things, not like today. After doing our chores, we bathed ourselves, ate breakfast and went to school.

My relative's house was near the Koror *hatoba* [today's T-Dock]. Koror *hatoba* was a busy place at that time. The people from Babeldaob landed at Koror *hatoba*, and the people waiting to go to Babeldaob gathered there. By the dock there was an office of the co-op, and the people brought vegetables there. Also, some fishermen landed their catch at the dock.

My mother sometimes sent me food from Ngeremlengui. I knew when the boat would come from Babeldaob, and I went to the dock to check if there was something for me. I was looking forward to getting food from my parents. Sometimes my friend and I opened the box at the dock and ate some of the food there. My mother visited me once in a while. She came to Koror with tapioca, taro, sugarcane, pineapples from

Ngeremeskang, and other fruits and vegetables.

At that time, I had only Palauan friends. We played rope skipping, hide and seek, and *sesse* (a Japanese hand-clapping game) and other games. The fact that I am half Japanese and look Japanese has never bothered me. Sometimes when they teased me and said “Japanese! Japanese!”, I would say, “Yes, I am a Japanese woman, so what?”

### **After graduating from school**

After graduating from school, I came back to Ngeremlengui once, but soon after that I went back to Koror. At first, I worked as a domestic helper, but what I really wanted to be was a nurse. So, I started to work at Palau Hospital as a trainee. I studied basic medical treatment in the morning, and in the afternoon I helped the doctors and nurses. I took care of injured children, and I took care of hospitalized patients, for example. If the patients were Palauans who did not understand Japanese, I translated for them what the doctor said. I and some other Palauans worked at the hospital before the war came to Palau.

During the war, I stayed in Ngeremlengui, and I learned how to raise vegetables. My friend and I went to the taro-patch, and worked while there were no airplanes. When the airplanes came, we hid ourselves in our shelter which was camouflaged by leaves.

After the war, I went to Guam to train to be a nurse. Actually, I worked as a nurse until I retired because of my age in the 1990s.

### **Traditional Palauan ethics and their decline**

In Palauan ethics, the most important thing is to respect others. For example,

- (1) If somebody visits the house, the housewife should open the door. If children do that, it is not good manners. So, if a child goes to the door, we will block him or her and say, “No.”
- (2) The elders should be highly respected. When we pass in front of elders, we should bow to show them respect. But the young people today do not do that. And if we went fishing, we gave some part of the catch to the villagers, especially to the elders who couldn’t go to the sea.
- (3) It is also important to keep order in man-woman relationships. When I was young, my aunt told me, “If a man you don’t know speaks to you, you should ask him which family he belongs to. If he is your relative, it is bad to be too close to him.” Even now, if my brother visits my house when I am alone, I think of a reason to go out. In Ngeremlengui, there were designated areas for men to bathe, and others for women. When a man passed by a women’s bathing area, he would clear his throat

and say, “Alii!” If a woman was there, she would wrap herself with cloth or something.

- (4) Of course, the chiefs should be respected. In Ngeremlengui, while the chiefs were meeting in a *bai* (meeting house), the people would step down from the pathway as they passed the *bai*.

If somebody broke the rules, a chief who was in charge of punishment would decide how much punishment was appropriate for that incident. And he would order the family of the offender to pay money or to work. In this case, Palauan money was used. Nowadays, American dollars are also used to pay the fine. But if no Palauan money is paid at all, it is not very good.

I think that Palauan ethics are declining these days. Even theft is very common now. I did not feel that Japanese influence created any conflict with Palauan customs. But in recent years, Palauan customs are more and more deformed. For example, today’s *ocheraol* (money-raising party) is too costly. Because everybody spends a lot of money for *ocheraol*, they are ashamed if they do not spend much. If they do not have money, they even get a loan from the bank. *Ocheraol* was not like that before. When we supplied food, a basket of food was enough. Now, we prepare a lot of food, and we let it spoil.

*Interview: 28 June 2006. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA*



## Story 41

Rubak Ichiro Rechebei

Born: 1929

Father: from Airai

Mother: from Airai



Rubak Ichiro Rechebei (2006)

### My parents

My father was a carpenter. He learned carpentry from Japanese carpenters around 1919. In the early stages of the Japanese administration, the Japanese government summoned a Palauan man from each village, and taught them the Japanese methods of carpentry. My father also visited Japan as a member of *Kankodang* [a cultural tour group arranged by the Japanese government] in 1933. At that time, there were two Palauan students in Japan. One was Oikang from Ngarchelong, and the other was Brans from Airai. My father and other members of the *Kankodang* visited them, and my father gave 30 yen to Brans because they were both from Airai. In the same way, Temengiil from Ngarchelong gave money to Oikang.

My mother studied in the school of the German Catholic church, and she could speak German. My mother was a Catholic, as were my father and I. She cultivated her gardens, and she also sewed dresses with a sewing machine. She learned how to sew from the German Sisters. This hand-operated sewing machine was bought in Japan by my father in 1933.

Because I was almost blind, I did not learn fishing, but my grandfather was always with me; and he taught me the history of our ancestors, and how to make rope.

### Life in Airai

Not many Japanese lived in Airai before the war. But some Okinawan farmers lived there, and I played with their children. Especially, two Okinawan boys who lived near my house were good friends of mine. Their father was a charcoal burner. This charcoal burner's name was Kentoku Higa, and the name of one of his sons was Taiyu Higa. Okinawan people had original dialects, and when they were surprised, they said "Akisamiyo!"

Even though I did not go to school because of my blindness, I learned how to speak Japanese while I was playing with my brothers, sisters and friends. I also did *Kyujyo-yohai* (a greeting to the palace) in Airai. On New Year's Day, a Japanese flag

was raised, and we sang ‘*Kimigayo*’, the Japanese national anthem. When a young Palauan yelled, “*Kyujyo-yohai!*” we bowed toward the north, the place the emperor was. We also said some words, like “We are the children of the emperor!” This ceremony was conducted by *Seinen-dang* (Youth Association) in Airai. They had graduated from *kogakko*, and they knew how to do that.

Around 1941, a naval radio station was built in Airai, and about 60 navy personnel lived there. They often visited our hamlet, and asked for *melladel* (oranges) from our gardens.

## Wartime experiences

At the first air raid in March (1944), we hid ourselves among the banana trees. The Americans bombed out the airfield and the radio station in Airai, but the hamlets were not attacked. We took refuge on a rock island named Orrak, and in May, we were evacuated to the forest of Ngchesechang by order of the Japanese army.

The biggest problem was the shortage of food. Sometimes, we could eat *kukau* which the people of Ngchesechang gave us. We also ate *belloi* (bitter and poisonous wild fruit), *denges* (bitter mangrove fruit), *cherob* [?] (mushrooms), and also sea cucumbers. My sisters went to the forest to collect food.

I lost my grandfather and my mother during the war. My grandfather was more than 90 years old, but my mother was only 44. She had asthma but we had to live in the forest, which was cold and bad for her condition. In addition to that, there was no more medicine to block the attacks of asthma. When she died in the forest, my father made a coffin for her, and we buried her in Ngersuung, her home hamlet.

On August 16, a military officer named Ashiya visited our shelters and said, “The war is over. Americans dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. And the Emperor said ... ‘No more’ ...” This military officer was close to the members of *Seinen-dang*, so he informed the Palauans that the war was over.

After that, American airplanes did not shoot at us any more. On August 17, my father and his friend went out to sea to take *kim* (clams). Oh, my goodness! They took such a lot of *kim* in one day!

I think that it was good for the Japanese to lose the war. Now, the Japanese take the lead in the war of commerce.

## After the war

After the war finished, we went back to Airai, and my father built a lot of houses for the people. There were many Japanese still remaining in Palau, and some Japanese entertainers visited them to raise morale. I remember a show, which was performed by the musicians named ‘Yamaguchi Goro: father and son’; a group of women dancers named

‘Tenka Review’; and a comic actor named ‘Tokkan Kozo’. They played music, danced and sang songs in the field on Ngerikiil [?] Hill. I remember the women’s group ‘Tenka Review’ sang a song named ‘8.15’ which they had composed and written.

On another day, my brother and I went to Ngerikiil Hill, and came across the Okinawan people dancing and playing music. Many people were lighthearted after the war.

*Interview: 15 August 2006, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA.*

## Story 42

Mechas Maria Asanuma

Born: 1929

From: Koror



Mechas Maria Asanuma (the second from right),  
with her friends and the author  
(2006; photo by Takashi Mita)

### My education

I was raised in Ngermid hamlet in Koror. I would walk to the kindergarten in *Honganji* temple [in downtown Koror], which was a long way for a six-year-old girl. At the kindergarten, there were only Palauan children. There might have been another class for Japanese children. There was a Palauan teacher and a Japanese teacher. The Catholic priests did not want me to go there; they said that it was not good to pray to dead people's ashes.

In 1938, I started to go to *kogakko*. It was thirty minutes walk from my house to school. Sometimes, I went to school on the bicycle of the Ngermid postman. I could ride a bike because I had practiced it. At that time, I worked as a *renshusei* (trainee) in a Japanese family's house after school. One day, I asked Madam, "May I borrow your bike? My father is sick and I need to go and see him immediately." To tell the truth, my father was fine, but I just wanted to practice riding a bicycle. I borrowed the bicycle, and practiced it in the school grounds. I enjoyed it so much!

I liked dancing. Hattori-sensei taught us how to dance. Two of my friends and I danced to the music entitled '*Aikoku koshinkyoku*' (The March of Patriots). We performed this dance in front of many people in the hall named '*Wakabakan*'. It was like a cultural festival, and students from *kokumingakko* (school for Japanese children) also danced.

One day, we went to the navy hospital in Meyuns. At that time, the war had not yet come to Palau, but injured soldiers from battles in the outer islands stopped by in Palau on their way to Japan. We Palauan students went there to comfort the soldiers. I saw a soldier who wore bandages all over his body, only showing his eyes and mouth. The students danced all together, and after that, two of my friends and I visited every room and danced '*Aikoku koshinkyoku*'.

Once a year, there was a school fair where we exhibited clothes sewn by the girls, handicrafts such as coconut ashtrays made by boys, and other things. My older sister sewed dresses in my size, and Ogusu-sensei's wife bought all the dresses she made. This was because Ogusu-sensei's daughter was the same size as me.

I have a funny memory about a teacher. One day several girls, including me, were

asked to clean up the house of Yanagimatsu-sensei. He did not have a wife, and he did not know how to clean his house. When we were cleaning the house, we found many geckoes. Seeing the geckoes, Yanagimatsu-sensei jumped on the table, and told us to get rid of them. He was scared of the geckoes! The girls made a lot of drama as I intentionally dropped geckoes from the wall with a broom.

I did not work very hard in my house. I gathered coconuts for my family, but after that I played around; for example, swimming in the sea or jumping into the river, swinging out on a vine.

I remember a young Japanese woman who loved me as though I were her child. She was in her mid-twenties, and she had a child in Japan. She worked for *Kinneko* restaurant, where I worked as a domestic helper. When she was sick and hospitalized, I took care of her. When she missed her child, I tried to cheer her up by dancing and singing. She had a boyfriend in Palau. He was a Japanese man who worked for *Nanyo-kohatsu* (South Seas Development Company). Sometimes, she asked me to deliver a letter to him. I asked my brother to deliver it, and then the man would visit her at night.

*Kinneko* restaurant was on the back lane, which was also called *Geisha* street. In front of the restaurant was a brothel. Sometimes I was asked by a prostitute to take care of her daughter.

## Memories of the war

In the air raid in March (1944), downtown Koror became ‘the sea of fire’. But the second air raid in July seemed less intense at first. So, I left Aimeliik, where I had taken refuge, for Koror, to get something. I saw many tents for the soldiers set up on both sides of the street. I visited my uncle in Ngermid hamlet and he gave me sugarcane. While I was walking, I met Namita-sensei in a car. He said, “Maria! You have grown up, haven’t you?” He was my teacher in the *hoshuka* (advanced course). Because I wanted to talk with him more, I waited for him; but I saw several airplanes coming, so I went to the shelter in Ngermid.

The Japanese fired anti-aircraft guns from Ngermid, and it was very noisy. Palauans helped the Japanese as porters. At night, we went to a rock island; and from the next morning, they started the air raid. My uncle’s house in Ngermid was destroyed.

*Interview: 16 August 2005, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewers: Maki MITA and Nasuhiko YAMAGUCHI.*

## Story 43

Rubak Joseph Ilengelkei  
Born: 1929  
Father: from Ngaraard  
Mother: from Ngardmau



Rubak Joseph Ilengelkei (2007)

### What my father taught me

In Palau, the chief would take care of the people in the hamlet. Because my father was the first chief of Ngeklau hamlet in Ngaraard, people of the hamlet asked my father for food and money if they were in need. My father would help them because it was his responsibility. My father always told us, “You should always have some food prepared. When the people of the hamlet do not have food, they will come here and ask for help. When this happens, you should give them your food, even if you have none for yourself.” I helped my mother to cultivate plants. We raised crops not only for ourselves but also for all the people in our hamlet. My father caught fish with a trap, and he also cultivated the gardens. My mother went to the taro-patches or gardens after her children left for school, and my father helped her after finishing his duties. We also helped them after school. We worked very hard at that time.

I started school at the age of six. My older sister felt lonely because she did not have her brothers and sisters at school. At the same time, I really wanted to go to school. One day, I went to school with my sister; this was because I was very mischievous and my mother was angry, and told me, “Go to school with your sister!” At school, a teacher asked my sister, “Mari-chan, who is this black boy?” “This is my younger brother.” “What is your brother doing at school?” “He wants to study.” “How old is he?” “He is six years old.” Then, the teacher addressed me, “Boy!” I replied, “Yes! *Konbanwa!*” (Good evening). This was in the daytime. The teacher said, “Why *konbanwa?*” I said, “Oh! *Konnichiwa!*” (Hello). The teacher asked me, “Do you really want to come to school?” I said, “Yes! If it is possible.” The teacher said, “You smell of coconut oil, so wash your body with soap, and come.” At that time I wore a loincloth. I went home and asked my mother, “Please sew me some pants! I will go to school.” Because there was no money, my mother sewed my pants using a rice sack. I was proud of my pants, but other people could see that it was made from a rice sack, because of the printing marks.

I spoke Japanese before I went to school because I played with Japanese children near my house. We played *menko* (Japanese card game) on the road. When I was four

years old, I went to Ngardmau with my mother. In Ngardmau, there were many Japanese. When I was playing with Japanese children, a Japanese soldier watched us. I heard him say, “This islander boy speaks Japanese!” Pretending not to notice him watching me, I said to my Japanese friend, “No! You played foul again, you idiot.”

### Memory of *kogakko* (school for Palauan children)

I went to school in Ulimang hamlet in Ngaraard. Once we entered the school, we only spoke Japanese. The things my father taught and that the teachers taught were different. My father taught me the most important things in life, and the teachers taught me basic matters.

In school, we learned Japanese language, geography, and mathematics. The purpose of school was to teach Palauans to use the Japanese language, in order to make them effective workers.

I moved to Koror to study in the *hoshuka* (advanced course). I came to Koror on a boat called *Midori-maru* or *Yamato-maru* with my father. At that time, for the first time in my life, I saw cars and horses. These things astonished me. When I looked at a horse, I ran to my father and asked what it was.

My father and I took a taxi to our relative’s house. To me, it looked as if the poles and trees were running. I clung to my father and said, “Dad! Why are the coconut trees running?” It was as if I came to a town from an African jungle.

In Koror, I lived in the dormitory. The older students took care of the younger students. Every Saturday, we went to the park to cut the grass, and went to the *shinhatoba* (dock) and collected firewood in the mangrove area, and brought it to our dormitory. Grass-cutting was called *kinrohoshi* (work for the community), but collecting firewood was just our job.

Japanese education was very good, it was the best in the Pacific, I think. We learned the importance of working for pay from Japanese education. After school, I worked as a *renshusei* (trainee). We learned to deposit the money we earned from this work. On holidays, I withdrew my money from the bank and brought it to my parents in Ngaraard. The Japanese taught us that if we worked we would get something, but if we didn’t work, we would get nothing. I worked at a house in Medalaii as a *renshusei*. When I went there, Madam asked me to do chores. I cleaned the glasses, chopped firewood, tidied the garden, and so on. If I worked well, she gave me rice balls. One day, I forgot to wear a cap when I visited the house. I was told to go back to the dormitory for my cap. They had been asked by the government [or school?] to make sure the boys wore caps. I guess that it was to avoid using children who didn’t go to school.

They also taught us ‘competition’. “Without competing with others, you cannot excel.” This is what the teachers taught us. For example, the Japanese teachers told us, “You must act like a man because you are male.” “Don’t give up learning this, because



*Minatobashi* bridge between Malakal and Koror (photo: Belau National Museum)

your brain is not black like your skin.” Japanese teachers were more strict with boys. They struck the boys on the head with their fists. If I said “Hello” too quietly to the teacher, I would be scolded. I needed to say “Hello” with a clear and loud voice. It was also bad to talk to the teachers in too familiar a manner. If I said “How are you?” very frankly, the teacher would say, “What did you say?” It would be impertinent of us to speak like that to the teachers.

To the Japanese way of thinking, fighting between boys was not to be discouraged. When I learned *judo* (Japanese wrestling) in school, sometimes I used Palauan techniques. There was a Palauan technique to throw a person, and it was similar to the Japanese technique called ‘*tomoenage*’. One day, I had a *judo* bout with a Japanese boy. He was very strong, and my friends urged me, “Use your Palauan move!” When I threw him in this way, the teacher remarked, “That was a little strange. Where did you learn it?” “It is a traditional way.” The teacher said, “Don’t use this technique. For people of your age, this is dangerous. You might break bones if you fail to do it correctly.”

There was a bridge named ‘*Minatobashi*’ between Koror and Malakal Island. We boys in *kogakko* climbed the handrail of the bridge, and dived into the sea. When I looked down, several Japanese, including our teacher, were watching us. When we dived, a career officer threw money to us. Our teacher was also satisfied with our performances. He did not scold us, but said, “Well done, boys!”

Japanese education was good. What we learned in the Japanese school was very useful in our lives. The Palauan children of today don’t work very hard. I was told to



keep time in school. Because I was educated in the Japanese way, I thought that the Americans were loose or lazy when I saw them after the war. I am proud to have been educated in the Japanese manner.

## Palauan children and Japanese children

Palauan children often had fights with Japanese children. I have heard that in the early stages of the Japanese administration, Palauan and Japanese children studied in school together. But looking at the Palauan students, the Japanese might have thought that the Palauan students would get ahead of the Japanese children. Being afraid of this possibility, the Japanese separated the schools for Japanese and Palauans.

Sometimes, on our way to school we met Japanese children and fought. In school, we would talk about it with our classmates. “Our friend was beaten by a Japanese boy.” “They might come with their fellows!” The Japanese children came to us, and we clashed again. The Palauan students in Ngaraard were from the first grade to the third grade, but among the Japanese students, there were older boys. If they brought these older boys, we ran away.

After fighting, my father would ask me. “Did you have a fight with Japanese boys?” “Yes, I did.” “How did it go? Did it go well?” “Yes, well.” When we had a fight, the teachers of the *kokumingakko* (Japanese school) and *kogakko* had a meeting, and they punished both sides equally. We were happy to see that.

Japanese children were not as strong as Palauan children. We Palauans slept on the floor and always climbed coconut trees. If Palauan and Japanese children of the same age had a fight, we would usually win. My father told me, “Don’t fight with Japanese kids of your age. You are too strong for them, and it is unfair.” The Japanese said that Palauan children threw stones at the Japanese children. And we were instructed not to do that. My father also told me, “If you fight with your fists, that is fine. But if you use stones, it is not a fight anymore. It is a murder.”

I have heard that it was the idea of the teachers of *kokumingakko* to have a joint sports festival with *kogakko*. The Japanese teachers in *kogakko* were pleased to see that the Palauan children performed well in every event. But seeing the Palauan children were much better in all sports than Japanese children, the teachers of *kokumingakko* became negative about the joint festival. The same thing had happened in other fields. The Japanese taught Micronesian children how to calculate with a *soroban* (abacus). One day, there was a *soroban* competition in Tokyo, and several students from Japanese Micronesia also took part through radio broadcasting. At that time, Palauan students won twice. This competition was also broadcast in Japan.

