BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: John M.W. Park, Jr.

John M.W. Park, Jr. was born in Lānaʻi City, Lānaʻi, in 1945. His mother, Margaret Myung Sun Park, tended to the needs of a household that included John and his four siblings, his parents, and a grandfather. His father, John Myung Whan Park, Sr., a longtime Hawaiian Pineapple Company storeroom manager, was active in the community. He served as a scoutmaster and basketball coach.

On Lānaʻi, John M.W. Park, Jr. participated in sports and scouting. He attained the rank of Eagle Scout.

A 1963 graduate of Lānaʻi High and Elementary School, he earned his bachelor’s in education degree from Central Washington University.

He was a classroom teacher and counselor for several years on the island of Oʻahu.

Retired, he now resides in Mililani, Oʻahu.
Today is July 24, 2014, and we’re interviewing John Park at his home in Mililani, O‘ahu, for the Lāna‘i City oral history project.

So, good morning, John.

Good morning, Warren.

First question for you, really difficult one is, give me the year you were born.

Nineteen forty-five.

Okay.

(Chuckles) I’m ancient history, already.

(Chuckles) Okay, tell me about your family. First, tell me about your father’s side of the family, their background.

Okay, my . . .

First of all, what was his name?

My father, John Myung Whan Park. And so, I’m Junior. And he’s the oldest son; he was born in Waialua [O‘ahu] in 1921. My [paternal] grandfather, Tuk Soon Park, was an immigrant from Korea. I believe he came in one of the first waves [of Korean immigrants to Hawai‘i] in 1903. He lived in Waialua, then later moved to Wahiawā, living on, I think, Leilehua Road. He worked, at one time, at Schofield [Barracks] in the laundry room, I think, and then eventually for Hawaiian Pineapple Company. And then, with Hawaiian Pineapple Company, he moved to Lāna‘i, and that’s where the rest of us were born. My dad has two older sisters and two younger brothers. In fact, one of the brothers became hānai to the Joe Kim family. And so, I never met him. I think my brother Billy went to the house later in Kāne‘ohe and got to meet the family. But I heard that he was hānai and raised with Joe Kim in Kalihi where the Joe Kim Kim Chee, [Inc.] company is. I guess, the cabbages were raised there.

My uncle, my dad’s youngest brother, soon after he graduated from high school and the Korean War came about, he joined the [U.S.] Army. And to make a long story short, he became a POW
during the Korean War. He stayed in the prison camp for either twenty-eight or thirty-three months, almost basically the duration of the war. Then, he got out, and he decided to make the army a career, retired after twenty-some-odd years. And been all over . . .

WN: What’s his name?

JP: Joseph Park. We call him Uncle Sonny. And he’s interred at Punchbowl [National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific]. He stayed with me for the last eight years of his life or so. And it came a time when it was too much for him to stay alone, because at times in the kitchen, the water is running, the hot water is going on, and I see stove, the lights on, you know. And one time, on the floor, I saw some medicine, pills. So, I called the VA and told the nurse of the situation, so she came to the house to visit. She does home visits. And she told me, “John, this is what I’ll do. Tomorrow, I’ll come to the house, tomorrow afternoon. When you come home from school, just go to your bedroom, don’t come out until I call for you.” And then, she was talking story with my uncle, took blood pressure and all those things. Then she calls me out and said, “John, how are you? We’re talking to Uncle here, and what are your concerns about Uncle?” So, I shared the things that were happening. And she looked at Uncle and said, “Uncle, I think you need more care. You need somebody to watch over you more, and I think a care home is a good place for you to be right now. Because Johnny here is at school, and you’re here all alone. You know, something might happen.”

So, at that point, he agreed, “Maybe, yeah.” And just by coincidence, his VA doctor, Dr. Pang, one of the nurses, the sister runs a care home. So, the social worker from the VA contacted Angie’s sister on North School Street, checked out the place, and then gave my uncle the information to go to the house to check it out, to see if you like it. So, an arrangement was made where we got there on a Sunday to visit. And before we left, my uncle kind of packed things up. I said, “Uncle, you’re not moving there. We’re just going to check out the place.”

“Oh, no, no, I’m going to take it, because Dr. Pang’s nurse, the sister runs the place.” (Chuckles) So, sight unseen.

We went there to look at it, and then he told the caretaker, “Yeah, I’d like to move here.” A room was available. So then, we came home, packed his things up, and I transported him down there. The VA got him a window air conditioner, you know, to make it more comfortable for him. But yet, on the back of his mind, he had the feeling that I kicked him out of the house. So, when I would go visit him every day to drop mail off, he would just ignore me. When his older brother, my Uncle Paul would go visit with the wife, you know, they’re talking up a storm. But I’m invisible. But I still would go there, visit him and so forth, take him his mail. And then say, “Goodbye, I’ll be back later.”

And then, about three times, he was taken to the emergency room, because something was going on. And then the third time, he was taken to the VA hospital, and Angie, the caretaker, told me, “Mr. Park, it’s too much. He cannot stay with me. He has to go to a nursing home.” So, from the VA hospital at Tripler [Army Medical Center]—no, the Center for Aging run by the VA hospital next to Tripler, they found a nursing home up Pauoa Valley, up in the heights there. And so, that’s where he stayed for the last eighteen months. And he was well cared for there, and I always went to visit, even though he’d tell me, “Don’t have to come.” (Chuckles) But I still went to visit.

And finally, I got the phone call saying, “Hey, something’s going on, you better come.” So, I called Billy up, and his older brother, our Uncle Paul. So, we went to visit. And whatever was ailing him, he kind of snapped out of it, and he looked okay. During all this time, he just lost
weight. And finally, he did pass away. And when he did, I guess because he lived with me last, I took it as my responsibility to make his funeral arrangement.

So, I contacted Schofield to make the arrangement. I said he was a former POW in the Korean War, and I’m looking for military honors services. And they couldn’t promise me everything, but they said, “We’ll do what we can.” So, we had the service at Punchbowl with his ashes there, and they did have everything. The chaplain, they had the riflemen, the bugler, and did everything. So, it was really nice. And several of his POW friends came. Clarence Young and Nick Nishimoto, they came. We had a get-together after the service. And our nephews and nieces were just all ears with Clarence Young talking about their POW experience.

But when my uncle was here, he never talked about his POW [experience] unless you asked him specific questions. But you can see that his life as a POW affected him, because when he goes shopping, he will buy things in bulk. You know, shaving cream, razors. And the VA nurse said, “John, this is one of the things that happen to POWs, because they don’t know if they’re going to get these things. So when they get it, they keep it.” So after he died, you know, when I was cleaning up here, wow, look at all these things that he hoarded. But that was his life.

WN: Now, he’s the younger brother of your father?

JP: He’s my dad’s youngest brother.

WN: Your dad was what number?

JP: My dad was—I believe he was number three. The two older sisters, Auntie May, Auntie Mary, my dad, Uncle Paul, and Uncle Sonny. And John Kim, the hānai brother.

WN: And were they all born in Waialua?

JP: I think my Uncle Paul and Uncle Sonny were born on Lāna‘i. My dad was in the first graduating class of Lāna‘i High [and Elementary] School, class of 1939. When he was growing up, he was a track star. On the wall, after he passed away, Billy and I went to the house to clean things up, and I found his [athletic] letters for his sports. I put it in a frame there on the wall. But he had a lot more letters. As we found out, when we were young, we played with it, we chewed on it, so they kind of disintegrated. But those four that I have there, plus his pins, you know, he was a track star, volleyball, and basketball.

WN: And where are his parents from in Korea?

JP: You know, his dad, I think he was born in what is now in North Korea, according to Ancestry.com. But my dad talked about Masan near Pusan in South Korea. It’s possible that that’s where he spent part of his adult life before coming to Hawai‘i in 1903. Likewise, my mother’s parents, my grandma was born in Pusan, and she came to Hawai‘i when she was nineteen years old in 1917. Her husband, my grandfather, was born in Pyongyang, I found out. Because what I did, I found out he’s buried at O‘ahu Cemetery. He has a huge tombstone about yea high, with all kinds of inscription in characters. So, I took a rubbing of that, and I took it to the Korean Consulate, and I asked the gal, “You know, I need some assistance. This is the rubbing from my grandfather’s tombstone, and I want to find out what it says.” So, she tried to decipher it, and then the consulate general came in. He took it to his office, and then they transcribed it for me, you know, the year he died, I think, in 1920 in Hakalau near Hilo in an automobile accident. And then, he was buried at O‘ahu Cemetery. But it had his address in
Pyongyang. Being that he’s from North Korea, there’s no way I can get any information, so I’m focusing on my grandmother from Pusan. And that’s the letter I just mentioned I got from the immigration office, you know, they have something on her C-file. So, I’m going to request the hard copies. I’m keeping my fingers crossed that they’re going to have addresses in Pusan. Because she visited her family a number of times.

