

Hiro Kawasaki

Interviewed by Bob Haft

The Evergreen State College oral history project

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FINAL

Haft: This is Bob Haft and I'm here with Hiro Kawasaki, and we're going to do an interview on his experiences and life at Evergreen. [Today is June 3, 2021.] You can talk about literally anything you want and we can mess with these tapes later. I want to start with your family background. Just tell us a little bit about your schooling.

Kawasaki: I was born in the middle of World War II in Tokyo where my father, during the mid-'30s, started a business. There was a family taboo—my family had been feudalistic landlords for two or three centuries, but he rebelled and went into business. He had a cousin who was a papermaker, specialized in handmade Japanese mulberry paper. My father started the business of exporting handmade Japanese paper—basically art paper—abroad. This turned out to impact the course of my later life. Unfortunately, my father along with his buddies from his college days were arrested by the military government because they were opposed to the military aggression in Asia. They were not radicals; they were idealists who were critical of the military dictatorship at home and aggression toward our Asian neighbors. My father was imprisoned and then exiled from Japan. Because my father had some education, he was sent—first to Taiwan to teach at Japanese school there. Even before the Pacific War, Japan was the dominant colonialist in East Asia. They had established many Japanese communities in various places, especially in Taiwan and Korea. There, there were schools for the children of Japanese parentage. They needed people to teach, so that's where he was sent. I suppose, as an exile, it was not too bad; he told us how he enjoyed being, living in Taiwan. Then, when the war became intensified, he was pulled out of Taiwan and exiled to Manchuria for the same job. But between transporting himself from Taiwan to Manchuria, he was given 2 - 3 days leave to see his family, and that's when I happened. [laughter] So I was born while my father was in Manchuria. When he received a letter from my mother about my impending birth, and asked her to, if the child was a boy, to name me Kazuhiro. It is a common name in Japan, but it can be written in many ways. He was specific about how to write the name. Many years later when I was at elementary school, maybe in 2nd or 3rd grade when we were began to learn Kanji (Chinese characters), my father explained to me how my name came about and why he chose the particular characters for my name. "Kazuhiro" consists of two Chinese characters. He drew these two from the middle of a four-character concept, "Heiwa

Hakuai”, meaning “Peace and Humanity.” He told me that he knew all of his correspondences were censored by the principal of the school who was an agent of the War Office, but he figured that since phonetically Kazuhiro is such a common name for boys the designation would not cause a serious problem. When I was much older, I found out that my father’s choice of my name was a pay back to our maternal grandfather who named his first grandson, my oldest brother Takenori, with characters convey “martial rites” or “martial courage”.

Haft: I’ve never heard that story before. That’s great.

Kawasaki: I was born in 1942. Of course, his business of trading paper was the first to burn down when the air raid on Tokyo began. Evidently my father foresaw the eventuality, before he left for second exile, he asked my grandfather to move the family to Miyazaki in the southern part of Japan where I grew up in bucolic countryside. My father was quite late in coming back from Manchuria; I think when the war ended, the soldiers were returned to Japan first, but the criminals, like my father, were the last to be back. I think I was close to five when I first saw my father.

After he returned from the exile and settled in the country home of his own youth, he became a changed man in his characters and habits. I had grown up hearing what a disciplinarian our father was with my brothers and sister. Generally he still had formal habits. But he realized that Japan had changed and the former life isn’t going to be sustainable. He was no longer the son of the landlord; he was just a member of the agricultural community. He became a farmer. Once I brought a couple of my classmates to visit our home. I had spoken to them about how my formal and strict father was. When we arrived at our home, he showed up at the main entrance in his underwear! [laughing]

It think it was interesting way of growing up. Initially, he was very disciplinarian, and my mother, who was raised by old Samurai family also was pretty much very traditional. Then the war changed everything, domestically as well as our relationship with people of the village. This shift of the social shift most severely impacted my oldest and second brother who had grown up and returned to Miyazaki as young masters of Jinushi, landlord.

After the war, the General Commander of the occupation, Douglas MacArthur, instituted land redistribution, mainly to break down the economic and social structures that the country inherited from the feudal times. Suddenly, my family’s farm land holding was reduced to same as our former tenants’. Interestingly, ownership of other properties, such as forests and real estate properties were unchanged. The new farm land ownership was determined by family sizes. Before this time, farmers often had more children; my grandmother who came from a peasant family had eight siblings.

Haft: How many brothers did you have?

Kawasaki: I had two brothers and one sister. My two oldest brothers' lives changed very drastically. I was too young to notice the shift, so by the time I became aware of anything, I was like everybody else, a farmer's son.

Haft: But your father's transition from—what had been before he started the paper exporting business?

Kawasaki: In his youth he was groomed to become the landlord after following our paternal grandfather. Grandfather ended up the final titular head of our family under this feudal family structure. But our grandfather also was in some ways a rule breaker; he married a girl from the “water-drinking peasant” family, which had never had before him in my family.

Haft: But it sounds like your father must have been a pretty impressive person to suddenly say, “I'm going to become a farmer,” right after having fallen from this fairly high place.

Kawasaki: But I think he knew that Japan had to become a very different country. Also, having gone through tremendous shortage of food after the war, he came to value farming. To my father, I think he saw it as security for the family. “At least we always had food,” he used to say. I also think he liked the man he had become after the war.

Haft: Your first schooling then was in Miyazaki?

Kawasaki: Yes, I entered Naka Elementary School, which was very close to my house, and all my siblings went there. We are 4, 5 + years apart. My oldest brother and my sister were famous for being brilliant pupils academically, and so I suffered a great deal. Many of the teachers who had taught my siblings were still there. [laughter]

Haft: Your oldest brother was how many years older than you?

Kawasaki: I believe he is almost 16 years older than I am.

Haft: Did you have much connection with him?

Kawasaki: Takenori, my oldest brother, in particular was an exceptional student, the brightest of us Kawasaki children, and he was very good looking. My maternal grandfather was a major influence in Takenori's entering the Royal Navy Academy. The cadets of the academy were elites and enjoyed reputation of super stars. It was supposed to be a training school for officers, but by the time Takenori became an upper classman in the academy, the war was coming close to end. Then, they were trained to become kamikaze pilots. The fact that the war ended two weeks before he was supposed to go on that fateful mission had most tragic effect on him and his fellow cadets.

Haft: For lack of honor.

Kawasaki: They were elite. They were like media stars for every young people. They made movies out of their lives. Then suddenly, the war ended. He was maybe 18. He and his fellow cadets didn't die. All of their senpai, upperclass men, perished, so they suffered from a kind of survivor's guilt, I suppose.

After that, my brother got involved with some of his former fellow student cadets and engaged in very risky business ventures. All of them failed, he became the primary cause of the family's financial ruin. It was very sad. It was tragic. He never recovered. He was brilliant and handsome, and the cadets at Etajima, in some way, existed in the dreams of many young men in pre-war Japan. They were expected to be heroes. It was a very sad story.

Haft: Do you have any notion of what your parents thought? I would imagine that they would be thrilled that he survived, in one sense, but also compromised in another.

Kawasaki: You have to know a little bit about my mother's background. My paternal grandfather—who was a former Samurai and had become a military man after the Meiji Restoration of 1868—had most powerful influence on my oldest brother since he was very young. I think that if our maternal grandfather had not played role in Takenori's decision, I doubt my father would have allowed Takenori to go into the Royal Academy.

When my brother got into financial but legal problems, ironically my maternal grandfather, who encouraged him to go to this military academy, turned away from him. If my brother had been killed in the war, he would have been a hero to our grandfather. It was my parents who took all responsibilities for my brother's problems. He was their firstborn, so they could no way abandon him.

Haft: That's so sad.

