

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Victor Hauanio

Victor P. Hauanio was born April 9, 1936 in Kukuihaele, Hawai'i. His parents were Victor Hoapili Hauanio and Emily Pa'ula'ula Hauanio of the Big Island. He attended schools in Waipi'o Valley and Kukuihaele until the eighth grade, and eventually graduated from Honoka'a High School in 1956.

In 1956, Hauanio moved to Honolulu to briefly attend the University of Hawai'i. He later worked as a stevedore for McCabe, Hamilton, and Renny Company. He returned to the Big Island in 1962 and worked as a site director for the Peace Corps camp in Waipi'o Valley.

In 1971, he began working for Honoka'a Sugar Company, which eventually became known as Davies Hāmākua Sugar Company and, beginning in 1984, Hāmākua Sugar Company. He was laid off in 1994 when the company shut down.

Hauanio lives in Haina with his family. He is contemplating a career in commercial fishing.

Tape Nos. 26-27-1-97 and 26-28-1-97

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Victor P. Hauanio (VH)

Haina, Hawai'i

February 24, 1997

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This an interview with Victor Hauanio on February 24, 1997, for the Hāmākua, Ka'ū families oral history project. We're at his home in Haina, Hawai'i. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, Victor, why don't we start. Why don't you tell me, first of all, when and where you were born.

VH: I was born in Waipi'o Valley, April 9, 1936.

WN: Okay, and then what were your parents' names?

VH: My father's name was Victor Hoapili Hauanio. My mom's name was Emily Paulaula.

WN: And they were pure Hawaiian, you said?

VH: My dad and my mom are pure Hawaiian. My mom was born in Honolulu, my dad was born in Ka'ū.

WN: You know how they came up to Waipi'o Valley?

VH: Well, as far as how they met, I don't know how they met. But I know I was born and raised in Waipi'o. We went to a school in Waipi'o up to third grade. And we learned about how to catch fish in school, how the living. The style of living in Waipi'o is taro farm, mostly taro farm. And I grew up, I think, after April Fool's Day had tidal wave [April 1, 1946], then we moved up to Kukuihaele. Then went to school Kukuihaele up to eighth grade. And from Kukuihaele, then I came to Honoka'a High School.

WN: So tell me, first, what were your parents doing in Waipi'o?

VH: Well, my dad was working for the County [of Hawai'i]. And when he come up to Kukuihaele to work, he ride a horse up, you know. The trail, the road was all mule trail, not for trucks or jeep. Was a horse trail. And my mom was a housewife.

WN: How many brothers and sisters you folks had?

VH: I have one sister, one stepbrother and one stepsister. But they were both raised in Honolulu. Hey, living at that time was good.

WN: What kind stuff you did to have good fun?

VH: Oh, we go fishing, get lot of kids [living] down there [Waipi'o Valley], families. We all families down there. We go fishing, swimming, hunting, everything what country people do. All those things, fishing, hunting, get together. Come up Kukuihaele [i.e., Pacific] Sugar [Mill] Company, we cut cane and take the cane home down Waipi'o. Everybody get together, sit down and just chew the cane. And that's the kind of fun we had. Swimming, mostly swimming.

WN: Where you went swimming?

VH: There's a deep spot down the beach, down the ocean. Usually, mostly we swim in the river. There's favorite place we call Waimihi, it's a deep place.

WN: Wainihi?

VH: Waimihi.

WN: That was [part of] Hi'ilawe Stream?

VH: Well, Hi'ilawe [Stream], Nanaue [Stream], all the stream all get [merge] into one, and then they come down here. And there's a high bank right next to the trail, the road, we all can dive off. Or sometime we go over to the next village, they call it Ka'au. There's a swimming pool, waterfall there, Nanaue, and that's where we go swimming, too. There's a water hole there. It's pretty deep. And we go over, meet with the families on the other end. Then we all went swimming.

WN: This is Waimanu? Or . . .

VH: No, right in Waipi'o.

WN: Oh, in Waipi'o?

VH: Yeah. There's a waterfall there called Nanaue.

(Telephone rings. Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: What kind fishing you folks did?

VH: River, catch 'o'opu, 'ōpae, mullet. See, what the Hawaiians used to do before, they used to get the old-style net, and they put it across the stream, put leaves and rocks, [blocking off the sides of the stream] and everybody go up [stream] in the water and start shaking all the rocks. And all the fish come down, the 'o'opu, the mullet, 'ōpae, all go into the big net. And then there's a long tail in the back [of the net]. We call that where the pocket [is]. So when all the fish get into there, they turn around, they cannot come out. Then we pick it [the net] up, take it out on the dry ground, pour it out. When everybody finish, then everybody have their

share, they take home.

WN: And what, the net stretched across the stream? The width of the stream?

VH: Yeah, see, the stream is about, maybe, fifteen to twenty feet wide. We set the net right in the middle of the river. And on the sides you put guava leaves, you know, you broke all the leaves, the branches, whatever kind leaves, *warabi*, you set 'em all on the side of the net, go to the shoreline. And then you put all the rocks, you know, make like a V-shaped pocket. When the fish come down they follow that and they go all into the net.

WN: And then, what, you surround the net?

VH: It goes into the net.

WN: Close the net?

VH: Goes into the net and goes into the tail, you call that—see, the net come this way and come down with a long tail. So when they pile up in there, they get hard time to turn around to come out, because it's narrow, eh.

WN: Plus the stream running down . . .

VH: Yeah, down.

WN: . . . and they have to go back upstream.

VH: Yeah. So that's the way we used to go fishing.

WN: How deep was the stream at that point?

VH: Oh, some places about, usually about one foot. If cross net, they use *kolo* then you go deeper area where about four, five feet, six feet. But when you use that old—we call that *kūkulu 'upena*, that's what the name of that net.

WN: Oh yeah? *Kūkulu 'upena*?

VH: Yeah, *kūkulu 'upena*. That is for shallow area for catch 'o'opu, 'ōpae, like that.

WN: Oh yeah?

VH: Yeah. Like we use the *pāloa* for the deeper spot. Catch mullet.

WN: How big was the mullet?

VH: They pretty good, pretty good size. If close to the ocean side they about, see, even two inch, two inches high.

WN: Two inch?

VH: Yeah, about, say, about this size.

WN: Oh, two inch high.

VH: Or even get about, maybe get about . . .

WN: One foot [length]?

VH: Over one foot, some. Maybe about, what, about half pound? And get lot of fish in those days. See, what we used to do, we used cut the guava tree, find one big guava tree, we cut 'em, we pull 'em with a horse. We take 'em in the river. He make like one house. You take 'em in the deep area. Leave it there until the leaves all fall off from the tree. And on the tree they get, what you call that, *limu*. The *limu* that grows on the tree, of the guava tree. That green slimy *limu* [i.e., algae]. That's what the mullet likes. So then they [eat] *limu*, that seaweed, you know, from that tree.

WN: You mean this stuff is growing on the guava tree on land?

VH: No, no.

WN: Oh, once you put 'em in the water . . .

VH: Once you put 'em in the water they get that . . .

WN: Oh, okay, okay.

VH: . . . *limu* grow on top that guava tree. So when the leaves fall off that's when the mullet come eat, and they start. . . . It's something like go one place where you can feed the fish all the time so the fish always come there all the time, you see. And then when get plenty *limu*, most of the fish come, then we bring the water lily, we set the water lily all around. Make one house. When we go dive, we look all over, oh, *choke* mullet! And what we do, we throw stone, and then the mullet all go underneath that big tree. Then we get the net, we surround. You only take what's stuck on the net, and the rest you let 'em go.

WN: And the 'o'opu was how big?

VH: The 'o'opu, we call that 'o'opu wai, big. They about this size, I think.

WN: That's a foot and a half?

VH: From here to here.

WN: Yeah? That big? (Laughs)

VH: Yeah. The head is I think three-quarters the size of my fist. Call that 'o'opu wai. That's from the mountain, that. See, when big rain, big flood, they come right into the pond with the current there. Push 'em over. Go down to the next pond, and then hit the river. So when you go to the bottom, to the oceanside, close to the ocean, you can see the big kind 'o'opu. The color different. But it's not cold enough. They stay about a month, they die.

WN: In the ocean?

VH: No, in the river.

WN: Oh, in the river?

VH: The river down here [near the ocean] is not cold enough to survive. So you have to go up in the mountain.

WN: So the river led into the *lo'i*?

VH: Yeah.

WN: So you can catch fish in the *lo'i* too?

VH: Yeah. (WN chuckles.) Catch *'ōpae*, *'o'opu*, catfish, tilapia . . .

WN: Mullet, too?

VH: Mullet. Those days, mullet all over the place. You know, not too many people [living in the valley] like today. Those days had lot of fish. And we used to go with a scoop net, you catch enough for eat, go home. Plenty, plenty fish. You see, that valley is about, three, four miles deep, goes in from the ocean to the inland, about three, four miles. And the mullet usually travel all the way upstream, all the way up inland as far as they could go. You know when the first time the prawns, they had let 'em go, the prawns, in the ocean, we went up, we *wen* go look for the mullets. You no believe me, the mullet was about pound and a half, two pound. Big, upstream. Big. The body was like that.

WN: You mean, like that around?

VH: Yeah. Hey, the diameter was like that. You talk about fat.

WN: That's about five-inch diameter.

VH: Five, six-inch diameter. There were big kind mullets up there. We used to go up, look for the mullets, ho. And we used to spear 'em. Lot of fish those days. Even the prawns. The first time we seen the prawns, whoa! What is that! We think was stick, you know, the branch hanging down like that. Then we diving under, that thing start moving. Ey, first time we seen the prawns.

WN: This is *'ōpae* or is this different? This the *'ōpae*?

VH: You never seen that Tahitian shrimp? The prawns, they call that the prawns.

WN: Oh, you guys had that in the streams, too?

VH: In the river? Yeah. In the taro patches you get that, too.

WN: Ho!

- VH: And you know the crayfish, now we have crayfish up here. There were lot of crayfish, they doing lot of damage to the taro farmers. You know, they go to the taro and just start biting, pinching it, pinching it, pinching it, and then get rotten.
- WN: Oh, the taro?
- VH: Yeah. And they dig holes in the mud, in the bank, aw, terrible that. And now this guy [taro farmer], brought in some pink snails. He brought into Waipi'o. That's the one doing the damage now.
- WN: How come he brought 'em in?
- VH: I don't know, he try to raise in his own pond for eat. So when the flood came, the flood took all that out. So it's all over now, all in the taro farms, but.
- WN: What they do? They eat the . . .
- VH: They eat the taro.
- WN: . . . eat the taro?
- VH: And the taro come all rot. And they said they get hard time of getting rid of the pink snail. Well, that's how. Everybody bring different kind things in, they figure it's good. Like the California grass, somebody brought in. (WN chuckles.) *Honohono* grass, they brought in, and they call that John Thomas grass they brought in.
- WN: John Thomas grass?
- VH: Yeah.
- WN: For the [school] principal?
- VH: Yeah.
- WN: How come they call 'em John Thomas grass?
- VH: Well, he the one brought 'em in. (WN laughs.) That was from the pond, eh. The thing just spread. Once she grow, ho, hard for get rid of. And when you clear 'em it breaks up, and then it start growing again. They have all kind grass. The guys who bring in certain things, they name 'em, you know, they give 'em their name. Yeah.
- WN: Well, how come they bringing in grass? What's that gonna do? How was that gonna help?
- VH: I don't know, maybe they good for the horses, cows, whatever.
- WN: Oh, I see.
- VH: They go different place, they see, "Ey, this must be good."

WN: So the fish you folks caught, how you folks cook 'em?

VH: Fry it, charcoal, *pūlehu*, raw, soup.

WN: Your mother used to cook?