When I was stationed in Yongsan in 1969 in the [U.S.] Navy, she was visiting her family in Pusan. The military was placed on alert, because Kim Il-sung promised to celebrate his birthday in Duk Soo Palace in downtown Seoul, so the military was put on high alert. Our bosses said, “You can go anywhere, as long as it’s in Seoul.” (Chuckles) So, I never got to visit her when she was there. After I got discharged, it never occurred to me or it slipped my mind to ask Grandma about her country, where she came from, information about that. All the living relatives that I know are in their eighties, and when I ask them, “Auntie, you have any information on Grandma?”

“Oh, yeah, she came from Pusan.”

(Laughter)

JP: Thank you. I knew that, but I was hoping that they had addresses.

WN: Your [maternal] grandfather [Duk Soon Chung Park] was from Pyongyang?

JP: Pyongyang.

WN: Do you know when he came to Hawai‘i?

JP: He came in 1903, 1904, about the same time my grandfather—my dad’s dad came. I think he was twenty-four years old at the time. And he had a son. I guess he was married, so he came with a young son. His son’s name was on his tombstone when he died later on. Well, my [paternal] grandfather and grandmother went and got divorced. My dad never talked about her. My uncle never talked about her. Neither one of my uncles talked about their mother, you know. Even when we asked questions, they had nothing to say. So apparently, the divorce was not a happy thing. So, I’ve never met her. I have her name on my dad’s birth certificate, you know, Tai Chun Kim. And then, when I got information when talking to my auntie, that her mother’s name is Bong Hun Sur. My dad’s birth certificate said Tai Chun Kim. Did she change her name to Bong Hun Sur? I went to the [Hawai‘i] State Library to look at the obituaries, and I found her, Bong Hun Sur. There were two entries; the first entry didn’t have any listing of my father or my stepmom, my Uncle Sonny, and so forth. And then, couple of days later, there was a corrected entry in this obituary, and it had my stepmom’s name, my Uncle Sonny’s name, and the other Park family’s name. So, that’s one of the mysteries. I said, “How come Dad’s birth certificate said Tai Chun Kim? Did she change her name to Bong Hun, and then married a Sur?” So that could be it. On the birth certificate, it has my grandmother’s social security number, so one of my chores, I’m going to go down to the library, on Ancestry.com, or wherever and check out that social security number to see whether it says Tai Chun Kim or Bong Hun Sur. I want to see which one it has.

I was able to get the application from the social security office on my grandmother, my mom’s mom, and my grandfather, my dad’s dad. They told me that since they’re both deceased and you’re family—I said I’m the grandson, they were able to send me their application. So, I have both of their social security numbers. In fact, I have my grandfather’s social security card. You
know, after he passed away, my dad had it, and after my dad passed away then I collected all that, and I have it in my safe box there.

So, I’m still searching. The quest has not ended for me. Even though I’m sixty-nine years old, I’m still looking, and I’m hoping I can find something. I haven’t given up on that yet.

WN: Okay, so let’s get back to your father now.

JP: Okay.

WN: He was born in Waialua.

JP: Waialua.

WN: And do you know how your grandparents ended up in Waialua?

JP: I think at one time—he could have been working for the plantation. I don’t know whether it was the sugar plantation or the pineapple plantation, and just commuted up to Wahiawā.

WN: This is your father?

JP: My father. He lived there with the parents in Waialua. And then, my grandfather moved to Lāna‘i with the family, the whole family, everybody.

WN: Your grandfather?

JP: My grandfather and my grandmother, when they were still married. And then, apparently on Lāna‘i, that’s when they went their separate ways. My grandmother left. So, my grandfather, along with my uncles and aunt, you know, lived on Lāna‘i.

WN: When did your grandfather come to Lāna‘i?

JP: It must have been …

WN: Paternal grandfather, right?

JP: My paternal grandfather. Probably in the 1930s. I forget which census I found that he was on Lāna‘i there, and he was listed as a supervisor. I don’t know what kind of supervisor he was, but I heard stories that he was, not a truck driver at that time, but like a mule driver, you know, with the pineapple slips and that kind of thing. He retired from Hawaiian Pineapple Company there. And my dad, having gone to school there, I guess, worked his summers with Hawaiian Pineapple Company, that later became Dole [Company]. He ended up becoming the storeroom manager after working for Dole all those years. After my mom died, he requested a lateral transfer to Honolulu and eventually ended up being the storeroom manager at the Dole Cannery.

WN: And then, how did your mom and dad get together?

JP: Must have been here in Honolulu, somehow they met. (Chuckles)

WN: Not on Lāna‘i, then?
JP: Not on Lāna‘i. And then, of course, they moved to Lāna‘i, because my brother was born there. We were all born there on Lāna‘i. In fact, I have a picture. During the summer months, when pineapple was at its peak, they were always looking for workers. And all the mothers would work for Dole and work in the pineapple fields, and my mother was no exception. She decided, “Hey, cannot just stay home being a housewife, got to go work and earn money back on Lāna‘i.” So, she worked out in the pineapple fields, too. And I remember my dad would be the one to call me up. Call home at six o’clock in the morning, “Get up, get ready for school.” (Chuckles) Or my grandfather would wake us up, because he lived with us until he died.

WN: When did he die?

JP: He died in 1965. He died first in April 1965, and my mom died in August 1965. So, that was not a good year. But my grandfather never learned English, and we never learned Korean. (Chuckles) But he enjoyed watching, at the time, Lucky Luck on television when we had television, you know, back in 1956. Oh, he was watching television in black and white, and he always watched Lucky Luck and so forth. But he remembers from the news that they had, he knew the president. Like, he recognized President Eisenhower and other presidents, you know. I feel bad that I never got to learn or understand the [Korean] language, and now here I am, I wanting to learn the language.

WN: Okay, so you were born in 1945.

JP: Nineteen forty-five.

WN: And your older brother Bob was born in 1942?

JP: Yes.

WN: So, he was also born on Lāna‘i.

JP: He was also born on Lāna‘i.

WN: And Bill and your other brother were . . .

JP: Raymond was also born on Lāna‘i. He was born in August 1944. I was in June [19]45. Billy is in September [19]46. And we had a younger brother Danny. He was born in December [19]47, but he died after a month in January 1948. And he’s buried on Lāna‘i. After my mom died in [19]65, in 1970 or so, my dad remarried. And I have a half-brother, Norman, and right now, he lives in San Jose [California].

WN: So, tell me again what kind of work your father did for Hawaiian Pine.

JP: For Hawaiian Pine[apple Company] and Dole Company, he worked at the storeroom. Whatever the company needs, machine parts or whatever they need, you know, it’s there in the storeroom.

WN: And where was the storeroom?

JP: You know where the turnout area is, where all the trucks used . . .

WN: That administration building?

JP: Not the administration building. It was down by the fire station.
WN: Yes, okay.

JP: You know, there’s those green-colored buildings—I don’t know what color they have it now, but we called it the turnout area. When we worked in the day shift or night shift, you go down there to board the trucks to take you out to various [pineapple] fields. But in that complex, there was a storeroom. And because my dad was the boss man of the storeroom, you know, he’s almost like on call twenty-four hours. You know, on a Sunday evening or Sunday during the season when the machines are out working and the machine breaks down and they need a part, they’ll call up my dad. “Johnny, we need this.” (Chuckles)

“Oh, meet me down at the storeroom.”

And if they have it in the storeroom, you know, then he will give it to them. So, he was the storeroom boss until he transferred. After my mom died, he decided life goes on, you know. So, he sold our house and lot there, and . . .

WN: This was in [19]65?


WN: Moved to Honolulu?

JP: Moved to Honolulu, yes.

WN: Just him, or you folks too?

JP: Well, I was going to school in Washington, already.

WN: Oh, you were already older.