Kawasaki: It is sad.

Haft: Did you know him well enough to look up to him as a kid?

Kawasaki: Evidently, when he came back from the war, I used to call him "uncle", as all Japanese children call a stranger. I was only two or three years old and I had never seen him before. I used to have a photo of my oldest brother in the Royal Academy uniform holding me and I was a tiny baby.

Then I had very little direct contact with him. I was too young to be told details of his dissolute life; the only thing I remembered was that he was causing a lot of heartaches to our parents. I have a photograph of my oldest brother and me when I must have been probably in junior high school. He was in mid-thirties and was still quite good looking. When in 1975 I went back to Japan during my graduate school to do research, I spent much time with him and his family in Kyoto.

Haft: You told me once about a memory you had of a bombing.

Kawasaki: Oh, yes! My grandfather moved our family from Tokyo to his own place in Miyazaki. We were still landlords, and one of the landlord's responsibilities—I think it was a way of controlling the agricultural production, was provide seedlings of everything our tenants grew from rice to all vegetables. My family traditionally maintained a water reservoir and the distribution of water throughout the farm land in our area.

Haft: Oh, my gosh!

Kawasaki: See what I mean?

Haft: Yeah, it was feudal almost.

Kawasaki: Exactly. We had a huge greenhouse where they grew seedlings for vegetables. Because my mother was physically frail, literally I was raised by my grandmother. I only have some memories of my grandfather who passed away when I was 10. When I was baby, I was told, my grandparents built a small garden just for me in the center of the green house so to keep me safe while they worked. They planted some trees and bushes in the center, and around it a small vegetable garden to grow things for the family's consumption (according to my sister).

We were far away from any major cities, and ours was a quiet life. But by the end of the war, we'd occasionally hear the siren, then we knew that the warplanes were coming. Every time when that happened, my grandmother would whisk me up from my garden, put me on her back, and run to the hill, where family bomb shelter had been built.

This is a story that was told to me many times as I grew, so I am not sure whether it's actually my own memory, but it has become mine. We were running to the bomb shelter, and I was on my grandmother's back, bobbing up and down, and suddenly, we heard a huge sound or mainly a pressure of air on my back, I am not sure. One thing I remember is that my grandmother swung around to look. We saw a huge column of fire rose at the spot I had spent so many days, my green nursery. I don't know if such fire really was red, but later, I was told, I developed an eye problem. Colors red and green would suddenly become interchangeable. I would be looking at something green and I see a flash of red, or vice versa. Before I entered elementary school, in hope of correcting the problem, my mother hired an artist to work with me with color, and I think that's might have been the beginning of my interest in art.

Haft: It's almost like a trauma.

Kawasaki: Yes. That was almost like the end of the war itself. The fortunate part of this, I was too young to really suffer from the trauma that other members of my family went through at the end of the war: social upheavals, land redistributions, my brother's disgrace, and other difficulties, really didn't affect me.

Haft: Do you think when you went to school that that had some effect that if you had these two older siblings—you had three older siblings, but two of them had been real stars—expectations on you were to be pretty high?

Kawasaki: Yeah. [laughing]

Haft: You say you know, but you're a brilliant person. You must have excelled in school.

Kawasaki: I think I did well, except that I wasn't them. I always thought it was pretty unfair. [laughter]

Haft: Did you get in trouble in school?

Kawasaki: Oh, yes. My worst one was the first day of elementary school. For the celebration of my entering grade school, either my grandmother or grandfather gave me a box of crayons. Because of this artist teacher who was hired to work with my eye problem, I was drawing quite a bit at home. It was a small, country grade school. I think my class was only about 20-some students. Finally, I was put into this new environment, and I guess I wanted to make an impression. I took out the crayons and did these huge landscape on the glass windows. During those times, the crayon was really a wax—true wax. You know what happens to wax crayon on the window panels in warm weather? My mother had to send somebody from the household to spend a lot of time scraping off my first masterpiece.

Haft: But you put a lasting impression. [laughter]

Kawasaki: I don't know. Some of the teachers had my siblings—my older sister and brothers—and they were perfect, model citizens, so I'm sure I got a lot of . . .

Haft: Did you ever think about becoming a teacher when you were a student at all?

Kawasaki: No.

Haft: What were your ambitions as a young person in school? What did you think you were going to be?

Kawasaki: I really liked my art teacher and I thought it would be great to be artist but not to be an art teacher, because I felt sorry for him. My artist tutor had to put up with me a lot. Although what he had to do with me were more psychological rather than artistic. I just liked spreading colors.

I was precocious in some ways because I became kind of notorious in junior high school for being arrogant. I guess it was almost reacting to the reputation of my brothers and sister. I admit I was arrogant, and I used to not only think but tell my classmates, that our teachers were fools. [laughter] Yeah, I was being arrogant just to cause trouble. When I was in junior high school, there was novelist called Shintaro Ishihara. He was one of those nouvelle vague writers that attracted attention of kids like me, maybe not as young as I was then. Although Ishihara later became a conservative politician and the governor of Tokyo, at that time, he was the first writer to address postwar youth's sexual lives. His

debuting novel was entitled *The Season of the Sun*. It was a story of post-war bourgeois youths who hang out in the resort areas, driving sport cars and sailing boats and so forth. For one passage in the novel, this young man in love with this very properly raised girl, and they are in rooms separated only by a sliding screen covered with thin a paper. The young man sticks his erect penis through the screens; the scene caused a huge scandal. At a school assembly, the principal told us never to read this novel and if we do we would be expelled. We were told that we would not find a copy in the school library. Of course, I had to go and buy the book to find out what happened after the scene: I told everybody.

Haft: Would you consider yourself some sort of a leader in high school?

Kawasaki: No, I was not very popular because the people thought I was arrogant. By the way, recently I resumed a contact with one of my high school classmates. We were never close then. He told me that most of our classmates thought I was “stuck up” and “strange”! Well, ...

Haft: Who befriended you?

Kawasaki: Teachers.

Haft: That should tell you something about yourself and your ability.

Kawasaki: But I don't know why because I used to spread the rumor that those teachers are fools.

Haft: I know, that's what you just said. [laughing] You also told me a story once about being sent to a Buddhist monastery. When was that?

Kawasaki: Oh, yes. I was probably 12. The first American musical produced in Japan was *South Pacific*. A strange choice, because it's the story during the Pacific War and Japan was struggling to recover from it. Some Japanese stars were cast for major roles, but they were looking for the two children of the Frenchman, Emile. My sister sent a photograph of me and some made up stories about me to the audition committee, and I was invited to the audition.

Haft: This is in Tokyo, right?

Kawasaki: Yes, it was in Tokyo. During that time—this was in 1954 I think—the train trip from Miyazaki to Tokyo used to take 27 hours, and that was on the express. There was no way that my parents would have allowed me to go if they knew. They thought actors were beggars.

My sister got the money from our very rebellious aunt—she was not our aunt, but we used to call her “Aunt”—my father's cousin, actually—and she made arrangements and I went to Tokyo all by myself. That was a big thing. I grew up in a real tiny country village.

I went through the general auditions, and I became semifinalist. The semifinal auditions would be broadcast on radio. Aunty reserved a hotel for me, and asked the people to meet me at the Tokyo Station and took me to the audition. At the audition, the emcee asked, “Where did you come from?” I

said, "I came from Miyazaki." "Are your parents here?" "No." "Are your brothers or sisters?" "No, I came all by myself." I was proud of myself. The audition went on and the winners were supposed to be announced later that day. I went back to the hotel and there policemen were waiting for me. I was sent directly to the monastery after that incident.

Haft: I wondered, how could your parents not have known you were gone?

Kawasaki: They did find out quickly. That's why the police found me at the hotel.