The Japanese era was a good time for Palau, I think. By competing with Japanese students, Palauan students increased their skills. We should be good friends with others. If you have a papaya, you can share it with four friends. If there is a big piece, you

should give it to your friend. It is the Palauan custom.

## Days in agricultural school

After graduating from *kogakko*, I went to *Nantaku Tomin Nogyo Kunrensho* (South Seas Colonization Company Agricultural School). The school was in Ngetkib hamlet in Airai, and all the students were boys. I studied there for a year and a half; then, the war broke out.

I studied agriculture and other general subjects. There were also military studies. This didn't mean practicing fighting with guns, but brainwashing. For example, we learned about the story of General Nogi. He trained himself by taking cold water from a well every morning, from when he was a child. Like this, we learned about great persons in Japan; Hideyoshi Toyotomi, Masashige Kusunoki [both historically famous samurai] and so on. We also learned *kendo* (Japanese fencing) and *judo* (Japanese wrestling). The school was strict and vigorous.

From 8:00 to 10:00 in the morning, we studied at our desks. And from 10:00 to 12:00, we worked on the farm. We raised many animals; 2,000 fowls and ducks, 250 pigs, and so on.

Looking back on those days, now I can say that there was brainwashing. "Americans are evil and if I kill one or two Americans, I will be contributing to the country [Japan]." This is what I believed at that time. In the shelter, I kept it in mind that if the Americans landed I needed to kill some of them. Not only I, but everyone thought so. So, when the Japan surrendered, we cried from our hearts. I felt as if the Japanese were my father. When the war was over and the Japanese had to leave Palau, I was upset as if being separated from my parents. I was fourteen or fifteen at that time.

I learned about '*yamatodamashii*' (spirit of the Japanese). I think that it is a sort of determination. We learned it through *judo* and *kendo*. The teacher also told us, "If you think that you are men, you need to have *yamatodamashii*. Without *yamatodamashii*, you cannot be a Japanese man." We were brainwashed like this, and it was very dangerous. "Because you are now Japanese, you should do that in the Japanese way." "Don't do it like that! Stupid boy!" We were spoken to like this every day.

I learned Palauan values from my father, and Japanese values from Japanese teachers. So, in my mind, both values were mixed up. Even though Japan was defeated in the war, their value was great, I think. We have a song entitled 'Let Me Introduce Myself'. The lyrics say, "My first papa and mama were Spanish, next German, next Japanese, and now American." We don't expel the people who come to Palau. It is our custom. If somebody drifted from somewhere to Koror, this person would become a ward of the chief of Koror. If somebody came to Ngardmau, this person would be a ward of the chief of Ngardmau. We accepted foreign people in the same way. Spanish, German, Japanese ... they came to Palau looking for something good for themselves.

The good aspect of Japan was that they brought education. During the war, some of the military people did bad things, but before the war came to Palau, the Japanese did not distress us.

## Memory of the war

When Airai airport was attacked in March (1944), I was in school. On this day, Japanese planes named 'Palau' were expected to come to Palau, to celebrate the completion of the new airfield in Airai. So, when we heard the sound of airplanes before the sun rose, our teacher said, "It is the time when 'Palau' is due to arrive, isn't it?" So we shouted, "*Banzai! Banzai!*"

The sun was rising. It was still dark, but we could see airplanes shining in the sky. We Palauan students conferred in Palauan, "It is strange, those are star marks, aren't they?" We wore uniforms, puttees, and shoes, and we stood to attention with Japanese flags. The airplanes were shining, and suddenly they dived, and we saw stars on them! "Run away!" Right then, they started to shoot.

Everybody ran out, but I had to stay to open the gate and let out the domestic animals; including cows, goats, fowls, pigs and other animals. I got an order to do this from my teacher. When I opened the gate, the pigs, which had been reared by people, would not go out, and just grunted. I was sorry for them. Even after the animals went out of the gate, they just walked around the garden. I packed my clothes in a wicker suitcase, and went to my hamlet. My family was in the shelter.

The Airai airfield was bombed, and the oil tanks in Malakal were burned. The ships in Koror, and ships and warships in Meyuns were all bombed. During the war, the students of the agricultural school worked for the military; carrying messages and delivering rice, for example. Of course, the vegetables which we raised were supplied to the military. The agricultural testing grounds in Babeldaob, including my school, belonged to the navy. If the army requested food from the navy, we would take vegetables to them.

I know about a woman who had leprosy. Her name was Omlei [?], and she was from Ngardmau. She was sent to Ngerur Island. But her husband, whose name was Demk, missed her and often visited her secretly at night. She became pregnant and had to hide it from the Japanese who sometimes came to the island. Shortly before the baby was born, the woman told her husband to come to Ngerur Island in a week to pick up the baby. Soon after the birth, the baby was brought to Babeldaob by Demk. This baby was raised with my mother's breast milk, with me. We grew up together. During the war, lepers escaped from Ngerur Island, to several parts of Palau. This woman went to an island located in the north of Ngarchelong. The Japanese military decided to execute lepers, and a Japanese policeman and a Palauan guide went to the island where she lived. It was in the evening. The Palauan who guided the Japanese policeman heard the

last cry of the woman. She said, “Aa...” and died from being bayoneted in the chest. Before being executed, she was preparing her dinner, so her cleaned fish and washed rice remained there. The Palauan guide was told not to talk about the incident to others.

One day, two American airmen parachuted down. I was curious, and went to look at them. I hid myself, and secretly watched what was going on. I saw two Americans and three Japanese. Two of the Japanese were soldiers and one was a civilian worker. For the first time, I saw a man with brown hair and blue eyes. The Americans were talking to each other and they seemed not to know what would happen to them. When an American airman asked for a cigarette, a Japanese gave him one. The cigarette brand was ‘Hikari’. These Americans were taken to Ngatpang. I don’t know what happened to them after that.

We Palauans would take care of visitors. The chief of the hamlet is responsible for them. I learned this from my father. During the war, I met a Japanese child who was crawling on the road. I asked him, “What has happened to you?” The boy said, “Give me food, please.” “Can you walk?” “No, I can’t...” He had diarrhea, and his pants were dirty. I cried because I felt so sorry for him. I washed his bottom in the river, and carried him on my back and went home in Ngaraard. Looking at him, my mother said, “Oh, poor boy...” She heated water [to bathe him], changed his clothes, and had him eat. She made rice gruel from coconut milk and rice which was kept in our house. Because the boy could not eat by himself, my mother fed him little by little with a spoon. After he fell asleep, we watched him carefully. When he was getting better, she cooked fish and crabs for him. In two weeks, he could walk again, and his face was not bony any more. We took care of five Japanese children. At first, they were very thin and weak, but from staying at our house they became stronger. They regained their mischievous minds, and played around. The one I mentioned was about twelve years old, and the youngest was around nine or ten years old. My older sister sewed their shirts. After the war, the Americans made all the Japanese go back to Japan. It was very hard for the children and my family, especially for my mother.

## Religious beliefs

In those days, there were many varieties of religion in Palau. Traditional deities in each hamlet, *Modekngai* (Palauan religious belief), German Church (Protestant), Spanish Church (Catholic), Seventh Day Adventists (Protestant), Buddhism, and Japanese Shinto. Deities are deities everywhere in the world, so you should show respect. In Palauan it is called ‘*cheliid*’; in Japanese it is called ‘*kamisama*’. The names are different, and how to treat them is also different, but the sacred is sacred. When I was a child, I believed in *Modekngai*. My father changed his religion from *Modekngai* to Catholic, but later he went back to *Modekngai*. My mother was *Modekngai* and did not change her belief.

Those who believed in *Modekngai* would follow a lot of rules; food taboos for example. They used plants for medicine. The deity would tell a person to use a specific plant to treat the patient.

During the war, I met a person who had turned an American airplane away with a *Modekngai* charm. I also heard this story. Several Palauan people were sent to the outer South Seas [Pacific islands outside the former Japanese mandate, e.g. New Guinea]. Before leaving Palau, they were given some *Modekngai* charms. One day, they lost their way in the forest, and they prayed to the charms. Then, they saw a light in the forest, and it guided them back. When they returned to Palau, they went to thank the deity of *Modekngai*.

The charm of *Modekngai* was a piece of wood, or a red cloth. I had a red cloth as a charm even after the war. If you wanted to be protected by this charm, you had to behave appropriately. You could not drink alcohol, or fight with others. If you broke these rules, the charm would be taken away. When I was in Truk (Chuuk) after the war, I kept this cloth. When I took part in the sports festival, I wore it on my head, and I won my event. But one day, I lost this cloth. When I went to the person who mediated with the deity and asked for my charm to be returned, this person told me. “You know why your charm was taken from you, don’t you?” This person also said, “If you regret what you did, pray to the deity. One day, if you are favored, maybe ... [the charm will be restored to you].” So, I prayed to the deity.

I have heard a story from a Japanese man whose name was Mr. Shimonishi. He was in Ngardmau and worked as charcoal burner. He had a small shrine in his garden, and prayed to a Japanese deity. One day, his workplace was bombed by the Americans. Then, the Japanese deity came to him and reported to him, “The Palauan deities were on the American airplane, and they pointed out places and told the American airman, ‘Shoot there! And next, over there!’ Then the American airman attacked as directed. Palauan deities wore red loincloths and put combs in their hair.” Hearing this from a Japanese deity, Mr. Shimonishi was amazed and told this story to my sister’s husband. In each hamlet, there was a *ulengang*, a house of the deity. If we went there to pray, “My father, I have a wish ...”, then the deity would grant these wishes.

*Interviews: September 2005, 24 January, 6 and 26 February 2007, Koror. Conducted in Japanese, except third interview, in English. Interviewer: Maki MITA; except third interview, Richard WILLIS and Maki MITA.*

## Story 44

Rubak Lawrence Ierago Sr.

Born: 1929

Father: from Merir

Mother: from Pulo Anna



Rubak Lawrence Ierago Sr., with his wife (2007)

### My childhood

I was born in Echol hamlet on Ngerekebesang Island, and grew up in this hamlet. My father was a carpenter who had learned carpentry from the Japanese. My mother raised taro and tapioca. I learned fishing, especially throwing the net, from my father. Because my parents were from the Southwest Islands, I visited Sonsorol and Merir with my father. At that time, I met my grandparents.

After staying there for about eleven months, I came back to Ngerekebesang Island, and prepared for going to school in Koror. When I was in my hamlet, I spoke my parents' language at my house, but I also learned Palauan.

I was raised in the ethics of Southwest Islands and Palau. My parents did not beat their children, and they did not talk ill of others in front of children. I was always told to act nicely in another person's house. If I acted badly, it would be shameful for my parents. I learned to show respect to others; to lower my head when I passed between people, and to be obedient to the elders.

In my childhood, the seaplane port and dried bonito processing plants were in Ngerekebesang. Many Japanese, mostly from Okinawa, lived in Meyuns hamlet and Echang hamlet. Before the road to Echang hamlet was constructed around 1937, we had to climb the hill to go to Ngerekebesang hamlet. The causeway between Ngerekebesang Island and Koror Island was built when I was in the Southwest Islands; previously canoes were used for transportation. When my mother went to school in Koror, she swam there. When I started to go to school, there was a causeway already, so I could walk to school, and later I rode a bicycle.

### My school days

I started to go to school when I was ten years old. In the first and second grade of the *honka* (basic course), my teacher was Hattori-sensei. She was very nice! In third grade, I had Fukuoka-sensei, and in the *hoshuka* (advanced course), my teacher was Nameta-sensei. The headmaster was Kamata-sensei. I did not think that the teachers were strict.

They told us not to be late for school, to be tidily dressed, keep our hair short, don't be noisy, don't start fights, and so on.

From the second grade, I spoke only Japanese at school. Even at my house, I tried to speak Japanese with my mother and my brothers and sisters. We were sixteen brothers and sisters. Even though the teachers did not watch us at home, our friends might report to the teacher that we did not use Japanese at home. For me, Japanese was the third language.

My teachers called me Ierago. It is my real name which was inherited from my grandfather. Laurence is my Christian name. I was baptized when I was born. My parents were Catholics. There was a Catholic church in Merir; I myself went to the church in Ngerekebesang. Father Elias came from Koror on Sunday. He spoke Palauan.

In school, we declared, "We are the children of the emperor!", "We will be devoted [to Japan]!" and so on. I did not understand the meaning of these words very clearly. When I was in the third grade, *Nanyo-jinja* (South Seas Shrine) was built. I went there from school, and prayed. Father Elias did not say anything about that. Later, we did *Kyujyo-yohai* (a greeting to the palace) in the Catholic church in Koror. A senior naval officer came to the church, and after the Mass, we turned to the north and bowed to the emperor. The Catholic Fathers also had to do that. I understood that the emperor was not the deity, but something like a president.

After school, I worked as a *renshusei* (trainee). At first, I worked for Mr. Nomura who worked for the weather observatory, and later, I worked for a Japanese policeman. At first, the payment was 5 sen a day, but by the time I graduated from school, it had been raised to 10 sen a day. I deposited a part of my income, and I bought Japanese snacks with the rest of the money. My favorite was Japanese crackers! After working as *renshusei*, I went home and helped to do domestic chores; collecting firewood and tidying the garden, for example.

On New Years Day, we went to school to celebrate the New Year. We sang a song entitled '*Toshino Hajime*' (The Beginning of the Year) together, and we were given Japanese *mochi* (rice cake). It was very tasty! In the New Year, sometimes we could get *mochi* for free on the streets of Koror. I also liked Japanese rice very much. Sometimes, we bought rice and ate it with soy sauce. I liked soy sauce too!

At that time, we played baseball, football, *sumo* (Japanese wrestling), hide and seek, and so on. Sometimes we played with Japanese children. Of course we fought sometimes. But it is natural, we were children at the time! Occasionally, we experienced discrimination from Japanese. At that time, Palauans were scared of Japanese people. I felt that the Japanese were '*kokumin*' (nation) and different from '*tomin*' (islanders).

## Days in Mokko

After graduating from *kogakko*, I went to *Mokko Totei Yoseijyo* (Mokko carpentry

apprentice school). At first, I wanted to study in the carpentry course. But I was assigned to the mechanical engineering course. So, I told my teacher I wanted to give up studying in *Mokko*. Kamata-sensei came and asked me, “Why don’t you want to study in the mechanical engineers’ course?” I told him, “I want to study carpentry, because my father is a carpenter. I think that studying engineering is useless for me.” He said, “Is your father a carpenter? Then, how about staying in *kogakko* for another year? Then, I will let you study in next year’s carpentry course.” I said, “No,” Then he said, “How about studying for six months in the mechanical engineering course? And if you still want to be transferred, I will let you change to the carpentry course.” So, I agreed to his plan.

The first thing I learned in the mechanical engineering course was forging. I made a short sword, a knife, and with teachers watching, I made a Japanese sword. Making a Japanese sword is very difficult. We divided the hot iron, put a wire inside, and two of us hammered the iron to make it flat. Later, I learned about being a mechanic; we dismantled a Toyota car, cleaned it, and reconstructed it. I also learned to drive a car. Six months later, Kamata-sensei came to me and asked, “Do you still want to study in the carpentry course?” I said, “No, I don’t want to transfer any more.” He said, “Really?” Studying mechanical engineering was very exciting. I am impressed by the fact that Kamata-sensei remembered the promise.

I lived in the dormitory when I was in *Mokko*. The students came from a variety of islands; Yap, the Marshalls, Ponape, Saipan, Truk (Chuuk), and Palau. Only my cousin and I were from Sonsorol. We stayed together, and it was great fun. When the war was coming, we prepared for the war. We learned how to carry the injured and how to treat them.

## The war

When I was in the second grade of *Mokko*, the first air raid came. It was terrible! I saw fires here and there. Fuel tanks in Malakal, vessels, everything was destroyed. Our school was also attacked. We took refuge in our shelter. Palauan students went back to their parents, but I stayed with my friends from other islands.

When the second air raid came in July, I was in a place called ‘Ringyo’ in Aimeliik. We, the students of mechanical engineering, worked for Hachimaru troop. Because this troop was in charge of distributing food, we were able to get some food supplies. My duty there was to collect fish which were killed with dynamite by the others. At night, we went to Ngerekebesang Island, Ngeremlengui and other places to collect fish, and we brought them to Aimeliik. This troop did not have problems getting food.

One day, we were making hoes beside the road. Because of the smoke from the iron, the Americans spotted us and attacked. I was blown into a hole. Soon after that, someone else jumped on me. After the shooting had stopped, this person told everybody to come out. I found that he was a Captain. Seeing that we were under attack, he dashed



to us. Fortunately, none of us died in this attack. People don't die so easily!

I was with this Japanese troop until the end of the war. I learned that the war was over in a message from Ngatpang headquarters. I felt relieved to hear that.

After the war was over, I was ordered to go to Angaur by the Americans. I still thought that going to Angaur was dangerous. I did not trust the Americans at that time. But when I went to Angaur, I met my parents. My family had taken refuge in Ngemelis Island, and fortunately, soon after that, they were discovered by the Americans and captured. But one of my younger brothers died from a sickness in Peleliu.

*Interview: 5 February 2007, Ngerekebesang. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA.*

## Story 45

Rubak Techitong Rebuluud

Born: 1929 [? from his story, possibly earlier]

Father: from Ngatpang

Mother: from Ngatpang



Rubak Techitong Rebuluud (2006)

### About my father and mother

I was born in Ngimis in Ngatpang. My father worked for Mr. Ueki, a Japanese sawyer. Because my father did not go to school and did not speak Japanese, my brother or I helped him as a translator when he went to buy tools. My mother planted taro and pineapple, and sold them to an agricultural cooperative. Every week a boat came to collect her crop, and she was paid at the beginning of the month for what she had sold. Even though my father worked in Koror, he came back to Ngatpang on the last Saturday of every month. When I was very young, my father taught me how to make *biskang* (spears) and *derau* (small fishing nets). When we made *derau*, we used the bark of a tree named *chelmal*. We soaked the bark in the sea or in the river, let it rot, and then washed it to extract the fiber.

### My school days

I went to school in Koror for three years. Every morning, we sang ‘*Kimigayo*’ [the Japanese national anthem] while the Japanese flag was raised to the top of the pole. We had to sing slowly, because we could not stop singing until the flag reached the top. I learned about *tenno* (emperors) in the classroom. Meiji-tenno, Taisho-tenno, and Showa-tenno... I knew that Showa-tenno was born on April 29. I learned it like this, “April 29 is *Tencho-setsu*, the birthday of the Showa-tenno, a joyous day.” At the *Kyujyo-yohai* (a greeting to the palace), we bowed to the north, and chorused several patriotic phrases. For example, I said, “We will be devoted [to Japan]!” My parents also told me that without devotion we could not fulfill our filial duties. So, I knew that devotion was important, even before going to school.

When we reached third grade, we started to work at the houses of Japanese officials after school. Families which wanted to have a Palauan *renshusei* (trainee) applied to the school, and the teacher selected an appropriate child. I went to the house of Mr. Kouichiro Shimizu. Mrs. Shimizu was very hot-tempered, and got mad at her husband frequently. But Mr. Shimizu was very gentle, and he did not talk back to his wife. Mrs.

Shimizu even threw a glass at him! But she was kind to me. I learned how to heat the bath, how to cut firewood, and how to build a fire in a Japanese portable clay cooking stove. I also learned how to tend the garden and how to clean the room. I was paid 5 sen for one day, coming to 1 yen 50 sen a month. At that time, you could buy a shirt and pants for less than 1 yen. We could buy an ice cake or donut ball with the change. Two boxes of matches were 3 sen, but one box was 2 sen, because they did not use any smaller denomination than the sen in Palau.

## Memories of my Japanese friend

I had a good Japanese friend. His name was Kenjiro Ozawa. He was two years older than me. Even though he was my neighbor, I first met him at the Koror dock. Both of us enjoyed fishing, and because his fishing line had snapped, I gave him half of the fish which I caught. I took him to Ngatpang, my home for two weeks during the holidays. At that time, the ban on gathering *semum* (trochus shell) was removed. So we went gathering *semum* together. I also stayed at Kenjiro's house. In the wartime, he was drafted into the army. Even though we were in different units, I met him sometimes and gave him leaves of sweet potato and other vegetables. Kenjiro died on the Yamato Bridge. At that time I was close by, and I heard the bomb and machine guns. Kenjiro's fellows and I burned his body, and put his ashes in a box with his name on it. I brought his ashes to his family in Koror.