JP: Yeah. And Billy was at the University of Hawai‘i along with Bobby. Bobby was a master’s student, graduate student; Billy was an undergraduate there. So he decided to move closer to them. Raymond was going to, at the time, Maui Technical School. He became a body and fender man over there. And later on, he moved to Honolulu after he finished his schooling there. And my dad was working at the Castle & Cooke office Downtown.

WN: What was he doing?

JP: Doing some supervisory work there, dealing with supplies, I guess. I’m not too sure, since I was on the Mainland at the time. But then, there was a vacancy for the supervisor for the storeroom at the cannery, so he was sent to the cannery to become the boss man at the storeroom there. And he stayed there until he retired.

WN: Which was when?

JP: Was it the 1980s? I think he was with the company for some forty years, forty-five years. In the 1980s, I believe, he retired.

WN: And then, where did he live in Honolulu?

JP: He ended up buying a house in Mānoa, a block up the street from the Waioli Tea Room. You know, back then in 1968, the land prices were very, very—well, compared to now, it was
affordable. I think he was able to buy a house for maybe about thirty-eight thousand or so. So, after he bought the house, you know, his thing was, “Okay, as much money as I can, I’m going to put into the principal.” And within five years, he was able to pay off the house. And now, the house is worth, I think, in the millions, you know, with the location and so forth. So, my sister-in-law, Raymond’s wife, and the two sons live there right now. And Norman, when he comes home, that’s where he stays. You know, take care of the family there, and take care of the two nephews. Because there’s a huge difference in age between us, the four boys, and Norman. You know, about thirty years’ difference. (Chuckles) So, the boys, our nephews, Raymond’s two sons are closer to Norman, you know, than to the old folks. (Chuckles)

Although, since Norman was living on the Mainland, whenever something happened in Mānoa, Nellie would always call me up, you know. So, Billy and I would go to Mānoa. Sometimes part of the calls is, “The boys didn’t come home yet, it’s seven o’clock and it’s dark outside.” So, Billy and I would go there. Then she would call us up, “Oh, they came home.” But we continued going up there. But she’s been a loving, loving wife to our brother Raymond. He was bedridden the last eight years of his life, and she took good care of him.

WN: Okay, so tell me, growing up on Lāna‘i, you were born in 1945, and there were like, one, two, three, four, actually, five of you.

JP: Mm-hmm [yes].

WN: Plus your mother and father, and your grandfather.

JP: My grandfather.

WN: What about grandmother?

JP: Grandmother was . . .

WN: They divorced.

JP: Divorced, she was already out of the picture.

WN: So, this is your paternal grandfather that lived with you folks?

JP: Yes.

WN: And again, what job did your paternal grandfather have on the plantation?

JP: On the plantation, I know he ended being a yardman after he retired from the plantation. I don’t know in which department he was. He probably worked in every department there: the harvesting, the weeding, and so forth. And then, when he retired, he just became a yardman for some of the well-to-do people there. Then he had his own garden out in the back, he grew bananas and [raised] chicken. There was a bakery, Fujikami Bakery. She [i.e., the bakery owner] would always buy her eggs from my grandfather, because the yolk is so yellow, so golden. So, she loved those eggs, so she would buy the eggs from my grandfather. My grandfather would sell the bananas to Richard’s Shopping Center, you know, and they would come by to pick it up, and you know, they would leave five, ten dollars, or whatever. So, that was all he did. He kind of raised us, too. When it rained, he would bring our raincoat to school, wait for us outside the schoolyard with our umbrellas or raincoat. And he would go to the movie. For him, going to the
movie back then was free. And he always sits at the same place, and we know he’s there. When
he sneezed, the whole theater hears it. (Chuckles) “Oh, that’s my harabujee.” (Chuckles)

So, Lāna‘i being so small, everybody knew everybody. When you go to the store, you’d have a
charge account. When we go shopping—well, my mother goes shopping, everything is charge it,
charge it, and my dad will pay it off at the end of the month. So, everybody knew everybody on
the island.

WN: Your grandfather not being proficient in English, were there other Koreans there that he could
hang out with?

JP: Yes, there were other Koreans. But he was kind of a . . . solitude. He enjoyed staying home by
himself and just puttering around the yard. But there were other Koreans. Just across the block
away, there was the Andrew Park family, and he was a Korean pastor at the Korean church. I
know that there were—we had a small Korean group on the island. But my grandfather usually
was a stay-at-home grandfather and didn’t go out much. I know he would sit in front of the
beehive with his pipe. You know, of course, the smoke from the pipe just made the bees very
passive, so the bees don’t bother him. But he could sit there for hours and hours at a time, just
smoking. Come to think of it, I don’t think we ever harvested. (Chuckles)

WN: And so, he had chickens?

JP: He had chickens too. And oh, we used to go hunting, either deer or goat hunting, and at home
we’re dressing the animal. When my grandfather sees us dressing the animal, he would not eat the
meat from the goat or the deer. But when he would go to the store, and he would buy raw liver
and bring home, put salt and pepper, and eat that. “Harabujee, what’s the difference?” (Chuckles)
But you know, that’s his oddity. You know, cannot eat something that you kill. If a butcher kills
it, I guess it’s okay. So, he lived with us all these years. And we just learned few [Korean] words
that were important to us as young kids, like money, dön, to go to the movie, you know, or telling
him to come eat. But now that I want to learn, I watch my Korean drama seven nights a week,
you know, I hear certain phrases. I remember those phrases. You know, sounds very familiar to
me. But hopefully, I can learn it, and I can just watch the Korean drama without having to read
the subtitles.

WN: Did your mother do most of the cooking?

JP: You know, they both did. Both of them were very, very good cooks. And after my mom died, of
course, Dad did all the cooking. Even when Raymond and Nellie moved in with him in Mānoa,
he did all the cooking for the whole family.

WN: Today, we can just go to a Korean store and get kimchi and so forth and so on.

JP: Yeah.

WN: But in those days, did they make . . .

JP: They made the kimchi, made the taegu. And they were good taegu. Today I buy taegu from the
market, I say, “Oh, this does not taste like Mom’s.” (Chuckles)

WN: The taegu, was that from fresh fish that was caught, or . . .
JP: The dried codfish that they bought.

WN: Oh, I see, they’d buy dried codfish.

JP: Yeah.

WN: And they make taegu from that.

JP: Yeah. But when I taste the taegu like from Costco, it’s not as... it’s different. It’s different, you know. I bought a little container. Oh, it’s not the same. Billy said, “Make your own. All you do with the dried codfish is shred it up like Mom does, you add the honey, the kochujang, and (chuckles) sesame seed.” Yeah. Maybe I will. I remember my mom doing that. She made that, and she made the kimchi.

WN: How did she make kimchi?

JP: With the won bok. We had a big tub, you know, and you soak it in salt water.

WN: Ceramic tub?

JP: It was either stainless steel or aluminum.

WN: Oh, the kind that you do laundry in?

JP: Yeah, those big kind. Way back then, yeah? And of course, they were always the best. They were always the best foods. Both of them were very, very good.

WN: So, your household was, in essence, the five children, two parents, and grandpa.

JP: Yeah.

WN: So, was the house big enough for you guys?

JP: We had a four-bedroom house.

WN: This was on Caldwell [Street], right?

JP: Oh, no, it was on 437 Sixth Street.

WN: Sixth Street, okay.

JP: We had a big house. It’s a big lot, too. I forget how many square feet, but it was huge. We had four bedrooms. My grandfather had one; my mom and dad shared a bedroom. Billy and I shared a bedroom; it had two twin beds. And the other bedroom, Raymond and Bobby shared. So we were all comfortable there. Never complained.

WN: Was your house about the same in terms of size and so forth, as the others in that area?

JP: Yes, yes.

WN: Who else was living on Sixth Street at that time?
Oh, Sixth Street. I know there was a pastor next door from the Baptist church living next to us, right next to us. And then across the street, Pablo. He was a great sportsman. You know, hunter, fisherman. The corner house was the Del Rosarios. She was one of my—Diana was one of my classmates. And I think there was like only maybe four houses on the block. So, we had—they were big lots. We had a nice avocado tree in the backyard, delicious avocado without any string. In fact, I have a picture of the house. It was a rental after we left. Somebody from Honolulu bought it and used it as a rental. And I think later on, somebody else bought the house.

Is this now near Dole Park?