Haft: As punishment, you were sent to a Buddhist monastery?

Kawasaki: Yes. I didn't tell them that my sister had helped. She didn't belong in the monastery, and she didn't get into trouble. [laughter]

Haft: You still have a great relationship with her, too. Think how your life would have been different if you had gotten that role.

Kawasaki: No, no. Even if I were selected for the play, my parents would have never allowed it. In fact, it would have been very different if I had to stay in the monastery for the rest of my life. It lasted six months.

Haft: That's not bad.

Kawasaki: It was pretty bad, though.

Haft: What happened after that? You came home with your head hung low?

Kawasaki: Yes, very low. But it was frequent occurrence on my part because running away from home was my usual way of pouting.

Haft: Was coming to America a way of running away from home?

Kawasaki: My father thought so.

Haft: Whose idea was it, though? You and your sister's?

Kawasaki: Oh, no, no. This just happened in a very accidental way. As I told you, I entered a university in Kyushu. I had a girlfriend in high school who was devoted to becoming a doctor to help people in the isolated communities. She talked me into to go through the horrendous preparations, took exam and I somehow got in.

Haft: To become a physician, right?

Kawasaki: No, to become a pre-med student. I went with her to this university. Japanese pre-med wasn't any different than other science majors. She and I went into this; she with wide eyes and me because she thought it was a great idea. Unfortunately, or fortunately, it didn't work out for me, so I dropped out after two quarters.

Haft: Had you been to university before or was this your first?

Kawasaki: This was first, just right out of high school. But during the time, at famous national universities, competition was really high. That meant that during my three years in high school my family devoted to my getting into this university, so when I dropped out, it was a really horrendous disgrace. Thank gawd that my oldest brother was worse than me, but I couldn't go home.

Haft: What did you do?

Kawasaki: I went to Tokyo without any employable skills. I had no prospects. Because one of my high school buddies was working for Tokyo Electric, he found me a job there, and it was awful. I was placed in a team of five or six guys, and we'd all get on the back of a truck and go to power transfer stations, and our job was to take out the dirty oil that in the huge transfer tubes, and while it is going through the filtering machine, we had to go inside the tank and wipe it clean with rags. We were always black from the toes to top of the head. It was amazing I lasted about six months.

Haft: How did you ever get into university then?

Kawasaki: What do you mean?

Haft: After you dropped out of one university—

Kawasaki: I didn't go to university in Japan.

Haft: Not at all?

Kawasaki: No, not at all. Didn't you know Japanese universities do not allow changing one's major once you enter in one major? If I wanted to change into another major, I would have to take the entrance exam all over again.

Haft: So, you came to America?

Kawasaki: Not so simple. I was 20 years old when I found myself in Tokyo without any job, because I quit Tokyo Electric. This person that I met, through maybe an art group, suggested that since I knew how to draw, I should work for this fashion designer. This designer, Noriko Yamamoto, I think her name was, was a very good fashion designer at Sogo Department Store. She was middle-age and an imaginative dress maker. But she could not draw. My job was to just follow her around with a sketchbook, and she would talk to me incessantly. She was a talker! She was constantly talking, moving fast and talking fast. I was to do these drawings according to what she said, many stops, redos and go on. I would show what I drew and she'd say, "Oh, no, no, you have to change this in this direction, and with sharper angles, etc".

Usually, it was a kind of fun job, and I learned a lot. Also it was great because, at the end after she actually turned her designs into dresses, when they became part of a fashion show or special orders, my drawing would be used in advertisement in the newspapers and magazines. At the time, they didn't use

photographs in advertisement, mostly illustrations. Some of those drawings appeared in newspaper, magazines, and then I would get special pay.

Haft: Do you have any of your drawings or photographic record of them at all?

Kawasaki: No. The designs were not my creations to begin with, and my drawings were never returned from the printer shop. Maybe my chief designer kept them. It was one of those things. Frustrating. That's how the whole thing started about coming to the United States.

Haft: But you can thank your mother for those art lessons you had as a kid.

Kawasaki: Yes, yeah. Also, it was a kind of curse, which I will tell you later. Anyway, in 1963, I get a letter from my father. I still remember vividly the starting line of his letter: "I am sure you are not doing anything worthwhile." [laughter]

Haft: Thanks, Dad!

Kawasaki: That probably was true to him during this period of my life. To him, fashion illustration would not be something one chose as a career. Since I didn't know anything about sewing or making, I didn't have any avenue to becoming a designer either. He said the son of a couple in America, to whom he had sold Japanese handmade paper before the war, is coming to Japan for merchandise search. The clients themselves used to come to Japan once every several years to discover different things to import. Previously, this old couple used to come, but they had gotten too old for traveling the long distance to Japan, so they're sending their son. My father ordered me to stop whatever I was doing and take care of this person. My English was non-existent, so it was an awful proposal.

Haft: You couldn't translate.

Kawasaki: Not much, but I was already pretty close to being disowned, so I did what I was told. [chuckles] Mr. Howard Roloff and I traveled around Japan for over three weeks looking for different merchandizes, and met producers and wholesalers with whom his parents had previous contact. I went to the office of the Trade Commission and found more things that Roloff Imports might be interested in.

Haft: Excuse me. Back up. Howard was the son of this elderly couple that your father knew?

Kawasaki: Yes. He came and we spent over three weeks, close to a month doing this. He listened to me very patiently, and tried to understand my very poor English. During our trips, I remember telling him how frustrated I was in seeking future directions. He listened about the work I was doing, and said, "How about this? There are two private art schools in Seattle." One was at Cornish. The other one was Burnley School of Art that was in Capitol Hill. "Why don't you come to Seattle and see what might trigger your interest?" He wrote to his mother, I think his father was passed away, and she said, "By all means." They sponsored me. I had very little money, and my parents definitely couldn't support while

they were supporting my brother. So, I came with the intention of staying just for one year, and that was 1965.

Haft: You lived with Howard?

Kawasaki: No, I lived with Mrs. Roloff, his mother.

Haft: Did you go to Cornish?

Kawasaki: No. It was too expensive. Besides, my English was so bad that Howard sent me to this school called Edison Technical School, which was a precursor of Seattle Central Community College. They had classes for English for foreign students, and I was there for two and a half months during the summer sessions. At the end of that summer session, many of my classmates were coming back for the fall quarter.

My teacher, Mrs. Travenik said, "If you want to study art, you don't have to go to art schools. You could go to colleges." I said, "Yeah, but I'm going to be here only one year." She said, "You never know." She recommended me to take an entrance qualification exam and I passed, barely I think. Howard was very pleased, and I think also he was very happy that I would be able to stay with his mother because she had heart issues.

In 1966—no, it had to be the fall of 1965 because I also went to only the summer session at Burnley Art School. I then attended Shoreline Community College briefly. With Mrs. Travenik's recommendation, I applied for a scholarship to attend Reed College, so I went there. Unfortunately, in the middle or toward the end of the first quarter, they told me that there was a mistake, and that I wasn't qualified for this particular scholarship because I was a foreign student. So, not only do I have to pay this exorbitant private school tuition, they told me to pay back for the first quarter that I was almost finishing. There was no way I could ask Mrs. Roloff for the money, so I just left, and I went to Portland State.

Haft: Oh, you did? Wow!

Kawasaki: Yes, and they accepted me. They were very sympathetic, and they found a scholarship that I qualified. I think they were a little competitive with Reed.

Haft: But much less expensive than Reed, too.

Kawasaki: That's for sure. [laughter] I was at Portland State for two quarters before I came back to Seattle and transferred to the University of Washington.

Haft: Did you study art exclusively when you went?