## Work experience and training as a soldier

After graduating from school, I went back to Ngatpang, and worked for a Japanese company named *Awa-Shoji*. This company dried the bark of mangrove trees for export to Japan. I did not know what it was for. Because I was only twelve years old, I did not work in the mangroves. My task was to dry the mangrove bark. Many Japanese and Okinawans worked there, but not many Palauans. I worked there until I turned sixteen years old.

After that, I went to my village again, and started to work for the Japanese armed forces in place of my father, because he was sick. I was dispatched to the dock, where people loaded ships with coal. I carried drinking water for the workers. I grasped four bottles together in each hand.

In 1942, there was a recruitment for *Kirikomi-tai*, a Palauan troop. I was trained there for a year and three months, and finished training in 1944. There were two troops of *Kirikomi-tai*, and fifty-seven people including me belonged to Western troop. The leader was Captain Koike. In *Kirikomi-tai*, we especially trained on rainy or windy days. For example, we practiced crawling on our elbows and knees holding a gun in one hand. A soldier fired above us, but the bullets were made of wood. We also practiced

swimming while carrying a weight. We made a box, put mud inside it, and at night we swam Ngatpang channel with this box, leaving it at the entrance of the channel. Then, the next party went there and retrieved the box. Those who practiced this could carry a bomb easily. I was only seventeen, and I was heedless and rough. I did not imagine I might die or be injured. I did not think about death, and just did my duties. I thought that my duty was to shoot a gun and hurl myself at the enemy with a grenade. Of course I knew that I might die if I did this. But I did not care very much about protecting my life.

### **As a Palauan soldier**

After the first air raid in March, some soldiers came for me in Ngatpang, and I was dispatched to Sato troop, which was a *Gohei-dan* (guards) unit. I was the only Palauan in this troop, all the others were Japanese. One of the missions of this troop was to help the army to across the river. Eight people were in one group, and we carried horses, soldiers and guns on a raft across the river. At the deepest part of the river, the water level was over my head.

From May to June in 1944, several times we landed in Peleliu by stealth, to help the Japanese troops. At night, a group of nine soldiers went to Peleliu by barge. It took two to two-and-a-half hours from Ngerechong Island. The Americans were based on the beach. We scaled a cliff, and visited Hasegawa troop, Sakura troop, and Imano troop.

On Peleliu, I met a Japanese woman who was called Yo-chan. She told me her real name was Yoshiko. She was a mistress of Captain Hasegawa, and she was with Hasegawa troop. She used to work in 'Parao-kan', a brothel in Koror. There were many brothels in Koror. She told me that she was sold by her father to another family to cancel her father's debt, and this family sold her to a brothel. She told me that when she came to Palau, she did not have any hope in life. She came to Peleliu with Captain Hasegawa because she thought that she could benefit Japan if she fought alongside the soldiers. She bound her chest with a cloth to make her breasts flat, shaved her head, and wore a soldier's uniform. Later, I heard that the Americans found her body after a battle.

When I was in Peleliu, I fought with the Americans sometimes. But it was dark, and we just shot in the direction from which they shot at us. Sometimes, it was bright from a flare bomb. While we were quite far apart, we shot at one another without seeing each other. Their machine guns shot much faster than ours.

My fellows in Sato troop called me Tetsuji. Captain Sato gave me this Japanese name. Because I was only about seventeen years old and I was the youngest, they were kind to me. One day, I told a comrade that I was willing to give up my life at any time. Mr. Arai, who was about thirty, replied, "Don't be foolish. If Japan wins the war, people will understand your feelings and respect you. But if we are defeated, what will happen? If we are defeated and you have lost your life, who then will appreciate these

sentiments?” He lost his leg in the war.

I was injured in June 1944, at night. A bomb from an enemy airplane exploded behind us in Peleliu. I was carried to our camp in Ngatpang, and brought to a hospital in Ngeremlengui by horse. I lost a toe, and had several shell splinters in my left side. In the hospital they had anesthetics, but all the hypodermics were broken. So I was held down by several men, and the doctor extracted each shell splinter. The doctor said, “You can cry and shout. I don’t say to ignore the pain. But I need to remove these shell splinters, or you will die.” When I went back to Ngatpang after the treatment, I could not feel anything with my foot. I could not tell whether or not my foot was touching the ground. After that, I did not return to Peleliu. I shot at the enemy’s airplanes in Ngatpang. The big machine guns which we used are displayed in front of the Police station today.

My wounds did not heal for two months after the war. I cured them with Palauan medicine. But I did not regret my injuries.

It seems that I was the only one who joined a Japanese military unit from the western group of *Kirikomi-tai*, the Palauan troop. Many of the soldiers of Sato troop were from Saitama prefecture, Japan. In this troop several soldiers, including my friends, were killed. Four of my friends were wounded, and died of their wounds after the war had ended. By then, the rest of Sato troop had already left for Japan. So I cremated them, put their bones in wooden boxes, put their names on the boxes, and wrapped them in white cloth. Japanese soldiers of another troop helped me. After the war, I brought their bones to Japan. One of them was my team-mate, and his name was Imaichi Yamamoto. In *Gohei-tai*, we worked in teams of three, and if one was injured, the other two were to carry him. Yamamoto was shot in the leg and died. I knew his address in Japan, so in the 1980s I brought his remains and a photograph to his family. Yamamoto left his father’s Japanese sword in my care before he died. I returned it to his sister when she visited Palau after the war.

Do you know a song entitled ‘*Umiyukaba*’? In this song, the lyrics are, ‘When I go to the sea, I find the bones of the soldiers scattered in the water. But they can’t go home, to Japan. When I go to the mountain, I find many soldiers at rest beneath the grasses. But they can’t go home, to Japan.’ Even though I am Palauan, I can’t help weeping when I hear this song. This feeling is deeper than those which are called ‘*omoide*’ (memories). Even now, when I talk about my experiences in the old days, I feel as though I am walking through the forest, not sitting in this office.

## My sentiments about Japan

When the Showa-tenno passed away in the 1980s, Etpison and I went to his funeral as representatives of Ngatpang. I don’t know if other hamlets also sent anyone to Japan. I was given a belt and a photograph of the emperor’s family in his memory.

I don’t know how other people feel, but I have loved the Japanese people with all

my heart. I learned many things from the Japanese. I learned how to get along with people, and to this day, I do not talk ill of others. I have conducted my life in the Japanese way, and educated my children in the Japanese manner. I named my first son 'Okada'. When he was born in December 1945, Captain Okada was in Ngarchelong, and he told me, "I want you to give him my father's name 'Yoshio'." So my son was originally named Yoshio. But I renamed him 'Okada'. Okada is a family name in Japan, but I don't care. I liked Captain Okada very much; he was a very good-looking man.

*Interviews: 12 and 13 September 2006, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA.*

## Story 46

Mechas Nina Antonio  
Born: 1930  
Father: from Melekeok  
Mother: from Melekeok



Mechas Nina Antonio (2006)

### Japanese education

I studied at Melekeok *Kogakko* for three years, and then at Koror *Kogakko* for two years. I think that Japanese education was good. Our teachers told us to act as schoolchildren, and not to imitate adults. For example, girls in school should not wear a shirt without sleeves. This would make a girl look like an adult woman, and it would not be suitable for a schoolgirl.

In Melekeok *Kogakko*, there was one Palauan teacher and three Japanese teachers. Speaking Palauan at school was prohibited in Melekeok. One day, I used a word ‘*boku*’ for myself, and was advised not to use this word because I was a girl [*boku* means ‘I’, but is a masculine form]. We spoke in Palauan when we were at home, but sometimes our teacher said, “Please use only Japanese at home today.”

Because Japanese education was strict, we learned everything very quickly. Today, they say that Japanese education was too strict, but I think that it was good to learn this way. Look at today’s American education! It does not work, does it? I believe that children should be educated strictly. Otherwise, they do not develop a sense of responsibility.

I remember that my Japanese teacher said, “Now, we are in the last 5 minutes!” near the end of the class. It means that it was time to stop working, and to tidy up the room. Now, I say the same thing to my children. I like the Japanese way.

When the bell rang, we entered the classroom, and we did not make noise. I appreciate the Japanese style of education. The teachers were not blindly strict. They trained our minds. Students should be student-like. Humans should be human-like, because they are not beasts.

In the cleaning hour, we cleaned up our classroom, and restroom. Sometimes, we mowed the grass with a *kama*, a reaping hook. When the teacher said, “Last 5 minutes!”, then we stopped working, cleaned the tools we had used, and put them where they should be.

### Education at home

When I was a child, my brother told me, “Only after finishing your homework can you

go out to play.” And we came back home before the lanterns were lit. When we came home, we had to collect some firewood or coconuts. If we did not do that, we were not allowed to eat at night.

At home, we did everything on the floor. After eating dinner on the floor, we cleaned it, and studied on the floor and then slept on the floor. Cleaning the floor and inside the house was the children’s job at my home.

What our parents told us was not very different from what our teacher told the students. At home, my mother said to keep the room in order, and at school our teacher told us to pick up trash when you found it.

## School and the war

When the war was coming, the government ordered Palauan students back to their homes. So, I went back to Melekeok, and continued to study there. But we could not study very well at that time, because we had to raise vegetables, and do other things to prepare for the war. For example, we practiced lying down quickly in case they dropped a bomb near us. I graduated from *kogakko* in Melekeok.

## About the war

In March 1944, we moved into the forest to take refuge. We carried mats, a pot, clothes and other things from our house to the shelter in the forest. We changed our shelter twice, and we moved into a deeper part of the forest.

From July, the Americans attacked Palau every day. After taking Peleliu and Angaur, they began air patrols over Babeldaob from around 6:00 a.m. We went to our hamlet to harvest taro and tapioca, but we had to move under cover, to hide ourselves from the airplanes. We left our shelter around 3:00 a.m. for our hamlet. We had to pass by the farm and houses which belonged to *Nanyo-kohatsu* (South Seas Development Company), and the Americans attacked there around 6:00 to 6:30 a.m. To pass the place before the airplanes came, we left our shelter at 3:00 a.m. After harvesting taro and tapioca, we brought the baskets of the harvest to a preselected place. It was around 7:00 a.m., and the sun was already up in the sky, which meant it was dangerous to go back to the shelter. So, we just waited there until the night came.

My brother and his buddies who worked as fishermen for the Japanese army came to this place around 9:00 or 10:00 a.m., and they carried the baskets on a raft and hid them in the mangroves. At night, they carried the baskets to our shelter by raft. We did this dangerous trip once or twice a week.

One day, I said to the Japanese schoolmaster, “Why? Why do we have to suffer such difficult conditions? This war has nothing to do with Palauans.” Then, after thinking for a long time, he said, “Well, unfortunately we are in a war. But we can’t do



anything about that. Please be patient. This war might end in the near future.” At that time, I was fifteen or sixteen years old. Since I was experiencing a very hard time, I had spoken out without thinking.

### **The shortage of food**

During the wartime, everybody suffered from a shortage of food. I saw Koreans working in Ngaraard who were only skin and bones. Some of them sat down under the trees, and died. We looked at them and felt very sorry.

We Palauans knew how to find edible things, but the Japanese did not. I don’t know what they ate, but everybody was very, very thin. Both soldiers and civilians were thin, and it was even hard to distinguish one person’s face from another’s.

One day, I went to Ngaraard to get crops from our garden, and I noticed somebody in our hut. He was a Japanese airman. He was very skinny and looked very weak. He was just sitting on the floor, and looking at a picture of his family which he had leaned against a column in the hut. I showed him bananas and said, “Please eat them.” He replied, “No, thank you. I am dying. I don’t want to take food from you.”

I went back home, and told my sister and brother about him. We had a brother who went to New Guinea to work for the Japanese military and died there. My sister remembered him, and said, “Bring this food to that airman and let him eat. If he eats something, I can feel as if my brother is also eating something, somewhere in New Guinea.” This time, my brother went to the hut, and tried to persuade the airman to eat. But the airman would never accept our food. The next day, when we visited the hut, we did not see him anymore. He had left, but I wondered how far he could walk.

We cannot say that the Japanese military personnel were all bad. Just like all people in one society are not the same, there were bad people and also good people among the Japanese military. Especially when they suffered from hunger, it will have been hard to act nicely. We should understand this.

Of course, we had troubles caused by the Japanese military. For example, we were not allowed to go inside the restricted area which was established by the military. So, we could not approach some areas of where we used to live. In this area, there were banana trees and other edible plants. Because we did not have enough food in the forest, it was a problem.

### **My brother’s death in New Guinea**

My brother was a member of *Kirikomi-tai*, a unit of Palauans, and he worked for the Japanese military [this unit is assumed to be *Teishin-tai*, see endnote <sup>9</sup>]. His name was Ongino Ruloked, and he died in New Guinea when he was around thirty-two years old.

There was a recruitment drive, and from Melekeok five or six young men volun-

teered, including my brother. I think that my brother thought he should work for the government.

I really wish I knew where his burial site is. My brother left his wife who was four months pregnant. And my mother, who relied on her son very much, became sick after hearing of his death. Her hands and legs were paralyzed, and she became unable to do anything for herself. A Japanese military doctor examined my mother, and he asked me, "Does she have any anxiety?" I told him, "Yes! My mother lost her son recently." Then the doctor said, "That's the cause!" He gave my mother an injection, and she became better. But she was not as she had been before. I had to take care of her, so I could not go to school after the war.

### **Japanese children during the war**

During the war, there were many tragic incidents. I remember two Japanese children whom I met in Asahi hamlet. I knew that they were the children of Mr. Mamori, a teacher at *kogakko*. He had lost his wife, and he raised his two sons. They were still very small, maybe around seven or eight years old. When I met the two boys, I cried. They were not wearing clothes. I asked them, "Who takes care of you?" They answered, "Our uncle." I felt very sorry for them, and said, "If possible, please come to my house." The older boy did not say anything, but the younger boy said "Yes."

After coming back to my home, I said to my brother, "Please go to Asahi hamlet, find two Japanese boys named Yoshiyuki and Takuji, and bring them to this house." My brother asked me why. So, I said to him, "They are my teacher's sons, and they seem to be poorly cared for. So, I want to take care of them." My brother went to Asahi hamlet, but he could not find them. That was the saddest incident for me. They were very thin, I am so sad about them even now ....

Many Japanese children were brought up by Palauans. A few years ago, I was asked by a Japanese woman, who grew up in Palau, to help her as a translator when she met her uncle who had come to see her from Japan. Because she was raised by Palauans, she could not speak Japanese well enough. She married in Palau, and she had many children and grandchildren, and the whole family prepared to welcome their relative from Japan. To see this, her uncle looked happy but at the same time he looked a little bit sad. He said to her, "You already have your life in Palau, and you might be better not to come back to Japan. That is fine. I can come and see you at any time. If you need any help, please ask me." She could see her uncle in Japan, but even now, some people cannot find their Japanese relatives.

*Interview: 18 July 2006, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA.*

## Story 47

Mechas Iwesei Rengechel

Born: 1930

Father: from Koror

Mother: from Koror



Mechas Iwesei Rengechel  
(2006; photo by Takashi Mita)

I grew up in Meyuns hamlet in Ngerekebesang Island. My father worked for *Nanbo* (South Seas Trading Company) as a cook. My mother worked in her taro-patches and gardens. I did not learn how to raise taro, tapioca and other vegetables when I was a child. When my mother went to her taro-patch, she asked someone to take care of me.

### My school days

I studied at Koror *Kogakko* for three years. When I was a student, I woke up early in the morning, and swept around the house before going to school.

Because I did not like bags, I carried a backpack to school. I also wore shoes at that time. The causeway between Koror and Ngerekebesang was already constructed, and I walked on it every day. When I was passing by the Palau branch office of the *Nanyo-cho* (South Seas Government), I looked up at the clock on the top of the building. It was about fifteen minutes walk from there to Koror *Kogakko*. If it was raining, I walked under the eaves of stores along the street.

Among the subjects we learned in school, I most liked dancing and singing. Hattori-sensei, a female teacher, taught us how to dance with music. Sometimes, we danced holding small Japanese flags in our hands.

In school, we raised pigs, cows and horses. Even during the holidays, students from Koror had to take care of the animals. Students from Babeldaob went home in the holidays. We also raised vegetables in our garden. It was hard to cut grass with a sickle.

After school finished, I sometimes visited *Nanbo* (South Seas Trading Company) on my way home, and saw my father working there. He gave me some money, and I bought *aberabang* (oil bread), shaved ice with sweetened syrup, ice cream, or *karinto* (fried dough cookies). I ate them on my way home.

One day, somebody who was related to the Japanese emperor came to Palau. I don't remember the name of this person. When he came, we students made a line and bowed deeply, so that we could not see his face at all.

When I was a third grade student, my father passed away. Because my mother did not have a paid job, we became very poor. So, I could not go on to the next stage of school. After that, I helped my mother at home until the war came.

### **About the war**

During the war, people in Meyuns went to Ngerberruuch hamlet in Aimeliik. First of all, they built a *bai* (meeting house), and after that many houses were built. Even now, there are several graves of the people from Meyuns in Ngerbeluu. They were from Meyuns, and died during the war. Some of them were children, and some of them were old people. When the food became scarce, we ate *belloi* (bitter and poisonous wild fruit) in the forest, and also *denes* (bitter fruit) from mangrove trees. To make them edible, we had to leave them in a river for more than a day after cooking.

### **My religious belief**

My religious belief is *Modekngai* (Palauan religious belief). Even though there are many religious beliefs in Palau today, I have only believed in the Palauan deity. My mother was also a believer in *Modekngai*.

*Interview: 9 August 2006, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA.*

## Story 48

Mechas Ngerair Kozue Rechelulk

Born: 1930

Father: from Ngaraard

Mother: from Koror



Mechas Ngerair Kozue Rechelulk,  
with her granddaughter  
(2007; photo by Takashi Mita)

### Life in Koror

My father had an apartment with six rooms in Koror, and rented the rooms to Japanese. There were three wells on the apartment site. The rent was 30 yen per month per room. My father took the income from four of the rooms, and gave my brother and me the income from one room each.

30 yen was a lot of money for a child. We could buy two pieces of twisted donut for 5 sen [1 yen is 100 sen], a plate of sweetened shaved ice for 5 sen, and a large oil bread for 10 sen. Even though I had 30 yen a month, I bought only small things, such as hair-clips. I was afraid of using money. When I needed a dress, I went to a tailor named Futabaya with my father. They made high quality dresses. We bought a dress for 10 yen. It was expensive, but I could wear it for a long time. I ordered a dress twice a year. I wore them only on special occasions; such as church services. I bought my shoes in *Nanbo* department store. The shoes were about 1 yen and 50 sen. Because I did not like shoes with laces, I wore shoes with buttons. I bought my underwear in Yamaguchi store. We could buy undershorts for 50 sen. We wore these every day, even when we swam. It was a new custom for Palauans. I don't think that the Japanese men wore underwear. They wore *fundoshi* (a loincloth), I think. Palauan men also wore *fundoshi* but their way of wearing it was different. In the Japanese time, sometimes Palauan men also wore *fundoshi* in the way that Japanese fishermen did.

At that time, if we had 10 to 20 yen, we could have a high standard of living. Electricity cost only 1 yen a month. We did not need anything special. If we had enough money to pay for medical care, it was enough. We produced much of what we ate or used. For example, we extracted oil from coconuts. At that time, we ate Palauan dishes. My mother made *brak* (giant taro), *kukau* (taro) and *diokang* (tapioca), and my father caught fish. Another dish was *berdakl*; fish soup with salt. Because I did not use most of my income, I kept money in my trunk, and gave it to my mother.

In the Japanese time, Koror was a town. Many stores stood side by side, and if we went under the eaves, we would not even get wet if it rained. There was a book store, a bike shop, a photo studio, and there were fish stores, general stores, grocer's shops, and

other stores. Many Okinawans lived in the back lane of Koror. After work, they drank a little alcohol, and played the *sanshin* [traditional stringed instrument of Okinawa]. I liked this custom of the Okinawans.

At that time, Palauan people went everywhere on foot. There were few cars in Koror. One car was for the director-general of the *Nanyo-cho* (South Seas Government), another was for the government office, two cars were taxis, and three trucks were for official people. There were also two public buses. There were bus-stops, and we used the bus for transportation in Koror. It was 10 sen for one ride.

