

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: ROBERT REVILLA, 21, Ono Ono Poi Shop worker

Robert Revilla was born on February 17, 1957 in Honokaa Hospital and was raised in Kukuihaele. His father Juan emigrated from the Philippines in 1924. Juan is a retired sugar company worker and has raised taro on a part-time basis for the last 30 years. Robert's mother Sophie is Portuguese.

After graduation from Honokaa High School in 1975 Robert got a job in Seiko Kaneshiro's poi factory, Ono Ono Poi. He works there full time and occasionally helps in his father's Waipio taro patch as well.

Robert likes fishing, diving and car models.

Tape No. 4-51B-1-78

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Mr. Robert Revilla (RR)

June 25, 1978

Kukuihaele, Big Island

BY: Vivien Lee (VL) and Yukie Yoshinaga (YY)

[This is an interview with Mr. Robert Revilla. The date is June 25, 1978. The location is the church in Kukuihaele.]

VL: Okay. Robert, can you tell us where you were born?

RR: In Honokaa. And just I was born in Honokaa, at Honokaa Hospital.

VL: Did your parents live in Kukuihaele, at the time?

RR: Yeah, uh huh.

VL: What's your birthdate?

RR: February 17, 1957.

VL: That makes you how old?

RR: Twenty-one.

VL: Right now, you're working for Seiko Kaneshiro. How long have you been working for him?

RR: About three years, right now.

VL: Was that right after high school [1975]?

RR: Yeah, uh huh.

VL: How did you get the job?

RR: Oh well, I been working for Seiko for a long time. When I was small, we pulled taro like that for him. I cleaned taro patch, like that. So, when I graduated, he figured I'm a good worker. So, I couldn't find another job, so he helped me out and gave me a job.

VL: Oh. So when you were younger, you worked for him.

RR: Uh huh.

VL: Did he pay you for this?

RR: Oh yes. Uh huh.

VL: About how old were you then?

RR: Oh man. Say, about six or seven, though, if I'm right. No, I was working from small time, you know, already. With my father and with Seiko. But that's like me and my father was together, when we was working with Seiko. Say it that way.

VL: So actually Seiko paid your father then?

RR: And my father pays me too. And he tells me for save it up. "Maybe in the future you need it." So that's what I did. So everytime he give me, I go to the bank and then put it in.

VL: How did you like working taro patch when you were young?

RR: Oh well, it was a lot of fun. And it's hard too, but I had a lot of fun. Because everytime I go in the patch, I pull taro. But sometime I pull the taro, I fall in the mud and all that. Oh, was really fun that time. I really enjoyed it. But like now, it's a different thing now. Because, well, when you small it's not that bad because you think that's nothing. But now when you grow up, it's something else. It's harder and, you know, with all the experience you had, from small to big, well, it's a big difference.

YY: Is it more like work now?

RR: Really. It is. Ain't no play thing. Really, it's work.

YY: But your present job with Mr. Kaneshiro is not in the taro patch but in the poi shop.

RR: Yes. Uh huh.

VL: Can you explain what your duties in the poi shop are now?

RR: Well, I just have to open the cooker, put [cooked] taro in the potato peeler, and then throw it [peeled taro] over to the pan. And then I have to, when the bag fills up with the taro skin [from the potato peeler], I have to throw it in one slop can. And then, after it fills up the can, I take it out and then put a new one in. And I just do it over and over like that. And that's all what I have to do. But when I deliver poi, well, it's another thing too. I have to go up to the poi shop and then put the poi in the boxes and then load it up. And then I drive, I deliver the poi.

VL: Where do you folks deliver to?

RR: I go to Kona. And we go to Kohala too.

VL: Which part of your job do you like the best?

RR: The driving. I meet many people, and I like to meet new people every time. And I like to get to know them and make friends with them. That's one thing I like about driving.

VL: How about, which part of the job do you like least?

RR: The part that you have to hemo the bag, for throw the slop out. That's one I don't like. Because it's really...oh man, so much weight into it, strength into it. You got to make strength everytime. You got to carry it, then you got to throw it. Then you got to put back again. Then you got to go back to the potato peeler again.

VL: You're talking about the bag that comes from the potato peeler?

RR: Yeah, uh huh. Like before, we didn't have that. It just go through the pipe and then it just goes out to the cesspool. But now it does not. You have to stop that rubbish [taro peelings] and all that. And then take it out. And then he dumps it down Waipio.

YY: Why did he change the method?

RR: Something with the Health Department. They didn't like that. And so, that's what had jam up everything. That's why, yeah, it's more work now.

YY: When you go and deliver, Mr. Kaneshiro always goes with you?