Kawasaki: No, at first, I was just doing a lot of English courses, history and social science types of things. I took first year math, because most of that stuff taught was the level I had already studied at high school in Japan, that left more time for me to spend on my English classes.

Haft: Oh, you were pretty advanced in it already.

Kawasaki: Yeah. In fact, the two quarters that I was at Shoreline, I also took math and art, both non-verbal classes, so that would give me time to work on English classes which were really difficult for me.

Haft: I know your interest in English literature and in humanities is really high. Where did that come from? Did you study any of those things?

Kawasaki: I did quite a bit on my own on literature when I was in high school, but naturally they were all in translations. I think that was one part of my arrogance, I spoke about earlier. You think it was cooler to be reading Dostoyevsky and stuff when the other students were reading Japanese novels.

Haft: The idea to go to the University of Washington, did that come from an external source? Was that Howard?

Kawasaki: No, but I had to come back because I was already two quarters away from Mrs. Roloff and she was quite ill.

Haft: I see, so you applied to U Dub?

Kawasaki: Yes. Fall of '66, I was back at the University of Washington.

Haft: You said you entered Reed in '66, so it must have been—

Kawasaki: You are right, that's was wrong. It was the fall of 67.

Haft: That was when you entered U Dub?

Kawasaki: Right.

Haft: You were there for a BA?

Kawasaki: Whatever. I didn't know.

Haft: You got an undergraduate degree in . . . ?

Kawasaki: I got B.A. in art. I wanted to be a painter, right? But in my senior year, I was still thinking about painting, but one of those weird moments came to me. Despite my technical skills in drawing and constructions, I came to the realization that I lacked what it takes to be a good artist. That was a really big shock to me.

Haft: Can you explain to me how you came to that conclusion? Because I know you can draw really well.

Kawasaki: That was because while I was an undergraduate as a major, I had to take art history courses. As I was studying art history and gained more insight into the artists that were covered—whether it was Medieval to Renaissance all the way to the 20th Century—I think that's what gave me the ability to assess where I was, where my capability was. Since I was five years old, I was doing art things, and everybody thought it was great because I had technical skills, whether in drawing or in kosaku (form

construction) and so forth, and that continued all through high school, in elective art courses everybody thought I was great. Even at UW undergraduate art classes, I got mostly As, but the more I studied art history and the great artists, I think it gave me an ability to assess what I was lacking to become an artist.

Haft: But you were assessing yourself against great artists rather than your fellow students. Right? And you didn't have a professor who said, "Hiro, you'll never make it as a painter. You should go into art history."

Kawasaki: No, no, no. That's true. But that was a really tough time because I was so close to graduating, and I had to make a decision whether I'm going to go into an MFA program or go back to Japan. Howard said that if I wanted to go to graduate school, he would sponsor me. His mother, in 1970, had a stroke, and went to nursing home. So I could work part time.

It was very difficult, but I was really, really fortunate. This professor who taught Japanese Art History, Dr. Webb, was quite fluent in Japanese, but he didn't have the ability to read "kanbun", which is Japanese documents written in Chinese characters only. In Japanese documents in art history, lots of documents are written in Kanbun. Dr. Webb had a difficult time with it. He was in the publish or perish tenure, so he had to constantly produce research work. He proposed that I came into graduate school in art history. I had no idea what art historians do. But I went anyway because it came with his promise teaching assistantship for me. It also meant in-state tuition. It came with a very small stipend. I think it was like \$400 a quarter or something. [chuckles] But the tuition was considerably lower because I had previously been paying the non-resident tuition before.

Haft: What did you teach?

Kawasaki: In addition to assisting Dr. Webb with kanbun documents, I was a teaching assistant in the server courses, from pre-history to 19th Century, over and over. I did that for a total of four years, my gawd! From 1970, as I entered art history graduate school. In 1972, somebody recommended me for a job—a one-year replacement job—at the Montana State University. Their art history professor was going on a sabbatical leave. But even though it was a one-year job, Montana State wanted me to have master's degree, and so I did a slapdash job on my thesis. I wrote the master's thesis in about six months before I arrived at Bozeman. I was there for a year, '72 to '73, and I returned to the University of Washington for PhD program. I was there again for two years as a teaching assistant, including one quarter to Prof. Alps in his history of print making class. But the head of Art History Department—I still remember the day when Dr. Rogers called me in to his office—this was 1974—said to me, "Hiro, you have received teaching assistantship for three and a half years now. If I give another one next year, I will

have to give you tenure in teaching assistantship, and I am sure you wouldn't want a tenure in teaching assistantship, so this would be the last year. You'd better finish."

During the first half of 1975, I went through the rigorous testing process called General Exam. It was a really awful experience. For art history general exam, they give you four or five months to prepare and they ask you to pick areas that you are to focus. Because I had been working with Dr. Webb for last three years, I chose Japanese art as the primary area, then Chinese art as the second area, and the third area was in the 19th and early 20th Century Western Europe and American.

But that was still broad scopes to prepare, so I went through almost night and day- reading everything and reviewing my notes from courses I had taken and books I had read. I really didn't have a regular daily schedule. I'd work until I'd fallen asleep. At the end of five months of the self-directed study, I took writing exams. That general exam was very hairy. It's a three-day process, and you're locked into a small room. You were not allowed to bring any books. Because of my problem with English, they allowed me to bring English /Japanese dictionary. I had to ask the dean's secretary to let me out to go to the bathroom. I had to take my own lunch each day. When I arrived in the examination room, each of the three days, the secretary handed me specific subjects and questions in each of the three areas, and you had to spend three, four hours writing on them. Japanese art wasn't too much problems. Questions on Chinese art was a little tough—I wasn't very strong in it. But the most interesting thing I was asked came from Dr. Christofide, the head of Romance Language Department, the famous professor who volunteered to serve on my Ph.D. committee. He gave me—with a twinkle in his eyes—a subject I was to write about: "Critical Analysis of Baudelaire as an art critic."

Haft: Ooh.

Kawasaki: Charles Baudelaire. I just said to myself, oh my, why is he asking me this? Then I realized that one of the courses I took from him, he was teaching Romanticism. I wrote a paper on Romanticism of paintings by Eugène Delacroix. Half of my term paper was about music history, the change from Mozart to Beethoven to Chopin and other romantic composers. I looked at Delacroix's paintings, in context of the difference between the baroque art and the romantic art. Then, I tried to show the parallels in stylistic developments in music and painting. I talked about what I experienced when I listen to Beethoven in comparison to Bach, not music theory, which I knew little, but mainly what happened to me personally, and then compared that to my responses when I compared paintings by Delacroix and Rubens. My thesis was parallel relationships. Maybe, I thought, that was the reason Dr. Christofide decided to give me this topic. Baudelaire admired Delacroix and wrote art criticism. Perhaps, he had remembered that I tried to cross artistic disciplines in my term paper for the course.

Haft: Baudelaire's poetry.

Kawasaki: Yeah, and Baudelaire's poetry. I would have been really terrible if I were to analyze Baudelaire's poetry, but I had read quite a bit of Baudelaire's art criticism in his journals. I had a lot of my own criticism of Baudelaire's aesthetic but still in his journal I saw signs pointing to new movements in art making.

Actually, at the end of those three days, three committee members who gave me the exam topics followed up with oral exams. No, I guess it wasn't the same day because they had to read whatever I wrote. On oral exam, the only really insightful reaction I got was from Dr. Christofide: He agreed with my own rather harsh criticism of Baudelaire's as an art critic. [laughing]

Haft: Do you think Christofide was kind of throwing you a softball because he knew Hiro can write about this?

Kawasaki: Right.

Haft: That's great. Do you want to take a break?

Kawasaki: Sure. Let's have lunch.

Haft: Okay.