At the house of the director-general, there were two horses. I was afraid of them. In Palau, there used to be no horses; but when Kyushu Division of the Japanese army came to Palau, they brought five hundred. The horses made noise from 4:00 in the morning, and interrupted my sleep. They stayed in Palau for about two months, and suddenly disappeared. I guess that they left at night.

Because my house was located in the center of Koror, many Japanese lived around me. We Palauans spoke Palauan at home, and Japanese when we were out. In the hospital, in the bus, wherever we went in Koror, there were many Japanese. The number of Japanese increased, and they made a second school in Koror which was only for Japanese children.

### **What my mother taught me**

I learned Palauan customs, cooking and other traditional matters from my mother. In Palau, if somebody you didn't know passed by your house, you would say, "Hello, where are you from? How about coming into my house?" If this person said, "I came from Ngerekebesang hamlet", then we would say, "How about eating a meal?" So, Palauan girls learned how to cut and cook taro. It is the women's duty. The way that taro is cut is different for the guests and for the family. For an old person, we should beat the taro to make it soft. If we cut the taro incorrectly, the guest might think, "I should not stop by this house ...." It is shameful to not know how to cut and cook taro appropriately. The guest is looked after very carefully in Palau.

### **Memories of school**

When I turned eight years old, I went to *kogakko*, a school for Palauan children. I remember my teachers' names. In the first grade, it was Hattori-sensei. The second grade teacher was Namita-sensei, the third grade teacher was Yanagimatsu-sensei, the fourth grade teacher was Obara-sensei, and the fifth grade teacher was Mori-sensei. The headmaster was Kamata-sensei.

The school discipline was strict, and we learned things very effectively. I guess that what we were taught by the Japanese teachers in one year is almost equal to what

today's children learn in three years. In class we had to sit up straight. Otherwise, the teacher would hit our backs with a bamboo stick.

Because I spoke Japanese when I played with Japanese children, I understood Japanese a little even before going to school. In school, we learned how to read and write Japanese. In the first grade we learned *katakana*, and in the second grade we learned *hiragana*. Even though the Japanese teacher spoke only Japanese, we could understand the class with help from Yohei-sensei, the Palauan assistant teacher. His Palauan name was Imetengel. When we wrote the day's incidents in our diaries, the Japanese teacher would read it and correct our Japanese.

We did not speak Palauan at school from the second grade, and in five years, we became proficient in speaking and listening to Japanese. In Koror, we had more chances to use Japanese than in Babeldaob. Besides Japanese language, we studied math, singing, and other subjects. When the war broke out, we sang a song about soldiers. Hattori-sensei played organ when we sang.

In the ethics class, we listened to the stories which the teachers told. For example, a teacher told us, "See how bananas look? When they ripen, they bow deeply. Like bananas, you should respect others after you have achieved high status." My favorite story goes like this; "If you dig a well, at first, muddy water might come out. But if you continue to dig patiently, at last you will get pure and good-tasting water. Life is like that. In difficult situations, be patient and continue your efforts; and then you will find the clear water." This story remained deeply in my heart.

We also learned about the Japanese emperor. On the emperor's birthday, we went to school wearing nice clothes and sang a song, looked at a photograph of the emperor, and listened to the teacher tell a story about him. I don't think that we did *Kyujyo-yohai* (a greeting to the palace) every day. It was only on special occasions.

I started to work as *renshusei* (trainee) when I was in the third grade. Normally, children started this from the fourth grade, but I was introduced to an acquaintance of Hattori-sensei when I was in the third grade. The people who hired the students were mostly good people. They were of high status, and understood that the Palauan students came to the houses of Japanese not just to work but to learn, so they should not give them hard tasks. At this house, I washed laundry, cleaned the house, tidied the garden, took care of the children, chopped firewood, steamed rice in a pot, and did other domestic chores.

It was not hard for me at all, because I also did these things at home. In my house, we bought felled mangrove trees from an Okinawan, and chopped it into firewood. When I went home, it was about 5:00 p.m. I warmed cooked fish in a pan, and ate it.

The income from this work was 1 yen 50 sen for a month. At that time, it was recommended that we deposit the money in the post office. So, I handed all the money I got from my work as *renshusei* to the teacher, who deposited it in the post office. But after the war, the money was not returned. I just worked for free!

On our graduation day, we sang a song, '*aogeba totoishi*' [Japanese song expressing appreciation to the school teachers]. I liked this song. When we sang this song, our teachers were in tears. Several years ago, when Hattori-sensei visited Palau, her former students got together and sang this song. We all cried. We never forget our teachers and our school days.

## Working in Japanese society

After graduating from school, I worked as a domestic helper for a family who owned a cafe. The cafe opened at 6:00 in the evening and closed at 11:00. They served beer, snacks, coffee, and tea. It was called 'Café Nippon'. When the war came closer and people did not come to the cafe, they closed it and opened a coffee shop on the second floor of *Nanbo* department store. It was called the Hashizume coffee shop; Hashizume was the owner's name. I worked as a waitress in this coffee shop. It was great fun. I wore a uniform which was a checked one-piece dress, and the collar and cuffs were white. I also wore a tiny white apron. I was the only Palauan worker in this shop.

When we placed the order, we used small plastic chips; a square chip for ice cream, coffee-colored chip for coffee, and for *mitsumame* [dessert made of fruits, *azuki* beans, and agar cubes], we used a white chip on which they wrote *mitsumame*. A cup of hot coffee was 50 sen, a glass of iced coffee was 25 sen. Hot coffee was more expensive than iced coffee because they drip-filtered it. Ice cream was also hand-made, and cost 25 sen. A cup of hot tea and a glass of cold barley tea were 25 sen each.

The customers of the coffee store were Japanese. Navy officials and pearl divers often came. We could see the status of the officials from their uniforms. If there were two buttons on their sleeves, they were high officials. I worked from 8:00 in the morning to 9:00 in the evening. We took our lunch out the back, and when a customer came, we went out and took the order.

My salary as a domestic helper was 20 yen, and when I became a waitress, it went up to 30 yen. At that time, I was fourteen years old, and 30 yen a month was a lot of money. I used 10 yen for my daily needs and for some luxuries, and deposited 20 yen. I did not know how much the other waitress earned from her work. Were their salaries bigger than mine because they were Japanese? Because I did not want to know that, I did not ask them how much they earned. Anyway, 30 yen was very big money for me. I was satisfied with that.

Even though my house was in Koror, I lived with other workers in the dormitory. The owner of the coffee shop prepared our food, and it was free. Sometimes, I went to the movie theater with my Japanese colleagues after work. I watched 'Three Nurses', '*Hitozuma Tsubaki*' and so on. '*Hitozuma Tsubaki*' was a love story. We bought ice cream and donuts, and watched the movie while eating them. There were two movie theaters in Koror; *Daiichi Wakabakan* (First Wakabakan) was for silent movies, and



*Daini Wakabakan* (Second Wakabakan) was for the talkies.

I remember the happenings of the Japanese time very well, because it was the blossom season of my life.

## **My religious beliefs**

I was protestant from when I was a child. There was a German church in Koror. Even though I was a Christian, I went to the kindergarten in Kodokan. Kodokan was an institution for *Tenri-kyo* [one of the Japanese new religions]. My father did not care about the differences between religions. My uncle always went to the services of *Tenri-kyo*. He went to a hall, chanted a sutra, and got a Japanese sweet. His real purpose was getting the sweet.

When I was in the third grade, the *Nanyo-jinja* (South Seas Shrine) was built. I did not go there because it was too far from my home. My mother did not want me to go there because I was still very small. The German ministers did not prohibit going to the shrine. The names of the German pastors were Herr Löhenge, Herr Siemel and Herr Pai. In Sunday school, I was taught not only the Bible, but also how to do domestic tasks. The wives of the pastors taught the girls how to wash laundry, how to clean the room, and so on. At first, the Bible was written in German, but a Palauan translated it into Palauan. So, for me, it is easy to read and write in Palauan.

## **Memories of the war**

At the first air raid, I took refuge with the Hashizume family and my family on one of the rock islands, near Koror. Madam [this coffee shop was owned by Hashizume brothers, and they called the wife of the older Mr. Hashizume ‘Madam’] had prepared the shelter in one of the rock islands two months earlier. She had been advised to make a shelter by a friend in the military.

She gave my father money, and asked him to make a shelter in a cave, buy a small boat, and bring food and other provisions into the shelter. So my father built a four-room shelter, bought taro, sweet potato, tapioca and other food, and brought them into the shelter by boat. She also bought a big clay cooking stove and a lot of coal. She said, “We can’t continue our business here any more. So, bring all the supplies for the coffee shop to the shelter.” There was a big quantity of sugar, *azuki* beans, thirty to forty boxes of canned fruit, and the ingredients for ice cream. Madam also bought boxes of canned corned beef, canned whale, and canned *iwashi* (sardine). She also bought yellow pickled radish.

We moved to the shelter one day before the air raid. A close friend of Madam was in the military, and he told her a day before the air raid, “Please take refuge as soon as possible. Surely they will come here before tomorrow morning.” Hearing that, we

moved to the island. Our shelter was already prepared nicely. Those who took refuge in this shelter was Madam, her son, the wife of the younger Mr. Hashizume, her son, and my family including my parents, my brothers and sisters, my mother's sister, her husband, and I.

Early in the morning on the day of the first air raid, Madam cooked rice with *azuki* beans, soup, and tea. When we had a cup of Japanese tea, around 5:00 or 5:30 a.m, we heard the sound of the airplanes. It was a different sound to Japanese airplanes. They bombed and strafed Airai airfield, and they flew over us to Airai. We climbed the rock and watched where the airplanes went. After attacking Airai airfield, they began to destroy Meyuns hamlet in Ngerekebesang Island. When they shot at oil drums, each one exploded like a bomb. And then, they dropped bombs in the center of Koror. *Nakajima*, the biggest store, was bombed at that time. They knew Koror very well. I guess that there was a spy. Malakal Island was also bombed. There was a company which produced dried bonito [which was hit].

In two weeks, it became quiet again. So, we went back to Koror, and the Hashizume family returned to Japan around May. The Palauan people who had been in Koror moved to Aimeliik. In June, we moved to Ngaraard, because my father was the chief of Ulimang hamlet in Ngaraard. In July, the second air raid came.

Every morning, my father went to Ogino troop, and got information. If they did not have food, he instructed the people of Ngaraard to carry food to them. My father divided the coconut forest, and he gave the Japanese troop half of the forest. If the soldier went into the wrong half of the forest, my father would tell him off. They did not harass us.

The American airplanes flew over Palau routinely. In Ngaraard, we saw them at 9:00 a.m, 11:00 a.m, 2:00 p.m or 3:00 p.m, 4:30 p.m, and 9:00 p.m. They did not attack our place except when they saw something to attack. Even though my father did not go to the sea for fishing, he could get *rekung* (crab) and fish by the mangrove area. We also cultivated our garden, and ate taro and sweet potato. We did not have trouble getting food. I know that in other places, they struggled with hunger.

The headquarters of the Japanese military was in Ngatpang during the war. One day, some Palauans who worked there overheard the military planning the execution of several Koreans who worked in the headquarters, because there was not enough food. Fearing for the Koreans, the Palauans smuggled them out at night, and took them to separate hamlets to hide. The younger brother of my father brought four people. One of them was not from Korea; he was Okinawan, and my uncle hid him in his mother's house. And he brought three Koreans into our house, because we had food. These three Koreans were tall, and they did not speak Japanese. The Okinawan's name was Nakandakari. He also could not speak standard Japanese very well. I guess that the military decided to kill them because they were useless for the military.

I remember that the Koreans did not like to catch *rekung* (crab) in the mangroves

because they were afraid of them, but when we asked them to clean the pots and pans, they cleaned them very thoroughly in the river. Because they did not speak Japanese, we communicated with them by gesturing. They stayed at our house until the war was over and the American headquarters informed us they would repatriate the Koreans.

The Japanese military killed the Spanish pastors, the Americans who escaped from the crashed airplanes, and several lepers. I wonder why they killed lepers. It was terrible; they cut off the lepers' heads and buried them in the foxholes. The younger sister of my husband's mother was killed by the military. She was about eighty years old,<sup>17</sup> and she was from Ngardmau.

Under military orders, my later husband brought her, two other lepers, and some Japanese soldiers to Ngarchelong. The old woman asked my husband, "Why have you brought me here?" He replied, "I didn't want to bring you here, but I can't refuse a military order." Then, she said, "Please let me go back to Ngerur Island." The next day the three lepers, who were this old woman, an old Palauan man, and a Yapese, were brought to the hill by the Japanese soldiers. The man from Yap heard the Japanese soldiers talking; they said, "Where should we do this?" "We should avoid open spaces, because the American airplanes would come." "Where is the foxhole we made recently?" "Near here." "Then, we should cut them there." Hearing this, the Yapese tried to warn the old Palauan man and woman, but they did not understand Japanese. There was no way to help them. He crept into the mangrove area, and escaped to the sea. The soldiers could not find him, and they killed the Palauan man and woman. Both of them were very old. Why did they have to be killed? It was very sad. This Yapese survived and returned to his island after the war. I have heard that the lepers in Ngeremlengui were killed near Ibobang. I believe that the Japanese should not have killed them. Such murders could not contribute to the war.

There were the tall people from somewhere around Indonesia, Philippines, and Singapore. They came to Palau with many horses. They were in Malakal Island, and the horses were brought to Ngardmau. The people in Ngardmau were very scared of the horses. The captain of the Japanese troop distributed rice to the people. I think that the tall people were all killed, because none of them were seen after the war. They might have been killed because there was no food for them.

Even the Japanese soldiers died of hunger. They just stopped breathing, while sitting under the trees. When my father and I went to Ngchesar with a basket of taro on my head, we met a soldier sitting by the road. He said, "Please give me something to eat ...." So, my father took out some taro and he was going to peel the skin. Then, the soldier said, "Please don't do that. I want to eat the skin also." We had two coconuts. So, we husked one of them and gave it to him. We started to walk again, and we found another soldier. We gave him food, and as we walked, we met many starved soldiers. So, when we arrived in Ngchesar, the basket was empty. We walked the east coast of Babeldaob. In Ngiwal, we saw many soldiers. They were lying down in a hut, and asked

us for food. My father cut taro into small pieces, and he also cut the white meat of the coconut, and we gave them a piece of taro and copra. It was miserable, very sad. At that time, I was only fifteen and was not married. But after having my own children, I thought that the starved soldiers might have had families, and I wondered what they thought about. These thoughts made me feel very sad. Many soldiers died of hunger. They died not in a battle, but for want of food. It is nonsensical. I don't know what to say. I saw some young soldiers among them. They were still twenty-something years old, and I could see from their uniforms that they had graduated from a military academy. It was a big waste.

We learned of the end of the war from the fliers. My father said, "Don't pick it up. It could be a bomb!" But when I read it, it said that the war was over and we could go anywhere freely. It was written in Japanese. But my father did not believe this. The Palauans who lived in Daini Koror (second Koror) went to Koror and asked the soldiers if the war was really over. Hearing that it was, they came back to Babeldaob and informed the people. So, we knew that the war had truly ended!

*Interview: 4 February and 19 September 2005, 11 January 2007, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewers: first and second interviews, Maki MITA and Nasuhiko YAMAGUCHI; third interview Maki MITA.*

## Story 49

Rubak Tadao Ngotel

Born: 1930

Father: from Japan

Mother: from Ngarchelong



Rubak Tadao Ngotel (2007)

I was born in the Palau hospital in 1930. At that time, my mother was married to a Japanese man, Mr. Kuroda. But my mother caught tuberculosis, and she was put into isolation. They were divorced, and my mother died.

My older sister and I were adopted into other families. I was adopted by my mother's parents in Ngarchelong. My last name, 'Ngotel', is my grandfather's name. Sometimes my Japanese father visited me from Koror and gave me donuts and other things. He remarried a Japanese woman, and went back to Japan when the war broke out.

### Life in Babeldaob

I was raised by my grandparents in the Palauan manner. They taught me the Palauan way of living. For example, when we walked beside the *bai* (meeting house), if *rubaks* were inside, my grandmother would say to me, "Son,<sup>18)</sup> let's walk beside the path." We stepped off the paved path, and walked on the soil.

If an old person was coming, I would step aside and let him or her walk in the center of the path. In Palau, when I was young, it was very important to respect old people. Now, this kind of respect is no more. No more!

There were only a few Japanese living in Ngarchelong and Ngaraard at that time. We did not play with Japanese children because we were scared of the Japanese. The situation was different from Koror.

Even though I was half Japanese, Palauan children were not mean to me. Sometimes they said, "You are Japanese, aren't you?" But it was just a joke. In Palau, the mother's line is more important than the father's line. So, I was OK because my mother was Palauan.

### My beliefs

I have believed in *Modekngai* (Palauan religious belief) from when I was a child. This was my grandparents' faith. It is a local religious belief, and there were many believers

of *Modekngai* in northern and western Babeldaob, Peleliu and Angaur.

The Japanese government prohibited us from gathering together for prayers. So, we prayed at home. We were afraid of the Japanese. The Japanese captured Temedad, the leader of *Modekngai*, and put him in jail, and sent Ongesii and Renguul, the other leaders, to other islands. I have heard that the Catholic priests were killed by the Japanese military. They did not like either *Modekngai* or Catholicism, I guess.

In our religious practices, we boiled plants and drank the water as medicine. When I was a child, there was no hospital in Ngarchelong, so I treated myself with medicinal herbs. The first time I had modern medical care was after the war, when I got a check-up from the Americans. In the Japanese time, we used our herbal medicine secretly.

## My school days

I went to *kogakko* in Ngaraard. It was a concrete building, and school was free. Palauan children in Kayangel, Ngarchelong, Ngaraard and Ngardmau went to this school. I stayed at my relative's house in Ngaraard, and went to school. A year before the war broke out in Palau, they made a *bai* into a dormitory, and I moved there. Once a week, each child's family brought food to school. I wore a shirt and pants, but I did not wear shoes. I think it was after the war that wearing shoes became common in Palau.

In school, every morning we bowed to the north. I think that the Japanese people regarded the emperor as something like a deity. But for me, the emperor was not a deity, but a person from a high family.

We had to use Japanese language in school. Even though I did not know how to speak Japanese, I tried to use it. The Palauan assistant teacher helped us. After several months, we could make out most of what was said to us.

The teachers were strict. Sometimes, a student who did something wrong was beaten with a branch, or got some other punishment. One time, the teacher put a pencil between my fingers and twisted them. It hurt a lot; I stood up because of the pain. Sometimes, I was struck with a fist and scolded, "Why were you late?" I don't blame the teachers now, but I did not like school very much. The students worked well. We raised vegetables in the gardens in school, and we also raised pigs. After school, we went to gather food for the pigs. One time, the students of Ngaraard were sent to Ngardmau, and they were made to collect bauxite for two weeks.

## Memories of the war

When the war broke out, the students were sent home. At that time, I was in the third grade. I went back to Ngarchelong, but soon after that, the army ordered us to take refuge in Ngaraard. From August 1944, we stayed in the forest until the war ended.

Because we could not get enough food in the forest, we had to go to Ngarchelong once a week to harvest taro and other crops.

It was hard to go fishing. In the daytime, it was too dangerous because of the American airplanes flying around. At night, we could not leave the channel between the mangroves, because the Japanese guards were watching. There were many American ships between Babeldaob and Kayangel. We could see the lights of the ships at night. The Japanese watched the channel to prevent the Americans from entering, and the Palauans from going out to the American ships to surrender. After the Palauan chief police officer Oikawasang and several Saipanese in Ngarchelong fled to an American ship, the Japanese military became cautious about our movements. One of my relatives succeeded in getting beyond the reef to an American ship.

Food was scarce. My father's uncle, who was around eighty years old, and a son of my uncle who was four or five years old, died of hunger. The Japanese were also hungry. They began to steal produce from our gardens. But they rarely touched our taro-patches. Maybe they did not know how to harvest and cook taro.

Soldiers wore uniforms, but inside their uniforms they were only skin and bone. Because there were no ships supplying food from Japan, they could not eat. The high officials in Ngatpang might eat rice .... We ate even the tips of the young coconut trees. We also ate *belloi* (bitter and poisonous wild fruit) and *denges* (bitter mangrove fruit) but their taste was terrible. We had to force ourselves to swallow them.