VH: Oh yeah. My mom used to cook, bake. She was a good baker, make bread. But those days, they had a old store down in Waipi'o. They had---I don't know if you heard of this Chinese guy in Hilo, Ahana.

WN: Yeah.

VH: They used to have a store down there [Waipi'o], their grandmother used to have a store down there.

WN: They had poi factory, too?

VH: Yeah, they had the Ahana Poi Factory. And after the poi factory, then had Mock Chew Poi Factory.

WN: Mock Chew.

VH: Mock Chew. They had a poi factory, too, in Waipi'o. And I think that's [Ahana] the only store we used to get in Waipi'o long time ago. That's where my mom pick up most of her stuff. She baked bread, you know. Bread, pancakes, cakes, or whatever. That's how we used to live. Mostly cook taro, poi. Once in a while we have rice. Those days, hard to get rice. And when my dad used to work for the County [of Hawai'i] he used to buy [and bring home] canned Spam. Canned Spam those days was just like steak to us.

(Laughter)

VH: Ey, that's true. Just like steak. When my dad come home we look in the package, "Ey, get Spam! All right!"

(Laughter)

VH: Was just like steak.

WN: I guess so, yeah.

VH: But other than that, it was cheap living. The life was good. I don't mind going back to that kind of life again. Today we depending more on jobs so that we can survive. But in Waipi'o, you live off the land. If you don't do it, you don't have anything to survive [on], you see. You grow some taro, make a garden. You want fish, you go. Everything is, you have to do it. If you don't do it, you won't get it, you know. You go beach, catch a fish, come home, feed the family. Or you get '*opihi*. You can do all those things. You get taro, poi, you get *warabi*, you get freshwater shrimp, '*o'opu*, all that you have to do. You gotta go hustle. Today, future is, you no more job, you starve in today's life. So I think the olden days is better off than today, the way I see it. I wouldn't mind going back to the olden days. Today

is real hard. Everybody, to survive, the husband and wife gotta work. And if you no more job, hard to survive. Hard to survive.

WN: Your father worked for the county, you said.

VH: Yeah, he worked for the County [of Hawai'i], after the county he transferred to the Board of Water Supply.

WN: Was that unusual for somebody—well, you know a Waipi'o family—for the father to have that kind of county-type job?

VH: Well, you see, he went to school up to third grade. And he and his buddy were—this Portuguese guy, Mendes, they were real close, just like brothers those two guys. And when Mendes became a police—both of them went to the same school, they finish third grade and they didn't go back to school. But his [Mendes'] family was well-to-do. So that's how my dad got a job with the county, from a friend. And he been there until he retired.

For some of my uncles down in Waipi'o, my dad help them out when he was working for the county. You know, hire them and let them clean all the trails, all the road in Waipi'o. So that's what they did. They hire 'em for six months, then they let them clean all the roads in Waipi'o, all the trails. They used to get the road go right around, all the way down to the beach. And they have the center road come up, meet the main road. So they used to clean all that, all the trail. Before was nice. The trail all clean, and just the kind horse trail. They clean 'em, they make 'em wide. The county used to take care that.

The Z trail that go up to Waimanu, the state used to take care that. They hire students, maybe kids with low income, they hire them to clean the trail. Before, county used to take care all the trails in Waipi'o. From that time to now, county don't take care the road. They only take care from the top to the bottom. Anyway, you cannot get through, now. Before, those days no more fence. You can walk, you can ride right around with a horse, nobody bother. But today, all fenced up. They fence the road. You cannot get in. So when the outside people came and they start buying places [i.e., property in Waipi'o], then they fence up their place. Fence the road. You cannot get in. Then the local people start looking at that, "Ey, they no let us go into their place, we fence up our area." So everybody start fencing up. Then the outsiders who buy land on the inside cannot get to their place because the local guys all fence up their place, too. And they got mad.

They had kind of friction down in Waipi'o about those things, fencing up their place. Well, he [outsider] taught the Hawaiians how to fence up, so they doing that. (Chuckles)

"Well, you taught me how to fence up, so I fence up my area, too. You don't let me go into your place, I won't let you go in my place."

You know, so they have to find a right-of-way of getting in, like that. They have kind of friction down there, they still do. It's not like what it used to be. Big changes in Waipi'o.

WN: Your time, growing up, everybody knew everybody, yeah?

VH: Yeah. Mostly all families. You know, lot of Filipinos, and the Japanese, and the *Pākēs* who

was living down there, they all families. They know one another. Every time they make parties, everybody is invited, you know. Then they break out the *'ōkolehao*, and all that. But that's how it used to be. Not today. Today, I guess everybody is each individual for their own. Before we were brought up, help one another, but not anymore. You help them, they turn around, they sue you. Amazing, eh?

WN: Yeah. So what kind work did you used to do? What kind chores you had down there?

VH: Waipi'o? Well, my chores was to take care the animals.

WN: What kind animals you had?

VH: We had horse, pigs, ducks. Well, the ducks, they take care of themselves. They go in the taro patch and eat all the—what do you call that—the *pūpū*, they call that snails?

WN: Yeah, yeah.

VH: Yeah. Well, the ducks . . .

WN: They eat that?

VH: Yeah, the ducks eat that. But only the pigs we had to go cut—pull out *da kine*, what they call that? *'Ape*. That's those wild, Portuguese taro.

WN: Oh yeah? *'Ape*?

VH: *'Ape*. And then we used to bring 'em home, cut 'em up, boil 'em, mix 'em up with the *honohono* grass, feed the pigs.

WN: You never have to buy middling?

VH: Well, those days, middling hard to get. When we move up here [Kukuihaele] then we got middling from the store, but when we was living Waipi'o, no more. Then the taro stems, we used to cut 'em up, boil 'em, feed the pigs. Go fishing or torching in the night for *'o'opu*. Yeah.

WN: The pigs was for eat?

VH: Yeah, commercial pig. Sometimes we catch wild pigs. We raise 'em.

WN: And then you folks sell 'em?

VH: No, slaughter 'em.

WN: Slaughter 'em.

VH: Party, *kālua*. When we get party we *kālua*. Like, some of the families get party, they come over, you know, they want to buy the pig. We sell 'em. Those things was cheap, eh. That's how.

Then on the weekends, we harvest, pull taro. And those days was about two-and-a-half [\$2.50] or three-and-a-half dollars [\$3.50] a bag. If I remember correctly.

WN: Hundred pounds?

VH: For hundred pounds. You get two-and-a-half [\$2.50] or three-and-a-half [\$3.50] for a hundred-pound bag taro.

WN: Who they sold the taro to?

VH: Ahana Poi Factory in Hilo. And that's about a hundred-pound bag taro were sold before. Then when you get lot of taro—those days get lot of farmers—so when get lot of taro the price go down to two dollars and a half [\$2.50]. Then my dad say, “Oh no. You give me three dollar half [\$3.50].”

“No, no. We cannot give you. Two dollar half [\$2.50].”

“Aah, my taro going stay in the patch. Let 'em get rotten.”

Yeah, that's how those days. Let 'em get all rot.

WN: 'Cause your father had job with the county, and what, the taro was more . . .

VH: Part-time job.

WN: So he could tell 'em . . .

VH: Part-time, but for us was full-time. (WN laughs.) Us, every day work. You gotta go in, pull the grass, clean the banks, check the water. Certain time you have to shut the water, you gotta keep the water in so that it gets warm so the taro, instead of growing wild, the stem start dropping down so the taro get big. If just let 'em grow wild, only the taro [stems] gonna grow tall, but all the vitamins is—all the food is going into the stem, not the taro [corm]. So you have to keep the water warm so that the stem drop down, so everything goes into the taro [corm]. Yeah, hard days, though. Hard job. But I enjoy doing it. But today, you look at the price today, how much a—and they no sell 'em hundred-pound bag. All mostly eighty-pound. And they pay up to forty-five to fifty dollars a bag. Forty-five to fifty dollars a bag.

WN: Sheez.

VH: And now you go Waipi'o, you look from the top, if you going down you look, get lot of people are opening. All the old taro farmers, taro patches used be in there, they open 'em all up. Get lot of taro. But taro is in demand and they cannot keep up with the poi. So the farmers down there, they making good living with taro, raising taro. The price is good [for sellers].

WN: So still got some of the old-time families farming down there now?

VH: Yeah, through generation, generation. They pass on to the kids. There were some longtime—there was Kenneth Eskaran. He was born and raised in Waipi'o. And after the first

plantation, they merge with one other company. You see, they used to work for Kukuihaele, had a plantation.

WN: Oh, Pacific Sugar Mill [Company], eh?

VH: Yeah. And then get Honoka'a [Sugar Company]. So when they merge, all the old-timers came down. All the new-timers were, you know, laid off because of the seniority. [It is unclear whether VH is talking about the 1928 merger of Pacific Sugar Mill Co. and Honoka'a Sugar Co., or the 1972 merger of Honoka'a Sugar Co. and Pa'auhau Sugar Co.] So he moved to Honolulu. He and his wife moved to Honolulu. They stay Honolulu all their life, until about, what, six, seven years ago they came back to Hawai'i. And they going Hawaiian home[stead], Waimea, and they open a taro land. And he was a mason contractor. And he came back, he work here for couple of years, mason, then he retired. Then he open all the taro farm in Waipi'o, the father-in-law's place. He married one of the [Toko] girls.

WN: Oh, Toko, yeah. Roy?

VH: Yeah. That's my brother-in-law, that.

WN: Oh yeah?

VH: He married to my sister. But anyway, he [Eskaran] married to one of the Toko girls. And that girl's father was Nelson Chun. And he open up all over the place in Waipi'o. Today it's all open. Nothing but taro.

WN: Oh, that's good.

VH: That's why he say he wanted for his kids, you know, let his kids take over. At least they have something.

WN: What's this guy's name? What's his last name?

VH: Eskaran.

WN: How you spell that?

VH: Eskaran, I don't know how you spell that.

WN: That's okay. What kind name is that?

VH: Kenneth, he's a Hawaiian-Filipino.

WN: Oh, Eskaran is a Filipino name?

VH: Yeah.

WN: Okay. So you spent your childhood up to ten years old . . .

VH: I spent my childhood down in Waipi'o.

WN: What kind of house you folks had?

VH: A regular house. Those days, no more grass shack, I don't know, no more grass shack.

WN: (Laughs) No, no.

VH: But we had a not bad house.

WN: I mean, what, three bedrooms, two bedrooms?

VH: Three-bedroom house, a big parlor, kitchen. But the bathroom outside. Outside get bathroom.

WN: So no more plumbing, no more electricity, eh, you folks?

VH: No. See, what we do, like, we used to get that old kind sink and put 'em in the house. The old kind, put 'em in the house, then we hook up the bamboo to the bottom piece, and then run 'em out to the pond. That's why my mother wash the dishes inside, then goes into the pond. But you gotta carry the water with the bucket inside. Put 'em inside one big drum, one fifty-five-gallon drum or fifty-gallon drum. And those days those drum doesn't rot [rust]. I guess the metal was good, those days. So that's how we go connect the faucet, open 'em, wash dishes.

WN: And then the water drain to the pond?

VH: Yeah, to the pond in the bamboo. That was the days.

WN: How far away was the pond from your . . .

VH: Oh, not far, maybe about from here to the car.

WN: Oh, about fifty feet?

VH: Ah, no more fifty feet. The white car right here.

WN: Less than fifty feet.

VH: Yeah, about fifteen feet.

WN: Oh.

VH: Then, you see, those days, every house lot used to get stone walls around their lots. This the trail, and then they all stone wall.

WN: How high was the stone wall?