[End Part 1 of 2 of Hiro Kawasaki on June 3, 2021]

[Begin Part 2 of 2 of Hiro Kawasaki on June 3, 2021]

Haft: This is the second half of my interview with Hiro Kawasaki. We're just getting to Evergreen. My question is, how did you hear of Evergreen?

Kawasaki: I was in Kyoto. I was married then. I was married to Sarah Brown, a fellow graduate student at the University of Washington. We went to Japan because I had to do my dissertation research. We had no money. The first several months, we lived with my family in Miyazaki, in southern Japan.

Then I received a notice from University of Washington that Kyoto University accepted me as a research fellow with a small stipend. It was one of the arrangements that the Art History Department at the University of Washington had with the Kyoto University.

Haft: That's an honorific.

Kawasaki: I said, "Great." We still didn't have very much money, so temporarily we were staying with my oldest brother who lived in Kyoto with his family. That was where I received a letter from Rudy Martin saying, "You have been recommended for a teaching job at Evergreen. Would you like to apply?"

Haft: Recommended by whom? By somebody at the U Dub?

Kawasaki: I never knew and never found out. That's why I talked about Dr. Christofide earlier. Concerning Evergreen, it makes sense that it was him who made the recommendation. Or it could be my mentor, Prof. Glenn Webb, because he knew my dissertation research was not going well. I told him that the dissertation topic that I was on works for me. The subject was what he had chosen for me. Maybe he felt guilty for directing me to the direction. So, it might have been him. I told my oldest brother that I have this job offer and I was going to have a telephone interview. My brother's concern was, since I had been back in Japan for almost a year, "You should tell them at the very beginning that your English isn't as good as it used to be." [laughing] I didn't have my own personal telephone, so I was relying on my brother's telephone. I didn't realize that it was going to be conference call. I thought it was another one of those one-to-one interviews with my future boss. Then I was told that there were certain members of faculty in the conference by phone. The only person that I still remember besides Rudy was Matt Smith who was in that committee. I have no idea how they decided to give me the job. Later, I talked to my wife who was sitting by me during the interview. Sarah said, "I think one of the good things—you gave one good answer—was when they asked, 'What do you think are assets you could bring to teaching in the college?'" She said, "You said, 'I may not have an answer to the students' questions, but more than likely, I could help them to figure out how to find the answer on their own.'" She thought that that was a really good answer. Sarah's youngest sister attended Evergreen, so she knew something about the college. Me, I still don't know how I got the job.

Haft: But you got the job over the phone.

Kawasaki: Over the phone. Those were the days.

Haft: That's a first. [laughter]

Kawasaki: Except for York Wong, I was the first foreign-born faculty member at Evergreen. [laughing] That's something!

Haft: Indeed! Do you remember what your first teaching assignment was?

Kawasaki: Yes. I heard—while I was still in Japan I received a letter from—at the time there was not e-mail, this was 1975—Charlie Teske said that he just got NEH Foundation money to do this very interesting program called Roots of Romanticism. I thought about maybe it was Dr. Christofedes all over.

Haft: It's right up your alley.

Kawasaki: Yeah, Charlie spoke about himself that he was not only a literature person, but he was also a jazz musician, and told me that he had asked Brother Ron from Saint Martin to join the team, who was

not only a Catholic monk but also a Jungian psychologist and a flutist. I said to myself “Oh, my god, that sounds so interesting. I think I found what Charlie talked about the program was as you said, right up “my” alley, because I always thought art history by nature is multidisciplinary and one need to approach it from interdisciplinary points. I thought, that alone might be a good entry step for me.

I certainly didn’t know a lot of things that Charlie was saying—you know how Charlie loved to talk. I had come out of traditional art history training. By taking art history as interdisciplinary discipline, I said to myself, I wouldn’t have to do everything by myself, not like I were to teach art history by myself. That gave me a comfort. When I arrived, Charlie literary took me under his wings. Rudy was so helpful in organizing my entry to Evergreen. Then that year, Bill Winden became a dean. I love music and he was also a good painter. It was so nice. At that time, remember, we didn’t have professional deans. They were all faculty members, so both Rudi and Bill knew exactly how to embrace me, or how to bring me in to totally a new experience.

Haft: But you couldn’t have asked for a better first person than Charlie.

Kawasaki: I know.

Haft: Who else was on that team?

Kawasaki: Gil Salcedo was the third person. He taught with us for two quarters. I don’t know what it was, the reason, that he was replaced by a couple who were exchange teaching from the University of Tennessee. This was an interesting because later—many years later—Susan Fiksdal, Duke Kuehn, who was a dean then. . .

Haft: Yeah, I know.

Kawasaki: . . .and I was invited by the University of Tennessee to come and offer a workshop on multicultural interdisciplinary studies.

First two quarters were four of us—Charlie, Brother Ron, Gil Salcedo, and me.

Haft: Let me just back up for a minute. What were your first impressions of Evergreen and Olympia? Coming from Kyoto, Tokyo, you must have thought, my gawd, what have I done? [laughter]

Kawasaki: Believe me, that happened when I first arrived in this country in 1965. Seattle was a really small town. Ivar’s Restaurant was about the best restaurant in town. I had been living in Tokyo for four years, and it was a real shock to find myself here.

Haft: You were a city boy.

Kawasaki: Yeah, I was. Then I went to Evergreen, and Olympia, but as far as the academic activity is concerned, I didn’t have that much resistance or shock to accommodate myself to what was happening. In fact, many, many years later—actually, when I went to the retiring faculty event, they asked me to

talk about my experience. One of the great things that happened to me teaching here, I said, was to be able to do the best post-post-graduate work and to get paid for it.

Haft: Yeah, bravo.

Kawasaki: In fact, the first two years, in addition to full-time program, I used to teach modules. Do you remember modules?

Haft: Oh, sure. I taught modules, too.

Kawasaki: But I soon realized that I really didn't feel I was making a very good use of myself teaching modules. I was at Evergreen 30 years, and I never taught a course on art history. I taught program focused on Japan only once toward the end of my career there. I was quite willful in organizing that program. I think my colleague the team would have preferred to do a traditional Japanese culture program, but I was the coordinator and I wanted to focus on modern and contemporary Japanese culture.

Nancy Taylor, Sam Schragger and Setsuko Tsutsumi did Transformation in Modern and Contemporary Japanese Culture, which I felt would really be helpful to some of the students we were sending to Japan for exchange studies.

Haft: Yeah, because Evergreen had established an exchange program with Miyazaki University.

Kawasaki: Because if they go with just pure romantic notions about Japan and with the classical aesthetic of tea ceremony and all that stuff, they're going to be in shock.

Haft: Yeah. Were you still married when you started?

Kawasaki: I was married until 1980, so five years. But my former wife, when I came back to Evergreen, chose to stay in Japan because she was learning Japanese. When she was in graduate school at UW, she worked in a Greek fraternity house. She spoke Greek and French! Then, when she went to Japan with me, within a year, she showed remarkable affinity to Japanese language. She felt that she just was not yet ready to come back to the United States. So she stayed on. After almost five years later, she met somebody. She asked for a divorce and I said, "Sure."

Haft: Do you remember the first program you designed that wasn't somebody else saying, "This is what we're going to do"?

Kawasaki: It was interesting. I told you that Rudy was a dean then? and then Bill Winden came into the deanship. In my first year, I was drowning in this new way of thinking and new ways of learning and new way of helping students. Bill Winden said during the year, "How would you like to organize a program on hands-on art for the next year?" I said, "What do you mean by "organize", and "hands-on art?" He said, "You can choose any art mediums that you want." I said to myself one way I could use myself,

having grown up in Japan, is to share my love of crafts. I organized a four- faculty team program called Craftsmanship Program. It was wonderful because I was given freedom to pick what I wanted three hands-on disciplines and who to teach with.