One day, my grandmother and I went to my relative's house in Ngaraard to ask for taro. We brought a small piece of *brak* (giant taro) for our lunch. When we walked in front of a small cave, a Japanese soldier stopped us. He had a gun with a mounted bayonet. With the gun, he pointed to our basket and asked, "What is inside?" He found the cooked *brak*, and he took it from us. My grandmother was very scared. We went to our relative's house, and on our way back, we passed by the cave. Then, we saw that somebody's blood had flowed. The Japanese soldier who took our food had been shot dead by an American airplane. Three soldiers were investigating his body. My grandmother told me, "The man who took our food has died."

In eastern Babeldaob, there were many coconut trees which had been planted in the German time. The Japanese military had commandeered them. We young Palauans were made to collect the coconuts there, husk them, remove the meat, and squeeze the oil from it. They brought the coconut oil and squeezed coconut meat to Ngatpang, to feed the soldiers. My duty was to collect coconuts, and I worked from 7:00 in the morning until 5:00 in the afternoon. I worked without eating lunch. After working, I was allowed to take one coconut for myself.

## **After the war**

After the war finished in August, we started to learn the 'A, B, C's in a *bai*. It was

November. At that time, teachers also started to learn English with their students.

I visited my Japanese father's home after the war. The first time was in 1978, and the second was in 1980. He had already died by then. The first time I visited, his Japanese wife said, "I don't know, I don't know anything about you." When I asked her, "Have you been to Palau?" She said, "Palau? Where is that?"

When I visited his house the second time, I was with my wife. My wife, Kyoko, is half Japanese, and she spoke Japanese well. So, I asked Kyoko to tell the Japanese woman that I had no interest in moving to Japan. Then, this Japanese woman showed me my father's photographs. And she asked me, "Tadao-san, how is the market place in Koror? There was a big market place at Koror dock." So, I learned that she had lied to me in the beginning. She might have thought that I wanted my father's money. I don't like a liar.

*Interview: 4 July 2007, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA.*



## Story 50

Mechas Basilia M. Kintaro

Born: 1930

Father: from Ngchesar

Mother: from Melekeok



Mechas Basilia M. Kintaro (2007)

### What my grandparents taught me

I learned a lot of things from my grandparents on my mother's side. After dinner, my sister, brother and I were required to sit in front of my grandparents. My grandfather instructed us in many things. For example, he told us, "If you are born as a human, you should have responsibility. Otherwise, you are worthless." As we grew up, he required more and more of us: "Get up early in the morning before the sun rises, collect coconuts, and draw water from the well", "If you find trash on the hamlet path, you should pick it up and throw it away in the correct place, as this is our hamlet", "You should bow to the elders", and "If you visit somebody's house, you must greet them properly."

My grandmother also taught us many rules. For example, she told us, "Respect your mother and father, and don't complain about the tasks they give you." She said to the girls, "Weaving baskets, washing laundry, and cleaning the house, these are all women's duties. If you don't know how to do them, ask me to teach you."

Among these teachings, I have a favorite lesson. One day, my grandfather asked me. "Basilia, do you know about Palauan money?" I said I did. He said, "Yeah, you are wearing them on your neck. See? The biggest one is in the center, and the smaller ones are arranged on either side. Between them, there are ordinary glass beads. Do you know their name?" I said I did not. He continued, "These glass beads are arranged between pieces of Palauan money just to fix them in place. I don't want you to be a person like these glass beads. Even if small, you should be Palauan money." My grandfather was very knowledgeable. After the war, a Japanese-American from the US government visited our hamlet, and he learned a lot of stories and other lore from my grandfather. He was astonished by my grandfather's knowledge, and said, "How do you remember these things? Did you write down what you were told?" My grandfather replied, "No, it is all just stored in my brain." The American said, "You are more knowledgeable than professors."

My grandfather wanted to teach us what he knew, and told stories to us every night. One day, I asked him, "We are still very young. Do you think that children should learn these things?" He answered, "Yes. While you are young, you can absorb every-

thing. When you grow up, you will remember what I have told you.”

## My school days

When I turned eight years old, I went to Melekeok *Kogakko*. I remember there were three Japanese teachers; Mori-sensei the headmaster, Yoshida-sensei, Maniwa-sensei, and one Palauan assistant teacher, Kintaro-sensei. Kintaro-sensei was no relation to my husband’s family, even though they had the same name.

The lessons of the Japanese teachers were similar to those I had learned from my grandparents, but not exactly the same. Like my grandparents, schoolteachers told us to respect elders, to be honest, and to be punctual. The teachers also told us to express ourselves clearly and directly. They said, “Don’t guess vaguely. If you do not know the answer, this is fine. Tell me honestly that you don’t know.”

In the morning, we had assembly. The headmaster would tell a story, then we sang the Japanese national anthem, and bowed to the north. I learned about the Japanese emperor, and I respected him.

I believe that God created all people; Japanese, Palauan, and others. Then, God gave some of them ‘titles’. At that time, we did not have elections [so high rank was accorded to some people by their birth]. Why would I not respect the title of the Japanese emperor? This also was God’s gift.

I was baptized in a Catholic church as a baby. I know about traditional Palauan deities in hamlets, but I don’t bother with this kind of belief. For example, the deity in Ngchesar is the dove. People who have a blood-relationship with Ngchesar cannot eat them. If they did, [they believe] their body would become swollen or itchy; and if they then apologized to the guardian of the dove, they would recover. When I was a student, I went to the *Nanyo-jinja* (South Seas Shrine) from school, but I did not bother with this either. I didn’t believe in it.

Because I lived in Ngchesar at that time, the school was very far away. It took about an hour. In addition to this, I would not come straight home but played here and there. So, when I came home, it was around 6:00 p.m., and I was very tired. I went to sleep without doing my homework or taking a bath. Next morning, I would wake up early, and do my homework while walking to school! I did my mathematics homework sitting under a tree on my way to school. When I arrived in Melekeok, I bathed in the stream beside my grandparents’ house, changed clothes, and went to school. My two younger brothers would come to school with me. I would help them bathe, and make them hurry. I was very busy!

After three years education in Melekeok, I moved to Koror and went to the *hoshuka* (advanced course) at Koror *Kogakko*. I lived with a Japanese family in Koror. The husband in that family was a friend of my brother. He had wife, a daughter and a son. When I came home, I took care of the children and helped the wife.

I liked geography class. It was interesting to study places I didn't know. On the other hand, I did not like art class. I always drew the same thing, because I had no idea. I liked handicrafts, but unfortunately, when I was in *hoshuka*, the last female teacher went back to Japan. I learned how to sew pants before she left, but I did not learn how to knit. So I went to an older girl, who graduated from school before me, and learned knitting from her.

## Memories of the war

My last three months at school were spent for preparing for the war. We were trained to carry sand and water in buckets. Then, they ordered us to move out of the school so the military could use it. We studied in a *bai* (meeting house) in Koror for a while, but after that the teachers sent us to our home hamlets to continue studying there. I graduated from school in Melekeok, and after that, I went home to Ngchesar.

I remember the first air raid. At that time, I was in Ngchesar. There was an order to build shelters, so my father prepared one in our garden. Until that day, I had never seen airplanes and never heard machine guns. When the people shouted, "The airplanes have come!", we rushed into our shelter, and I looked out. I saw four airplanes flying with star marks on the fuselage. I said, "They are American airplanes!" Then, I heard the sound, "papapapapapapa ...." They attacked a small boat which transported vegetables in the channel between Melekeok and Ngchesar. We were shaking from terror, and stayed one night there.

Next morning, we were ordered to move into the forest. My brother and father built a hut in the forest, and we moved there. Our original house was occupied by Japanese soldiers.

For the next three months, it was calm. We moved to another shelter near Ngchesar. But in July, the fighting again became heavy. Again we were ordered to move, to another place beyond Shimizu hamlet. Because my grandmother was too old, my brother carried her. We carried quilts and other belongings, took the hands of children, and walked in the darkness. We headed for the huts which my brother and others had prepared, but because it was very dark and we could not use lamps, we followed a rope which they had set beforehand. At that time, I was thirteen or fourteen years old. It was a tough experience! After we had eaten all the food we brought, my older siblings went to our hamlet and gathered taro and tapioca. When we cooked them, we used firewood which would not make much smoke, and somebody stayed outside to watch for any smoke coming out of the hut. And if we heard the sound of an airplane, we put the fire out immediately. You don't know how cold it is in the forest at night. When it rained, water leaked from the roof.

My grandmother asked me, "Basilia, why do we have to be in such a place?" "It is because of the war." Then she said, "Whose war? Is this a Palauan war?" I said, "No,

America and Japan are fighting ....” My grandmother said, “Why? Why must we take refuge because the Americans and the Japanese are fighting?” I said, “We don’t know anything. All we can do now is just take refuge and try to avoid being shot.”

We went to our hamlet to harvest taro, tapioca, sweet potato, coconut, and other edible plants. Sometimes we went to the swamp to gather clams and small crabs. When we talked to each other, the Japanese soldiers who lived in our hamlet scolded us. We tried to be friends with the soldiers. My sister made me say to them, “Let’s be friends. We can sing or dance for you.” One time, my sister told me to ask a soldier, “Would you give me a cigarette?” Then, the soldier asked me, “Setsuko-san, do you smoke?” My Japanese name was Setsuko. I said, “No, my sister smokes. If you give me a cigarette, I will sing a song for you.” Because I was a child, I was not embarrassed. Then the soldier said, “OK, Setsuko-san.”

After several months, we went back to our first place of refuge. A Japanese troop was there. They collected coconuts, for the oil. The commander of this troop was Captain Kato. He was kind, and my father helped the soldiers to extract the coconut oil. Captain Kato asked my father if I would help him. So, my father told me, “Basilia, please go to Captain Kato, and take care of him.” I was surprised and said, “Oh, are you sending me to the Japanese soldiers?” My father reassured me, “He is a good person. Don’t worry.” So, I started to work for Captain Kato. I asked the captain to let my friend and me work together. He agreed, so we prepared the tea and breakfast for Captain Kato every morning, and we also did various chores. He said, “You are good workers!” Then, we said, “Really? It is because we are young.” Now, it makes me laugh. I was very young and funny.

The captain had a mistress. She was from *Nankairo*, a brothel in Koror. One day, the captain told me to prepare a larger amount of food than usual because he would have a guest. So, I prepared a lot of dishes. But she was the captain’s only visitor. I asked her, “Miss, who is the guest? Oh, will you stay here? For what purpose? You are not a soldier, so you should not stay here!” I also said to her, “Only the soldiers are allowed to eat white rice. So, this is not for you!” Then, the captain told me, “Are you jealous? Setsuko-san, give her some food.” “Who is she, Captain?” “She is my girlfriend. When you grow up, you will also be somebody’s girlfriend.” But I would not stand for it. I told the captain, “Don’t say such things! This is a war, you should save food for the soldiers!” Finally, the captain got angry and said, “Don’t be stubborn!” I think that the Captain thought that I was a child and did not understand the situation. He was a nice person.

One day, I saw an airplane scattering fliers. A soldier said to me, “Setsuko-san, don’t pick it up.” I asked him why not, but he just said, “Don’t do it.” At that time, I took care of the soldiers who extracted coconut oil. Sometimes I overheard someone saying, “Maybe the war is over.” One day, when I went to the camp to work, there was nobody there! I was sad that they did not even say goodbye, but just suddenly disappeared.

Maybe they left during the night.

I became free from military work. I stayed in my home. Sometimes, Japanese civilians from Shimizu came to our hamlet. For example, a mother with an infant drew water from the well in our hamlet, and she asked me for a coconut. I also met a mother with two children. The children cried and had loose bowels. They did not eat a lot, and they were very thin. They might have died after that . . . . In Shimizu, the Japanese military took the crops which Japanese civilians had raised, so the civilians starved.

I will never forget a Japanese girl who lived with me as my daughter. One day, an old Japanese woman came to my hamlet with two boys and a girl. I felt sorry for them, and took a coconut and taro from my basket and said, "Old woman, please take them for the children." I met them several times after that. One day, the old woman asked me, "Setsuko-san, don't you want to have a child?" I said, "Yes, I do." To tell the truth, I wanted to have the youngest boy, but he cried a lot. The oldest girl, who was eight, wanted to come with me. So, I brought her home and raised her as my child. I gave her my love, everything! I taught her Palauan language, and whenever I went out I brought her with me. However, four or five months later, a Japanese policeman told me, "All Japanese must go back to Japan." I told him, "I adopted this girl!" but he did not accept this. I asked him, "Does she have a home in Japan?" I guessed that Japanese people who had emigrated to Palau no longer had their homes in Japan. He said, "It is the order of the government." I even said, "You are stupid!" I cried, but I sent her to Japan. She had already learned some Palauan words, and when I told her, "*Mei*" (Come), she came to me. She told me that she did not want to go to Japan. Even now, I want to call her back.

I saw many people who were hungry and almost dying. I remember a Japanese man who sat by a tree. I gave him a sweet potato, some pieces of coconut that had been squeezed for oil, and leaves of sweet potato. He said, "Thank you, Miss", but he was too weak to take them with his hands.

We also took care of several Japanese men on one rainy evening. They came to my hamlet to get coconuts and draw water. But the sun set, and it was raining. My mother met them and brought them to our house. We fed them, and the next day they returned to their shelter. I am not sure if they were soldiers or civilians.

I did not experience a serious shortage of food. I had many siblings, and we gathered food from the sea and the gardens. I was afraid of the air raids and soldiers' scolding. In addition to that, I was afraid of what would happen if Japan was defeated. The Japanese soldiers told us, "American soldiers are dangerous. They like women, and if you refuse them, they will tie each of your legs to two horses, and kick the horses to make them run." We worried about what would happen after the Japanese left and the Americans came.

## About Palauan titles

When I was a child, Melekeok's high chief *Reklai* was Tellei. After he died, Brel became a *Reklai*, and next was Lomisang, and then, my brother Siangeldeb. After Siangeldeb died, Bao Ngirmang took over the title of *Reklai*. The title of *Reklai* is a succession within one *kebliil* (clan), and those who choose the man who is suitable for this title are women of this *kebliil*. I am one of them. When we choose *Reklai*, we look for a man who is thoughtful. He should think about the people much more than about himself. At *Reklai*'s house, they must prepare food for anybody in need; travelers, for example. *Reklai* would go to bed at 2:00 in the morning, in case somebody came to him for help. The woman's title paired with *Reklai* is *Ebilreklai*. *Ebilreklai* is also chosen from the *kebliil* of *Reklai*. I know how hard it is to have the title of *Reklai* and *Ebilreklai* because I saw it in my family. But those who don't understand the responsibility of these titles want to attain them. My brother was *Reklai*, and my sister was *Ebilreklai*. When my sister died, I was one of the candidates for *Ebilreklai*. But I did not want it. I was a widow, and jobless. How could I take care of others?

The grandparents who taught us so much were my mother's parents. They educated my brothers, sisters, and me as people who would lead. I think that parents have responsibility for their children's future. If you plant a seed, you should give it water and remove weeds. If the plant grows bent, you should make it straight.

*Interview: 3 July 2007, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA.*

## Story 51

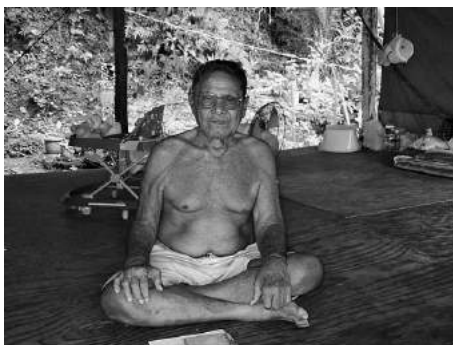
Rubak Patris Tahemaremaho

(Suketaro Yoshino)

Born: 1930~1932

Father: from Japan

Mother: from Tobi (Hatohobei)



Rubak Patris Tahemaremaho (2006)

### My parents

My biological father was Japanese. At first, he worked for *Nanyo-boeki* (South Seas Trading Company), and later his company was combined with *Nanyo-kohatsu* (South Seas Development Company). He got together with a Tobian woman, and they had a baby; that was me. But my mother was a Catholic and my father was not, so they did not get married. When I was still a baby, they separated. My Japanese father went to Koror and got married to a Japanese woman. Later, my mother married my foster father.

### Tobi (Hatohobei) in the 1930s

During the Japanese time, there was a phosphate mining business in Tobi. People from Japan, Okinawa, Yap and Palau worked there. The population of Tobians was small.

There was a Catholic church in Tobi, and the Catholic priests, including father Elias, came to Tobi from Koror once a year. I was baptized when I was very young, and after I came to Koror, I attended the Catholic church in Koror.

### My school days in Koror

I came to Koror from Tobi when I was six or seven years old. My mother and I boarded the *Kokkou-maru*, a boat which belonged to *Nanyo-boeki* (South Seas Trading Company). It was a week's journey from Tobi to Koror. We landed at Medalaih, and went to Ngerekebesang by bus. The causeway between Koror and Ngerekebesang was already constructed. It was my first experience of riding in a car. I did not understand fully what was going on. It felt as though the trees were running behind us.

At the end of Ngerekebesang, the road divided into two. One road led to the Japanese naval airfield, and the other led to Ngerekebesang hamlet. My mother and I stayed at my uncle's house in Ngerekebesang. My Japanese father visited us sometimes, and he gave me food and clothing. Not only Palauans, but people from Tobi, Sonsorol,

Merir and Pulo Anna also lived there. Even though we had different languages, we could communicate with each other. Sometimes Japanese visited Ngerekebesang to play on the beautiful beach.

I went to school on foot from my uncle's house in Ngerekebesang. Sometimes I used the bus, and it was 5 sen from Ngerekebesang to school. There was also a taxi at that time, but it was too expensive to use; it might be 1 yen for the same distance. If we were late arriving at school, our teacher would shut us out, and we had to stand outside the school for an hour.

I remember Yoshino-sensei, Okuhara-sensei... and other teachers. Yohei-sensei was Palauan, and he translated Japanese into Palauan for the first grade students. But students from Tobi could not understand Palauan, so we learned Japanese without any help. Two or three students, including me, were from Tobi, and there was one student from Pulo Anna and Merir respectively.

At lunch time, I visited my Japanese father's house and ate lunch there, since my father lived near the Koror *Kogakko*. Sometimes my father gave me money, so I bought caramels and other sweets. Sometimes we children found money on the street. If it was a big amount, we brought it to the police station, but if it was 5 sen or 10 sen, we kept it in our pockets. We did not spend a lot of money at that time because there were few things to buy. Even notebooks and pencils were supplied to us at school.

Going to the movie theater was prohibited by the teacher. I think that the films shown there were sometimes not good for children; such as showing a naked woman or something like that. But when Japanese national films regarding the war were shown, the teachers brought us to the movie theater.

When I was in school, the students helped construct *Nanyo-jinja* (South Seas Shrine). I helped with construction, but I did not go there to pray. The Christian priests did not allow me to pray to the stone in *Nanyo-jinja*. If they found that I had been there, they would have punished me by refusing Holy Communion.

## War experiences in Tobi

After graduating from school, I went back to Tobi. My Japanese father wanted to take me to New Guinea with him and make me go to school. My Japanese father did not have a child with his Japanese wife, and he wanted to raise me as his child. But my mother did not agree to this request. World War II had already started by that time, so my mother was scared to let me go to New Guinea. Even after going to New Guinea, my father visited Tobi and tried to persuade my mother. I don't know if he died in New Guinea or if he survived.

I was in Tobi when the war came. It was a terrible experience. The British<sup>19)</sup> dropped bombs on the plants and boats, and they shot at running people. We thought that we would die, because everything was destroyed by bombs! The British raided in



the morning, but it was quiet in the afternoon. We went out to sea to fish, and cooked the catch inside the caves. We were scared during the bombing, and at the same time, we were angry at the Japanese, because the Japanese brought the war to Tobi!

During the war there were many Japanese in Tobi, but many of them died at that time. They did not have enough food, so they even ate their own excrement! Unlike Tobians, the Japanese did not go out fishing because they were scared of sharks. We shared our food with Japanese servicemen, but it was not enough. I felt very sorry for them.