VH: Maybe about, three-and-a-half, four feet. All stone wall, both side of the road. Where we used to live, there's a high—people live up, we live below—and it goes all the way, like that. All stone wall, all the way until you—you go to the last house then from there no more stone wall, just trail all the way until you hit the next boundary, there's stone wall. People that own

their place they have a stone wall around their property. But that's the kind of life we had before. But good life.

WN: But the stone wall wasn't meant to keep anybody out, though, yeah?

VH: No, I guess the stone wall like those days was just to mark the boundary.

WN: The boundary.

VH: Yeah, the boundary that they own.

WN: So different from the fence today, eh?

VH: Oh yeah. (WN chuckles.) Today, well, I'm glad the place that I got after the closure of Hāmākua Sugar [Company], it's about 24,000 square feet, I think. Pretty big. Goes all the way up to the road, from there come down to the bottom road here.

WN: This is where, Waipi'o?

VH: No, this place. [VH is talking about his present property in Haina, where this interview is taking place.]

WN: Oh, this place, yeah. I'll ask you about this place a little later.

VH: But the one in Waipi'o belongs to my grandmama. My dad's mom.

WN: Oh, you folks still have it?

VH: Yeah. My dad's place is further up inland. And that's where my sister them take care the taro. We have another place at the bottom where my grandmother's place. During that time, Waipi'o is Waipi'o. Not anymore. Today, it's not Waipi'o. We lost Waipi'o. You know, did you ever go down to Waipi'o Valley?

WN: No, never went down there.

VH: Waipi'o Valley is not Waipi'o. As soon as you get into the valley it's not Waipi'o. The only time you see Waipi'o is when you go about three miles or four miles inland to the waterfall. When the water come up there's a big pond at the bottom.

WN: Is that Hi'ilawe?

VH: No, no, beyond that. There's a big pond, and no river. The water go through, seeps through the ground and come out down to—that's how they get the river. That is why they named the whole valley Waipi'o. Waipi'o means, what, no water, the waterfall is disappear. So that's Waipi'o. You seen that, then you know you seen Waipi'o. That's why they named the whole valley Waipi'o. And you heard the story of the Nanaue waterfall?

WN: No.

VH: No?

WN: I don't think so.

VH: They used to call that the shark pool.

WN: The shark pool?

VH: Shark pool. You never hear the story about that?

WN: No, no.

VH: In the olden days before, I don't know whether that was true story, or what, but they have that story, I think, at university or up at—what that museum?

WN: Bishop [Museum]?

VH: Yeah, they have that story there.

WN: Oh yeah? I better go look it up.

VH: Long time before, a Hawaiian man used to live there. And he used to farm the area, they get garden, potatoes, whatever they plant. So when he see people go down to the beach, he ask question if they going down to the beach go pick 'opihī. And he jump into the river, into the pond and change himself into a fish. And he swim all the way down, then go to the ocean, he change himself into a shark. And then he follow those people who are picking 'opihī. Then all of a sudden, one of their crew fall in the water. Then he eat 'em, then he come back. That was the story long time ago.

How this story started, this guy from Maui came over. He was a shark god, he came over from Maui, swim over to Hawai'i. Then he met this beautiful Hawaiian girl. They got married, they had a son. So when the son born, he had a mouth on his back. So the only way they could cover up that was put a cape cover his body up. The mom used to cook and feed him, you know, cook stuff and all that. But as he grow, grow, grow, grow, he went in the water, he became like the father. Follow them ['opihī pickers] all the way down to the beach, eat them and come back. And they caught them, though. That was the story. I don't know if was true or what, but. That was what the Nanaue waterfall pond was all about.

WN: And how you heard the story?

VH: Somebody told us that. My parents told us before, but I don't know if that was true story or what, but. I know there's lot of things up there happen to me, though. Good things, not bad. Good things happen to me in Waipi'o. I used to go fishing down there, go throw net. When I finish work, I go down, take my net. Then go down there, look, ho, there's a nice smooth—the water is real nice. And in where the rocks *stay* is real nice, calm. So I look at that, thinking, must get fish. I went down, take my net, I threw my net in there, in the pond, that area. Ey, then I pull, I feel the fish poking the net. You can feel 'em poking the net. So I pull the net, it got stuck to the rock. So I pull the cord, I *wen* tie to the rock. So I went up, I *wen* go change my shorts, my short pants. When I went down to pick up my net, the net was

on dry land. Somebody brought up my net, put 'em on dry land with the fish inside.

WN: Oh, had the fish inside? (Chuckles)

VH: Yeah. I look around, I look down. I know the net was stuck in the water. I told my brother, 'cause he's a minister. But I don't think so he believe me. (WN chuckles.) He think I lying, but ey, I not lying. Honest. Just me, down the beach. I guess maybe they figure, chee, I have to take out my net.

Well, before that, I found a skeleton down at Waipi'o, down at the beach. There's a truck trail, goes down to the river mouth. I guess the wind and everything keep blowing, blowing, blowing. But I found a skeleton, from the head to the toe. Everything intact. When I drove over, ey, just like I seen something. Nah, couldn't be. So I reversed back, I jump out, I look. I found a skeleton. So I took my *bentō* all out from the box, I put the box down. So I look at the skeleton tell him, "If I going put you all into this box, I don't like you bother me. But if you like get run over by the truck, I going leave you there. So I might as well put you in the box, I go bury you one safe place." So I found one place get three big pine trees. I dig one hole in the middle, nobody can go through there. Then I put all the bones all inside, put one cloth underneath, and I bury 'em inside there. So I tell 'em, "Whoever you are, you better not fool around me. You going fool around me, I going take you out, I going put you back over there, and the trucks going run you over. And you going scream while you lying because the trucks going bust all your bones down here." So that's what I did. I bury 'em. Maybe the guy *bin* help me out, I don't know. Honest, I was surprised. I was kind of scared, though. But during the day, eh. I was kind of scared, though.

I looked up the shoreline, I look down the shoreline, I no see nobody. I look all around, nobody was but the net. (WN chuckles.) And the fish on dry land. Just like somebody *wen* pick it up and put it right there. So I pick up my net, I turn around, I tell him, "Thank you, whoever you are, thank you very much." I walk up to my truck, then I went to the river mouth. I go shore casting nighttime.

WN: Wait, I going turn the tape over.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: Okay.

VH: Then I go shore casting nighttime. So I stayed down there that night. Where I was by the river mouth, nothing bite. Fish no even bite. So bother me. Maybe. . . . This place was good for me, you know, what *wen* happen? So I went back up. I went back up there, I talk, I tell 'em, "You know, I come up here, I no like you bother me tonight." So I went [down], first cast I make, (snaps fingers). Eh, no more even five minutes. Whew! I caught big kind *moi*, about three, four pounds, I think my *moi*. "Ey, all right." I come up, pull 'em up, I cast again, ey, no more three, four minutes, phew! Going again! I picked up six in a row. Put 'em in the truck, put 'em all in the cooler. "Thank you, I'm going home."

(Laughter)

WN: This happened all after you *wen* bury the skeleton?

VH: After I *wen* bury the skeleton. Yeah. So I don't know, maybe the person *bin* help me out. But was a good thing, though. Not bad.

WN: As you look back at your life and see all the good things that happened to you, you can think back to that one time.

VH: I go fish all my life down there. I not afraid of the place. I go by myself. I stay down beach by myself, go fishing. But sometimes, you think back, eh.

WN: You said that you were [lived] there from '36 to '46, eh? [Nineteen] forty-six was the tidal wave, where were you when the tidal wave hit?

VH: When the tidal wave hit, we don't know what it was tidal wave. I think April Fool's Day, that April Fool's Day, we was up in Kukuihaele. I think we was Kukuihaele or Waipi'o. My house is about mile and a half from ocean inland. And those days, they came over and they get a mike [microphone] or something, they say, "Tidal wave, tidal wave. Get out." Nobody knew what was tidal wave. My aunty, you know Ruth Kaholoa'a? She was on TV for that Hawaiian. . . .

WN: What program was that?

VH: Aunty Ruth Kaholoa'a.

WN: Kaholoa'a.

VH: Yeah. She's a old-timer. She's a old-timer from Waipi'o. She lives in Hilo right now. She's about ninety, ninety-something years old. She's strong. She ride helicopter go to Laupāhoehoe fishing. She go *'opihi* picking. (WN chuckles.) Tough, she's tough. (WN chuckles.)

WN: How old is she now?

VH: She's about, oh, ninety-six or ninety-seven. And she's tough. She's still working her taro patch. She get dryland taro in Hilo. She's the oldest-timer [surviving] that was born and raised in Waipi'o. You want to hear history of Waipi'o, you talk to her. She's good. And they were living at the beach at that time. Kenneth Eskaran, my grandfather, and there was a old Japanese man across of the river, his name was Nakanishi. And he used to live down there, the beach. So people from the top, by the lookout, yelling to the guys in Waipi'o for run away because tidal wave, tidal wave. And nobody know what was tidal wave. So all the people ran down to the ocean when they seen the water go down [i.e., recede] and they see the fish flapping on the sand. So that come up, each time the wave was coming more up, more up, and they go down, they run down, they chase the fish, grab the fish. Then all of a sudden they see big swells coming. So that's when they took off. So they took off. Then the old man, he no could run because he was old, he had hunchback. So he walk all the way up to the highest sand hill right in the back of his house. And he climb on the guava tree and he stay there. And my cousin guys took off. They ran, when they reach halfway, the waves was

coming up already. So they climb the coconut tree. And my aunty guys just made 'em to the mountain side. They climb up. And from that time on, the waves came inside [the valley], just cover the whole Waipi'o. And it [water] went as far as mile and a half, right in the back of our house.

WN: So your house was okay?

VH: My house was okay, the rest was all bust up down the beach. Nobody knew was tidal wave anyway.

WN: But you weren't down there that day, you were up . . .

VH: Us, I think we was up at—if I'm not mistaken, we was up at Kukuihaele when the people say that tidal wave. So everybody went by the lookout. Because those days wasn't like [today]. All trees. Just run down to the corner, look out. Just cover the whole valley, but. (VH makes swooshing sound.) I know Hilo and Laupāhoehoe took a beating. But other than [that], Waipi'o, we didn't lose anybody, Waipi'o.

WN: Nobody died?

VH: Nobody got killed, nobody got hurt.

WN: But you folks moved out after that?

VH: Oh yeah. See, then . . .

WN: Lot of people did that?

VH: Oh yeah, lot of people did that. Most of the people move out. They move, some went to Hilo. Us, we stayed at Kukuihaele, mostly at Kukuihaele.

WN: They moved out of the valley because the tidal wave busted up. . . .

VH: No. They came---where we were, it just came right in the back of our house. And over there, [it was] just like a small little village. Before used to be rice paddies, the Chinese farmers. They get houses down there. And my aunty guys' [house] was down at the beach. Their houses was all bust up. All gone. But first time you look at that, you get scared, eh. So everybody plan to move out. So the Thomas [family] move out, we move out, the Lau Kongs and the Ah Pucks move out, the Loos move out. They were all staying one small—it was one area. So everybody move out. They all came to Kukuihaele. All of those people that were further in [the valley], way up from the ocean, they stayed there until two, three years, then they moved out. And then everybody came up to Kukuihaele, living Kukuihaele. The Kanekoas, the Nakaneluas, yeah, everybody came up. And then from there we kind of forget about Waipi'o. Lifestyle was different when we came to Kukuihaele. There were more things to enjoy, different from what we used to do in Waipi'o, the lifestyle.

WN: Like what?

VH: Well, we meet some other new friends, play baseball, basketball. That's kind of new games

to us. So we always out down at the park playing baseball, volleyball, basketball. There were different things to do. Then when we used to go school in Kukuihaele, they used to teach different kind of things, like English, social studies, we never had that before. [At Waipi'o School] they only teach you how to live.

WN: Waipi'o School?

VH: Yeah. To survive.

WN: Who was teacher down Waipi'o School?

VH: Mrs. Hino. Hino and Kanaka'ole. And the principal used to be Sam Kaaekuahiwi.

WN: So when you moved up Kukuihaele, what else different? I mean, I would think had some plantation people up there?

VH: Oh yeah. Because they had a—but they were all in different camps. They all in different camp. In Kukuihaele there were Kam[ehameha] IV Camp . . .

WN: Kam[ehameha] IV?

VH: Kam[ehameha] IV. That's where all the sugar families used to live. Not too many sugar families were living Kukuihaele. Mostly the people from Waipi'o, they had families up there [Kukuihaele] and they move up. But most of the plantation workers were in the [plantation] camp area, about two miles down. It's all houses both sides, one camp.

WN: You mean, that's where, like, Joe Batalona lives? That area?

VH: No, Joe them used to live in Kukuihaele, but that was the father-in-law's place, that. They used to live more up to the lookout. That's where the parents was living, Batalona. Big family, that, Batalona family.

WN: So what kind house you lived in in Kukuihaele?

VH: Regular house, T and G [tongue and groove]. But was smaller. It was a three-bedroom house. Same. But the Waipi'o house was better, was bigger than the one up here. When we move up to Kukuihaele the chores was almost the same, taking care the horses, pigs, chickens. Those days we used to have *da kine* outside hot water. We have to get firewood, go up the forest, cut some guava trees, bring 'em home—dry guava. That was my chore.

WN: No more taro though, anymore? You folks didn't go down the . . .

VH: No, we had a small taro patch up there. We used to go down . . .

WN: Not down the valley?

VH: No, we still had down the valley. So every weekend we go down. Oh, you get up early, [go] Waipi'o. Six o'clock, clean taro patch, harvest, bring up the taro. And those days was mule train. Bring up the taro. You know, we think back, was hard life, but yeah, was more easy

life than today. Today you call hard life. Real hard life. Everything is so expensive, everything you look at, it costs money. Waipi'o, everything you look at you go get. You no get, you no eat. You go get, you survive. But here, no. You gotta survive, you gotta work. You have to get job. If not, hard to survive.

Then my uncle was a principal in Kukuihaele School.

WN: Oh yeah?

VH: John Thomas.

WN: Oh, that's your uncle?

VH: Yeah. We all live in Waipi'o, close by.

WN: So Kukuihaele, the school taught you more kinds of things?

VH: Yeah, English, social studies . . .

WN: By the way, when you was growing up in Waipi'o, what language you spoke at home?

VH: Well, they taught us English, not Hawaiian. But at home, we speak Hawaiian.

WN: At home you speak Hawaiian?

VH: Yeah. But we go to school, they teach you English. But at home our parents talk to us in Hawaiian. So at that time, we had to learn how to speak English. But I kind of forget my mother tongue. I wish that I kept up with my Hawaiian. If I kept up when my parents were living at that time, aw, be easy for me today, you know. But when you go school they tell you gotta learn how to speak English. So that's what they taught us. And then when we came Kukuihaele School was something different again. There were things they taught us was different when we was going to Waipi'o School. Then after I finish eighth grade, then we went to Honoka'a School. And that was a challenge, though. There were sports out there, but I wanted a more action-type sport, so I took up football. But there wasn't any football game in Honoka'a, football team.

WN: No more football team?

VH: No, we---you see, one day, I was about ninth grade, I think, one day we, couple of us, we used to play football in Kukuihaele, two-hand touch [football]. And then we challenge the Honoka'a School guys, you know, from Kukuihaele eighth graders. So when we went to ninth grade we challenge the Honoka'a people. We used to do two-hand touch, so every lunch hour we play two-hand touch football. Then they came up with the flag, so we played, played. Then one day the principal and the coach came see us. Said, "Ey, you guys want to play football? You guys want to make a football team?"

"Oh, yeah, yeah."

We talk with them. So one month later they call us. They said Kam[ehameha] School is gonna

send us some uniforms. And it was the old, the old-type uniforms, something like—what do you call that kind? You know when cold they usually wear that, just like pajamas, the whole thing, the whole suit. So they send us that. (WN laughs.) That was green and yellow. Bright color, you know.

WN: That's not Honoka'a [School's] colors, eh?

VH: No, Honoka'a is green and gold, but that's the uniform they send, and we gonna use 'em.

WN: This is Kam[ehameha] School?

VH: Yeah. And *da kine* old-kind helmets, old-kind shoulder pads, and they send 'em all to us. We had to go repair 'em and fix it up. So we made our football team at that time, when I was ninth grade. So then we have to get our parents' consent in order to play, and you have to get good grades in order to play. So that was fine. I went home, I took the application, my dad didn't want to sign. He said, "Nope. You come home *pau* school. You get your chores, and Waipi'o we gotta go pull taro, this and that, clean the taro patch." That was hard. I kind of liked football because I enjoyed the sport. And I forged his name.

(Laughter)

VH: So I can play. Then every day we used to walk home from Honoka'a to Kukuihaele, you know. And those days, not too many cars. So used to walk home, get home late. This is about 5:30, 6:00. Until my dad get all mad. He start beating us up. And those days no more child abuse [laws]. (WN chuckles.) Yup.

WN: But you played?

VH: I played until I graduated from Honoka'a School. I went to two Shrine games, Shrine Orchid Bowl game. I played in my—'54, '55 I played.

WN: Shrine, meaning where? Over here . . .

VH: Shrine Orchid Bowl in Hilo. We played against Honolulu All-Stars. It was good game, close game, 0-0, Warren. Yeah, they get all-stars from Hawai'i, from all the schools. And we challenged the Honolulu schools. That was good. Then I had scholarship to go University of Hawai'i.

WN: Oh yeah? Football scholarship?

VH: Yeah. And I blew 'em.

WN: Why?

VH: I blew it.

WN: How come?

VH: With Tom [Thomas] Kaulukukui, I guess. I went to University [of Hawai'i] and practice

football with them. The guys are big. (WN laughs.) Tom Kaulukukui, eh, the guy, big guys.

WN: What position you played in high school?

VH: Quarterback.

WN: You was quarterback?

VH: Yeah, used to play quarterback for Honoka'a High School. And I went University [of Hawai'i], practice, scrimmage down there, play football with them. Ey, when I got into the middle, (VH makes guttural sound), me the only smallest guy there. The guys was huge. And they had the guy Solomon—Solomon, I forget his last name.

WN: Solomon?

VH: Solomon, he's from Kailua.

WN: Oh. Naumu?

VH: No. (Pause) Alo the name. Not Solomon, Gilbert Alo. Man, the guys was all big guys. (WN chuckles.) Tell me, "Ey, you came here to play football?"

"Yeah."

"Ey, kind of small, eh, *bruddah*? That's all right, *brah*." (WN laughs.)

Play, play. The guys come up to me, "You all right? Yeah, (chuckles) you all right. Come up, you all right."

WN: Had other Honoka'a boys on the UH team?

VH: No more, no more, only me went.

WN: Oh, only you went?

VH: Yeah. Had the scholarship. Me and my coach went. My coach is. . . .

WN: Who was the coach? Vasconcellos?

VH: No, my coach was from up here, was the guy, Kitagawa, Jack. You know they have that Jack's Tours?

WN: Yeah.

VH: Yeah, that's him. Used to be my coach.

WN: Who was your UH coach?

VH: They had Vasconcellos.

- WN: Hank [Henry] Vasconcellos?
- VH: Yeah. Was hard, though, but. Yeah, my girlfriend got pregnant. Then the parents said, "Either you get married to my daughter or we going take you to court."
- "Okay," and got married. I had to get out [from the football team].
- WN: Where was she living, over here? Or. . . .
- VH: No, we got married five years and then divorce. I thought, shucks, I wanted to finish—I just started university—I wanted to finish, but the parents said either you get married or go jail. Thought, well, shit, I don't want to go jail.
- WN: So this was---1956 you graduated Honoka'a [High School], that year you went . . .
- VH: [Nineteen] fifty-seven.
- WN: [Nineteen] fifty-seven? And that same year you went to Honolulu.
- VH: University.
- WN: University of Hawai'i. Where did you live when you went UH?
- VH: I stayed with my cousin [in] Kaimukī. You see, at that time, Joe Batalona them was living in Kaimukī.
- WN: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. Wilhemina Rise?
- VH: Yeah. See, they were staying with the father-in-law.
- WN: Oh, okay. So how was it coming from over here [Big Island] all the way to Honolulu? What was it like?
- VH: Yeah, something, man. Fit right in. (WN chuckles.) Yeah, but sometime I get nightmares when I think about it. I could have been something today. Could be one teacher, could be something else. Tsk. So I no let that happen to me again. If I going do something, I gonna do it.
- WN: So how many---you said you spent one year at UH?
- VH: No, no more even one year. No more even one year at UH. No more even half year, I think. Tsk. *Haole* girl. I met coeds, coeds they used to call that before, coeds. (Sighs.) Then from there, struggle. Life was hard.
- WN: So you had to support the child?
- VH: Yeah, support the child. And the parents came down from the Mainland, stay with us.
- WN: Oh, was somebody from the Mainland? She was from the Mainland?

VH: Yeah, she's a *Haole* girl. I had two sons and a daughter. They all up in the Mainland except my second oldest is in Honolulu. And this my second marriage. After my dad passed away I came home, take care my mom.

WN: So after you stopped going UH, what did you do? You stayed in Honolulu?

VH: Stayed in Honolulu for twelve years. Worked construction, Hawaiian Dredg[ing Construction Company]. Then I worked McCabe Hamilton [& Renny], stevedore. Then Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays, I jump on my bike, go riding during the weekends. You heard of the Sons of Hawai'i [motorcycle club]?

WN: Yeah.

VH: Yeah, we made the club, the Sons of Hawai'i.

WN: Who's "we"? You and who?

VH: There were sixty-four of us. Used to go down to old Montgomery Motors. And we used to—upstairs used to be our clubhouse. And there were five of us from the [Big] Island that were living in Honolulu then. We formed the club, plus sixty-four other guys. Mostly local people. And that was a good club. Like Friday nights, all the boys get together, we drive out to country side, or might be Kahuku, we go to that area. Stay at one beach. And we have two vans, and a pickup truck with all parts, all our tools. And if the gang drinks, then the keys all go in the car. They lock the key up. Nobody drive. That's the rule. You drink, nobody drive. The keys all go in the car and they lock 'em all up. Until the next day they, you know [return the keys]. The only time we drink, when we camp. Other than that, we on the road. We stay out until Sunday night. Sunday night, go home. Following week, start all over again. Go around the island. But we not *da kine* radical, you know. We go to drive-in, they say, "Ey, you cannot come in with your bike." Park 'em all out. Walk in, we sit down, eat. Or if they [the drive-in] have little argument, we walk out, jump on the bike and go different place. Kailua was the worst one. We come in, there were couple bikes went into the drive-in, so the owner came, tell 'em, "Ey, you guys cannot park here." Then we park all alongside the road, you know, line up, everybody. The cops came down. Ey, *choke* cops, *brah*. Came down. (WN chuckles.)

Tell, "No, we just stop by, you know, give the guy business, come down here we go eat."

So the guy said, "Oh no. We want you guys out of here."

But no hassle. Everybody jump on the bike and went back. Then we reach down the clubhouse, break up, then everybody go home. Then we discuss about going out to place to eat. Then we brought our own food. (WN chuckles.) We brought our own food, take 'em to the beach. Bother nobody. We figure we go to the drive-in give the guy business. And there are lot of guys, sixty-four. You double up, that's 128 guys. (WN chuckles.) And that's lot of money. You buy one hamburger, cost you about two dollars, he make two, three dollars [per person]. The guy make, how much. But that's the way it was.

WN: You guys used to wear leather jackets?