I picked Jean Mandeberg, Sandy Percival, and Curtis Hafer, a local ceramicist, a mud-baked pottery guy. It was kind of really nice because I was able to talk to students about how craftsmanship in Japan incorporates both a particular aesthetic and ways of life, and how crafts people of different disciplines are familiar with each other. Many of the famous Japanese artists in the history worked and lived in interdisciplinary communities. The Japanese guild system for artists and craftsmen was much more fluid and flexible than it had been in Europe in the middle ages. I talked about the artist's community in Takagamine in early Edo period. The artists who lived and worked there were calligraphers, poets, and painters, potters, and lacquerware makers. There were all these multidisciplinary artists working together, even collaborated in creating works. That's what I had envisioned for the program. It was good.

In the middle of that, I think the deans really thought that our program was working well as coordinated art program, it was a good model, so they asked me to do another program the following year. I asked Jean, "What do you think? I have this idea of doing a program called Visual Thinking." To me, thinking and feeling visually seem to be most fundamental basis both for artists and for audience of arts.

Haft: Those really were the days, weren't they, where you could carte blanche put programs together?

Kawasaki: Yeah, it was wonderful. Also, I had the pleasure of keeping Jean and Sandy Percival from the Craftsmanship team, but because I envisioned Visual Thinking required a more broad aesthetics . . . how can I say this? . . . I asked -- the name . . . the guy who used to run the print shop . . .

Haft: Oh, yeah, um . . . he had an interesting first name . . . Young Harvill.

Kawasaki: Young Harvill! Yes. I admired his imagination. He was a staff person. He was running our print shop. I said to myself, "his sense of humor, his imaginative almost surrealist vision, will be really beneficial to the new program." But because Jean was also very excellent in that way, she deserves to be more than a jewelry maker. I personally needed to expand more to the . . . I don't know.

Haft: Two dimensional?

Kawasaki: No, beyond the materials and craftsmanship. I needed someone like Young to help expand myself.

Haft: Okay. He was brilliant.

Kawasaki: I know.

Haft: He should have been on the faculty.

Kawasaki: Yeah, and so I asked him to join.

Haft: Oh, wow! That had to have been a first. You asked a staff member to join the faculty team.

Kawasaki: Yeah.

Haft: His craftsmanship was phenomenal, too. That's great. Can you talk about maybe what you'd consider the best program you ever had?

Kawasaki: Oh, god, that's hard to say.

Haft: How about the worst? [laughing]

Kawasaki: For myself, one program that I learned most was Reflections from Nature. That was because I really had to step out of my comfort zone perpetually.

Haft: Who was that with?

Kawasaki: That one was Rob Knapp, Thad Curtz, and the biologist . . . this is terrible . . .

Haft: It could have been a couple guys. Jim . . . I'm blanking on his name. He lives in Hawaii now. Oh! It was a biologist. This is going to drive me nuts. His wife was a nurse. Barbara? I know but I can't think of the name. It's terrible.

Kawasaki: Isn't that terrible; I just got a Facebook posting about him. Anyway, I even went camping with the program, students and faculty together. I hate camping, you know. [laughter] One time we were on one of the outings . . . what did they used to call going out of campus?

Haft: Just off campus. I'm not sure what you mean.

Kawasaki: We went somewhere in Southwest Washington.

Haft: Oh, yeah, field trips.

Kawasaki: Yes, Field trips! It was an overnight trip. We stayed in some boy-scout campground. I finished all what I needed to do for the day, and I was in the bathroom brushing my teeth and one of the students came to me and said, "Hiro, I forgot to bring my toothbrush. Can I use yours?" [laughter] Those were the days. [laughter]

The best, most pleasant and also kind of culminating programs, just the whole experience, had been programs during the last few years, the end of my career there. It started with the program that Marianne and I did called "New Blood: Study of the Decadents."

Haft: This was with Marianne Bailey, just to clarify. Was it Oscar Soule who was in that other program?

Kawasaki: No, it wasn't Oscar. It was Larry Eickstaedt who was in the "Reflection of Nature" program.

Haft: Of course. Goodness me. So, back to New Blood.

Kawasaki: That was the study of works by the Decadents, in literature, philosophy, visual art, music of late 19th and early 20th centuries. Someday someone in the future ought to do, what does decadence mean today? They would be totally different things today. We approached decadence as creative force that generated something new, experimental and sometimes radical.

Haft: It's a push against an existing paradigm that actually is better.

Kawasaki: Yes, and then you, Marianne and I did Classical Legacy.

Haft: Oh, yeah. That was so much fun.

Kawasaki: Yes, also, this Classical Legacy took me back to my beginning at the college with "Roots of Romanticism". Basically, it was the same program, looking at what we have and looking at where it came from. But in Roots, I was completely new and inexperienced and trying to find myself as well as what I was teaching. But with you and Marianne and I in Classical Legacy, I felt more confident of what I was doing. Even though classicism wasn't my cup of tea, the program allowed me to reexamine the concept of classicism itself with new eyes. I think that, because I grew up in the '60s, I previously had the kind of attitude about classical structures as being negative, restrictive.

Haft: They are, in a way.

Kawasaki: Yeah, but classical art viewed primality from contemporary-centric point was not restrictive and negative. It became new to me.

Haft: I remember us putting that program together, because I liked classical stuff, but I also saw it as a straightjacket for standards of beauty, which we still adhere to at our peril. This is stuff we don't need to do anymore. That program, to me also, was one of the best times I've ever had with you guys. It was great.

Kawasaki: Yes. Teaching with Marianne and you was wonderful—I wanted to say that yesterday during Marianne's retirement celebration—all those wonderful things that Marianne did in lectures, and in helping students—but some of the moments that I treasured most working with her were not intellectual. One time in the Decadents program, I insisted that we need to have students look at a video of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, because it really examines our notions of individualism. It shows that Love is the dissolution of individual self. The most memorable part was at the end of the opera, *Kuwvvaris*. Marianne and I were absolutely in tears with a strong empathy with both the story and music. All these intellectual reasons that I was talking to students about the opera, and in selecting this and that work of art, that wasn't it in the end. The most important part was that we were so moved, so deeply affected by what was happening in front of our eyes and to our ears. We spent much time

intellectualizing and finding ways to construct structures of art work, simply so that we could talk. Less talk; just see, just listen. We lose quite often the sight of what we are experiencing.

That's what I was going to write to you about personally. Remember, you recently asked me, "Why are you getting so hooked on the Korean melodramas?" [laughter] I think what's happening to me is that it's a very safe territory where I really don't have to feel ashamed of or embarrassed about not thinking about the social, cultural or political significance of these dramas, not understanding why's, just reacting and feeling. Privilege of retirement.

Haft: I tell you what. My assessment of that is the best teaching moments that I've ever had have come when emotions come flooding into the discussion.

Kawasaki: Yeah, perhaps.

Haft: And that overwhelms everything else. Suddenly, everybody is on unequal footing—it's like an earthquake—and you can get stuff done because—there are a couple examples that I distinctly remember, and I won't go into it because this is your talk. I can just remember also being moved in the classroom and either wondering why the students weren't moved as well, or when they were, then we were all as a unit, and we could really talk about something important.

Kawasaki: Yeah. The one example that happened to me is still vivid to me. When Alice Nelson, Caryn Cline and I were teaching together, they gave me a week for me to go to New York to see a retrospective of Jackson Pollock's work at MOMA. I came back loaded with gifts from New York, the breads and cheeses and so forth to pay back for their generosity to let me go. But when I started talking to students about what I saw in the exhibition—this is the second time I got really this way, I just broke down because I was so devastated by looking Pollock's works at the end of his life crumbled down in front of my eyes, his incredible gifts destroyed by his alcoholism and self-destructive personality. He created great paintings and then at the end left us with paintings of nothing but of his style.