Dole Park is between Seventh [Street] and Eighth Street. So, I’m one block away, right across the street from the back of the post office. And it’s just about four blocks down to the school. We were a block from Lāna‘i Avenue, and Fraser Avenue was on the opposite end, so we were just down the street from the main entrance to the school. And there were three of us, we used to go to school together. Albert, my classmate, and Gilbert, they lived one block above. I’d wait for Albert. If Albert and Gilbert are late, I’m going to be late to school, too. (Chuckles) And it happened a number of times, because I’m waiting for them. That’s one of the joys of living on a small island. The friendships that you make, the bonding that lasts all these years, you know. The class that I graduated in, the class of [19]63, we were the largest graduating class on the island at that particular time. We had fifty-two in our graduating class. Last year, we celebrated our fiftieth high school reunion, and of the fifty-two, twelve have passed away. My brother Raymond was the most recent one that passed away that summer, two months before our reunion. So, it was a nice get-together.

Whenever we have our reunion, invariably, we talk about our hanabata days, you know, growing up on Lāna‘i. How memorable, you know, growing up on that island. In fact, I have written down on my little flash drive my wishes. I put down what I want done. I want to be cremated, for one, and I want my ashes to be scattered around Lāna‘i.

Like, we did that to our dad. We had him cremated. He died on Halloween 2004. In November, twelve of us went to Lāna‘i. We first flew to Maui, we stayed at the Maui Beach Hotel, rented a car—rented several cars, drove to Lahaina, took the ferry [to Lāna‘i], you know, spent the day there. We went to the graveyard at the foot of my mother’s grave, and the foot of my grandfather’s grave. We put a handful of ashes there, then went down by Sweetheart Rock. We scattered his ashes there. And we saved some—Norman wanted some, and he wanted to keep some at home. Norman also has some more ashes of his mother. Had her cremated, and scattered her ashes on Lāna‘i, too. So Lāna‘i is going to be my [permanent] home.

So, when you talk about hanabata days, tell me what you did to have fun as a kid growing up.

Well, growing up, when we were older, hunting and fishing. Always lot of fun. Driving around, sitting in front of the [Dole Company] administration building, the old administration building.

Where the flagpole is?

With the flagpole. You sit down hours upon hours, just sitting there. And you could count the number of cars that came by on one hand. (Chuckles) Just sitting there talking stories, or going down to the beach. Those are the things we just enjoyed doing, you know. Not much else to do. There was a bowling alley; you could go down to the bowling alley. There was a theater that showed movies. Usually, twice a week there was a Japanese movie, twice a week is Filipino, and then on Saturday, Sunday and another day there was American movie. I think when we were
growing up, a movie was like, you know, ten cents, and a nickel for popcorn. So, with twenty-five cents, you can have a feast. You know, you pay your admission to the theater, then you go down to Tanigawa to buy your snacks, or there’s a popcorn machine where you put a nickel, you can get a bag of popcorn. Those are the things we did. We didn’t have any Boys’ Club back then—oh, we had Boy Scouts. My father was a Boy Scout scoutmaster. We had two major troops: Troop 24 and Post 124, which my dad kind of took over.

WN: [Post 124], that was Explorers, right?

JP: Explorer Scouts, yes. And then, you had Troop 59 and Post 158, the Boy Scouts and the Explorer Scouts. So, we were the two major groups there on Lāna‘i. Then annually, you have your Camporee or Jamboree there, you know, your competition and so forth. That was a lot of fun. And for us, the Park family, we were unique, because four sons achieved Eagle Scout rank. I think when Billy, myself, and Raymond got to Eagle Scout, I think Hector Munro—I think he was the son of George Munro. I think Hector Munro was known as the “father of scouting” at one time. So, he was there at the ceremony, you know. And they put it in the little community newspaper, small kind of—that kind of run off on mimeograph back then. (Chuckles) You know, had the pictures of the three of us, you know, saying that, “Oh, the Park family made history on Lāna‘i. All four Park boys have earned the Eagle Scout rank.” Yeah, and my dad had been a member of the scouting for many years.

In fact, I have one of his plaques back that he received from the Boy Scouts of America. So he was very involved in that. My dad was also involved in coaching at the high school. He was a basketball coach. Then later on, they changed the rule, saying that to be a coach you had to be a faculty member. So he had to give it up. But when he passed away, I asked [Liberato] “Libby” Viduya if he could do the eulogy. And he gratefully consented. In his talk, he kind of mentioned, he said, “Oh, I must have been Mr. Park’s favorite basketball player, because he always kept me next to him sitting on the bench. I never went in, but I was always sitting next to him on the bench.”

(Laughter)

JP: That was so funny. And when he [Viduya] became [DOE district] superintendent, I was at Wai‘anae Intermediate School. I was a counselor there. And the vice principal and I went to a workshop at the Ilikai Hotel. And Libby was going to be one of the speakers. So, the principal and I went down to Waikiki, the Ilikai, early. We parked, and we got there early enough, so we went across the street to the McDonald’s at Yacht Harbor Towers there to have breakfast. Then Libby came walking into McDonald’s. I said, “Hey, Libby, come join us.” You know, the vice principal kind of elbowed me and said, “You know who that is?”

I said, “Yeah, that’s Libby. He played basketball for my father.” (Chuckles) Well, besides basketball, he was in the Explorer Scouts too. And Libby was one of the two Viduya brothers who were in the FFA [Future Farmers of America], went to the national, and received a national public speaking contest award from the FFA, you know, both Robert and Libby.

WN: Now, when you were growing up, this is when the company had a strong presence, of course, on Lāna‘i. But also, the union [i.e., International Longshoremen’s and Warehousemen’s Union] was a strong presence, too.

JP: Yes.
WN: To what extent did the company and the union, what kind of influence did they have on your everyday life?

JP: You know, my father was, I guess, in management, because he was the storeroom boss here. But we had a lot of friends who worked for the plantation, you know, the laborers in the union. When we were growing up, I think the biggest strike was in 1948 [1947], the long, long strike that lasted . . .

WN: That was the first one [i.e., the ILWU pineapple strike in 1947].

JP: The first one. And I think there were a lot of ill feelings between the union and [company] management. But I guess at that time, I was only three years old, so I was just oblivious, so I don’t know what happened. But I know growing up, my dad and my mom were very close friends with a lot of the Filipino families there. They would always go to their houses, play cards, or they had a beach home. The Eugenios for example had a house down Keōmuku, and had land, and they had watermelons to plant and he [i.e., Mr. Eugenio] would sell the watermelons to the marketplace. I remember us as young kids would go down to Keōmuku, camp out for the weekend, stay at the house there. We had the opportunity to use outhouses, just a hole in the ground, a shed, and a wooden bench with a hole. (Chuckles) If you needed to go to the bathroom, that’s where you go.

WN: But in your house, you had . . .

JP: We had running toilet, yeah. I think most of the houses had running toilets back by then.

WN: Indoor plumbing, in other words.

JP: Indoor plumbing. But we would go down to Keōmuku doing that, and had a lot of fun, go fishing, *hukilau* with the family there. My mom and dad would always play *sakura* with their friends, the Filipino families there. We became good family friends; very, very close family friends. So, you know, I didn’t see any animosity between them and my dad, because they were not of the same [economic] strata. You know, my dad was salary man, and they were union people, but—well, some of them were job foremen, you know, for the pineapple gang. So, they became salary men too, you know. But a lot of harmony. I guess was too small to have these kinds of friction.

WN: What about, you know, like kids, for example. You know, they tease each other because of the—they have names for the Japanese, the Filipinos, Koreans, and so forth. Was there any of that?

JP: Not in my [school] class. I know we had the *Haole* Camp. The *Haole* Camp is where the upper management would live in nice homes there. In fact, when we were younger, one of our jobs was, we’d deliver the newspaper. And my route was *Haole* Camp. I had Lāna’i Inn as one of my customers; the Au family was running the inn. And I guess everybody in *Haole* Camp were on my list, even the manager, Mr. [W. W.] Aldrich. At one time, my dad’s boss, George Brenner, had a nice house back there, and I delivered to them. Then once a month, I’d have to go collect. You know, back then, you had to knock on the door and collect for the newspaper. And one of the things I really appreciated when I’d go to Lāna’i Inn, Mrs. Au always had some dessert to share with me. “Hey, Johnny, here’s some rice pudding,” or whatever, and paying me for the fees and giving me tips. They were nice people. The plantation manager Mr. Aldrich was a very nice man. Mason Newport was the assistant manager, and they had a nice house there, too.
And [today] I see Lāna‘i has changed in terms of more houses, newer homes have come up. But it still maintains the quality of a plantation community. You know, you look at the older homes, you still have those corrugated roofs there, and colorful. I like going back there. In fact, I’d like to go back there again soon. Maybe I’ll ask my cousin James, “Hey, you want to go Lāna‘i? Let’s go spend couple of nights there. I’m going to rent a jeep, and let me show you my island.” You know, Keōmuku, Shipwreck Beach, Garden of the Gods, Mānele, the two fancy hotels that we have there. I did that in 2011, December, I rented a jeep. I didn’t want to bother anybody, so I stayed at the Hotel Lāna‘i. And I had a good time. I want to do it again. Maybe have James come with me. He’s never been there.