VH: Leather jackets [with] Sons of Hawai'i [patch on the back]. But I give my jacket up. Too small, so my niece got my jacket. (WN laughs.) "Ey, uncle, I going take the jacket."

I tell, "No, I like keep for remembrance."

Get couple of guys up here that was in Sons of Hawai'i, too. Last year they had a big get-together, Sons of Hawai'i. But I couldn't make it down.

WN: They still have Sons of Hawai'i now, eh?

VH: Yeah, they have the club, yet.

WN: So you folks had . . .

VH: We had a reunion last year. So my friend call me up. Tell me, "Ey, come up Tex [Drive In & Restaurant]." So I went up Tex, I meet him. Tell, "Ey, we get a reunion down in Honolulu."

Tell him, "Ey, I no can make 'em."

WN: Okay, so while you were Honolulu, you worked stevedore and other jobs, yeah?

VH: Hawaiian Dredg[ing Construction Company], stevedore.

WN: Hawaiian Dredg[ing Construction Company] and McCabe Hamilton & Renny, yeah?

VH: Yeah.

WN: So you worked down the pier, then.

VH: Down the pier.

WN: How you like that kind job?

VH: Good, good. Stevedore, ey, no can beat. That's a good job. You no work hard. Anything above fifty pounds they bring the finger lift. But you know us, we so used to carrying heavy stuff. So the boss tell us, "Eh, no, no, no. Bring the finger lift."

"Nah, no need the finger lift."

He tell, "No, you gotta get the finger lift." So everything above fifty pounds is all finger lift. You work in the hatch, get dust, they send you the vacuum, the blower, suck everything out. Good job, good pay.

WN: You guys had union, eh?

VH: Union, ILWU [International Longshoremen's & Warehousemen's Union]. I think they one of the highest paid guys, the longshore[m]en. They make about twenty-six bucks [an hour] at that time.

WN: At that time?

VH: Yeah. I was making about eighteen dollars at that time. Today, they make, chee, they might be making about thirty-something dollars an hour, I think, longshoremen.

WN: How you got the job? Was easy?

VH: Through a friend. See, me and this guy, George Kahapea, were close. We used to go fishing, we used to go sports, we used to do everything. He work for the City and County [of Honolulu]. His uncle was a ship boss for McCabe Hamilton [& Renny]. So he tell me, “Ey, Cuz.”

I tell, “What.”

“Like work?”

I tell, “Work where?”

“Stevedore.”

I tell him, “Yeah! Ey, I like work.”

He tell, “I go tell my uncle.”

Next day the uncle call me up. Tell, “Ey, come down here.” Pi‘ikoi and—what street that?—Pi‘ikoi and. . . . Was Kalihi industrial area. So I went down.

WN: Not Pi‘ikoi, then. Pi‘ikoi is . . .

VH: Not Pi‘ikoi. Pi‘ikoi is down Waikīkī side. [Pu‘uhale Road.] They had a office down there with a big warehouse.

WN: This is, what, McCabe?

VH: Yeah.

WN: So you worked McCabe first, or you worked Hawaiian Dredging?

VH: McCabe, I was working with McCabe and Hamilton.

WN: So from 1957 you worked McCabe?

VH: Yeah. And talk to him, he tell me, “Ey, you like work, you start tomorrow.”

I tell him, “Sure, yeah.”

“You start tomorrow.”

“All right.”

You see, we start four o'clock—I work second shift. Four o'clock to 4:30 is straight time. From 4:30 on is all time and a half.

WN: So from four o'clock, for half an hour you get regular pay?

VH: Regular pay. (WN chuckles.) And from 4:30 till whenever you *pau* is all time and a half, OT [overtime]. All time and a half. We made good money. My boss is Bill Lincoln, this guy from Kohala. Tell me, "Boy, 4:00 to 4:30 is straight time, 4:30 to when you *pau* that's all overtime."

I tell, "How can be?"

Tell, "No, that's all overtime pay."

"You sure?"

"Yeah."

"Okay, *brah*."

From the time I started second shift I never changed.

WN: I bet everybody like that shift, eh?

VH: Oh yeah. If you work graveyard, same thing. You get that. And plus you have the night differential, too. So we were having that three hours or four hours night differential, too.

WN: Hoo. Straight pay, plus time and a half, plus night differential for that one second shift?

VH: I think get about four or five hours, I think, differential. And they take you down to Pearl Harbor or Hickam to eat. And you don't pay anything. See, we work down Pearl Harbor, we go down to the mess hall and eat. But every Friday or every Thursday, we used to get paid. Open the envelope, "Wow!" That's how. Then I kind of stay back. My supervisor call me, he tell me, "Ey, get one boom operator never come work. You like work?"

"Shoot."

I work overtime, double time. I work eight hours boom operator . . .

WN: Boom operator, that's skilled labor, eh?

VH: Yeah. That's the winch they use for haul the stuff out. They were making good bucks, man. Tell me, "Ey, you go boom operator tonight. The guy never show up."

"Shoot."

WN: How you learn how for operate 'em?

VH: Every lunch hour I go up, practice. Me and my boss. My boss go show me how. Tell me,

“Ey, come. I go teach you how for operate this. Easy.”

Oh, easy. Because all hydraulic. So once you learn how, *pau*. Easy. Hard though, the hardest one is on the Japan ship. All compress, eh, all steam, all air, that. Different from the hydraulics. And two guys gotta operate two booms to unload. One guy across here, you two guys gotta work the same time to lift up. But on the Pioneer, like that, we use only one boom, two guys operate, but. You just use one boom to bring up stuff. Good money, *bruddah*. I used to stand by every time. “Ey, boss.”

“What.”

“No more?”

“No more overtime.”

Like overtime. Good money. Then I lost—I never go back. Well, when I lost that job—I never lose 'em, anyway, because I had my accident, motorcycle accident.

WN: Oh, this is when? [Nineteen] sixty-two, you said?

VH: Yeah. So I never go back. I should have gone back when I had my leg [amputated]. Maybe I could have work stevedore yet.

WN: So you was stevedore from about, '56, '57 to '62?

VH: But not that hard. You get eight guys one gang, plus one supervisor. And you split the gang, four and four in one hatch. Four this side, four this side. Two guys work from this gang, two guys from the other gang. Us four guys working, the other four guys sleeping. In work. Honest. So they work one hour, two hours, “Ey, your guys' turn.” They go back, they go rest. You go work for the two hours, “Ey, your turn.” Take lunch hour. Till *pau hana*. Actually, you only working four hours. The other four, you only sitting down.

WN: And then you gotta wait for your ship come in. What if your ship no come in?

VH: Well, either you go to ammo [ammunition] dump, you go down to 'Ewa Beach, that's where they have the ammos. You go down there. They pay you a dollar more. And then you go work in the freezer, they pay you ten cents more or twenty-five cents more. So they get jobs.

WN: This is still McCabe?

VH: McCabe and Hamilton.

WN: And then when you worked Hawaiian Dredging?

VH: Ah, before that.

WN: Oh, before that.

VH: Before that.

WN: Which one was better?

VH: Oh McCabe. McCabe was better. Hawaiian Dredge, you work for your money. I no lie. You work for your money. That's good. We loaded silos down at Barber's Point. All the concrete silos, we put up all that. And they put up six silos at one time, and all by air jets. And once they start pouring they cannot stop until they finish. That's why three shifts turn around. Some guys don't show up, you working two, three shifts. They pay you for work. And every two minutes, that air jet works. Shoo! (VH makes swooshing sound.) And it goes up, up. Some place cave in, and you have guys on the side patching. They have walkway, and they patch same time. They shoot that chemical for quick dry the cement. But that thing just keep going up every two minutes. So that's how. You work for your money when you work Hawaiian Dredge. You good worker, they keep you. You not a good worker they lay you off.

WN: You was ILWU, too, that time, Hawaiian Dredging?

VH: No, no. We just was off and on.

WN: Oh, I see.

VH: Work until the project is over.

WN: And then you laid off?

VH: Yeah. I think to myself, yeah, I like something steady. So I got into McCabe and Hamilton. Then was ILWU.

WN: You worked there until your accident?

VH: Yeah.

WN: And then what happened after that?

VH: After my accident I came back.

WN: [Nineteen] sixty-two?

VH: Yeah, after I learn to walk with my artificial leg, I went all to the islands: Kaua'i, I went Maui, Moloka'i, Lāna'i.

WN: For what?

VH: Just go tour.

WN: Oh.

VH: After I get my artificial leg, then I came home here.

WN: How long took you to learn to walk?

VH: Say, one week. After I got used to to the leg. It wasn't actually finished. They make it, and they have all stainless steel pipes, with the adjustment on. And as you walk, they adjust, they adjust. So once adjust was good, they. . . . I was supposed to report back to the rehab[ilitation], [but] I went on the trip.

(Laughter)

VH: Wear long pants, you cannot tell, eh. Went on a trip, went all islands, then I came home, then I stayed here for a while, then I went back. So I went to the rehab, they tell me, "Shee, where you been all this time? (WN chuckles.) Here, give me the leg. I going put the leg all together."

I tell 'em, "Yeah, yeah." (WN chuckles.)

So I never did go back to rehab after that. "Aah you. You supposed to be back, we supposed to adjust."

I tell 'em, "Ey, no, the leg good. I went all the islands, take a trip."

So they finish 'em up and they gave me the leg. And when my dad died, I came back. I went back.

WN: [Nineteen] sixty-two, yeah?

VH: Yeah. Then I went back again. I came home, help my mom. She was getting old, you know. So I came back. Then after I came back I work at the Peace Corps [camp in Waipi'o, as a site director].

WN: For the state, yeah?

VH: Mm hmm [yes].

WN: How you felt about coming back over here?

VH: Big difference. Everything is quiet. No more lights, nightlife is different. Everything is quiet. Oh, big difference from Honolulu. At least at that time, you not afraid to go out. At least from here, you know mostly everybody. But in Honolulu. . . . One time, me and my girlfriend went from Wai'anae—she lives down at Mākaha. And we came in town [Honolulu] for have dinner and then we go nightclub. On the way up, right by the old airport, Damon Tract, we heard the (VH makes two gunshot sounds). That's all we heard. And we didn't stop, we kept on going then we hit to the service station and we pull over. And we look in the back, we had two bullet holes.

WN: Oh yeah?

VH: I told my girlfriend, "*Ai-ya*, I think somebody was shooting at us."

She tell, "Nah, nah, nah, keep going, keep going."

And when we stopped at the service station, two bullet holes. Straight to the hotel, we went. We went Pagoda [Hotel], we stayed at Pagoda. Then we came home during the day, we came home. I tell, "Crazy. You can have Honolulu, I'm going home, Hawai'i." So I made up my mind, I came back. I don't care to go back Honolulu. I think the only time we went Honolulu is for the kids, before they go back school, take the kids down shopping for their school [supplies]. We stayed at Pagoda. Pagoda is good, Pagoda is right there. You want to eat, you go Likelike [Drive Inn Restaurant], there's the place to eat. You can have breakfast at Pagoda, see all the *uluas*, all the fish. (WN laughs.) And the shopping center is right below, close. That's why lot of local people from here, when they go, they go all Pagoda.

WN: Right.

VH: Good place.

WN: Nice place. Yeah.

VH: Then came home, work for Peace Corps, then I went to. . . .

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 26-28-1-97; SIDE ONE

WN: Tape two of interview with Victor Hauanio on February 24, 1997, at his home in Haina, Hawai'i. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, so then you were saying you worked for the state until '71, and then what happened from '71?

VH: Yeah, April, I think was April 21st or 22nd I worked for [Honoka'a] Sugar [Company]. You know, the best part about it, to hear friends in the company. They say, "Ey, go apply for plantation."

I tell 'em, "Yeah, okay, I go apply." We had cousins, uncles working for [Honoka'a] Sugar. So I put in for [Honoka'a] Sugar.

Three days after that they gave me a call, tell me, "Ey, come down, we go take physical, interview."

I *wen* take physical, everything, I start work. They hire you for work. So go drive truck, sugar trucks, haul cane.

WN: Haul cane trucks.

VH: Yeah.

WN: So you had no problem getting the job with your leg?

VH: No. Well, at the beginning they never know that I had artificial leg. So they said, “You can drive truck?”

I tell, “Yeah, I can drive truck.”

Tell, “Okay, you go train with these guys.” So I had this guy, Islas, he used to be the truck driver, so I go partner with him. And then as I work with him he teach me how to shift, all that. So when we hit the good area, flat place, I jump on and I bring the truck into the yard, drive 'em in.

Tell me, “Yeah, eh, not bad, not bad. Keep practicing, driving, driving, go to the field, load up.” And when you load is something different because the terrain is kind of rough, so you gotta go slow. And once you hit the main road, then all right. It took me about a month, then I had my own truck. From that time, my record was good. I had good record working for [Honoka'a and] Hāmākua Sugar. I drove truck for five years. And then every year new trucks come in, I used to get the new trucks. There were three shifts, so three guys get new trucks. Then if your truck break down, then you have to drive the spares, and that's the old trucks. So we talk it over with three guys that drive the truck, talking, tell 'em, “Ey, you gotta take care the truck. Check this, check that. We don't want the truck broke down, we gotta drive junks after that.” So it was great. For five years I been driving. And Kawawaki, he was the superintendent, he was the overseer for the whole harvesting, cultivation.

WN: Kawawaki?

VH: Kawawaki. He was good man, that. Good man. He used to live right up here, *Haole* Camp. He came over to me, he talk to me, tell, “Ey, how would you like to be supervisor for harvesting?”

I tell 'em, “Ey, you must be joking.”

He tell, “No, when I ask you question like that I not joke.”

I tell, “Sure, I like.”

Tell, “Okay, you let me know tomorrow.”

So next day I came work, I talk to him. Then I went to the supervisor staff. Became the supervisor for harvesting. I stayed with harvesting for about another six months. And after that they put it to a different department. They want you to know all the departments, you know, cultivation, planting, replanting, the seed area, the seed station. You gotta know all the seeds and all that, what variety, what kind of variety for certain field, or certain elevation have different varieties. So I went through all the class. And then I stayed with day shift with cultivation, with the planting crew. I stayed there for about two years. Then I went to the replanting for two years to learn the trade. Then I went to seed area for one year, then I went to cut seed for about two years, then went back harvesting.

WN: When you started, what was the difference in pay from longshoreman to . . .

VH: Oh, big difference, big difference. When I started working plantation, was \$6.45 an hour.

And closure of Hāmākua Sugar, we make up to, what, \$8.75. That's how much we was making. But the overtime, we make lot of overtime, so that's the only way we could make money. Guy tell, "Ey, we get drivers never come work. You guys like work?"

"Shoot." Work overtime. Plus you have the night differential, too. But it's not that much like working for the stevedore. Stevedore time was big money. When you come back down here, well, no can help, though. Eight seventy-five. From \$6.45 to \$8.75. And our last year we never get raise. We never get raise for, what, seven-and-a-half years. And they wanted us to take a pay cut, you know, just before the closure. We told 'em, "No." Tell, "We no can take a pay cut. We never get raise for seven-and-a-half years. No can take pay cut." But I like for something different. Something challenge when I came back to Hawai'i and work for [Honoka'a] Sugar. Something different. That's a lifestyle a plantation worker has. Every day, day in, day out. And you know why, you know the trucks come pick you up? Labor trucks come, pick you up, take you work, they bring you home, drop you off. Next day is the same routine. Day in, day out.

WN: Where did you live when you started [Honoka'a] Sugar?

VH: I live in Kukuihaele. You know where Joe Batalona lives?

WN: Yeah.

VH: Right next.

WN: Oh yeah?

VH: Yeah. That was my mom's place. And then I used to live right there. They come up they blow the horn, you come down jump on the labor truck, go work. And when *pau* work you jump on the labor truck, they drop you off. Was good.

WN: And most of the people who lived over there, Kukuihaele, worked for the plantation?

VH: Yeah. All them houses there belong to plantation. Even the one in the back, the store, all plantation. When you see a camp, like that, once upon a time used to be plantation.

WN: How did your mother get the house?

VH: See, when my dad died in '62, she married again to this guy Benito, Filipino man. So he had a plantation house.

WN: Oh, he was working for the plantation?

VH: Yeah, he was working for [Honoka'a] Sugar as a fertilizer. They take contracts for fertilizer, so they go by contract. They spray so much bags a day. So they got a plantation home. And he bought the place just for about, what, nine thousand [dollars]. It's about, seven thousand five hundred [7,500] square foot, I think. Yup, so my mother got married to him. And then he passed away, then she had the place. When she passed away, she turn over the place to me. Then we had little bit problem with my sister, so, tell 'em, "Do what you guys like. Sell 'em, sell 'em." Terrible. But anyway.

- WN: I know that when you started Hāmākua, was it Hāmākua at that time? Hāmākua Sugar?
- VH: Davies. [Honoka‘a Sugar Co.]
- WN: Was [owned by] Davies?
- VH: T. [Theo] H. Davies. [In 1978, Honoka‘a Sugar Co. and Laupāhoehoe Sugar Co. merged to form Davies Hāmākua Sugar Co. In 1984, Francis Morgan purchased the company and formed Hāmākua Sugar Co., which closed in 1994.]
- WN: T. H. Davies. Davies Hāmākua [Sugar Company].
- VH: Yeah. Was T. H. Davies. They have sugar company in Philippines, but it’s not [called] Davies. I don’t know what name they go by, but. We had [cane loads] from Kukuihaele, all the way to Pā‘auhau. All belongs to [Davies] Hāmākua Sugar [Co.]. Lot of sugar. We used to make money. We used to broke records, and we used to make good bucks. Management, each year time, they have different manager. Different engineers. Every time when they have different management, different engineers come in, they want to do something different. You making money already, you know you making money, but they want to try do something more where they can make more money. But they spend a lot of money trying to make it better. They didn’t make better, but. They make it worse. And then management, they only sit in the office. They don’t go out and look. That’s why Kawawaki was great. That’s why he retired early. He know what’s happening. And we wanted him to be the manager, but. He was good. If he was manager, I think [Hāmākua] Sugar still be here. But then we had—who that guy?
- WN: Morgan.
- VH: [Francis] Morgan. He’s not a sugar man, he’s a cattle man, not a sugar man.
- WN: So when they had these changes from Honoka‘a to Davies, were there like layoffs and things along the way while you were working there?
- VH: No, when we working for Davies company . . .
- WN: The mill was, where, Haina or was at . . .
- VH: Haina.
- WN: Haina, not ‘O‘ōkala? Had ‘O‘ōkala, too?
- VH: Had ‘O‘ōkala. See, ‘O‘ōkala was different. And then had Pā‘auhau, they had a sugar mill, too. Then when Morgan took over, they wanted to expand. So they bought Pā‘auhau, they merge with Pā‘auhau. And then ‘O‘ōkala [mill] was taking care [i.e., processing] of Pa‘auilo [cane]. So after we merge with Pā‘auhau to one, that’s Hāmākua Sugar. They spend lot of money. They made roads. We had roads built from the bottom, from the shoreline all the way up to ‘O‘ōkala. And then they put in a \$1 million project for the electric line so we can send power to HELCO [Hawai‘i Electric Light Co., Inc.]. Then we merged with ‘O‘ōkala mill, then we joined, then we can sell more power to HELCO. It was a good idea in the start, but

they close ‘O‘ōkala mill too early [in 1987]. If they only kept ‘O‘ōkala mill running, that could take care all the sugarcane in ‘O‘ōkala area and Laupāhoehoe, until after they harvest all that, then close it down. But no, they close it down earlier. Then all that cane from there, had to come all the way to Haina. You spend big money. If you go one far trip, you only can make two trips a day. And all the time is wasted. It would be easier from there [i.e., Laupāhoehoe] to ‘O‘ōkala. Grind all the far field up, then close, then move here.

But they not sugar men. They all *pipi* men, they all cow men, them guys. As things was going on, you know, they close the fertilizer. And the one best thing that we had here was the liquid fertilizer. We had all tanks, about five-hundred-gallon tanks. So these guys from Gaspro fill up their tank, truck come down, unload ‘em into our fiberglass tank. And certain time of the day they fertilize the field, all liquid fertilizer. And we produce, at that time, when we had liquid fertilizer, fourteen, fifteen, sometime sixteen, but most time is from twelve up to fourteen ton [yield] per acre. And then we had good crops. Sometime we hit fifteen ton per acre. Then all of a sudden they cut back on the liquid fertilizer. They said too expensive. They go back to air fertilizer, with the plane, fertilizer. It came down to nine tons per acre. Sometimes seven tons per acre. No more cane. And they stopped irrigation. Then everybody look at each other, they say, “Guarantee [Hāmākua] Sugar going close up.”

Then when we had a meeting then the union say, “Yeah, they going file for bankruptcy, Chapter 11.”

You go in the---ey, we had pitiful. You go in the field, you cannot even make one ring roll. A ring roll is you pile up all the cane so that the crane can load the truck. You cannot . . .

WN: The yield was so bad?

VH: The yield was so bad. No more cane. Sometimes the cane all like this, stand up. You push it down, it lays down on the dirt, and you have to get the *lilikō* machine with the tine rakes to rake ‘em all. Bad. Some, one shift no can even make one strike. Before, one shift make about, three, four strikes. When you make three, four strikes you making good sugar. Now, after that, we could smell that the thing is coming. These guys not planning to raise cane. Once they shut the fertilizer down, that was it. That was the main one, the fertilizer, the liquid fertilizer.

WN: They did that to cut cost or they really wanted to shut . . .

VH: They just wanted to shut down. They want to go more in *pipi*, I guess, but. They even built one slaughterhouse. They used the money from sugar to build a slaughterhouse, a place to raise the cattle. And they spend, they borrowed [money] from Hāmākua Sugar to build up the slaughterhouse area to hold *pipi* pens, and they buy hay, you know, whatever feed for the cattle. And big bucks they get. We could see what was going down the line. So they said, *pipi*, slaughterhouse they get, they would make money. They was making pretty good.

WN: I know in ‘84 when the company wasn’t doing too good, Morgan stepped in and sort of kept the plantation going . . .

VH: Well, that’s the good part, he kept—he didn’t lay off anybody. He kept the sugar business going. Even was going bad, he kept us on. Until the last shutdown, he kept us on. He tell,

“The only thing, I don’t want to lay off anybody. So we go until the shut off, the last date.” Even was going bad, he still kept us. And he said, “There’s ways.”

Oh, yeah, but if you not going to plant sugar, tell us. You want to go into cattle business, tell us.

WN: So you guys didn’t know what was—what side they were gonna go.

VH: You know what side they going already. They not thinking about sugar.

WN: About when did you start to think that sugar was gonna be going down?

VH: That was in the [19]90s, about ’92. [Nineteen] ninety-one, ’92 we can smell the rat. Guys didn’t care. And they hold supervisors’ classes to better the company. I cannot see that. For a week, all the supervisors was down at [Hilton] Waikoloa. And all paid by Hāmākua Sugar. And I couldn’t see that things are happening, and they having a class for better each supervisor. It doesn’t make sense. You could see the thing is going down the line and nobody is doing anything. So why hold a class for better the supervisor? It doesn’t make sense. And they spend something like, thirty, forty thousand dollars just for go do that summer class. And to me, that’s stupid. We could use that money for raise. Since we never get raise, we could have used that money for raise, but no. They spend big bucks for things that unnecessary. We grumble but we just was small potatoes, we not the big-timers like them.