RR: Yeah. Well, yeah because he doesn't think that I can do it myself. And it's more head work and I don't have that much head. But I will try it, you know. I'll give it a try. But he never give me a try yet. I think he waiting until the time he think it's right. Then he'll give me a try. But now, I just got to watch what he do and learn 'em. So that's what I do.

YY: Where do you go?

RR: To Kona, like that. And then, well, when we stay going Kona, he teach me. But only I get hard time is the paper work. That adding and all that kind stuff. I cannot figure 'em out.

YY: Does he use a calculator?

RR: No. He does not. Just in his head. So it's really....if he use one calculator, I think it's little easier. If you don't have much head, but you do that, main thing you know how to use it, eh. And I tried it plenty times, that stuff. My girl friend teaches me,

but I have hard time yet. I cannot figure 'em out yet. She tell, "You got to learn 'em." So, once in a while, when I go down, she teach me.

VL: You also help to peel the taro?

RR: Oh yeah, uh huh. Yes. I peel the taro too. After I finish loading the taro inside the pan.

VL: Totally, how many hours a week are you working for the poi shop?

RR: Well, we don't have....in one week, we get about....like how you say, in one day? Or you mean one whole....

VL: In a week, including your driving.

RR: I get hard time for figure that one, though. About, actually, about 40-something. Actually 48 or something like that.

VL: So it's a full time job for you?

RR: Yeah, it is. But still yet, I like something better in my future, though. Because if I stay there, I no more future, actually. I know it in my heart already, I don't. That ain't going to help me that much. So I have to find something better. That's what I been doing all this time, but cannot. Hard.

VL: Where are you looking?

RR: All over. Any kind of a job that pays more than what I got. Because what I get now, if no more taro like that, no can. No make 'em.

VL: What do you mean?

RR: If you don't have taro, patches that you pull the taro and then comes up. That's how you got your money going. By pulling your own taro.

VL: Are you saying that you would like to raise your own taro?

RR: Yeah, right. Uh huh. That's what I had in my own mind, but it's not that easy to do it. See, like now my father teaches me. From small time, I know but he's teaching me something that I never learn yet. So, because he's coming old now, he teaching us. He teaching me and my brother. Like I had patience, but not like my brother. My brother doesn't have patience. So I listen to my father, and sometime, I think I know more in certain things but he know more on something else. So I have to listen. But sometime, if you have a brother like think he knows everything, he no da kine, boy.

VL: What's stopping you now from having your own taro patches?

RR: Well, see, I don't have the land to do it. Because, actually, the land that my father has, it's somebody else owns it but we just take care of it. Like Mr. Kaneshiro, we have some of his land too, that we take care of too.

VL: Sharecrop?

RR: Yeah, right. In a way that he has some....I don't know how they go this. Like 60/40 or 30/70 or something like that they go. So that's how him and my father get agreements.

VL: But with all the idle land in Waipio, why is it that you can't find a piece of land?

RR: Say that if you buy your own land, it ain't that cheap anymore, like before time. So it's pretty hard to do it. If you take care of somebody else land, then I think I can do it. But, you know, sometime they don't want, eh. Not everybody would let you do it that way. But if had that way, I would do it that way. Because at least I know that even I did it that way, something would come out of it. If it didn't, I wouldn't do it.

VL: So, right now, you cannot find land to farm?

RR: Well, like my father says, if anything happens to him, the land that he taking care now, he wants us to take of it. So the agreement over there is made. So he teaching my brother, but I don't think so my brother going.

VL: How about you?

RR: I think I going. It's going to be hard, but I think I got patience so I think I can do it. I would give it a try. If I can't do it, well I can't do it. But I have to try first.

VL: How about a plantation job?

RR: Well, I've been trying long time. Everytime I go down there, it's the same story. "You have to have patience, wait. Anytime get openings, come down and sign up. And if they call you, then we'll let you know." It's always that. But, when I heard something else, didn't make sense. See, like this guy, he had the same thing that I have, that had put me down. And he got the job but I never. So I don't know how come is that. So I wen go down for grumble, but no sense.

VL: You mean he had the same qualifications that you did?

RR: Yeah. But I never get 'em.

VL: If you had a choice between working plantation and working taro patch, what would you do?

RR: Well, if I couldn't get plantation, I rather work taro patch. Because you the own boss. Nobody else boss you around. But if you thinking in another way....to me, if I had two ways, I could work plantation and I could work patch. I would rather have it that way too. Because at least, by the time I working plantation, money coming there. And then, by the time the taro ready for pull, I get money coming from there too. So I had both ways, so I don't have to worry nothing. So I rather do it that way, if I had chance to do it that way.

VL: In the poi shop, you're the only guy, other than Mr. Kaneshiro.

RR: Yeah, uh huh. Really.

VL: How do you like working with all the ladies?

RR: It's nice. It's good. At least I learn plenty from them. But only when they get, their moods change, then really I get all....no can talk, nothing. In front them or not. They get change of moods, man. So I know, if they're happy, then you can talk anything. You can joke wild, they going take it. But when they change and you never know nothing, that's something else, man. But I like the ladies. It's nice. They really nice to me and I try to be nice to them too. So, at least over there, everybody work together. Everybody likes everybody, so it works out good. But if have somebody over there is one lemon or what, nobody get along. But like this, everybody work together, that's the best way. That's one thing, it's good.

VL: Did you ever think that you would not live in Kukuihaele, in the future?

RR: No. I like it here. But if I had one job a different place that I have to move, well, I move. Because that's where the job is. Other than that, I ain't going to move. That's one thing.

VL: What's good about here?

RR: Well, I love the valley. That's one thing. And, well, all my friends is down here so it's hard to run away from them. I always have fun with them. Everybody always together, joking and all that. If I go another place, I have to make new friends again. And sometimes, it's not that easy. Because everytime you going think about your old friends.

VL: What do you think is the future of the valley?

RR: Maybe in the future down there, maybe taro like that, maybe they

going plant something else in the future. They going plant something else than taro.

VL: You think taro might phase out?

RR: Maybe phase out.

VL: Why would that be?

RR: Because if the sick that it does have right now, they don't find out what's the reason why he getting sick, then the taro not going come out right. And they going lose more taro. Like the one you plant that day, and then when the time comes for you pull the taro....like say, you wait about 15 months. But no even reach the 15 months. And then you just pull one taro and then all that wipe out. The whole patch. If comes like that, like some of the guys that I know, that did happen like that, that's what they worrying about.

But they have these people that comes down and check out the soil and all that. So sometime they say, "That's the soil, the trouble."

Some guys tell, "The water the trouble."

So it's hard to say what's going to happen. But I think the taro going phase out. And they going try maybe planting something else that grows in water too.

VL: Do you think young people should be encouraged to raise taro in the valley?

RR: Yeah, uh huh. They should, because that's a lot of help down there. It's hard work but at least, if you working someplace else that it doesn't make that much, and you have your own taro. Well, if like you have plenty bills like that, well, the money that comes out of the taro would help you a lot.

VL: You seem to see it as an extra income.

RR: Right. Extra income. That's how I feel.

VL: Would you ever think of it as your full time job? Have you considered that?

RR: Well, I thought of it one time. But to me, in the future, I rather have it the way I feel now. That it's [extra] income. But if I think that no more no place to turn, then it's a full thing.

VL: What could be done, in your opinion, to encourage young people to go into taro farming?

RR: Well, they should give a try first. Try see if they can do it. Try plant and do whatever you have to do to make a....

VL: I mean, for say, the government....is there something that they could do to encourage young people like yourself to start farming.

RR: Oh, I don't know. That, I never have that question before, so I don't know how to answer it.

VL: Right now, how much do you work in your father's taro patch?

RR: Well, not that much. Because he used to give me a little, just enough to help me out. To pay some of the things that I have to pay. Like that. But a little, like maybe \$30, or something like that. Sometime he gives me \$100 like that. It comes out, but not that much. Because I don't want to ask too much of them. I just like helping them out and then learning at the same time. And at least I know that I worked hard for it. I tell my dad, if he wants to give me, then it's fine. "But if you don't, it's fine too."

VL: You talking about now, once a month?

RR: Yeah. Like that, uh huh.

VL: How many hours do you work down there?

RR: About, say about three to four hours.

VL: A day?

RR: Yeah. Because the things that we do, we always finish. Finish the things that we do down there fast. Because, like my brother, he takes us down with his truck. So he have to come home and do something, things else. So we go down there and do whatever we have to do, and then come home.

VL: Every day?

RR: No. Like say about twice a week. Every Saturday and Sunday. So that's how we do it.

VL: You have anything else you want to add?

RR: Well, no, not really. Not now.

VL: You want to say anything about your life?

RR: No.

VL: Or your plans for the future.

RR: For the future.

YY: Your dreams.

RR: Oh, I had lot of dreams. So many. For the dreams, I wish that I want to get married, make my own family and build a house in Kukuihaele and raise taro. And I always wanted to drive a truck, cane truck. I always wanted to. So that's what in the future, I want. Really. So many of my dreams.

END OF INTERVIEW

WAIPI'O: MĀNO WAI

AN ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

Volume II

ETHNIC STUDIES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

**ETHNIC STUDIES PROGRAM
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