I could [chokes up] . . . and I was talking in the class as if for the first time. It was not just about Pollock. I was talking about what was happening to me in front of those sad paintings. I was embarrassed by what was happening, but I couldn't help myself. After the lecture, several students asked for appointments. Some of them were simply worried about me. The first student who arrived at my door asked, "Are you okay?" I said, "Yeah, I am okay." Then, she asked, "How did it feel to see your hero crumbling in front of your eyes?" That was a very insightful question I thought.

Haft: It's a good thing for students to see that you're a human being rather than an automaton.

Kawasaki: Yeah. Another thing that happened to me at the Seattle Art Museum. The museum one time was showing a very small Rembrandt painting—painting of St. Peter on loan from somewhere. I

took a group of students with me to see it, and I was talking about the painting right in front of it. It showed St. Peter slumped against this huge column behind him. Obviously, the column symbolized the church he was destined to build? The weight of the post—the pillar—was crashing down on him and he was just really small and looked so frail. I was talking about that. Suddenly I thought about my father. It was soon after my father had died. My father and I had very limited contact since I left Japan. But that painting of St. Peter made me realize what a giant my father was and he has remained so even now. I always knew of the weight of tragedies, both historical and personal, that almost crushed him, which he had borne with courage and personal integrity. I didn't mention my father; I was forced to stop talking. Silently, they joined me in simply looking at the image of this frail small old man who had borne so much.

When art does that to you, it's really special. It really is special. It was such a small painting, and it had such a gigantic impact on me.

Haft: It's wonderful to see that the students were able to witness that, too, because that's such a private moment. Both of them that you've talked about, but the first one that the students were actually moved enough to be worried about you and seek you out, I think that's just a marvelous story.

Talking about students, are there particular ones that stand out in your memory of, oh, this was the best student I ever had, or maybe this is the worst student? [laughter]

Kawasaki: Oh, god.

Haft: Because you have had a tremendous impact on a number of students I know for a fact.

Kawasaki: I don't know. I don't have as many as you do, but I—

Haft: No, no, no, no. I retired.

Kawasaki: But I do have a few students who I'm still in regular contact with.

Haft: I would argue that with you because you're much closer to Amanda Burr and Evan James, and lots of students over the years. Lots and lots of students.

Kawasaki: No. But you know, I think you've heard of this student who got away but I ended up feeling good about? It may not be a traditional success student-teacher story, because I encouraged him to leave the college when Evergreen was suffering from poor enrollments. In fact, I always told this story only to very few friends.

Haft: Yes. [laughing] You told me about this guy. You saw him with his mother later at the market?

Kawasaki: Yeah, yeah. I think those things are more memorable because I did something that probably I shouldn't have done.

Haft: Well . . .

Kawasaki: Because we were so . . .

Haft: There again, I disagree with you. I think it's the job of a teacher to recognize what a student's needs are.

Kawasaki: Yeah. Despite the fact that he spoke very little when he was in my class and had not contacted me since he left, I felt we were close, both when he left Evergreen and when I saw him again after nearly 10 years.

Haft: And you knew that this guy should not have been in college, the guy should have been doing something else, and he later thanked you for it. Right?

Kawasaki: Yes. But it might have been more a better story if I were able to put him on the list of my accomplishments as a teacher, if I had been able to help him stay at the college and had helped him to be a better student. Sometimes things don't work that way. I know Marianne has a lot of students who became very successful in their own chosen fields and so forth, but sometimes I think about . . . I think some of things I did was okay too in some moments.

Haft: I think you did, too. How about other faculty? Were there people who mentored you at all that you remember, old-timers?

Kawasaki: Charlie.

Haft: He was incredible.

Kawasaki : Probably because he was my first mentor at the college. But reasons why I admired some colleagues were opposite of how Charlie affected me. Someone like David Marr; he was never loud, never dogmatic, and yet, he always seemed to be listening to what I was saying much more deeply than a lot of people. One year, I taught a program with David and Chuck [last name?] and . . . what was his name?

Haft: Oh, yeah, Richard Alexander.

Kawasaki: Richard Alexander? No, it wasn't Richard Alexander. Who was it? Now I remember, I think his name was David Powell. He was very much like Richard Alexander. Anyway, it was a very interesting contrast, especially between Chuck and David. They had very different ways of affecting people.

Haft: Yes.

Kawasaki: When we were teaching together, I was socially close to Chuck but ultimately it was David who has had lasting effect on me and I feel we became close friends.

Haft: He was one of those guys who, as they say, hid his light under a big bushel basket, I think. But I remember you telling an anecdote about getting a migraine headache one time when you were teaching with David.

Kawasaki: Oh, god, I know. Perhaps, because his wife Susan was nurse, he noticed something was happening to me. He thought I was having a stroke because he saw the left side of my face drooped. He took me home, and with Susan, nursed me until I felt better.

Haft: I also want to ask you about how you did it when you were able to go to Japan for a couple years, and Paris for a year, while you were teaching. How did you manage that?

Kawasaki: The Japan thing came up because exactly at that point, I was midway through in my life, between Japan and the United States. I left Japan when I was 22, and I was 44 when I chose to go to Japan for two years. I didn't know if Bill would be willing to go with me, but I decided I needed to go. I realized that I left Japan without really having enough experiences as an adult. Before I left, I was floundering and did not really have life there.

I was so grateful that Bill took risks by coming with me to spend two years in Japan. I had a stupid notion that there existed the Japanese middle age man, and I was not one. Bill and I met a number of Japanese middle age men, but they were as individual as Americans we knew.

Some in my family though were worried about me. My nephew told me that he, his younger brother and my second brother, who passed away young, were watching the television news about homeless in America. He said, jokingly, "Watch out for your uncle. He may be one of them." [laughter]

Haft: How did the school allow you to do that? Did you take a sabbatical?

Kawasaki: No, I paid my own way.

Haft: You took leave without pay for two years?

Kawasaki: I received one quarter sabbatical leave and the rest of the two years I was on my own. When the time came to spend a year in Paris, I insisted that I needed a whole year because in the past 23 years, I received only that one quarter in Japan—well, I got two quarters.

But I think both of the leaves I took were very important. I always thought that the students should take time in the middle of their college career to go somewhere that is totally different from home. I think that those two years in Japan settled me to feel I'm going to be okay in the States.

Haft: When you came back from that, do you think it had an effect on what you decided to teach or how you taught?

Kawasaki: I did teach the Japan Program a few years later, and I also organized and presented the exhibition at Evergreen entitled “A Vital Tradition; art of textile dyeing” showing world of my friend Shizuo Okawahara and his son Makoto.

Haft: Yes. The Okawaharas are a family that Hiro have known for years and years. Tell a little bit about that relationship and about inviting them to Evergreen.

Kawasaki: I told you that in 1972, I went to Montana State for a year, and when I returned to Seattle the following year and I went to see my mentor, Dr. Webb, and told him, “I’m going to finish my PhD work.” He said, “Fine. I will talk to Dr. Rogers, the head of the Art History Department, and ask him to accept you back into the Ph.D. program and reinstate you in teaching assistantship.”

He jokingly then said, “In exchange, I want you to take care of this family.” The senior Okawaharas were here in 1973 for six months, teaching at the University of Washington. He brought his wife with him. This was their first trip to the United States and neither of them spoke English. There was one Japanese American woman, wife of an architecture professor, helping them in the classroom, but everyday life was difficult for them. I spent time with them regularly during the six months that they were here. That was good, I think, for me anyway. I don’t know . . .