WN: By that time, 1990, ’91. . . .

VH: There’s no hope.

WN: No raise, or. . . .

VH: What can we do? We go to meetings, we tell them, “I think our liquid fertilizer should be one of the main issues because that’s where we make our cane, our yield. It’s all from liquid fertilizer. Once you take that out, there’s no sugar, there’s no cane.” You go by air, it’s all go--the wind catch ’em, it’s going blow ’em away. Irrigation, not enough water. They hardly water the cane. You can see ’em, spots in the field all dry, getting dry. No liquid fertilizer, I tell them, that’s the main thing, the liquid fertilizer. From Waipi’o lookout all the way to Pa’auilo, all drip [irrigation]. Below the state highway, we have some above the state highway, it’s all drip field. You talk about yield when they fertilizer, liquid fertilizer, you having fourteen, fifteen ton per acre of cane. That’s what you want. The more cane you can produce, the more sugar you get. We go by that record. Still they want to cut it out. So they cut liquid fertilizer out, then the yield start dropping, dropping, dropping. You can see the big difference. And they said that that’s all right, they no care. They use air fertilizer, no changes. We knew something was going on. If a company really wanted to grow sugar, to make money, you wouldn’t stop liquid fertilizer. But you can see then the yields are dropping. One shift cannot make one strike. Sometime you make only half. The mill gotta shut down because no more cane. So everybody come down to the yard lunch hour, sit down, talk story. They say, “We going down. This place going down.”

WN: What kind stuff did the union tell you?

VH: The union cannot do nothing. They only can tell—they only can take care of us, but they cannot do nothing with the company. We get meetings with the company, see what the situation is. And they always say that we have to cut cost here, cut cost there. But I think you guys cut in the wrong place. Morgan, too, doesn't want to lay off anybody. So we tell 'em, "Oh, you gotta cut this, like the air fertilizer is no good. Go back to liquid fertilizer. We were doing good."

WN: When did you first find out about the actual close—it was gonna close?

VH: When we find out was sometime in '91 or '92. Early part of '91, '92.

WN: And how did you hear about it? How did you hear about the . . .

VH: We didn't hear about it, we know about it. How the situation was going. Why they cut out liquid fertilizer? They say too expensive. Why expensive? That's the way they make their money. They go by air, what, you can see the tonnage from each acre is dropping, the last tonnage. We *wen* run out of cane. When we have the tonnage we never run out of cane, there were *choke*. They have to stop, sometimes they have to knock off shift for no come work when there's too much cane in the yard, you know.

But now, no more cane. The mill gotta wait for us bring in the cane. And they pay guys for work overtime for haul cane, bring in the yard. No make sense. Why pay guys overtime? When you had the cane at one time. You lose 'em. Now you gotta pay overtime, no make sense. Bring guys early, four hours early, in. Double up for bring in cane. To me, that's stupid.

There were couple of us that knew that these things is going down. You know, we sit down lunch hour and we talk. And we knew. There were lot of people that knows that the company going down. We talk it over with the union, we get union friends. We sit down and talk to my friends, guys. Tell, "Man, this company going close up."

Tell, "Yeah. The way it going, going to fold up."

Even the union, the union was prepared. The union was all prepared for that. So they went ahead. And talk to the company that if they gonna close up, they wanted house and lot enough for the workers. So they went ahead, they didn't wait. And they ought to try get some money back, you know, severance pay for all the workers, and this and that. They went---they never send 'em back. The union really *wen* help us.

WN: At that time you were living here?

VH: Yeah. This is the house I was living in, because I was a supervisor. This was the supervisors' houses.

WN: Oh, I see. When did you move over here?

VH: Between '76 and '77 I move here.

WN: So when did you hear about the final harvest?

VH: Well, we got the final answer when we had a stop-work meeting. The union told us that the company filing for Chapter 11. And we knew that was coming. Everybody knew that. And even the union knew that, so the union, when I hear they try get things before they filing for Chapter 11, get some contract going, like getting the house, the land for the workers. So they went ahead. They tried to settle the severance pay. But see, after they filed the bankruptcy, everything was locked in to the bankruptcy, severance pay, everything, because they have to pay all their creditors outside. First they have to collect all the money and then pay off all the creditors. So until today, we never get our severance pay yet. The ILWU union lawyer is still filing. Last year, I think, the union sent us a note saying that we going have a severance pay, about 40 percent of what we had, 40 percent of that coming to us. But the only thing is when. So they talk to court-appointed trustee [John] Goss, after Goss pay all the creditors, then our severance pay get paid to us. But the thing is when. So we still waiting. But I no care about the severance pay. Main thing, I got the house and lot. That was the main thing. Because . . .

WN: Did they say that to keep the house, you had to participate in the final harvest?

VH: Yeah.

WN: That was part of the . . .

VH: Yeah, that was the deal between the company and the union. In order for us to get all the people who have to work to the last final harvest in order to get a place. So we all did that. October 10, 1994, that was our last day. Last day to work for Hāmākua Sugar. Then we had the trucks patrol the town, the cane and everything. Oh, that was real sad, though.

WN: Were you in there? Were you in that last parade [on September 30, 1994]?

VH: We was on the boat.

WN: On the boat?

VH: Yeah, we took our boats, too.

WN: Oh.

VH: In the back of the truck, the float, they had two boats. And then we had couple sugar workers with us holding the cane. Some old Filipinos with the cane knife, holding the cane and motion, eh, cutting seed. That was good.

WN: But how you felt that day?

VH: Sad, though. Real sad. There were lot of outsiders, even tourists—there were lot of tourists—when they seen that, they knew that was the closure of Hāmākua Sugar. People were talking to them and saying that this is the closure, the last day. Even the tourists were crying. You know, people from outside. Yeah.

WN: Did you go down to the mill for the last . . .

VH: The closure? Oh, yeah. We was all down there. Everybody was all on the bank taking

pictures for the last grind. And then guys were blowing [their truck] horn. We had even guys from the news, reporters. We went down, took pictures, we took them around in the sugar fields where they have the loaders, the truck, took all pictures, loading up the cane for the last day, and bring 'em down to the mill. That was good. Sad, but. Sad you see something like that. Especially for the old-timers. I worked there, what, twenty-three years. Twenty-three. My cousin guys work there for thirty-two [years]. And we figured it's a security job, you know. You figure it's not gonna close or bankruptcy, but it happens. But we learned a lot. When you have something like that, you have to cherish it. You never can tell when you gonna lose it. For a big firm like this, it's different from, like, working in a hotel. Hotel is something different. Like, plantation is a good job, but it's a slow job. Not as fast like hotels. There's lot of times you can goof off, talk story, but not hotel. Hotel, either you do it or you're fired. Like Hāmākua Sugar, you can smoke wherever you want, you no get fired. Like, you go hotel, you smoke, you get fired. Not as free like working for plantation. So now all our plantation workers that working in the hotel, they know that now. Nothing is free anymore. You start at seven [o'clock], you finish at three [o'clock], you start at seven [o'clock], you finish at three [o'clock]. Lunch break, you go out to your lunch break, and you back on the shift. You five minutes, ten minutes late, you get chewed [out], or warning say, "Ey, this the first and last [time to be late]." You keep on doing that, they fire you. Change of life, it's different from [how] we [lived], once upon a time, twenty years ago, twenty-three years ago. It's way different now. You can feel it when there's no job available. You go to hotel, you put in application, we go classes, I went to cooking school, I went to leadership class, I went forestry class, landscaping . . .

WN: You found anything?

VH: . . . you go apply, they won't give you a call. I always bother 'em, I call 'em up almost every week. I tell 'em, "Ey, you get anything open? I applying for this."

Tell, "We let you know."

And is only good for sixty days. After sixty days you want a job you gotta go back, reapply again. I went McDonald's, I went to local stores over here, Like T. Kaneshiro, they had opening for stock clerk. They no even hire you, they don't even call you. Hotels, farthest hotel I went, [Hilton] Waikoloa. From Waikoloa I work my way back down to Mauna Kea [Beach Hotel], [Hapuna Beach] Prince Hotel, Mauna Lani [Resort], Sheraton. We put in application, they won't call us. So once a week I call the hotel saying that I had applied. They tell me, "Oh, I'm sorry there's no opening yet. We call you if there's any opening." And after sixty days you look in the paper, ey, get opening again. You call up—there's a phone number—I have a schedule for all the hotels. You call them up and they have a tape saying what kind of job are open.

WN: You think your leg has something to do with it?

VH: Well, half the time they don't know if I had artificial leg. I wear long pants and I hardly—I don't show much limp. And until afterwards, if get hired then I tell 'em. "To tell the truth I have a artificial leg, but as far as for working, it doesn't bother me."

But the guy tell, "Ey, you sure you can drive?"

I tell, “Oh yeah, I can drive.” I drive any kind equipment. Hydraulic crane, trucks, bulldozer, grader, no make difference.

WN: So since '94 you been looking for work?

VH: Yeah. After the closure of Hāmākua Sugar, '94, we collect, before—for six months—before the six months were over, we applied.

WN: You mean, collect the unemployment?

VH: Yeah, before we finish, so we had applied for job just in case, just about the end of collecting, you already get one job set up. It wasn't that easy. Then I worked for city employment for seventeen hours a week, minimum wage, \$5.25, and three days a week. Then they place you where they want you to work. And so I told 'em, “Ey, what about [Hawai'i Island Catholic] Social Ministry”?

And so they call 'em up, tell 'em, “We going send one guy work for you guys as a clerical aid.” Work in the office.

I tell 'em, “Oh, right on.” So I work with them, get to know Carol Ignacio, met Maryann Pyun, Gloria Watson, and Bella, I know them, because their husbands all worked for Hāmākua Sugar. Their father, their parents. Then while working with Carol, they had funds. They said if I wanted to teach some young kids. I told 'em, “I no mind. I no mind teaching some young kids. But what you want me teach them?”

Tell, “First, we gotta find a name for your class.”

So I tell, “Oh, *ho'oponopono* class. They make one *ho'oponopono* class.”

But she tell me, “What is *ho'oponopono*?”

I tell, “*Ho'oponopono* is you sit down and *talk story*. You tell me your story, and I tell you my story. That's *ho'oponopono*.”

Tell, “Yeah, that's a good name.”

So we name 'em. We got twenty-three kids, the kids that are not active in their community, not active at school, almost say that they dropouts. They don't want to do nothing. They don't want to go to the P and R [parks and recreation programs]. So I had twenty-three kids, from here to Pāpa'aloa. And we brought all the kids in to the union hall, and we sit down with them, talk with them. I tell 'em, “If you folks want this class, you folks have to tell us what you guys like. Not we tell you what you guys gotta do. What kind of things you guys like do?”

“I like mechanic. I like do mechanic but nobody like help us. Even my father no like teach me, this and that, but I like mechanic.”

“How many of you boys here like mechanic?”

There were couple of boys wanted mechanic. So we put it on the board, mechanic. Then the girls came up, silkscreen, there were couple guys were interested in that, we put down, silkscreen. We came out with about twelve different kind of things they want to do. So out of these twelve we told them, "From the twelve we break it down, either to six or five, the best that you guys really want to do." So they get 'em to five things they wanted to do. And then after the breakdown finish, then we ask them, "You guys sure you guys want to do this?"

"Yes."

There were art drawing, silkscreening, auto mechanic, outing like learn how to paddle, like how to fish, throw net, diving. So we pick up all that. And then we ask them if they were so sure about it, they said, "Yes." So we went out and get the guys who are involved in silkscreening, art, and we did with Parker School that they were willing to teach our kids mechanic.

WN: And these were kids whose families were affected by the closing?