WN: James . . .

JP: My cousin. My mom’s youngest sister’s son. So, he’s never been to Lāna‘i, so I’d like to invite him to come with me, and I’ll treat him and show him my stomping ground. Just like Andrew. After my dad died, he couldn’t join us in November since he was at school and finals were coming up. So in December, I asked him, “Hey, are you free? You want to go to Lāna‘i?”

“Sure.”

So, he took off. I had a jeep and took Andrew around. Showed him my stomping ground, where we scattered the ashes, took him to the cemetery, showed him his great-grandfather and his grandmother’s grave, and his youngest uncle who died as an infant. Then I asked him, “Andrew, how long can you survive on this island?”

He said, “If I have my Walkman, maybe one week.” (Chuckles)

WN: (Chuckles) Walkman?

JP: Back then, the [Sony] Walkman.

WN: Yeah. (Chuckles) Now, you know, when you were growing up, we were talking about the different ethnic groups and so forth. And you know, the Japanese had, for example, New Year’s, they did what they did, and Filipinos probably had their own . . .


WN: Rizal Day, and so forth. Was there like a Korean community, where Koreans got together to do something . . .

JP: You know, if they did, I never did see it. (Laughs) I know on occasion, we would have—well, Mom and Dad and my grandfather would make Korean food, you know, for like the—I don’t know if it was for the Lunar New Year’s or whatever, but it was during the holiday season, we’d have all these Korean dishes. I remember like, on a bamboo skewer you put your beef, your green onion, your—a whole thing. And then, you dip it in flour and egg, and you pan-fry it. And oh, it’s delicious. And yakbap. I remember yakbap that they would make. In fact, I’m getting hungry. I’d like to go down to Pālama Market now.

WN: What was that you just said?

JP: Yakbap.
WN: What is that?

JP: It’s a rice dish. I guess it’s mochi rice [cake], with sugar. And they put other things [nuts and raisins], but it’s sweet. And they have it down Pālama Market. Along with, we would do mochi-pounding. You know, we had a . . .

WN: Usu?

JP: Yeah, we did Korean mochi, my grandfather, where they would steam the rice, and then we had a—I believe it was like a round stone that we would pound on and, you know, wet your hand and turn it [i.e., the mochi] over. And then, we would either have that with honey and . . .

WN: Was this only during New Year’s? I mean, that special time, or any time of year?

JP: Basically, that’s the only time we did it, during that holiday season. And like I said, my mom learned from her mother how to do all these Korean dishes. Very delicious and enjoyable.

WN: What about other things, like music and clothing, or anything like that in terms of being Korean?

JP: None. I’ve never seen my grandfather or my parents wear any [traditional] Korean outfit, you know, the hanbok or the Korean paji. I’ve never seen them wear that. I’ve never seen any Koreans on the island wear that. Not like how you had the Japanese Bon dances, you know, and the Filipino Rizal Day. So, I don’t think the Korean community was that large where they could have a community kind of celebration like that. If they did, it was mostly private celebrations within their own homes.

WN: I wanted to ask you, you know, every part of the state or the island has their own kind of pidgin dialect. Did Lāna‘i have certain words that only Lāna‘i people use, or anything like that? Growing up, do you remember?

JP: I cannot think of any words that were specific to Lāna‘i.

WN: I know somebody from Maui who said the term “some good” comes from Maui.

JP: Oh, really?

WN: Yeah. Or on the Big Island, instead of “shave ice,” they say “ice shave.” I’m just wondering if there’s anything . . .

JP: No. We always used those terms, like “some good”, “mo’ betta”, “shave ice”. I think I call it “shave ice” instead of “ice shave.” I know other people call it “snow cone.” (Chuckles)

WN: Oh, on the Mainland.

JP: On the Mainland, yeah. (Chuckles) I remember one time—or on several occasions. Once was, I was teaching in Vancouver, Washington. I graduated from Central Washington [University] in Ellensburg, and did my student teaching in Jason Lee Junior High School. I was teaching ninth grade Washington State history. At one time, my supervising teacher said, “Okay, John, you’re on your own, you can do the lesson and present it to the class.” We had four rooms, so we opened up the walls because it was a large-group presentation. My lesson of that day was food that the early mountaineers, the mountain men in the Pacific Northwest could have eaten.
I chose that, because my college roommate sent me a care package, and in one of the care packages he sent me was a can of top shell. So, I got that, I opened it up, cut it into pieces. And then, as I was doing my lecture, I was talking about the mountain men in the Northwest. As I was talking, I was really into it, and as I looked, they had this blank stare. I said, “What happened?” And, oh, I started talking pidgin English, so they didn’t understand me. (Chuckles) But when I got back on track, I told them, “This could have been what the mountain men could have eaten, one of the things. If you want to sample it, raise your hand, and I’ll give you some. But I’m not going to tell you until the end of the day, until everybody tries it, because if I tell you, you’re going to tell the other class and they’re not going to eat it. So, don’t ask me.”

So, a lot of them did raise their hand and I gave. “Oh, it’s good. It’s kind of fishy, but it tastes good.”

WN: (Chuckles) Now, this top shell came from Hawai‘i?

JP: Came from Hawai‘i, yeah. So, they did. And there was one girl that came back after school. “Mr. Park, what was it?”

“It was a snail.”

“Ohoo!”

(Laughter)

JP: She didn’t throw up, but she couldn’t believe it. I said, “See? Had I told you before, you wouldn’t have eaten it. But you enjoyed it, didn’t you?”

She said, “Yeah, I did. It tasted kind of fishy.”

And when I was in college, we were in the lounge watching TV, and there were a couple of other Hawaiian people, local. We were talking story, and as we were talking, some Caucasian students came over. They said, “What language are you folks talking?” (Chuckles) Because they didn’t understand a word we were talking. You know, we were all just talking in pidgin English, which was fun. You know, that was one of the bonds that we had for the Hawai‘i students on the Mainland; we got together and we always conversed in the local pidgin English.

And then the lū‘au is a big thing. I think every big school on the Mainland that has a Hawaiian club, you always have a spring lū‘au, and we did that. We had the help from the companies back home—United Airlines, Dole, Del Monte, the parents. They would collect flowers, they would send us pineapples. United Airlines would provide free transportation. And we found a merchant that owns a meat-packing place, large refrigerator, we could keep our salmon there, things that we made. And of course, when we had the lū‘au, they got free tickets to come, you know, to share. And for them, it was a big eye-opener; kalua pig, you know, the lomi salmon, the poi, of course, the pineapple, and seeing the local decorations, local songs and dances of the islands. To them, it was a big treat. In fact, the Kiwanis Club in Ellensburg wanted the Hawaiian Club to be the program of their lū‘au and help with the menu. But their menu was, you know, teriyaki steak instead of kalua. (chuckles) Rice [instead of poi]. . . . But it was fun. It was a good experience, you know, coming from the islands, growing up here, going to school on the Mainland.

WN: Do you remember any kind of holiday celebrations that the company itself would have for everyone?
They used to have a Christmas party in one of the big halls. I remember going there, and you know, Santa Claus would give you a stocking full of candies and fruits, and whatever. So, the company would do that every Christmas.

And where was this at?

I think—was it at the gym? Either at the gym, or did they use the union hall, the ILWU hall? I think those were the only two big places they could gather back then. The company would do those at one time, did those things. But I don’t know how long after I left whether they still continued that.

And you said earlier your grandfather, and I guess, maybe your father had a garden.

Yes, my grandfather.

What did he grow? What did they grow in that garden?

He had … well, besides his chicken grass . . .