I have a Japanese friend named Takeo Tomono. He came to Tobi as a medical officer during the war, and my mother fed him even when he was sick. He greatly appreciated my mother's help, and he came back to Palau in 1976 and looked for her. We became friends at that time.

*Interview: 18 August 2006, Koror. Conducted in Japanese and English. Interviewer: Maki MITA.*

## Story 52

Mechas Ulang Maidesil

Born: 1931

From: Ngeremlengui



Mechas Ulang Maidesil, with the author (1999)

### My early life

I was born in Ngarchelong, and when I was six months old, my mother adopted me from her sister. Because my adoptive mother married a man from Ngeremlengui, we lived in Ngeremlengui.

When I was an infant, there was an aluminum plant in Ngeremlengui. They extracted aluminum from the ground. My brother worked there, but I did not see much of the plant, because my mother did not allow me to go there. She said that it was dangerous to be there because vehicles were coming and going.

### My school life

When I reached eight years old, I went to Koror and started to study in Koror *Kogakko*. We had school uniforms from when I was in the second grade. White shirts and blue skirts for girls, and white shirts and black trousers for boys. We wore uniforms only on special occasions.

I lived in a dormitory when I was a student. Students from first to fifth grade lived together in a dorm; and when we did our homework, we could ask questions of the older students. Because we did not have desks to study at, we usually studied on the floor. The dorm had a wide veranda, and that was a nice place to study.

In the dorm, we laid out our mats on the floor, and slept on them. My father prepared two pillows for me, but there was not enough space. So, I asked my teacher to keep one, and I kept one pillow for sleeping. Because the dorm was very crowded, lice spread very quickly. When I came to school, I had long curly hair and I braided it, but after I picked up lice, I cut my hair very short.

At night, sometimes young boys sneaked into the girl's room to see the fifth grade students. We first grade students slept at the front of the room, and fifth graders slept at the back. So, when boys sneaked through the windows and headed for the fifth grade girls, they walked across younger students. Sometimes small girls cried from being stepped on.

Every weekend, my father visited me by boat. I looked forward to seeing him, and I went to the wharf and sang while I waited for him. My father brought me food and

money, and went back to the village. After my father had left, I felt very sad and I could not even sleep very well.

Sometimes, there were thefts in our dorm. In fact, someone stole my food which my mother had sent me, which made me cry. Hearing that, my father made me a box with a lock, and I kept my food in this box for security.

### ***Renshusei***

I started to work as a *renshusei* (trainee) when I was in the second grade. Usually we started to work as *renshusei* when we reached fourth grade. But my teacher judged that I and another three second grade students were capable enough. I worked for Yukiba pharmacy. My job was to dust inside the store. There were a lot of medicine bottles on the shelves. One day, I found a bottled snake preserved in liquid, and I screamed. I also cleaned the floor, shelves and other things.

Mrs. Yukiba always praised me, and she gave me a sweet when I left. When I went to Yukiba pharmacy, Mrs. Yukiba put a stamp on my card. Later, I submitted it to my teacher. I don't think that I received money from my teacher for this work. But it was fine, because I went there to learn Japanese.

### **South Seas Shrine**

One day, our teacher said, "We will go to *Nanyo-jinja* (South Seas Shrine) today." Even though I went to a Christian church at that time, I was happy to go there, because I did not have to study that day.

All the students from first to fifth grade formed a long line, and walked to Ngermid. At the shrine, we put our hands together in the Japanese way, and prayed to a Japanese goddess, *Amaterasuomikami*. I do not remember what we prayed for, but I guess that we prayed to win the war.

When we went back to school, we made a line again, and walked. On our way back, one small boy had a toilet accident, and he defecated in his pants. He could not say to his teacher that he wanted to go to the toilet. The students around him said, "Oh, it's smelly!"

### **War and school**

Sometimes we visited the Japanese naval base in Ngerekebesang, and we danced and sang songs to cheer the soldiers. Because I had a loud voice, I sang songs when I visited them.

When I entered the second grade, we could not study very well, because we were very busy preparing for the war. We practiced passing a bucket from one person to

another, in case a bomb fell on the school building. Later, the school asked the parents of the students to come and take their children home. My father came to the dorm to pick me up, but I was not there. So, he came to Yukiba pharmacy and took me home to Babeldaob.

After going to Babeldaob, I still continued to go to school, in Ngardmau. At that time, I stayed at the house of my biological mother in Ngardmau. There were a lot of horses there! I could not go to the river to bathe because I was afraid of horses and army dogs. So, I bathed using water from a tank. Before the war, Ngardmau was like a city. There was a big Japanese company there, and many Japanese people lived there; also people from Yap, Saipan and other places. But wartime conditions became harder in a year, and I went to Ngeremlengui to take shelter.

Because my Japanese education ended in the second grade, I only learned *katakana* letters of Japanese, not *hiragana* [another form of Japanese character].

## Experiences during the war

Three days before the first air raid in March [1944], an old Palauan woman said to my brother, “The war will come in three days, so tell your mother to prepare food.” This woman was an intermediary for a Palauan traditional deity, and my mother believed in this tradition. So she prepared food to bring when we took refuge. When my mother told this story to one of her relatives, he said, “That old woman is crazy.” But on the third day, the American airplanes really came! While the people were in panic, my mother and I were already in the forest.

There is another story. When a lot of American boats came to Ngarchelong, a religious person prayed to a Palauan deity. This person said, “Please make the American boats go away.” Then, these boats went somewhere else.

So, I believe in the Palauan deities even today.

In Ngeremlengui, there were many Japanese servicemen. Many Palauans in Ngeremlengui also worked for the military. For example, a representative of each family worked together and made cement from stones. Because my father was busy fishing for the Japanese navy, I did this job. I carried stones and water.

At that time, my father raised pigs, and sometimes we went to the naval base and asked them to give us any spare food supplies. On such occasions, I and other girls put on traditional leaf skirts, and danced. One soldier said, “You have lovely curly hair, haven’t you?” Sometimes I worked as a love messenger. One day, a soldier whispered to me to call a young Palauan woman named Namiko. Because I had the chance to talk to Japanese soldiers, my Japanese improved.

Some Japanese soldiers lived in our house because our house was large. One day, when the captain went to Koror, these soldiers drank alcohol, and sang ‘Arirang’, a Korean song. Hearing that, my father said that they might be Koreans who were taken

to Palau by the Japanese army. When I also sang a song, they laughed and said, “Come in.” But I did not enter the house because I was a little bit scared.

My father fished for the soldiers. He used dynamite to kill fish. When the war worsened, we were troubled by the shortage of food. Because soldiers took tapioca from our gardens, we ate even the roots of banana trees. One day, my father was supplied with cooked rice and brown sugar for his job, and he brought it home to share. My mother divided it between the members of the family.

### **My religious beliefs**

I believe in the traditional Palauan deity. When I was a student, my uncle took me to the German protestant church. So, I learned Christian belief there. But after the war, I believed only in the Palauan deities. It is different from *Modekngai* [another Palauan religious belief].

My mother believed in the Palauan deity, and before she died, she made me a request. She said, “Please believe in the Palauan deity in which I believe. Then we can help each other in heaven after both of us have died.” If I believe in the Christian God, I might eat bread in heaven while my mother eats taro, isn’t that right? If our religious beliefs are different, it is hard to help each other in heaven. My mother’s request means that we shall eat taro in heaven together.

I have heard that this Palauan deity foretold that the Japanese would come to Palau.

I also heard that the Japanese used to live in Palau a long, long time ago. At that time, they lived in Ngatpang, and they gathered shellfish named ‘*sang*’ [unidentified]. But some Palauans treated the Japanese badly, so the Palauan deity sent the Japanese to Japan. That is why the Japanese still put ‘*sang*’ after a person’s name when they address them. And you know what? The houses of traditional Japanese leaders had stone walls surrounding them. I have heard that the Japanese people built stone walls in imitation of Palauan people. The walls needed to be high because they used to fight using *biskang* (spears).

*Interview: 28 September 2006, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA.*

## Story 53

Rubak Minoru Ueki

Born: 1931

Father: from Japan

Mother: from Ngermid, Koror



Rubak Minoru Ueki (photo by Takashi Mita)

### About my father and my childhood

My father was Japanese, and he came to Palau in the early years of the Japanese era. He was a sawyer, and he taught Palauans how to mill logs to make timber. He was the only person who was licensed to cut ironwood trees in the rock islands. He used to cut trees on what is now called Inoki Island, with several Palauans. He also collected botanical specimens and sent them to Kyoto University, Japan. Here, this land where my office is now located, was reclaimed by my father.

I had one older sister and two younger brothers. One of my brothers died when he was very young. I was brought up as Japanese, and in my house we spoke only in Japanese. Even though my mother was Palauan, she told her relatives not to use Palauan when talking to her children. So I did not understand Palauan at all when I was young. I learned it after the war. I think that my mother continued to fulfill her obligations as a member of Palauan society. Because of that, I was selected as a traditional chief of Ngermid several years ago.

I went to a kindergarten at the *Honganji* temple. Even though my mother was Catholic, and my father was from the family of a Shinto priest, they did not have any problem with sending their children to a Buddhist temple. In my house, there was a small Shinto altar. Every day, I clapped my hands and prayed to a Japanese deity in the Japanese manner with my father. In the kindergarten, most of the children were Japanese. I don't remember if there were half-caste children other than my sister and me. After kindergarten, I started to go to *shogakko* (elementary school for Japanese), and studied there for six years; and then I passed the exam and went to junior high school for four years of further education. It was the only junior high school in the South Seas Islands. Students from all over the region came to Palau and lived in a dormitory. I think that about fifty students were selected by entrance examination.

### Experiences of discrimination

In my school days, I experienced discrimination. I think that discrimination is one of

the worst aspects of Japan. Those who came from Okinawa, Palau and Korea were called ‘the Third People’ or ‘the Fourth People’. Okinawan people were Japanese, but they were looked down on by the children of the officials of the *Nanyo-cho* (South Seas Government). Because of that, Okinawan students and half-Palauan students like me became good friends. I fought for my Okinawan friends many times. The students whose fathers worked for the *Nanyo-cho* brought excellent lunches; for example, baked egg and bread with jam! But Okinawan students and I had poor lunches, such as bonito hearts, which were easily found in Malakal. Especially after my father died when I was in third grade at the elementary school, we could not afford luxuries. Sometimes, the Japanese students told us, “You are Okinawan”, and “You are ‘*tomin*’”.

At that time, I lived on Malakal Island, where many Okinawans also lived. So I had many friends from Okinawa. I had Japanese friends also, but I remember that some of my friends called me a ‘*tomin*’ (islander). That was hard for me. Personally speaking, I am against discrimination. I know how hard it is, being discriminated against. When I visited my mother’s hamlet the Palauan children, including my relatives, said to me, “Don’t come here, you Japanese”. And when I went to school, I was told, “Get away, you islander!” At that time, I did not have many Palauan friends, because we went to different schools.

I performed well at school, but I was not selected as a class president. I could be only a vice-president of the class. The teachers selected the class president from students’ school records. So the fact that I wasn’t selected shows that there was discrimination. I guess that the teachers and parents did not want to have a Palauan class president. My father did not object to that because it was true that I was half Palauan. So I had to fight on my own behalf. Sometimes I got commendations for good performance in study and sports, but I could not be the head.

During the Japanese administration, the baseball team of Keio University visited from Japan. There was a Palauan all-star team, and both the Palauan and Keio players wanted to have a game together, but the *Nanyo-cho* would not allow this. Only the team consisting of Japanese living in Palau played the Keio team. The Palauan all-stars was a very strong team. They had beaten the Japanese team in the past, and after that the government prohibited further games between Palauans and Japanese.

I think that discrimination in school was not caused by the teachers but by the Japanese officials. Their children were very thin and white, and spoiled. In my class, only Ueda and I were half ‘islander’, but there were many Okinawans. The children of officials spoke ill of Okinawans, and they fought. Because the Japanese officials were contemptuous of Okinawans and ‘islanders’, their children imitated them. Children themselves did not have a sense of discrimination originally, but as they grew up, they learned their parents’ way of thinking. After school, I used to play with Okinawan children. Some of the Japanese children were picked up by somebody, or just went home early. We played together only during the recess. When I was ready to go home

to Malakal Island, Mr. Suke from Taiwan took me there by boat. He was a native Taiwanese and he had run away from a ship. At that time, there was no causeway between Koror and Malakal. Mr. Suke came to my school to pick me up, or waited for me on his boat.

### **As a Japanese child**

Working at home was also very important in my house. I cleaned up the garden, and fed the fowls. My parents trained me strictly. They thought that they should bring me up well, as a Japanese child. My father was Japanese, but he was not an official. In those days, Palauan children from the *kogakko* went to the houses of rich Japanese, who were mostly officials, and learned domestic chores. I think it was good, because they learned a hard-working spirit and were familiarized with Japanese culture in their daily life.

After my father died, we moved to Koror, and my mother started to work. She washed officials' laundry in the daytime, and after coming home, she continued working. If she had taken us to her home in Ngermid, she would not have had to work like that. But she had decided to bring us up as Japanese children. Sometimes, my mother's family sent us food, but as long as I remember, my mother worked all day long. Several years after my father's death, she remarried, to another Japanese man. When I entered high school, she was already with him.

After graduating from *shogakko*, I took the exam to go to junior high school. I think that the *shogakko* teacher visited my house and advised my mother to let me go to junior high school. This was a good feature of Japanese education, I think. Even when I did something wrong, in many cases it was a fight, my teacher visited and told my parents, "Your son had a fight at school. They should try to get on well." They never said, "Your son had a fight. It was his fault". The teachers were very good. After the teacher reported that I had had a fight, I would be scolded severely at home. Following the teacher's advice, I took the entrance exam for junior high school. My mother supported me.

After the exam, fifty boys were selected. Amongst them, only Sugiyama and I were half-Palauan. Sugiyama's father worked as a judicial scrivener. I wonder if it was an experiment to select Sugiyama and me, as half-islanders. There were many Okinawan students from all over the South Seas Islands. Our school was located in Ngerbodel, Koror. It was below today's cemetery. We studied science, English, Chinese classics, *kendo* (Japanese fencing), *judo* and so on. We were taught to have pride in being Japanese. While I was a junior high school student, the war came to Palau. So I was not able to graduate from junior high school.



## Experiences during the war

In the first air raid in March, we junior high school students were working at Airai airfield. Because of the air raid, two students died. After the war, we made a memorial for them in the naval cemetery in Koror. After the first air raid, the students took refuge in the hills. The first place we took refuge was Airai *bai* (meeting house). There were two teachers and twenty to thirty students altogether. Some students had already left for Japan. The children of higher status people went to Japan early, but the children of ordinary people, such as merchants, were still in Palau. When we were in Airai *bai*, some of my classmates were injured. And in the bay of Airai many Japanese ships were under attack. Early in the morning, we left Airai and went to Ngerikiil; and after that we went into the jungle and walked for four days through the hills. At the police station on the border of Airai and Aimeliik, we broke up. Because I did not know that my family had taken refuge in Aimeliik, I went back to Koror. My mother shouted at my uncle, “Go and look for my son!” He found me and took me to Aimeliik.

Between March and July, a teacher told us that classes would begin again. We were called to Mizuho hamlet in Babeldaob, and were trained as boy soldiers. We cultivated plants for the armed forces. In the daytime, we studied and tended the gardens. By this time, the English teacher had been fired. Even when playing baseball, the use of English was prohibited. The military training was very hard. We were still twelve or thirteen years old, and one of the students became mentally unstable, and wet his bed. Many students cried and called for their mothers. I was lucky because I was strong. I was dispatched to the Japanese military headquarters in Nekken, and worked as a messenger. I got better treatment than other students. The head of the Japanese troops had an Okinawan mistress. When I visited headquarters, I ate food which she cooked. At school, we cooked for ourselves. Even though we got rice from the headquarters, we could not get enough to eat. The war got worse and worse. When the war was over, about twenty students returned from the hills.

## Life in Japan

After the war, the Americans made the Japanese people return to Japan. Because my father had entered my name into his family’s register, I was ordered to go. Most of the half-Japanese people were not legally accepted as Japanese, so they did not have to leave. Some of the half-Japanese did go, and my family was also instructed to leave Palau with the Japanese man whom my mother had married. However, my mother’s father resisted this order. He said, “My daughter is Palauan, and because Palau is a matrilineal society, my grandchildren are Palauan.” He sent his family to the American headquarters to add their voices in support of this claim. Then the American officials said, “The mother doesn’t have to go to Japan, but the children must leave Palau.” After

that, they negotiated again, and finally they ordered that only I, the eldest son, had to go to Japan.

I went to Japan with Mr. Kishikawa and his son. Mr. Kishikawa used to work with my father, and my father asked him to take care of his children after his death. Mr. Kishikawa was from Saga prefecture, and because I could not get in touch with my relatives in Japan, I went to Saga with them. I went to junior high school there for two years. When we took refuge in Babeldaob, my teacher made certificates to show that we had studied for a certain period in the junior high school in Palau. So, I was able to continue my study from the point it was interrupted by the war. Mr. Kishikawa's family were farmers. So, I had to work hard, but I did not have trouble getting food. Life was hard for a Japanese farmer. In summer, the day was long. I had to work until 8:00 p.m. because it was still light. After studying at school, I worked on the farm. After graduating from junior high school, I moved to my aunt's house in Tokyo. That family also had to struggle to survive. My aunt told me, "I will let you go to an agricultural college", because it would help Palauan people. But the life there was hard, and I always thought about my mother.

## Coming home to Palau

One day, a chance came to go back to Palau. A group of Palauans came to Japan from Indonesia, intending to return to Palau from Japan. When I heard this from Sugiyama, I went to see them. I really wanted to go back to Palau. My relative in that group told the Japanese officials, "He is Palauan, so please let him go with us." Fortunately, I was allowed to go with them, and in around 1948, I arrived in Guam. We were put in barracks with Japanese war-criminals. At that time, my sister was in Guam, and she came to see me. I was so happy to see her! After that, we left Guam for Palau, and in Peleliu we were investigated to determine whether we really were Palauans, and I was allowed to come home.

After that, I was taken to the American naval office and asked what kind of work I wanted to do. I told them that I wanted to study. They gave me two choices: one was a school for teachers, and the other was a school to be a medical doctor. I chose the medical school. At the end of 1948, I went to Guam and started to study at Guam Naval Medical School. The first six months were spent only learning English. English, English, nothing but English! After four years of training, I went back to Palau and started to work as a doctor. My mother was very happy that I came back to Palau. From that time, she never argued that I was a Japanese. I gave my salary to her when I started to work.

*Interview: 24 February 2006, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA.*

## Story 54

Mechas Humiko Kingzio

Born: 1931

Father: from Okinawa, Japan

Mother: from Ngchesar



Mechias Humiko Kingzio (2005; photo by Takashi Mita)

When I was a child, there were six Japanese families in my hamlet in Ngchesar. Five of them were from Okinawa, and the other was from Hachijyo Island, Japan. The wives of these families were mostly Palauan women. My father was from Okinawa, and my mother was from Ngchesar. My father was a carpenter, but he also worked as a charcoal burner.

### My school days

Because I was half Japanese, I could go to *kokumingakko*, the school for Japanese children. But my father made me go to *kogakko*, the school for Palauan children, from when I was eight till I was eleven.

Because I spoke standard Japanese to my father and spoke Palauan to my mother, the Japanese class at *kogakko* was too easy for me. My father's mother-tongue was Okinawan dialect, but he said that it would mean less to learn Okinawan dialect and talked to me in standard Japanese.

*Kogakko* was in Koror, so I lived apart from my family. It made me feel very lonely. So, even during the recess, I did not go out to play with other children. I just stayed in the classroom. Then, Hattori-sensei asked me if I wanted to learn how to knit. I enjoyed learning knitting from her.

After finishing the *honka* (basic course) at *kogakko*, I was transferred to *kokumin-gakko* in Shimizu (a Japanese immigrants' hamlet). Even though it was a long way to go to *kokumingakko*, I was happy to be able to live with my family. I walked four hours with my younger brothers and sisters to go to school.