VH: Yeah, the sugar workers, all the sugar families. So had the thing going good for, what, six months, almost six months. Then we ran out of funds. And we met with [Governor Benjamin] Cayetano's financial guys, they came over. We had a meeting with them, if we could have more funds for our kids.

WN: This was state funds?

VH: This is the kids that we are worried about because they are not interested in anything else. These the kids that we afraid might turn to criminal things, drugs. That's what these kids doing now, drugs, steal. There's no program for them. We had that team leadership class in Pōhakuloa last week, two, three weeks ago. Tajiri, he's the guy that teach those class, he's a island boy. And there were a couple from Honolulu, Akiona, Mr. and Mrs. Akiona. And we had the schoolteachers up there. And then my son, my son was interested in the class . . .

WN: This one?

VH: Yeah, so he went. And that class, leadership, is teach you about to lead yourself to find your own road, find out what you're interested in. Find what you want to do.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: So with the plantation closing, how has it affected your family?

VH: Well, when we were working for Hāmākua Sugar, financially, it really helped my family in financial way, medical. There wasn't any question about paying the bills. My kids had allowance. And when closure of Hāmākua Sugar, just like I lost half of my life. Where I going get my income? We knew that plantation was gonna close, so what we did was, to last day we work, we put away some money. And we figure that that money would help us for

the next few months or half a year until I get a job. That was the plan that I had, so we put away money. And the funny thing about it was, when the closure of Hāmākua Sugar, it really affect my family, my kids, 'cause there wasn't any income coming in, no more medical. Times were hard. On the medical side, you see, AlohaCare, we had all AlohaCare, us. And we knew the closure of Hāmākua Sugar so we put away some money for us to get by. Then here comes AlohaCare saying that if your asset is more than \$2,000 we gonna knock off your medical. You are no longer with AlohaCare. Just like that. And we were paying something like \$87 a month on the medical. That was great, that was cheap. We can afford that. That's when we was working for the plantation. Then during the closure of Hāmākua Sugar, without a job, our premium came up to \$216. Just imagine, our premium came up. When we had a job, our premium was \$87. And when we went out without a job, our premium came up to \$216. It's almost double of what we were paying. And we paid the \$216 because we wanted the insurance. Our medical for cover me and my family, that same month we paid the premium, that was in May—I think May 1995. The same month, at the end of that month, we got a letter from AlohaCare, they say, "You are no longer with AlohaCare because your asset is too high."

So we had a meeting with [State Representative] Dwight Takamine up here at the old hospital. Try to find medical for our families. So he came and there were HMSA [Hawai'i Medical Service Association] representative, then they had Kaiser, and the AARP [American Association for Retired Persons], or something like that—another insurance, a medical—came. And the cheapest was Kaiser [Permanente Medical Care Program] plan, \$350.

WN: Three hundred and fifty dollars [a month]?

VH: That's the cheapest they can come up with. So I talked to Dwight, "Dwight, you know AlohaCare, the funny thing about it, getting me puzzled is, when you working you pay \$87. You have understanding that you pay \$87. That's good, that's fine, that's cheap. Then when the closure of Hāmākua Sugar, our premium went up [to] \$216. How we going pay that? We no more job. Why the premium never come up to \$216 when we was working? And just opposite, when we without a job, drop the premium down to \$87."

He said, well, he don't know, this and that, we talk, talk. Then I told him, "You know, in the same month, they told me that my asset is too high, that we are no longer covered by AlohaCare. After I pay my premium then they tell me that? And they send me one letter saying we are no longer with you?" I tell him, "This is a shakedown. This is bad, then. To me, that's wrong. Because my asset is high. Who gonna take care me if I never save that money? Welfare is not gonna take care me. Damn sure, they not gonna take care me. So that money in there is to take care us. They mean to say I qualify, if no have that money. Who going buy food? They going buy food for me? That's what that asset is for. That asset is to take care me and my family. Now, if everything come up I going pay insurance \$216, ey, that not going last me for one year, or half year. That money was put in there was for us to take care of something until I find one other job. But the way you guys going, you guys like take all our money away, no can make a living like that." So until today, we no more medical.

WN: No more?

VH: No more medical. No more insurance.

WN: How many in your family?

VH: Six.

WN: How many kids you get?

VH: Four.

WN: Four kids.

VH: Four kids. I get four kids. My wife work, but her medical only cover her.

WN: Oh, she don't have medical for the family?

VH: Nope.

WN: While you was working for the plantation you had for the family?

VH: Yeah, for the whole family. But my wife can get medical, she can get for the family if she pay another additional \$307.

WN: Hoo.

VH: I tell, "Where we going get that kind money? We only going pay insurance, we going starve."

WN: What about, like, welfare, you had welfare? Food stamps?

VH: No. When you go to get the welfare or food stamp, you cannot own a car or a truck. You can own one, there's one limit to the family. My truck is not worth more than \$2,000, so I can keep my truck. But there's a boat that I get. I don't qualify. In order for qualify you gotta sell all that.

WN: Even for food stamp?

VH: Even you go apply food stamp, you gotta get rid of most of that stuff.

WN: Yeah? Oh. What about your kids? How they being affected by this? How about your children?

VH: My children, they feel bad. They feel hurt. I know they do because there's no income coming in where my kids can have money. Shopping is different, the life is changed. Before we used to go out buy food, buy clothes for the kids. Once a month we buy about three, four hundred dollars worth of food. Today is different. There is no more those kind of days. You no can go in one month and buy three, four hundred dollars of food. When you get money, then you can buy. You no more money, gotta struggle. We go beach, whatever fish we catch, we use 'em for home consumption or we sell 'em. That's the way it goes now. And my daughter works. My daughter was working for [Hawaiian Macadamia Plantation], now almost the season over, so they keep [only] the old-timers. My son works on Saturdays, my other young

daughter, the skinny one, works at the Honoka'a Club. In the night, sometime [until] eleven o'clock, then she go back work six o'clock [A.M.] Main thing they work, they have some money. And that's the only part.

WN: All temporary kind jobs, yeah?

VH: Yeah, it's not a full-time. A job is a job, no matter what. So at the end of this month, I going Hilo. I going move in Hilo.

WN: You gonna move to Hilo?

VH: Yeah. Just me, though. I going do full-time fishing.

WN: Fishing?

VH: Yeah.

WN: Oh, with your boat?

VH: I might as well, because I bought the boat. I might as well go full-time. There's no full-time jobs. I work only part-time as city employment. And hard. I took early retirement. Early retirement I make \$333. And with the part-time city employment, about \$600, I make. And not enough. Until I collect social security. I get one more year before I collect social security, so I have to do something.

WN: So you think you can make a go?

VH: Fishing?

WN: Yeah.

VH: Yeah.

WN: Sell to, what, Suisan [Company, Limited]?

VH: Mostly to Suisan. See, *shibi* [season] almost start. By next month, by March, April, May, then mostly full-time. You go out every night.

WN: What kind fish you going catch?

VH: *Shibi*. That's *da kine* blue 'ahi. That's *da kine* they sell 'em all to Japan. That's the fat kind 'ahi.

WN: Blue 'ahi?

VH: Blue 'ahi. See, the one you [usually] catch is yellowtail [i.e., yellow fin tuna].

WN: Yeah, yellowtail.

- VH: That's daytime. *Shibi*, nighttime. That's the blue 'ahi. They come up to three, sometime four hundred pounds. And that's the kind, real plenty—oily, that kind fish.
- WN: Yeah, Japanese like that kind, eh.
- VH: Yeah, they like that kind, because fat. So they sell 'em all to Japan. *Shibi*, they make good money, about twenty-five dollars a pound. And you was watching that Hari Kojima? They went fishing in Japan?
- WN: Oh, I don't know, I never see that.
- VH: You know the flounder? The one-eye fish? They about this size.
- WN: One foot.
- VH: You know what he said? A pound is twenty-three dollars. One-pound flounder, that small flounder, twenty-three dollars a pound. And they go out, these guys all go out on a boat, fishing boat. And one guy get about three, four poles. Just sitting there and setting two poles, two poles. Oh, they come up. They catch plenty that kind fish. Twenty-three dollars a pound.
- WN: Where you going live in Hilo?
- VH: I get my daughter living there. Kind of close by to Suisan. Just about half an hour, half-an-hour drive. Well, that's the only way I can think, instead of waiting for hotel give me a call. I been waiting too long. I should have start going out fishing from last year.
- WN: You ever did commercial fishing before? Or was all sport fishing for you?
- VH: Commercial, I used to go bottom fishing. Long time. Before I went Honolulu I went commercial fishing. I had my own boat, small fourteen footer. But at that time, you young, so anything is good when you make money. Then after that you get tired doing the same thing so I went look for new life. So I gave up, look for job, work.
- WN: One more question. I was asking you about growing up in Waipi'o, and then you said, really, you didn't really need money at that time because you lived off the land. And then later on, now, your life has become something where you have to have money in order to survive. So what are your thoughts on all of this now? Your life now?
- VH: Yeah, like I said earlier, I would rather go back to the olden days where life was simple, more easy. And we used to learn most about herbs, when you sick there's certain kind of herbs to take. When you have toothache, there's certain kind of medicine to take. And they're all Hawaiian medicine. And when you have a cold there's certain kind of tea that you take. More simple. Those days we never know what is going to a medical infirmary or Hāmākua infirmary. Those days no more nothing like that. When I used to live down there in my young days, I never even think I was sick. The only time I need Hawaiian herbs or Hawaiian medicine when we used to ride horse, wild horse, and the horse buck us off. You got broke up (WN chuckles) or sprain. And then they have herbs for those kind of things. Life was cheaper, easier, simple. Not like now. Anything, you have to pay. Hard to live, you have to buy food, everything is you need money to pay for your things. But when you live in the

valley, everything is there, what your parents had taught you. All you have to do is go out and get it.

WN: You think your kids could live that kind life?

VH: I think my kids would enjoy those kind of life. I have nothing against the schoolteachers. . . . Did you ever been to the school, like Honoka‘a or Hilo school or Kohala, Kona school?

WN: I went Laupāhoehoe [School].

VH: You went to Laupāhoehoe? Laupāhoe[hoe] is not too bad. I think they are kind of little bit decent. If you go to Honoka‘a School, you ought to look at the teachers, the way how they dress. Man, they have guys with long hair, long beard, *puka* pants, and they teachers. And they want the kids to get education, you have to represent yourself better than that. That’s why today, you look at kids with shorts, bermudas, tank tops, they all going school. Broken clothes, anything what they can find to wear. That’s how you see high school today. It’s almost like they don’t have no respect for the teachers. And I feel sorry, though. It’s way different than from my time. Our time you have to dress neat, you have to get haircut, you have to wear shoes. The only time I take my shoes off when after the raising the flag, then walk to the class, I take off (WN laughs) my shoes because we not used to wearing shoes. We always used to go in barefoot. So the teacher tell, “Ey, why don’t you wear your shoes?”

I tell, “My feet sore. I not used to wearing shoes, I used to walking barefoot.” But we have to dress neat to show some respect. Today, those thing is down the road. And today living is expensive. I rather go back to the olden days. I think my kids would enjoy more olden days than the way they live now. Live off the land. I was brought up that way, I know how to live off the land. I can teach you. And they already know how to go fishing, how to catch fish, prawns, ‘*o‘opu*, they know how to live. *Warabi*, and they love, my boy love hunting. So we know how to live. And it’s cheaper. Way cheaper. Today, life is hard, expensive.

WN: Well, Victor, thank you very much.

VH: Don’t mention it. Anytime.

END OF INTERVIEW

THE CLOSING OF SUGAR PLANTATIONS:

**Interviews with Families
of Hāmākua and Ka‘ū, Hawai‘i**

Volume I

**Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa**

August 1997