Chicken grass?

Yeah. He had that, and . . .

What is chicken grass?

It’s kind of tall grass. (Chuckles)

And the chickens would eat the grass?

Yeah. He would cut it up, put chicken feed, and mix our leftovers, and feed the chickens. What else? I think we had like, string beans, sweet potatoes. I think we had some of those in the backyard. Did we grow—I think cabbage. Yeah. Like what you seen in the community gardens, you know. Billy might say something different. “We had that? I don’t remember.” (Chuckles)

And you folks had, of course, kitchen with stove and so forth.

Yes.

What about laundry facilities?

At one time, we had the old-fashioned kind of washing machine. It was inside the house. You had to go outside the kitchen. There was a porch area, but it’s enclosed, and we had a washing machine there, and a dryer. I remember my dad, instead of having the water go into the sewer, just open it up. And we had calla lilies alongside the house, so we had to water the calla lily plants. And we had ʻākulikuli plants, and epidendrum orchids, and ti leaves, and so forth. You know, so recycle the water instead of wasting it.

And what about bathing facilities?

We had a shower inside the house. I know once a year, especially, our grandfather, when he’d take a shower, he’d be in the shower for like an hour. “Harabujee, you taking long time.” He’s
just taking his hot shower, scrubbing himself down, you know. It’s like his only bath a year he’s taking.

(Laughter)

JP: But of course, when he was working, like anybody, you have your daily showers. But once a year, he will spend hours inside there, scrubbing himself down. That was a neat experience, you know, growing up on Lāna‘i. I loved that. I don’t think anything can beat Lāna‘i.

It was interesting. When I went for my fortieth reunion, I stayed at a family friend’s house. I got up early one morning, was walking where the old administration building was. And then, there was this lady who was walking the other way, coming toward me. She said, “You’re John Park’s boy, right?” So, oh, after thirty years not being home, she still recognizes me.

I said, “Yeah, I’m John, Jr., the number three son.” In fact, she was Mrs. Honda; her husband was my Little League baseball coach. So, it was nice.

WN: I wanted to ask you about organized recreation. Like, you played Little League.

JP: Well, there’s Little League. You have, well, basketball. In summer fun, you know, you had summer fun softball. Besides baseball, you had basketball, maybe flag football. All of us—Billy, Raymond, and myself played baseball. In fact, one year, the team that we were on, the Yankees, won the island championship, so we went to Kaua‘i to play in the state championship. I remember when I was going up to bat, the announcer, when he was announcing my name said, “Hey, we have Johnny Pineapple.” (Chuckles) Johnny Pineapple? Who’s Johnny Pineapple?

We all stayed at one of the gyms; you know, camped out in the gym, you know, so it was fun. You know, going to Hanapēpē, “the biggest little town on Kaua‘i,” the Menehune [Fishpond] and Swinging Bridge. You know, those are my memories of Kaua‘i. Of course, we’d been to Maui over there and Haleakalā.

WN: When you guys went off-island, what did other people say, besides calling you “Pineapple”? Did they call you anything, or did they have a certain preconceived notion of what Lāna‘i people would be like?

JP: Lot of people didn’t know that Lāna‘i existed. I’d be walking around, and then some adults would ask—somehow got into a conversation with us, “Where are you from?”

“Oh, from Lāna‘i.”

“Where’s that?”

You know, they didn’t know where the island is located, you know, even though they could have been born here [Hawai‘i], but having no knowledge of the island. In fact, other people would say, “Oh, you’re the first person from Lāna‘i that I’ve met.” (Chuckles) But a lot of educators had their start on Lāna‘i and became big-time. Kengo Takata he started off on Lāna‘i, he and his wife.

WN: You know, I wanted to get into your schooling and so forth.

JP: Okay.
WN: But do you think we could do this another time?

JP: Yeah, whenever. I’m retired. (Chuckles)

WN: This is good, because I always do two sessions with [almost] everyone.

JP: Okay.

WN: Because it gives me a chance to think about what I didn’t ask, so that the next time, I can ask. So, can we stop here?

JP: Can do.

WN: Okay, good.

END OF INTERVIEW
Okay; we’re going to start. This is our second session with John Park, and today is July 29, 2014. This is Warren Nishimoto, and we’re at John’s home in Mililani, O‘ahu.

So, to start our second session, John, I want to ask you about schooling.

Okay.

What was schooling like for you? What kind of a student were you?

Lāna‘i [High and] Elementary School?

Yes.

I went there from kindergarten to twelfth grade. I enjoyed school. That’s one of the places you get to see your friends every day, you know, spend six hours with them there. School was good, I had fun. I mentioned to you the last time, our class was the largest graduating class when we graduated in 1963; there were fifty-two of us who graduated. So, we had two sections of classes, from ninth grade on up, you know. I guess they were the A and B classes. I didn’t realize how they divided it up, and so forth, but I was in A Class with a lot of my good friends. When we grew up, we got involved in student government. My senior year, I got elected as class president. My good friend Albert, he’s a retired administrator in Pukalani [Maui], was one of the senior class senators. And so, we had a good time.

I remember one year, my senior year, the student council passed a resolution that the student council had the right to tell students to get their hair cut. And Albert and I felt, “No, nobody can tell us to get our hair cut.” So, he and I were going to get a petition started; we talked about it. We never got around to doing it, because before the end of the day, the principal called Albert and me into his office. He talked to us, and he said, “Oh, I heard that you two here are opposed to the student government having the power to tell students to get a haircut.”

This is senior year, right?

The senior year.

This is the mid-1960s.
JP: Yes.

WN: Yes, okay. People did have kind of long hair.

JP: Yeah, the hippie movement at the time, you know, and so forth. But the principal said, “I tell you what. If that comes to my desk, it’s not going to happen. I’m not going to sign it.” So, we were satisfied. But we were surprised that he got wind of it, even before Albert and I decided to do our petition. And he was a very nice principal, Milton DeMello. In fact, when he left us, he became the headmaster at Mid-Pacific [Institute] for many years.

So, school was good. The teachers we had were very good teachers, been there for many, many years. We had some new teachers that came in. Ransom Wong was the social studies teacher, Gary Medeiros. George Ito was there for many years. They were good teachers.

I remember one time, Mr. Wong talked about golfing. “Oh, golfing is a stupid game. This little ball, you hit this ball. You walk up, you hit it, you walk up . . .” But he got hooked on golfing, because the principal, Mr. DeMello, was a golfer. And then, during school time, recess, we were talking to Mr. Wong.

“Oh, Mr. Wong, golfing is such a stupid game, yeah? You walk up to the little ball, you hit it, you walk up, you hit it. How stupid can it be?”

“No, no, no. You walk up, you address the ball.”

(Chuckles) You know, he became an avid golfer. But we would just kid him with that.

I liked the rapport we had with our teachers. You know, it was a small island community. We knew the boundaries. They’re our teachers; we’re the students. But even at that, there was this kind of camaraderie, the closeness between the students and the teachers when we grew up on Lāna‘i.

WN: Were many of these teachers were from the island?

JP: Many of them were not. There were a few who were from Lāna‘i who came back, but a lot of the others were from outside that came and stayed for many years. Like the Takatas came to stay there for a number of years before moving on, and then later on, he [Kengo Takata] became a [DOE] district superintendent. A lot of teachers who had their start on Lāna‘i, when they came to O‘ahu, you know, ended up being principals or higher up in the DOE So, it was a good twelve years, or thirteen years if you count kindergarten, you know, growing up on Lāna‘i.

WN: What about teachers from the Mainland?

JP: We’ve had several teachers from the Mainland. There was one especially that I really enjoyed having, Carroll Stevens. He was an English teacher. He stayed there for a number of years. He enjoyed Japanese movies, so on Tuesday and Thursday, when there were Japanese movies at the theater, he would be going to those Japanese programs and watching that. And then, our paths did not cross until later on. He transferred to O‘ahu, and then he ended up being like the first director of HAMS, the Hawaii Association of Middle Schools. He was one of the leaders of that movement. And when I was [teaching] at Wheeler Intermediate—it later became Wheeler Middle School, we had the opportunity to go to these HAMS conferences here. Our school would pay the
registration fee and so forth. And at one of them, I was able to meet Mr. Stevens, Carroll Stevens, and he was one of my high school teachers.