Haft: They made a major impression on your life, right?

Kawasaki: Oh, yes.

Haft: It’s an incredible family.

Kawasaki: Yes. Partially, my long relationship with the family was a way of rebuilding my connections with Japan.

Haft: That’s almost a 50-year relationship, and you now have relationship with the son and his wife and their kids.

Kawasaki: Yeah. There was lots of guilt in me about Japan, you know. I often felt that I have abandoned it . . .and every time, when I see and spend time with the Okawaharas, I feel good about my place with Japan. Obviously, my sister is a steady presence at home. That’s natural because she’s my sister, but the Okawaharas started as complete strangers. Totally a social beginning, not biological or working relationship. That I was able to maintain a very close connection with them for all these years gives me hope about myself as a Japanese.

Haft: Yeah. Talk about bringing them to Evergreen that first time, and then arranging for Makoto to come and actually teach at Evergreen. That was amazing.

Kawasaki: It was one of those sequential things. As I mentioned earlier, the senior Okawahara had had the experience of showing his work to American audience when he was younger.

Haft: Yes, he came to the University of Washington and spent a year here.

Kawasaki: I saw his son, Makoto, who had completed graduate work at Kyoto Art University. He was going through a difficult stage because he knew that he was expected to follow the family tradition. I think that he was really struggling with how much sacrifice he has to make in his own art work, the work that he wants to do. After all, Okawahara's is a business despite his father being celebrated for his amazing craft. A lot of times, joining the family atelier under the 6th generation, Okawahara comes into conflict with the kind of thing that he studied at art university and he wants to do.

Haft: Yeah, seventh generation.

Kawasaki: Exactly. In 1993, I organized an exhibition at Evergreen, with both of their work shown side by side, amazing contrast of styles but made with shared aesthetic sensibilities. I think it was a great success; at least I gained the life-long credit to be welcome to their home anytime I went to Japan. Ten years later, with your help I arranged Makoto to come to Evergreen to teach as artist-in-residence, though unpaid one. He brought his own young family to do this.

Haft: His experiences at Evergreen, yeah. I can still remember—it was 2003, I guess—when we were in Italy together, and we were driving—this was during the Classical Legacy—and you said to me, “Bob, I have a big favor to ask you.” I thought, oh, what's this going to be? You said, “Would you teach with Makoto if I invite him to come to Evergreen?” That wasn't a favor, that was a gift. [laughter] It was so much fun.

But that experience for Evergreen was also—I don't think that stuff happens anymore. I'm sorry, new Evergreeners, but boy, those old days, you could do anything you wanted to.

Kawasaki: I know. But partly, it's our fault that we took it for granted. We didn't demand it.

Haft: Yeah.

Kawasaki: We should have made a much bigger fuss about it. I was really—when I did the father and son exhibition, the Okawaharas practically paid for everything.

Haft: I know.

Kawasaki: Jane Jervis?

Haft: The old President, I'm blanking on her name.

Kawasaki: At the end of the quarter, before the family left Olympia, Bob helped organize an exhibition of works of students in the class, the only thing the president could come up to offer in appreciation of Makoto's contribution was a mug with the Evergreen logo.

Haft: Right, a provincial college. Yeah, this is an internationally renowned guy coming here.

Kawasaki: But I thought that the exhibition you organized at the end of Makoto's program; it was so fabulous. I thought that was really one of the highlights of that experience, for me and for Makoto, and most of all for your students.

Haft: I told you I still hear from students in that program that that was the most exceptional thing they ever had done or could think of doing, just because of Makoto and his wife. She did a tea ceremony for the students one time.

Kawasaki: Those little kids, popping in and out of the studio.

Haft: Yeah.

Kawasaki: It was just like being at the Okawahara atelier. . . one of the things that happened to us every time Bill and I visit the Okawaharas, it's never about the boss. It's always not only the children and grandchildren who welcome us, but also their friends and their relatives, who also had come and attended the father and son at Evergreen in 1993. I don't think that sort of thing happen often, . . . not valued too much anymore. There are all these artists that I know and see in the Seattle area. We know quite a number of them, but I don't know their families.

Haft: This kicks back to a couple things that we discussed here. Craftsmanship, number one. You go to their home and it's all about craftsmanship. But it's also about this legacy that goes back, and still drives what the younger kids are doing today.

Evergreen has a legacy, I hope, but—I'm editorializing now—it seems to me that it's in danger. Again, maybe it was our generation that needed to speak up and say, "Hey, something has gone off the rails here." Partly it has to do, I know, with just the realities of the day that suddenly, it's improper to do anything you simply wanted to do at the drop of a hat. Now, you have to check with the attorneys that the school has and all this stuff.

Kawasaki: I think that you're right. I was embarrassed when I saw the mug in Makoto's hand. I should have said something. I should have said that this is a significant event, and need to show that this should be seen and shown as Evergreen's progressive pedagogy. I didn't say it, and that was my fault. It's a different time issue, but also, we made a mistake. At a certain point, we gave up the faculty's prerogative to do those things that we wanted to do by hiring professional administrators.

Haft: Yeah, I agree.

Kawasaki: —that's happening at the Seattle Art Museum, for example.

Haft: Yeah.

Kawasaki: The daily function of the museum is run by mid-grade level administrators who have master's degrees in business and administration. They have no institutional history and ignore

connections with people who have devoted their life to the Seattle Art Museum. They are mostly concerned with the reputation of the museum in the art world and the number of museum attendees.

Haft: We'd better not go into that because I know they'll excerpt from that. [laughing] But let me ask you one last question. Anything that you want to talk about that we haven't talked about that you can think of? You can take a moment to think about it.

Kawasaki: Yesterday—you probably weren't on Zoom long enough—after Marianne's retirement celebrations, when they presented two faculty members who were applying to be the Faculty Chair, and each of them presented their strengths and what they can bring and so forth. Listening to them, it brought me back a terrible memory of attending a college association meeting when I was in graduate school. I wanted to talk to other graduate students or art historians in personal ways, talking about art and so forth, but the presenters just stood at the lectern and read their paper. The presentations by the candidates for the faculty chair were very much like that. I heard the word "processes" almost in every sentence, didn't really learn about them. [laughter]

Haft: I know exactly what you mean.

Kawasaki: I am so glad I was at Evergreen when we didn't have to impress our colleagues. Do you know what I mean?

Haft: Exactly. I guess that's it. You could be who you wanted to be, and you didn't have to have an ego about it necessarily. There were plenty of people who did. It reminds me of the faculty meetings that used to tie my stomach up in knots because the expressive arts was such a mixed bag of people—filmmakers, musicians, actors, artists—and it would get really heated. Then, Bill Winden would just clear his throat and go, "Well," in that wonderful, deep voice he had, and the whole room would quiet down. He had such a wonderful effect on people. [laughing]

Kawasaki: I think it got to the point where some of our colleagues in expressive arts, I think, were made very self-conscious of the fact that they didn't come to the college with an MFA, and someone like me for not finishing the Ph.D. dissertation. Those things didn't matter when I started. Nobody asked me whether I had a Ph.D. or not. When I visit artists in their atelier, I don't ask about their degrees.

Haft: What your degree was, exactly. If you were competent and you were doing your job, who cares?

Kawasaki: Right, exactly. Now, these two candidates, when they introduced themselves, it seem adding Dr. to their names was expected.

Haft: Yeah. The place has changed inexorably since we left, especially since you left because you left much earlier than I did. Maybe that's a good place to stop this so we don't gossip in front of our peers. [laughing] Thank you, Hiro. That was great.

[End Part 2 of 2 of Hiro Kawasaki on June 3, 2021]