Because I thought that the school curriculum of *kokumingakko* would be more advanced than that of *kogakko*, I studied the third grade again. But I found that there was not so much difference between *kogakko* and *kokumingakko*, in teaching math for example. Of course, Japanese language class in *kokumingakko* was more advanced than *kogakko*. I learned a lot of Chinese characters in *kokumingakko*. When I prepared for the class at home, I questioned the Japanese worker in my house. Because I studied very hard, I finished reading the textbook first in the class. Then, Mori-sensei told me, "As

you have finished reading already, please assist other students.”

When I was in *kokumingakko*, there was discrimination. Even when I performed very well, I was not allowed to be commended in front of the school. A Japanese girl who also performed well was called in front of all the students and commended on our behalf. This is another example; in the morning assembly a Japanese boy threw stones at me from behind my back. I just looked at him, and on my way home I caught him and said, “You threw stones at me, didn’t you?” And I struck him with a tapioca stem. It might have hurt because there are stipules on a tapioca stem. He cried and ran into his house. Then, his mother came out with a *kama* (sickle) and chased me yelling, “You! Stupid *tomīn!*” (islander). After this incident, the boy did not harass me any more. In *kokumingakko*, there were several half-caste students like me.

In school, I had to endure many things. These experiences made me a strong-willed person. I don’t give up on things easily.

## Discrimination outside the school

It was a big taboo for a Japanese woman to marry a Palauan man. I think that the Japanese thought that by intermarriage the lesser blood of islanders would dilute the Japanese blood. But Japanese men sometimes married Palauan women. I know of only one case of a relationship between a Palauan man and a Japanese woman.

The Palauan man’s name was Esang. He was a smart man who worked for the *Nanyo-cho* (South Seas Government). But he became sick and was shipped to a hospital in Japan. A Japanese nurse accompanied him, and they fell in love. After she became pregnant, Esang died and was buried in Saipan. The woman brought Esang’s belongings to his mother in Palau, and told her that she was pregnant with his baby. After that, the woman went back to Japan, but her father did not allow her to enter the house. Fortunately, her step-mother felt sorry for her, and gave her a place to sleep. After the baby was born, a policeman came and said that the baby should be sent to Palau. So, the woman brought her baby to Palau, and asked Esang’s mother to raise him. The baby was named Haruo and he grew up in Palau.

I have heard that Haruo visited Japan after he grew up and met his mother. The first time he visited, his mother, who now had a new family, came to see Haruo secretly. But when Haruo visited her a second time, he told her that he wanted to meet her Japanese husband. Hearing their story, the husband of Haruo’s mother said to her, “Why didn’t you tell me such an important thing until your son had reached this age?”

The Japanese called themselves ‘the First People’, and called Palauans and others ‘the Second People’ or ‘the Third People’. I think that those who did the hardest work were the Koreans. They built the causeways between Koror and Ngerekebesang Island, and between Koror and Malakal Island.

I gave up resisting discrimination because it was just a feature of the era. There

were many examples of such discrimination; Palauans could not go to a bar or brothel. Even if they did not do anything, if they were found in this kind of place, they were jailed. Palauans were prohibited from drinking alcohol. Those who visited brothels chose a brothel in which prostitutes from his homeland worked. So, Okinawan men would visit the brothel where Okinawan women worked, and Japanese visited the brothels which had Japanese women.

In the Japanese time, most Palauans just protected themselves and did not attempt to run their own businesses. From the American time, they became free to do anything.

## Palauan ethics

I learned Palauan customs and ethics from my mother. For example, she told me if a visitor came to the house, the children should sit down quietly and not interrupt their conversation.

When I became an adolescent, my mother taught me to be careful of boys. She told me, “When you visit another hamlet, if a boy tries to be friendly, you should ask him whose son he is.” In Palau, to have a child between close relatives or brothers and sisters was most carefully avoided. Nowadays, this principle is corrupted. Today’s students don’t know who their relatives are, because they did not learn it at home. Their parents also don’t know about this kind of thing because they were educated abroad. When the young people went to school overseas, they sometimes fell in love with their own relatives and had babies.

Sometimes, I learned Palauan ethics from my mother’s visitors. If a visitor came, I sat down behind them, and listened to what they said. A woman in our hamlet sometimes visited my mother and discussed children’s manners. She talked about a child who went into somebody’s house and touched their things. But the mother did not scold her child and just concentrated on chatting. “This is very bad”, this woman said. She added that, if she brought her child on a visit, she would instruct the child to attend to her words, and say, “If, when visiting, you see another child eating, do not watch; for the mother will feel obligated to tell her child to share, and I will feel ashamed.” She also said, “If I was attending a meeting in a *bai* (meeting house), and my child tried to get my attention, I would just shake my head. Then, the child would look down.” Hearing this, I was impressed.

In the old days, Palauans kept a good part of their food aside in case of visitors. Palauan ethics and customs are fading these days. The traditional knowledge is also not being passed on. When I was a child, I learned that if the leaves of the *amiyaka* tree turned red, clams would lay eggs in the sea.

I learned how to take care of the gardens from my mother. In the case of *brak* (giant taro), several tubers would grow from each root. Some people would harvest all of them, but my mother dug the land with a sharpened stick, and took only the biggest

one. Because she left the other tubers, they would ripen one by one. If you harvest *brak* from the root, you need to replant and wait for three years before it can be harvested. The methods of gardening were different in each family.

## Land survey

The Japanese government conducted a land survey. On learning that the government intended to survey the land, cunning owners drove in the stakes far from their homes, and told the government officials that the land inside the stakes was theirs.

There were many factors which confused the traditional land tenure system. One of these factors was translation. Those who surveyed were Japanese, and they were accompanied by Palauan translators. For instance, in Palau, where land was utilized by somebody, this didn't mean that this person owned the land. But in translation, sometimes they mixed up *kanri* (to administer) and *kenri* (to have rights over). If the person who conducted the survey wrote, "Mr. A has rights to this land", then the land would be inherited by his family after his death. But actually, this land belonged to his *kebliil* (clan), and he was just using the land, and even after his death, the owner of the land was the *kebliil*.

## Working and money

Palauan people used to work for the community without pay. We just made whatever we needed by ourselves. But from the American time, the Palauans became crazy about money. In the Japanese time, we still conducted our lives independently. We sometimes worked for the Japanese and earned money but it was not usual. Now, many Palauan people won't work without pay. When I was a child, we cleaned the lane in front of the house by ourselves. But now, they would say that the lane is administered by the government, so the government should clean the lane.

From the American time, Palauan people lost their inclination for effort. In the Japanese time, there were industries in Palau. We exported copra, dried bonito, pineapple, charcoal, bauxite, phosphate, and other things. Nowadays, there are hotels, but when the people who run the hotel go back to their country, we can't even break up the concrete building. We would be better off making our own businesses with our natural resources. In today's Palau, those who deceive the people make the money.

## The war

When the air raid happened in March [1944], I heard a strange sound. When we went out, there were many airplanes flying side by side. We saw the star marks on the airplanes. We said, "American airplanes have come!" and ran about. Because we had not

yet made a shelter, we hid inside the kiln for burning charcoal. My father said, "If a bomb strikes us, this kiln will be our grave."

In July, the second air raid came. We took refuge on the hill above Shimizu. Japanese and Palauans took refuge in different places. Our family took refuge as Japanese. We built a hut with betelnut trees. In this hut, the rain leaked through. Sometimes, I could not sleep because of snakes and insects that crept into the hut. When we were away from the river, we could get drinking water from the taro patch. We dug into the soil, put a taro leaf in the hole and waited for a while. When the mud settled we could ladle out the pure water.

Because we brought pigs, fowls, taro and other food to our shelter, we had food in the beginning. But as time went on, food became scarce. Because we took refuge as Japanese, some food was supplied. We could get a small portion of rice in the early stages, and later, some taro was distributed. But it was not enough. We ate things we would not normally eat. My father knew that the stem of the *chelwch* tree was edible. This tree was in Okinawa also, and when he had not enough food in Okinawa, he ate it. He also knew that a shoot of *kilkuld* grass was also edible. My mother knew that mangrove fruit, banana root, and a bitter fruit named *belloi* (bitter and poisonous wild fruit) were edible. We also caught shrimps and eels in the stream. Even though we were hungry, we would not starve to death.

After Peleliu Island was occupied and people in Babeldaob became busy, we went back to our hamlet.

Everybody suffered from hunger. One day, a Japanese man stole a coconut from some Palauans. Then, a Palauan boy of around sixteen threw a spear at his head. The Japanese man tried to run away, but the boy caught him and tied him to a tree, and beat him up. The man cried and said that he would never do such a thing normally, but he was too hungry. We told the boy to stop, but he wouldn't. The young Palauan boy beat this middle-aged Japanese man, and did not stop even though he had tearfully apologized! After the war, this Palauan boy died from an accidental head injury. We said that he died because he had been cruel to the Japanese man at that time.

When we went to the taro-patch, we sometimes saw that some taro had withered. This happened when somebody tried to dig the tuber and damaged the plant. Because there were no soldiers around, I thought that the Japanese civilian workers had done it. But my father said, "Let's forgive them. Everybody is hungry."

Some people ate snails. Because snails are poisonous, they have to be cooked appropriately. But some people died from the snail poison because they failed to extract it adequately, or they did not know that it was poisonous. I saw several Japanese civilian workers eat snakes. One day, they brought a snake which had already been killed, skinned it, and asked my mother to grill it. Because my mother was scared of snakes, she refused. Then, my father scolded her, and grilled the snake for them.

My father was very kind. Even though we did not have enough food, if a wounded

civilian worker passed by our house, he gave him taro. One day, a Japanese found a discarded crab shell, and started to eat it. Seeing this, my father stopped him, and gave him some food in the house.

My father was honest, and never talked ill of others, nor yelled at others. He died in March 1945 in an accident. When he was fishing for the military with another civilian war worker, the bomb for fishing exploded. The person with him was injured, but my father died. The injured man brought the body of my father back on the boat. I also lost my youngest sister in the war. She died of malnutrition eleven days after her birth.

## **After the war**

After the war, a Palauan found the bones of a Japanese who had sat with his back leaned against the tree. This body wore a helmet and shoes, but the clothes had been taken by crabs. This Palauan found several skeletons like this. They might have been Japanese civilian workers. They had tried to cultivate crops; but they did not succeed, and died.

Before the Japanese were sent to Japan, some Japanese children were left in Palau. Most had lost their parents. Palauan people adopted them as their children, and raised them. I know a woman from Okinawa; her father died in Peleliu and her mother was shot dead when she tried to draw water from the well. At that time, her mother was carrying her as a baby on her back. Then, an empty machine gun cartridge hit her mother's head, and she died. The baby cried and cried so much. A Japanese soldier heard it and looked for somebody who would take care of her. She was raised by a Palauan protestant priest and his wife in Melekeok, and after they died, she was adopted by their daughter, and after she died, she was adopted again by the priest's son. This woman is very rich now. I have heard that she told somebody, "I know that I am not Palauan. And I know my sad background. I want to meet the relatives of my true parents." She doesn't know her parents' names or her true name. I am sorry for her.

My father had three children in Okinawa. The oldest son was teaching in the Marshalls before the war, and later he was transferred to Palau. My brother asked my father, "When the war ends, can I take Humiko to Okinawa?" Then, my father told him, "Humiko is a girl, and I can't imagine the situation in Okinawa after the war. Don't take her there, because it might be dangerous." After the war, I saw my oldest brother several times. Around 1974, my brother visited Palau and we disinterred the bones of our father, and cremated them. My brother took some of the ash and brought it back to Okinawa to bury in the family grave. I also took my father's ash and brought it to my house. I visited my oldest brother in Okinawa with my younger sister and brother in 2004. It was because he really wanted to see us. He died in January, 2005.



## Religious belief

I was brought up a Protestant, the faith of my mother. In Ngchesar, the priests used to be German, but when I was a child, there was a Palauan priest. We sang hymns in a *bai* (meeting house). I don't know about my father's religious beliefs.

In Ngchesar, we respect the deity of the hamlet even now. The deity of Ngchesar takes the shape of the dove, and the ray. Their colors are the combination of black and white. If somebody treats the deity badly, they will become sick. There used to be a person who had responsibility for the deity. This person was the natural mediator between the deity and the people. If the family of a person who suffered a sickness came to this mediator, the mediator would tremble and speak in a strange voice. The mediator would give the reason why the person became sick; "Why did you do such a thing to me . . .", the mediator would say, something like that. The mediator knew what the patient had done even though they had not seen it nor been told by the family. The family of the patient would apologize to the deity, and pay money. Then, after the patient was taken care of in traditional ways, he or she would recover.

It happened in my family too. It was in the American time. My younger brother went fishing, and a sacred ray came up onto his raft. Because the stings of the ray are dangerous, my brother stepped on the ray. He knew that it was the deity, but he pushed the ray with a bamboo stick, kicked it, and tried to make it drop into the sea. But the ray did not move. So, my brother asked a man on the shore, "Brother, the ray of the deity came up on my raft and won't get off. Please remove it from my raft. I am scared." Then, this man told the ray, "This child is looking for food. Please get off the raft and make fish come to him." Then, the ray went into the sea by himself. My brother did not tell his family of this incident.

One day, when my brother was exercising in the school grounds, he broke his leg. It was the leg he stepped on the ray with. Because the hospital was far from our house, he was treated with traditional medicine. In a year, his broken leg was healed, but it was a little shorter than the other leg.

When he was older, he had an accident on a motorbike in Guam. The same leg was broken again. At that time, also in Guam, his older brother heard a dove of the deity cooing loudly on the roof. Thinking that it was strange that he heard the dove cooing just when his younger brother broke his leg, he told our mother in Palau to visit the mediator of the deity of Ngchesar.

When my mother visited the mediator, the old woman told her, "Why did he step on me? I was also looking for food." The mediator also said, "Why didn't you come to me until now, even though I warned you again and again? Do you want me to continue until some of you die?" My mother told the mediator, "I will ask my son what happened." When my mother asked her son, he told her of the incident when he was a child. My mother scolded him very severely. After an apology to the deity, this kind of accident

has not occurred to my brother again.

The symbol of Ngchesar is the sacred dove. Some of the Christians were against this plan, but the elders said that the hamlet deity had a traditional claim to our respect. If they wanted to be Christian, that was no problem; but still, they should respect the deity of Ngchesar. This is what the elders ruled. I never eat dove's eggs. Even when I visited Japan, I took care not to eat small birds' eggs, because I didn't know what kind of eggs they were.

As long as we treat it well, the deity will help us. In the Japanese time, a mother and her child went inside the forest to gather birds' eggs. But they lost their way, and the sun set. The mother told her child, "Don't cry. Let's wait for the morning under the tree." Then, they heard a dove cooing. A dove of the deity came to them, and it flew in front of them, and sometimes it looked back to them. So, the mother said, "The deity tells us the way!" They went after the dove, and finally they met the men of the hamlet who were looking for them. This child is younger than me, and still alive.

*Interviews: 9 February 2005, 19 January 2007, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewers: first interview, Maki MITA and Nasuhiko YAMAGUCHI; second interview, Maki MITA.*

## Story 55

Mechas Augusta Nagano

Born: 1934

Father: from Ngardmau

Mother: from Ngeremlengui



Mechas Augusta Nagano, with her husband  
Rubak Ngirawess (2000)

### My life in Ngardmau

My name is Augusta, and I also have a Palauan name, ‘Sibong’. Nagano is my father’s name which was originally the name of a Japanese friend of his.

I was born in Ngeremlengui, and adopted by my mother. When I was three years old, she married a man from Ngardmau, so that is where I lived when I was a child. In Ngardmau, there were many Japanese working at the aluminum factory. Palauans, Yapese, Okinawans, Koreans; there were many peoples working there. My father worked at the aluminum factory, and he also let a house to a Japanese family. There was a boy in this family, and we played together. Even though I did not go to school at that time, when we played I spoke to him in Japanese.

There was a cable car, movie theater, and many stores in Ngardmau. My father sometimes sent me to a store to buy tobacco. In the Japanese time, there were many horses in Ngardmau. Horses are big, and I was scared of them. Before then, we did not have horses in Palau. If a horse was on the road, I ran away.

One day, I walked around the center of Ngardmau with an older Palauan friend. When it began to rain, my friend told me, “Go into this Japanese store and ask them to lend us a *baiong* (umbrella). The owner of this store is a friend of your father, so they might say yes.” So I went inside the store. Even though I was very small, I spoke a little Japanese because of my Japanese friend. I asked a woman in the store, “Ma’am, please give me *baiong*.” She asked me, “What is a *baiong*?” Because I did not know the Japanese word for *baiong*, I mimed opening an umbrella, and said, “We use it like this.” Then, she understood and let us borrow an umbrella. Later, they told my father about this incident. Their family name was Inafuku, I remember.

I don’t know whether my father spoke Japanese. My mother spoke only Palauan. She was a woman who worked in the garden and taro-patch every day. My grandmother often took me to the taro-patch. “Please take my bag, and let’s go to our taro-patch”, she said. I guess that I was about four years old at that time.

When I turned seven years old, I went to school in Ngardmau. A Japanese teacher taught older students, and a Palauan teacher taught the small ones. I learned how to read

and write *katakana* in school. I did not feel any discrepancy between what the teachers taught us and what our parents taught us.

My parents disciplined me in the Palauan manner. They told me not play in other children's houses but only in our house, because I might learn something wrong in another person's house. When I was older, my mother told me to be careful about boys. She told me about a girl who did not listen to her parents. "Look at her. She already has a baby even though she is not married."

## About the war

One day my teacher instructed me, "Please go to pick up the headmaster's lunchbox." So I went out. On my way, I saw many Japanese and Okinawan people walking. They carried their luggage and pulled their children by their hands. Shocked by this scene, I just stood there and watched them for a while; so I was late returning to school. My Palauan teacher asked me, "Why did you take such a long time?" I said, "I saw many Japanese people walking with luggage. I was scared." Then the teacher said, "Oh, they might be taking refuge in the mangroves. There might soon be an air raid." So, the teachers told the students, "Eat lunch quickly, and go into the shelter." There was a big shelter in the school. We were in the shelter all afternoon, but nothing happened. So, we went home in the evening.

On another day, I went to Ngeremlengui with some other people. Around 5:00 in the evening, I and some other children went up a hill, and we saw many warships. We were so surprised, and reported it to the adults; but they did not believe us. They said, "Have you ever seen a warship? How do you know that it was a warship, even though you have never seen one?" We said, "There are many! We saw many warships!" But they said, "No, they might not be warships." But while we were sleeping, somebody shouted, "Take cover! The air raid has started! Hurry up!" When I woke, I saw many, many airplanes in the sky. So, we took refuge in the hills.

During the war, it was hard to get food. Adults went to our hamlet in Ngardmau at night, and gathered taro and other foods. It was very far from our shelter. Because I was only eight years old, I did not listen to the adults, and I insisted on going with them.

After the sun set, we walked to Ngardmau. It was very dark, and the person at the front of the line carried fireflies in a small cage and we followed their light. When we arrived at the taro patch in our hamlet, the adults worked in the darkness. I waited for them, and then we walked back to our shelter. It was almost dawn when we arrived. After that, I did not go with them again.

Even though it was hard to get food, our situation was better than others. I did not have to eat *belloi* (a bitter and poisonous wild fruit) and *denges* (bitter mangrove fruit) like the people in eastern Babeldaob did.

There were many Japanese soldiers in Ngardmau, and they confiscated one of my

mother's gardens. They prohibited us from harvesting from there.

I was Catholic from when I was a baby, the faith of my parents. But during the war, we trusted *Modekngai* (Palauan religious belief) also. My mother put a piece of wood in a small pouch with string, and hung it on my neck. She said that it was a charm which would protect me. But when I went to the toilet in the forest, I hung it on a tree-branch, and forgot to take it. Then my mother got very angry. "If you lose it, you might die!" she said. I was very scared and went back the forest to search for it. I found my charm!

During the war, my father worked for the military to make salt from seawater. They worked by the mangroves. At lunch time, I always brought soup for my father and for two Yapese who worked with him. One time, one of the Yapese gave me a crab and said, "I feel like you are my own child."

One day, I went to the taro-patch with my mother. My mother collected four coconuts, put them in a basket, and told me to take it home. She said, "If you meet any Japanese, and they ask you for the coconuts, don't give them any." On my way, I met a Japanese man. He was a civilian and looked very hungry. When I saw his face, I felt very sorry for him. So, I put one coconut in front of him. He said, "Thank you, thank you..." Later, my mother asked me, "Where is the missing coconut?" I said, "Mom, I found a very poor person..." "I told you not to give food to others", "But mom, I was very sorry for him..." Then, my mother said, "Is he your relative?" I could not talk back to her any more.

During the war, there were many bombs dropped on Ngardmau, especially around the factories. There were many unexploded bombs remaining after the war, and my father would dismantle them to get powder for fishing. But after my mother scolded him, he stopped doing this.

*Interview: 23 July and 23 August 2000, 7 July 2007, Ngeremlengui (except third interview, by phone). Conducted in Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA.*

## Story 56

Mechas Paulina Towai

Born: 1936

Father: from Peleliu

Mother: from Koror



Mechas Paulina Towai (2006)

### My background

I grew up in Koror. Even though I was too young to go to *kogakko*, I could speak basic Japanese because I had Japanese friends.

My father worked for the pearl shell farm. Before doing this job, he worked for the weather observatory. My parents had studied in *kogakko*, so they could speak and read Japanese.

### My Japanese friends

My friends were the children of Mr. Kono who worked for *Nantaku* (South Seas Colonization Company). Mr. Kono rented a house from my mother. He had two boys and one girl. The elder boy, Toyoshige, was seven years old and he was a student at the Japanese school; and the younger boy, Toyohiko, was not yet attending school. I have forgotten the girl's name.

When I played with them, I spoke in Japanese. We played *menko* (Japanese card game), *gomutobi* (a skipping game), *Saipan-dama* (marbles) and other games. Sometimes my mother gave the Kono family bananas and other fruits, and Mrs. Kono gave my family *tempura* and other food.

There was a Japanese store in Ngerbeched, and they sold coffee, beer, rice, shaved ice with strawberry syrup, *tama* (donut balls) and other sweets. I especially liked shaved ice with strawberry syrup. If I had 5 sen, I could buy two or three pieces of *tama*. Sometimes my parents gave me money and I could buy these things. I don't know about other stores in Koror, because I was afraid to go to a store which was far away from my house.

### About downtown, Koror

I remember the main street of Koror very well. I was hit by a bicycle on this street! At that time, I was still very small, and when I looked behind me, a bicycle hit me. I

tumbled over, but the Japanese man on the bicycle rode away.

I went to Palau Park on New Year's Day with my Japanese friends. They distributed Japanese *mochi* (rice cake) and oranges at the park, and we ate them. In the park, there was a small zoo. I remember that there were monkeys, gorillas, snakes, and an animal I don't know the name of. This animal had a long neck and it was big.

*Interview: 17 July 2006, Koror. Conducted in Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA.*

## Story 57

Rubak Obodei Iyar

Born: 1936

Father: from Koror

Mother: from Airai and Melekeok



Rubak Obodei Iyar (2007)

### My childhood

When I was in the first grade of *kogakko*,

I would go to *Honganji* temple. It was close to my house, and the Buddhist priest invited me there. It was like a Saturday school. There were about thirty Japanese students, and I was the only Palauan. We listened to the stories of the priest. He told us some Japanese folk stories such as ‘*Momotaro-san*’. At that time, Palauan and Japanese schoolchildren did not play together, because they would get into a fight. But I grew up surrounded by Japanese people. My house was in Idid, and it was just across from the *Honganji* temple.

Sometimes, the children at the *Honganji* temple stood up and told stories in front of the Japanese templegoers. When I did this, many Japanese said to me that I was just like a Japanese child, and only my color was different.

We children in Koror could speak Japanese even before going to school, because we had many chances to talk with the Japanese. So, when my cousins came to Koror from Babeldaob, we went shopping and I translated for them. Also, my cousins liked to eat Japanese sweets which the Buddhist priest gave us. So, I asked the priest to give us sweets, and we shared. The other Palauan children in Koror also wanted to eat Japanese sweets; so they came with me to the temple, and after getting the sweets they went away. Even though my parents were Protestant Christians, they did not mind that I went to the Buddhist temple. I was also Protestant Christian and went to Evangelical church, but I also went to *Honganji* temple, and sometimes to the Catholic school with my relatives.

Around 1985, two of my Japanese friends came to Palau and looked for me. At first, I did not recognize them, but when they mentioned *Honganji*, I remembered them. I treated them until they went home, and in the following year, one of them returned and gave me a radio. I still keep it as a memory of our time together.



## The traditional Palauan way of life

My father used to live in Oikull, Airai. We moved to Koror when I was a baby. Because my father helped the chief of Oikull, his maternal uncle, he did a lot of work in the community. For example, my father and others built a *bai* (meeting house); but many people stopped working on the *bai* because it took three years, and only a few people completed their work. My father was one of them.

My father taught me a lot of things; how to make a spear, fish trap, arrow and small canoe. And after I graduated from Emaus high school [after the war], I learned a lot of Palauan customs from my father and his brother in Aimeliik. My father said that people in Koror, especially people in high positions, needed to learn about their own traditions.

Each hamlet has its own law. But people cannot apply their local rules when they come to the center area, Koror. For example, if a woman comes to Koror, she should hide her Palauan money. It would be fine to wear it in her own village, but not in Koror.

Talking about Palauan money, in recent years, many *udoud* (Palauan money beads) have come from foreign countries. We can't compare these *udoud* to our traditional *udoud* which have histories. For example, the Palauan money which my father used to have has a long history. Each piece of Palauan traditional money has its own story, and the story makes it valuable. So, if the people forget the story, this Palauan money would be just a piece of money, but not as valuable as it used to be.

Even if you are an expert in one thing, you can't do it by yourself. I have seen the houses of carpenters which are ugly and almost breaking apart. During the Japanese time, there were work projects called *kinrohoshi* (community work). In *kinrohoshi*, people who wanted work done in their village could request the young men to come to their place and work for them.

But today, there is no more spirit of *kinrohoshi*. About fifteen years ago, the government started a project to fund work in each hamlet. I think that this project took over the *kinrohoshi*. Nowadays, if a person finds a broken part on a dock, he thinks, "I should make the government pay for that, and hire workers to fix it." We used to work according to the wishes of our chiefs, but today Palauan people like to do things for money.

There was also a traditional belief in Palau. There were speakers, persons who spoke the words of the deities in each hamlet in Babeldaob. There are lineages of speakers. One of my relatives has this power; she has suddenly spoken the words of the deity. It has happened to her twice. When there was a conflict regarding land, she suddenly began to talk in very different voice. She told us not to argue with each other about the ancestral land.

The God for the westerners is a big God, but there are also small gods in Palau. We call Palauan gods, '*cheliid*'.

## About Japanese school

When I entered *kogakko*, I felt that the class was very easy. And we did not feel any difficulty in accepting the Japanese way. The Japanese discipline was very strict. We were punished if we made a noise in the class, or if we fought in school.

There were school uniforms, and boys dressed in a white shirt and blue or black pants. All the boys had their hair cropped very short. Because we were under Japanese control, we did not have any choices; we just followed the orders of the Japanese. I think that the Germans and the Japanese are the same kinds of people. They just stick to orders.

One of the good features of the Japanese style of education was that the Japanese teachers were very direct with us about our mistakes and our weak points. So, we did not repeat them. The Japanese teachers also gave us an interest in learning. When you have a good education with discipline, it is easier for you to retain information, and you can learn how to solve problems by yourself. The Japanese teachers were strict, and sometimes we were punished, but it was nothing.

## Memories of the war

When I was in the second grade of *kogakko*, I moved to Ngerberuuch [Ngerbeluu?] hamlet in Aimeliik, because the war was coming. After that, I moved from there to Ngetkib in Airai, and experienced the first air raid in Ngetkib. We climbed the mountain called Rois er a Ngetkib. From there, we saw the American airplanes dropping bombs on Koror. We saw a very big fire when they dropped a bomb on the piles of asphalt in Ngchesar.

When I was in Oikull hamlet in Airai, I ate some normally inedible foods. For example, I ate *belloi* (bitter and poisonous wild fruit), mangrove fruit which was called *denges*, and banana stem. I also ate the top part of a betelnut-like tree. We called it '*chermel a bouch*'. In Oikull, there were not many coconuts, so we went to the mangroves and collected the coconuts which were already spoiled. After moving from Oikull to Ngiwal, I ate taro, coconut oil and salt. In addition to that, my father went fishing at night. In Ngiwal, there were many coconut trees, but the nuts were taken by the Japanese military.

We used to steal coconuts. While soldiers were watching, we hid ourselves; but when they passed, we climbed up the coconut trees. At first, I just watched my friends climb the trees and collect coconuts, because I was not good at this. There were not many coconut trees to climb in Koror. But after watching two or three times, I also tried climbing a coconut tree, and dropped coconuts. We had to do this very quickly, so when we came down we got a lot of scratches on our legs.

Shortly before the war ended, the top Palauan police officer, Oikawasang, escaped

to an American ship. After that, my brother heard that the Japanese would kill all the relatives of Oikawasang. My brother sent a boat and this message to my father. My brother said, "Our relatives will be killed. So, as soon as you hear this information, get the boat and go out of the lagoon. Then, you will see a big ship, and you can take refuge." Oikawasang was my mother's uncle, so it seemed that we must escape. But my father decided not to run, and just waited for a summons from the Japanese government. But the Japanese did not call us. One day, an airplane flew over Palau dropping leaflets, which said that the war was over.

*Interview: 21 December 2006, Koror. Conducted in English and Japanese. Interviewer: Maki MITA.*



## Acknowledgements

The ‘Palauan colonial history’ which I have tried to record in this document is an accumulation of individual experiences. Anthropological study is based on person-to-person relationships. As a Japanese researcher of anthropology, I felt it difficult to have a fair basis for my relationship with Palauans if I did not understand their past relationship with Japan. I believe the fact that I, a young Japanese researcher, listened to Palauan elders’ experiences was one of the most important aspects of this study. I hope this project on our shared national past will contribute to a better understanding of Palauan history.

Here I want to show my deep appreciation to the Palauan *rubak* and *mechas* who shared their experiences with me. Some of them have already passed away, but they left us valuable messages. I also want to express my gratitude to Ms. Faustina Rehuher, the former director of Belau National Museum, who understood my work and gave me the chance to conduct this project. In the process of translating, I received great assistance from Mr. Peter Holm, who was a volunteer worker at Belau National Museum. I appreciate his effort and reliable work in editing my English.

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## Notes

- 1) Belau is the local name for Palau.
- 2) Memories of the war has been one of the most popular topics in this kind of study (e.g. Falgout, Poyer, and Carucci 2001, 2008, Tuten-Puckett et al. 2004, White and Lindstrom 1989, White 1991).
- 3) *Rubak* also indicates a male elder in general.
- 4) *Mechas* is a respectful term for a female elder.
- 5) This is the informant’s answer to the question, “Where were your parents from?”. Sometimes the informants indicated that their parents were adoptive, but this may not always have been mentioned. This field reflects the information as supplied.
- 6) ‘Sensei’ means teacher.
- 7) In some cases the informant was asked only where they were from, not where their parents were from.
- 8) Palauan food is categorized as *odóim* or *ongráol*. *Ongráol* is starchy food such as taro, tapioca, and rice. *Odóim* is a category which includes a variety of food such as fish, meat, corned beef and other food (Akimichi 1980).

- 9) Two Palauan troops were sent to New Guinea. The first unit recruited in 1942 was *Chosa-tai*, and the second unit formed in 1943 was named *Teishin-tai* (Higuchi 2003). *Kirikomi-tai* units were formed for operations within Palau. From this, it would seem that Toshio Kyota would have been a member of *Teishin-tai*.
- 10) In 1933 the South Seas Development Company started to mine phosphate in Peleliu. (Nanyo Kohatsu Kabushikigaisha 1941)
- 11) Most informants who mentioned this person remembered his name as 'Elmano', but Hezel's book (Hezel 1991) has him as 'Emilio'.
- 12) Rubak Ubal Tellei wrote of his experiences and those of other Palauans who went to work with the Japanese military in "Remembering the Pacific War" (White 1991).
- 13) Later, schools for Japanese children were referred to as *kokumingakko*.
- 14) Hearing that, Belenges said, "It sounded like 'prrrrrrrrrrrr...'. Then, we all jumped into the holes which we had dug."
- 15) Mr. and Mrs. Daido's son, Mr. Isao Daido, visited Mechas Barbara in 2006 with his older brother Mr. Yutaka Daido. Mr. Isao Daido was cared for by Mechas Barbara when he was a baby.
- 16) Some informants mentioned a Namita-sensei, and others a Nameta-sensei. It is possible that they were the same person.
- 17) Adoption was common in Palau and may account for this age gap.
- 18) It is a common usage in Palau for grandparents to call children 'son' or 'daughter', and to be called 'Mom' or 'Dad'.
- 19) The informant said that 'the British' attacked Tobi. According to Dr. Black, an American anthropologist, many Tobians testified that the British attacked Tobi soon after the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941 (Peter Black in conversation with the author).

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## Appendix A List of the informants

Story	Name	Birth year	Home village*	Sex	Date of the interviews		
					~2005	2006	2007
1	Ngemelas Tomiko Kitalong	1915	Airai	F	15-Apr 2005	2-Aug	
2	Ibau Demei Oiterong	1917	Koror	F		16-Mar, 13-Jul	
3	Sebastian Koichi Oikang	1917	Ngarchelong	M	27-Apr 2005		
4	Singeo Techong	1920	Airai	M		17-Jul, 11-Aug, 15-Aug, 26-Sep	
5	Toshio Kyota	1921	Ngeremlengui	M		26-Jul	
6	Chiokai Kloulubak	1921	Ngaraard	M		5-Jul	
7	Ichiro Belesam	1922	Peleliu	M		3-Jul	
8	Sato Remoket	1922	Ngarchelong	M		6-Jul	
9	Kazuo Miyashita	1922	Koror	M	17-Mar 2005	10-Jun	
10	Masao Franz	1922	Ngeremlengui	M	20-Jul 2000, 6-Feb 2005	23-Jul	
11	Gabriela Ngirmang	1922	Koror	F		4-Dec	
12	Rosang Kazuo	1923	Angaur	F		11-Jul	
13	Tokie Morei	1923	Peleliu	F		27-Jun	
14	Santos Ngirasechedui	1923	Melekeok	M		29-Nov, 30-Nov	13-Jul
15	Losau Ngotel	1924	Ngchesar	F			27-Mar
16	Katalina Katosang	1924	Ngeremlengui	F		27-Dec	12-Jul
17	Ubal Tellei	1924	Melekeok	M	7-May and ?-Sep 2005		
18	Michie Sugiyama	1925	Ngeremlengui	F		15-Dec	
19	Tomomi Watanabe	1925	Airai	F		24-Nov	
20	Remusei Fumiko Tabelal	1925	Koror	F	24-Aug 2005	7-Dec	
21	Keiko Miyashita Cho	1925	Koror	F	17-Mar, 19-Mar, 10-Aug 2005	9-Jun	26-Jun
22	Ucheliei Malsol Toribiong	1925	Ngeremlengui	F		19-Jun, 21-Jul	
23	Kyarii Mellil	1925	Ngiwal	F	3-Sep 2005		
24	Dirraklang Saruwang Merei Ngirametuker	1926	Airai	F		10-Aug	
25	Belenges Oiterong	1920	Aimeliik	F		12-Dec	
	Yosko Oiterong	1926	Aimeliik	F		12-Dec	
26	Marino Debesol	1926	Ngchesar	M	19-Jan 2005		
27	Sngebard Lluul	1926	Kayangel	M			9-Jul
28	Henry (Hainrick) Albedul	1927	Ngchesar	M		27-Jul, 30-Jul	
29	Dilubch Rechebei	1927	Koror	F		3-Aug, 27-Nov	
30	Barbara Telams	1927	Koror	F		17-Jun, 28-Nov	
31	Ichiro Dingilius Matsutaro	1927	Peleliu	M	31-Aug 2005	26-Sep	
32	Diraul Mokol	1927	Koror	F			31-Jan
33	Sutella Kyota	1927	Airai	F			10-Jul
34	Mathias Toshio Akitaya	1928	Angaur	M		16-Aug	
35	Veronica Remeriang Kazuma	1928	Koror	F	12-Apr 2005		
36	Ochob Giraked	1928	Koror	F		28-Mar, 2-Apr	4-Jan
37	Dilyolt Teruko Etumae	1928	Peleliu	F	8-Aug 2005		
38	Wilhelm Rengiil	1928	Airai	M			9-Jan
39	Tengranger Oiterong	1928	Koror	F			5-Jul
40	Kiyoko Kawai	1929	Ngeremlengui	F		28-Jun	
41	Ichiro Rechebei	1929	Airai	M		15-Aug	
42	Maria Asanuma	1929	Koror	F	16-Aug 2005		

Story	Name	Birth year	Home village*	Sex	Date of the interviews		
					~2005	2006	2007
43	Joseph Ilengelkei	1929	Ngaraard	M	?-Sep 2005		24-Jan, 6, 26-Feb
44	Lawrence Ierago Sr.	1929	Sonsorol	M			5-Feb
45	Techitong Rebuluud	1929	Ngatpang	M		12-Sep, 13-Sep	
46	Nina Antonio	1930	Melekeok	F		18-Jul	
47	Iwesei Rengechel	1930	Koror	F		9-Aug	
48	Ngerair Kozue Rechelulk	1930	Koror	F	4-Feb, 19-Sep 2005		11-Jan
49	Tadao Ngotel	1930	Ngarchelong	M			4-Jul
50	Basilina M. Kintaro	1930	Melekeok	F			3-Jul
51	Patris Tahemaremaho	1930~32	Tobi	M		18-Aug	
52	Ulang Maidesil	1931	Ngeremlengui	F		28-Sep	
53	Minoru Ueki	1931	Koror	M		24-Feb	
54	Humiko Kingzio	1931	Ngchesar	F	9-Feb 2005		19-Jan
55	Augusta Nagano	1934	Ngardmau	F	23-Jul, 23-Aug 2000		7-Jul
56	Paulina Towai	1936	Koror	F		17-Jul	
57	Obodei Iyar	1936	Koror	M		21-Dec	

\* 'Home village' is an ambiguous term. Because Palauan Society is matrilineal, 'home village' usually indicates the mother's village; however, some informants expressed a strong connection with their father's village especially when they spent their childhood there.

## Appendix B Palauan place names in this text

Village	Hamlet/Place name	Village	Hamlet/Place name	
Kayangel	Dilong	Airai	Mizuho	
Ngarchelong	Ollei		Ngerikiil [?] Hill	
Ngaraard	Ulimang	Koror	Rois er a Ngetkib (Mt. Ngetkib)	
	Chelab		Idid	
	Ngeklau		Ngerechemai	
Ngardmau			Medalaih	
Ngeremlengui	Ngermetengel		Ngesachaol	
	Imeong		Ngerbeched	
	Ngchemsed		Ngermid	
	Ngerekngong		Ngerkeseuao	
	Yamato		Iyebukel	
Melekeok	Ngeremeskang (Asahi)		Ngerbodel	
	Melekeok		Ngerekebesang Island	
	Imolch		Ngerekebesang	
	Ngkud		Meyuns	
Ngerutoi Island			Echol	
			Echang	
Ngawal	Ngawal		Malakal Island	
Ngatpang	Kyu-Ngatpang (old Ngatpang)		Ngerur Island	
	Shin-Ngatpang (new Ngatpang)		Orrak Island	
	Ngimis		(Rock islands)	
	Kokusai		Ngemelis Island	
Ibobang			Ngerechong Island	
Ngchesar	Rouis er a Kebees (Mt. Kebees)		Peleliu	Ngerchol
Aimeliik	Ngerberruuch			Bukl ra Beluu
	Ngerdobotar			Ngerekiukl
	Shimizu			Ngerdelolk
	Nekken	Ngesias		
	Daini Koror (Second Koror)	Ngaramasch		
Ringyo	Kitamura			
Airai	Airai	Angaur	Shinmura	
	Ngchesechang	Sonsorol	Sonsorol Island	
	Ngetkib		Merir Island	
	Oikull		Pulo Anna Island	
	Ngersuung	Tobi (Hatohobei)	Tobi (Hatohobei) Island	
Ngerikiil				

## General index

This is not a comprehensive index, but a listing of topics that were judged to be of potential interest. As there were so many entries relating to cultivation and diet, these entries have been placed in a separate ‘food’ index, following the general index.

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