But we’ve had several very good teachers from the Mainland. One of them, another one, he had his—I never had him. He taught the class above us, and he had his students do book reports. One of my friends read one book by . . . And this guy writes only Westerns. And apparently, the teacher didn’t know the author, you know. “Yeah, that’s a pretty good book.” But the guy didn’t know anything about the book that he was reading and wrote his report on it. But he got a good grade. (Chuckles) And I don’t think the teacher knew who the author was and that he just—it was a good author.

WN: Zane Grey, or . . .

JP: Not Zane Grey. I forgot the name. I was trying to think of his name. But that teacher was a humorous teacher, and I think he was well liked by his students. Most of the other teachers were locals from the other islands, coming to Lāna‘i.

WN: And being in a really rural area, you know, agricultural area, what was the balance in terms of careers in agriculture, or curricula centered around agriculture, and college prep?

JP: I guess because on Lāna‘i, pineapple was king at the time we were growing up, and many of us who worked in the pineapple fields would say, “This is not the life for me,” and always looking for something else better to do. You know, going to school for other things to do. Like for me, as a [college] freshman, I decided, “Hey, I think I want to be a teacher.” Bobby, my oldest brother, initially started off wanting to be an engineer. But then, when he was at the University of Hawai‘i, took a battery of tests at the student center over there and found out that, oh, his interest lies in agriculture, farming, things of that sort. So, he got his master’s degree in entomology, and then worked for Del Monte [Company]. He became superintendent of research for Del Monte.

But in terms of . . . We had FFA [Future Farmers of America] at school as one of our classes. But it was wide open as to what we wanted to do, the line we’d like to pursue. A number of my classmates went into education, others the military and doing other kinds of jobs. Few of my classmates live on Lāna‘i still, you know, having stayed there for the most part. I can count about four of them.

WN: For you, was staying on Lāna‘i and working for the company an option for you?

JP: I don’t think it was an option. But I call Lāna‘i my home. And when the time comes, that’s where I want to be, my final resting place. I’m going to tell my son, “Scatter my ashes around the island,” or whatever, you know. To me, that’s home. I just love that place.

WN: In terms of a career and staying there, that wasn’t for you?

JP: No. I think because of the [lack of] opportunity. If I were to stay in education there, well, the only movement [you’d have is] if you go into administration. But doing other kinds of jobs back then, it was just pineapple. You either work for the [Dole Corporation] pineapple company or work for the stores there. So, not much of an opportunity. And even today, I don’t think the opportunity job-wise is there, unless you’re working for the service-oriented industry, for the hotels, for both hotels.
I just love that place. It’s such a tranquil place, quiet place. And the years I’ve been gone, Lāna‘i is still the same. You know, the same colorful corrugated roofs they have there; the people very friendly. You’ll be walking around or driving around, you got to keep your hand up here, because everybody waves at you. (Chuckles)

One of my good friends at school, the fiancé works for the wildlife and has to go to Lāna‘i on a number of occasions. They stay there for a week at a time or so to do wildlife work. And they have a truck there. And he said, “Wow, the people on Lāna‘i are so friendly. I’m driving, everybody’s waving. You got to keep your hand out.” (Chuckles) People are like that.

WN: That’s right.

JP: You go down to the airport, they ask, “Hey, you need a ride to the city?” You know, they will be willing to extend, you know, things like that. So, Lāna‘i is a special place for me, as the place that I really call home. So, I’m looking forward to going back. I hope I can go this year. I’ll just spend probably two nights, three days there. The only reason I set a short time is because of the hotel. The Lodge [at Kō‘ele], I think is about almost $300 a day. So, I figure, well, as a tourist, I can spend that. And the jeep itself is as expensive as the lodging. Because the last time I was there in 2011, December, I stayed at Hotel Lāna‘i for $99 a night, and then I rented a jeep for the three days. It was like almost $400 for the jeep. But I needed the jeep to go around. That trip, I didn’t want to bother any of the family. Because they would invite me over to their place to stay, but I said, “No, I just want to go by myself, not burden anybody so I can just come and go whenever I want, and do what I want to do.” And that’s what I want to do this time. But this time, I’d like to stay at one of the [two large] hotels. Probably the first time, stay at The Lodge [at Kō‘ele], and then another time somewhere down the road, going down to the Mānele Bay Hotel.

My sister-in-law just sent me a text. Her daughter and the husband plan to go to Lāna‘i next month for her birthday. I think they’ve been there about four times; they love the island. They stayed at the Mānele Bay Hotel, and they enjoyed the peace, the quiet, the solitude of the island.

WN: I’m wondering, you know, as a resident of Lāna‘i, you grew up there, small kid days were there, and your schooling was there. And then, you know, you come back occasionally, like you were just saying. What is different about Lāna‘i when you go back?

JP: Different, some of the physical changes. I think it must have been [David] Murdock, [who] built a swimming pool in the city. And then, I heard later on, the swimming pool was out of commission, or something was broken. And when [Larry] Ellison bought the [island], one of the first things he did was to repair the swimming pool. When I went there for my reunion, I walked around there, and the swimming pool was open. I sat down there, talked to the Lāna‘ians there, and they were very, very happy. This was one of the good things Ellison did right away, you know, the swimming pool.

I know there are talks of doing other things on the island, but initially, things were positive, where Ellison seems to be open to having dialog with the people, with Kurt Matsumoto being, I guess, the manager or whatever role he plays, having meetings with the townspeople, and looking at the vision of what to do with the island and so forth. As opposed to Murdock. Murdock seemed to be more secretive. (Chuckles) He’d just do what he wants to do without sharing. So, I’m hoping. I hope things work out for Ellison.

When I was [visiting] there, they talked about building a desalination plant for the water. And then, he had talk of building another hotel on the north side [of the island]. So these are the
physical changes that’s going on, and I think overall it’ll benefit the Lanaians in terms of employment. I’m hoping that they will have first option for jobs, you know. So, I think these are some good things I see.

And lot of new faces. When I went for my fortieth and forty-fifth and fiftieth reunions, walking around town, a lot of new faces there. I’m quite sure it’s going to come a time where the outsiders are going to outnumber the locals. I don’t know how bad it’s going to work in terms of voting, where these outsiders will want to do things differently. I hope not. I’d like them to be able to maintain the quality of the plantation lifestyle, the rural lifestyle on the island.

WN: Is that a realistic hope?

JP: No.

WN: There’s that question of development, which is good because of jobs and so forth, economic development. At the same time, there are people who want to maintain the old way. And so, can you have both?

JP: It’s going to be difficult to have both. But there’s a lot of land there for farming, you know, opening it up for truck farming or cash crops. I think there are some places that people are renting out the land to do some farming there. I know Alberta De Jetley, she has a farm there, and she supplies a lot of the food items to the local store, which is good. But it’s going to be hard for two different cultures to coexist—the plantation lifestyle and a more diverse. . . . Well, not urban lifestyle yet, but a different kind of lifestyle, you know, with the outsiders and new jobs, whatever jobs they can create there. Sometimes, I think, “Oh, Lāna‘i would be a good place for a new prison, a state prison.” (Chuckles) You know, open it up there. But new jobs need to come to the island. I don’t know what kind of jobs are able to come, other than farming, because there’s 50,000 acres of open land there that’s just sitting fallow. Part of the land was made into a solar farm, I think in Pālāwai Basin.

WN: Right.

JP: Yeah. So, it’s going to be difficult with these two cultures coming in.

WN: I talked to [a longtime Lāna‘i resident] the other day, and he was saying that people would tell him all the time, like tourists, would say, “Wow, look at all this land. You know, you could turn it into grazing cattle.”

JP: Cattle.

WN: And [he] said, “Well, it may look lush now, you know, with a lot of vegetation, but the droughts that Lāna‘i has . . .”

JP: Yes.

WN: He said, “In a few months, this place is going to be . . .”


WN: Brown, yeah. So, that’s always a problem. Because I was wondering, you know, Dole probably had an irrigation system.
They have an irrigation system there, yeah. And cattle raising was one of the early industries, once upon a time. In fact, if you go down to Black Sand Beach, if you go down to the small boat harbor, off to the right hand side as you enter it, there used to be a chute where the cattle would be transported into the ships there. But cattle was tried on the island, but did not succeed. And I know the Mormons down Pālāwai Basin had a settlement there, and I don’t know whether they were also trying cattle raising or not.

They tried sheep.

Sheep, okay.

At Kōʻele [i.e., Lānaʻi] Ranch.

Yeah. And then when James Dole did the pineapple, oh, pineapple was successful. Then they just grew from there.

And you know, we were talking about trying to maintain the plantation lifestyle. And yet at the same time, the original immigrants who came to work on the pineapple fields, [many of] their children moved away.

They moved away.

They had professional aspirations. Like you, for example.

Uh-huh [yes].

Right? So, I’m just wondering, who are the ones that want to maintain a plantation lifestyle?

I think the older folks like us. You know. That’s why many of us—for us, for my classmates, the last three class reunions were always held on Lānaʻi. You know, no place else. We always consider going back there, because that’s our roots, that’s our growing-up days. At the fiftieth, we mentioned, okay, the fiftieth reunion is our last formal get-together. Anything in the future, well, it’s up to the other classmates. And somebody suggested, in two years, 2015, let’s celebrate our seventieth birthdays in Las Vegas. You know, Las Vegas was in the back of everybody’s mind, you know, because LACA, every year in September or October, they spend a week there [on Lānaʻi], four or five days there at the LACA convention.

The Lānaʻi Alumni and . . .

Community Association, yeah. So, all the classes join into that. A lot of my classmates have been going to it every year, the LACA I have never had the opportunity. I think Billy went once, or could have been there during the time LACA was there. Bobby’s been there, I believe, once or twice. Or if he wasn’t there when the class, his class, the Class of ’60 had a class reunion, they had a reunion up at Las Vegas. So, Las Vegas seems to be—the ninth island seems to be a very popular place for a lot of the locals.

Right, but it’s not Lānaʻi, though.

It’s not Lānaʻi, though. Yeah, it’s not Lānaʻi. That’s why we go back to Lānaʻi. You know, we love Lānaʻi. I know times have changed. It’s inevitable that the rural lifestyle is going to have to change. Years down the road, it’s going to be very, very different. If I were to be living at
hundred and fifty years old, I go back there, I know Lāna‘i is going to be very, very different. So, change is inevitable. But sometimes, it’s difficult to see some of these changes happen, you know, only because you enjoy that particular kind of lifestyle.

WN: Last question is, if you were Ellison, owner of Lāna‘i, what would you do? What would you like to see? What direction would you be taking Lāna‘i?

JP: If I were Ellison . . .

WN: In other words, you own the island that you grew up on.

JP: Yeah.

WN: Okay? That’s the question.

JP: Yeah. (Chuckles) I was thinking like, you know, Fantasy Island. You know, I’m Tattoo. (Chuckles) Well, development is important. You have to bring people in to spend money. So, the two hotels, I think those are good things. Those were talked about for many years. When we were in elementary school, I know they talked about building hotels on Lāna‘i. And it never came to fruition until the 1990s, you know, when they did. But that’s the only way that you can improve the lives of the Lanaians; you have to bring in jobs. But if I were the owner, I don’t know what kind of jobs I can bring in. Farming, for one. If we can tap the aquifer for water, for irrigation, yeah, look at some kind of farming. I know the cost of living in Hawai‘i is high, but something that’s sustainable where some kind of agreement can be made with the state. We grow these things, you know, grow local, you sell local, like some of the stores, like Foodland. You know, they buy local, they sell local. And if we can do that, it’d be great.

Like on Kaua‘i, they want to put a dairy there [next to a hotel]. They had to compromise; they’re going to downscale the size of the dairy because the hotel said, “Oh, the smell, the stench.” Or like the Waimānalo Gulch [landfill] by Ko ‘Olina. You know, I feel for the people over there, because they always talked, okay, it’s going to close, Waimānalo Gulch is going to close and they’re going to find another place for the landfill. But whenever the time came, the due date, oh, we can’t find any [site]. We’re going to have a committee to search. They’d find places, and the community says, “Not in my backyard.” You know, so I feel for the people on the Leeward Coast. And you can see the trash. On windy days, the trash—even though they do have that high mesh wire, you know, trash is being blown over that.

WN: So similarly, what reminds me of that is on Maui, for example, HC&S, the Hawaiian Commercial & Sugar Company; that’s the last [sugar] plantation [remaining in Hawai‘i].

JP: Yes.

WN: And you know, our islands’ [economy] was in essence based on [sugar] plantations. And yet, when they try to burn cane, a lot of the residents who aren’t from Hawai‘i are saying, “Hey, you know, the ash and everything is coming into my house and my yard.” When I read that, I felt a little sad that people are not tolerant of . . .

JP: Yes. “Hey, sugarcane was here before you came. When you bought the place, you knew that sugarcane was there. And you knew this will do slash and burn before they harvest.” You know. Since we grew up, even on Lāna‘i, they burned the field, and we accepted it, because that’s part of the cycle of growing pineapple. Of course, the company won’t burn if the wind is not
favorable, too, so you don’t have the ashes coming into the city, the smoke and so forth. But you can smell it at the times when they’re burning; you know when they’re burning. I mean, that’s part of the local lore, the pineapple plantation. Like even on the other islands, on Kaua’i you had the [sugar] plantations there, but really, you don’t see them anymore, those plantations.

WN: So, I guess we’re getting away from large-scale agriculture, and more into urban and maybe small farming, hopefully.

JP: Yeah. I can see small farming. Too bad the state and the city agreed on the development of Ho‘opili. You know, prime agricultural land [in ‘Ewa, O‘ahu]. Once you put homes, you’ll never get the land back. Or Koa Ridge over here [near Mililani, O‘ahu]. Prime agricultural land, and the city approved the development of that. They might even put a hotel over there; a business hotel was in the plan. Or a hospital. Move Wahiawā General Hospital to that area. But yeah, I agree. Change is inevitable. But change should be made with discretion. You know, you should look at the total picture, not just money in the developer’s pocket. It’s sad.

And with Lāna‘i, it’s hard. The question you asked, what would I do? It’s hard. But you have to bring in jobs for the people to subsist. You cannot have—like in places like, I think Moloka‘i; unemployment is super high. And you have that group that doesn’t want tour boats to come in. You know, like one of the tour boats was supposed to stop by there, but I don’t know whether it was the local populace there, or the outsiders who moved to Moloka‘i that, you know, put a stop to it. Oh, the Super Ferry was supposed to go there too, yeah? And Maui and Kaua‘i, it appears a lot of them were outside influences that were trying to stop it.

WN: Well, let’s not get too much into politics.

JP: Yeah. (Chuckles)

WN: I just want to ask you one last question.

JP: Okay.

WN: And you probably answered this in the course of our interviews. But I’ll ask you again in closing. When people ask you, “Eh, John, glad to meet you. Where you from?” What do you say?

JP: Oh, I say, I’m from Lāna‘i.

WN: What does that mean to you to say that you’re from Lāna‘i?

JP: Well, to me, it’s a special place. To them, lanai is a porch. (Chuckles) You came from a porch? (Chuckles) But I tell them where it is. It’s the tri-isles. They know where Maui and Moloka‘i is. I say, “Okay, Lāna‘i is the third island here in the tri-isles. It used to be the pineapple island. Pineapple was king.” And you know, that’s home.

WN: So, you’re from Lāna‘i, and you know, you obviously say it with pride.

JP: Yes, I do.

WN: Why are you proud? What makes you proud to be from Lāna‘i? That’s the question.
JP: Well, because it’s special to me. I was born and raised there, I grew up there. And it’s just something that is special to me. You know, Mililani is a nice place, a nice planned community, but Lāna‘i is the place I call my home. This [Mililani] is my home away from home, but Lāna‘i is my home. If I had the money, if I were to go to Las Vegas and win the mega bucks there, I would take the next flight home to Lāna‘i, knock on the door and say, “Hey, my name is John Park. I used to live in this house. Are you willing to sell? I have this much.” (Chuckles) You know, I’ll give them an amount that is more than the cost of [many of] the homes on the island. I wouldn’t mind building a cottage there. I can use it as a retreat for myself, the family; you know, my brothers, so when they go to Lāna‘i there’s a place that they can stay. For some reason, it’s just a special place in my heart, you know, that it will forever be special. I will forever be a Lāna‘i boy. I know my son is a Honolulu boy. (Chuckles) If I ask him, “Would you like to be buried on Lāna‘i?” No, probably not. (Chuckles) But I’d like to be. I’d like that place to be my final resting place when I go.

WN: Good place to end. Thank you, John.

JP: Warren, thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW