LIFE HISTORIES OF NATIVE HAWAIANS
BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: GEORGE AI, Inter-Island steamer messboy, Pearl Harbor mechanic

George Ai was born July 2, 1901 in Honokaa, Hawaii. His Hawaiian parents were both born on the Big Island. The family moved to Oahu when George was two.

George never attended school. At the age of 14, he worked in a taro patch for 50 cents a day. Other odd jobs included delivering newspapers and working as a messenger for a drugstore.

Travel fascinated George who got his first job as a deck hand with the Inter-Island ships in 1917, serving on such ships as the Niihau, American Hawaiian, Maunakea, and the Kilauea. Disenchanted with working conditions, he switched to Matson Lines and worked mostly on passenger ships. He worked hard to educate himself and to learn English. He learned a lot from old whalers.

He traveled to numerous foreign ports and saw nearly every state in the union in his 23 years away from Hawaii. His on-shore experiences included hauling salmon in Alaska and fruit, vegetable, and cotton picking; a stint in Alaskan cannery. He returned to Hawaii just before U.S. entry into World War II.

He worked at Ford Island during the War, lives in Papakolea on Hawaiian Homestead land, has been married six times and has "several children." He is now actively engaged in preservation of the Hawaiian language and culture.
GA: My full name is George Ai.

JG: What does the name Ai mean?


JG: And that's the way you interpret your name?

GA: I guess, there are other interpretation about the word, but those are the only two interpretation that I really care (about).

JG: When were you born? What year and what day?

GA: I was born July the 2nd, 1901.

JG: Where were you born?

GA: In a town called Honokaa, Hawaii.

JG: Was your father Hawaiian?

GA: My father was Hawaiian.

JG: Pure Hawaiian?

GA: Typical.

JG: Where was he born?

GA: I wouldn't know where was he born.

JG: On the Big Island?

GA: Probably.

JG: And your mama?

GA: Big Island.

JG: And was she Hawaiian?
GA: She was Hawaiian.

JG: You said your father was typically Hawaiian. What did you mean by that?

GA: Means no other blood was mixed in with his. Just pure Hawaiian.

JG: How long did you live on the Big Island?

GA: I was born in 1901. I left there probably when I was two years old. And came to Oahu.

JG: Where did you live on Oahu?

GA: In Oahu I lived in Kalihi.

JG: How come your family moved up here from the Big Island?

GA: The reason is I wouldn't know. At that time, because as I grew up, they were already established on Oahu and I didn't bother them for the reason that they moved because I liked Oahu very well.

JG: What type of work was your father involved with?

GA: He was a stevedore, and also clerk for a lumber yard.

JG: Did you go to school at all?

GA: No.

JG: Was there any kind of a truant officer that ever came around and asked why you weren't in school?

GA: Probably.

JG: You don't recall?

GA: But it didn't bother me.

JG: What was your first job, then? If you didn't go to school you must have started working pretty early.

GA: Although I had done odds and ends around the house, working in the people's yards for loose change, but the real job I had was to work in the taro patch for fifty cents a day.

JG: About what year was this?

GA: This was around 1915. On the corner of Gulick Avenue and King Street.

JG: That was pretty good pay in those days, wasn't it?

GA: Well, I thought so. Fifty cents was quite large for me. It was a lot of money for me. I didn't know any better anyhow.
JG: One question I wanted to ask and I forgot it was when you were growing up, did your family speak Hawaiian?

GA: Yes.

JG: Did they speak any English at all to you?

GA: Yes.

JG: What about the neighborhood you lived in? Were the people there speaking Hawaiian or English?

GA: Hawaiian and English both.

JG: When you were working in the taro patch, were you working for a Hawaiian?

GA: Well, the owner of the taro patch was a Chinese fellow by the name of Charlie Ah Chee.

JG: Did he talk to you in Hawaiian or Chinese?

GA: He talk both.

JG: What kind of other jobs did you have?

GA: Well, I done little newspaper work. That is delivering newspaper. Work in a drugstore. I've been messenger boy. And then, that's about the only job I had. And then I got a little older, then start working on the Inter-island ships.

JG: How did you get your first job on the Inter-island ship?

GA: About oh, 1917.

JG: The first World War had started then?

GA: Well, not quite, not quite. I think the first World War started in--was it the 1917 or 1918. And I was already working on the Inter-island ships.

JG: How did you get that job?

GA: Well, by walking down the waterfront. There were the harbormaster, or whatever you call he was. He hired us. Seen us walking around. Ask us if we wanted to work. Work on the ship.

JG: Did he just yell and say, "Hey, would you kids like a job?"

GA: Well, we was happy to get that job.

JG: Were you looking for work?

GA: Yes, I wanted to work.

JG: And he just saw you on the dock?

GA: Yes, saw us on the dock. There was about six of us.
JG: Did you go down there quite often?

GA: Mostly I was down the waterfront to get a ship to go to the Mainland.

JG: You were going to leave Hawaii?

GA: Yeah, I tried to leave Hawaii early as I can because I worry very much about going to travel. I wanted traveling. With that thought in my mind all the time. I wanted to get away from Hawaii.

JG: And when this first job with the Inter-island steamer, do you remember the name of the first ship you shipped on?

GA: Yes, I guess the first ship that I worked on was Niihau.

JG: Did you have a contract at that time, or...

GA: No, no contract at all. You just go on board and just work, that's all. There was no kind of contract. You don't know when you gonna get paid. They pay you as they feel like, I guess. We didn't know any better.

JG: Now, the harbormaster hired you. What did he do, just tell you to go, or take you down and introduce you?

GA: Yeah, that's all. He ask us if we wanted to work on the ship. "Yes." "When do we start?" "Well, you have to get aboard this ship and get to Hilo." The ship was in Hilo. So we have to get to Hilo and get on this ship and start working. And our job was to work on this ship. It was a regular dilapidated Inter-island boat. Job was to haul sugar from the sugar mill to the American Hawaiian that was dock outside. Outside.

JG: In Hilo?

GA: Yeah. And we get the sugar from the sugar mill. They came out and land the sugar on this ship, on this Inter-island ship. And from this Inter-island ship we transfer, take the sugar and transfer it over to the American Hawaiian.

JG: Which mills were you getting sugar from?

GA: From all the mills. Hamakua coast. Every one.

JG: How were they loading sugar onto the ships in those days?

GA: Well, they had a cable come down from the mill to the mainmast. To the ship.

JG: The mills were up on the cliff?

GA: Yeah. It comes down on a cable. The sugar comes down on the cable. And then lands on the deck of this Inter-island ship. The ship that I was working on.

JG: Was the sugar up on the cliff loaded by the plantation workers?
GA: Yeah. By the plantation workers from the mill. It comes right
direct down on deck. And this cable is hooked up to the mast of this
Inter-Island ship.

JG: How did the sugar come down? In bags?

GA: In bags. Some of them are nice and soft and some of them are like boulders
when they hit the deck.

JG: Was that because the sugar had been wet?

GA: I don't know, but they were as hard as rock. Some of them were very
soft and some of them were very hard as rock. So you just have to
step clear in case they ever drop on you. To me they were like bunch
of rocks. They was so heavy and tough.

JG: Once they landed on the deck, did you hand-carry them into the hold?

GA: Right. We have to carry it into the hold, into the hatch. Well,
it drops right down from the cable, it comes to hit the mast and then
it drops right down in the hold, in the hatch. Down the hatch.

JG: About how many feet was that drop?


JG: They didn't break open?

GA: No, no.

JG: About how many men were working on that ship at this time?

GA: Oh, probably, let's see, five, ten, about 12. I'm not quite sure,
though. That was some time ago. I can hardly remember.

JG: What kind of hours did you work?

GA: Oh, any kind of hours. We didn't have no regular hours.

JG: You would just run between Hilo and Hamakua?

GA: No, we would tie up in Hilo and then, Friday, Saturday evenings sometime,
and then Mondays we get out again. Get out to load up the ships
again. We'd go out to the mill and get all these sugars from the
mill. And from this ship, you see, the Inter-Island ship I was working
on, from this ship we'd take it to this American Hawaiian which was
standing outside the bay.

JG: How long would it take you to go from Hilo up to Hamakua?

GA: Well, I used to know all the names of those plantation mills, but
I can hardly remember now. But the farthest from Hilo to Honokaa,
that was the last. Honokaa Mill was the last. Sometimes take us,
I can't remember now. About a hour, maybe two.
JG: About an hour's sail?

GA: Yeah.

JG: Now would you take and give stuff from more than one plantation, or was one plantation...

GA: Yeah, one plantation at a time.

JG: How long would it take to load up?

GA: About six hours.

JG: And an hour back?

GA: I'm not quite sure.

JG: How long would it take to unload?

GA: Unloading is pretty fast, because the ship, they have a skip (skiff) come down and you just load 'em on the skip and they take it right through there on deck, on the American Hawaiian.

JG: What kind of things did you do on the weekend? Did you stay onboard ship, or...

GA: No, no. Weekends, I used to take a ride to certain places. Honokaa. From Hilo. Get on the train, get to Honokaa and get up to the volcano. Sightseeing. But money wasn't too plentiful. Money was very little. You didn't have much money to spend. Because I don't really know how much I was getting a day. By the weekend, sometimes we get about six dollars, seven dollars. We don't really know. Anyhow, we were still green. To know what's going on. All we know was just to work to get some money.

JG: What kind of quarters did you have on that...

GA: The quarters wasn't so hot. (Laughs) It was lousy. Lousy. Food was lousy. The food was worse.

JG: How many of you shared? Did you have an open bunking room, or did...

GA: Well, each one had they own bunk. And it wasn't so handy to sleep on. It was just a bunch of boards laying there with a mat. Not a mattress, mat. Just laying on there. And then, whatever kind of covers you have. Not much covers. But tried to make the best of it. Anyhow, those days when I was aboard the Inter-Island the conditions was bad. Was really bad, although I didn't know anything what was going on, but conditions was really bad. The food was bad, the living conditions was bad, the pay was bad, and (Laughs) so far as I know everything was bad.
JG: That was Inter-Island Steam Navigation?

GA: Yes, that's the Inter-Island Steam Navigation.

JG: How long did you stay on that Hamakua-Hilo boat?

GA: Oh, I don't know. I don't know how long I stay on there.

JG: Where did you go next, then?

GA: Oh, I worked on the Maunakea a little.

JG: That was Inter-Island (run)?

GA: Yeah. Kilauea. Then, I thought, well, it's time for me to vacate. I didn't like the place at all.

JG: About how many years did that total up?

GA: Couple of years, I guess. Yeah.

JG: Had they got the union (Sailor's Union of the Pacific) by the time you quit?

GA: No.

JG: Not yet?

GA: No such thing as union. No, there were no union at all.

JG: What made you decide to change when you decided to leave Hawaii? Were you working a ship that went to the Mainland?

GA: No, I came back and worked the shore a while. Didn't do much. Went around picking jobs here and picking jobs there. And, finally, I got a chance to work on a ship to leave for the Mainland.

JG: What was that job like?

GA: Oh, that was a messboy. I got a job on the Lurline, the old Lurline. And then I got a job on the Wilhelmina.

JG: Was the Wilhelmina a passenger ship or a cargo ship?

GA: Well, she used to haul cargo, but not much cargo. It's most of a passenger ship.

JG: Was that part of the Matson Line?

GA: Yeah, That's a Matson liner (Matson Navigation Company).

JG: What was that like, working on that one?

GA: Oh, not much. It's a picnic compared to the Inter-Island. Conditions was better, food was better. Although, nothing to brag about, but it's a whole lot better. The food was better, living conditions, quarters, was little better.
JG: When you were on the old Inter-Island out of Hilo, what did they call you? What kind of names did you ahve?

GA: Well, they use to call us sailor moku.

JG: I know sailor moku, but were you called a deck hand...

GA: I guess you call it deck hand.

JG: You didn't have any kind of special name?

GA: No, I don't think so. No. I think that's the name, because we used to handle the lines. We used to do the rowing.

JG: Rowing?

GA: Yeah. The rowing to get your gears connected to the cable that comes from the mill. We have to do the rowing to get out there and get that cable and bring it up to the mast.

JG: When you were working along Hamakua, was it generally pretty rough, or...

GA: No, it was picnic. For a newcomer like me, it was rough.

JG: Was it considered dangerous?

GA: Yeah. Yeah. Dangerous, yeah. You better forget about anything being dangerous. You better think to yourself that it's just an everyday thing. It's simple. Because if you're going to think that this thing is dangerous, you might get the worse end of that. Because it is dangerous, especially when you're out there on that boat trying to hook up this gear that you have to connect with the cable that comes from the mill. It is dangerous. Outside of that, it's nothing to it. That's the only dangerous spot. That's the only time that you row. Unless you work on one of those passenger ships, then you do a lot of rowing, too, because there's a lot of ports that they don't go on. That they have to stay out and you have to go in and get the passengers on this rowboat.

JG: They had no power on the baot?

GA: You mean engines?

JG: Power boats.

GA: No. You got to row. And not so easy.

JG: What ports would you have to do that in, for example?

GA: Well, let's see. You got to do that in Kawaihae and Mahukona (both on the Big Island). But Kawaihae not too bad. The water there is sometimes is not as bad as Mahukona. Oh, yeah. What you call that Kona coast? I forgot the name now. Hookena, Napoopoo.

JG: What was that one at Hookena like? What was the docking like at Hookena?
GA: Well, you have to stand outside and then you have to row in. A ship cannot go in.

JG: How big was Hookena at that time?

GA: Not very big.

JG: Was there any stores?

GA: Oh, well, where the dock is, is way below, way below from the town. And then there's not much there where the boat lands. There's not much of a port.

JG: What were you carrying mostly to Hookena? Or from Hookena. Was it loading on or off-loading that you did?

GA: Well, merchandise. Merchandise, lumber, steel, not much of anything, though, because most of the stuff goes to Hilo. It's easier to unload in Hilo because the ship goes right in. And then from there, they transfer it to wherever they want to take it.

JG: Bring it up on a wagon.

GA: On a wagon. On the train. On the train, they come as far as, oh, there's a little town. I forgot the name now. Then from there they have to get it on a truck.

JG: What about Kailua-Kona? What were they bringing in there?

GA: Same thing. Kailua-Kona, you cannot go in either. You have to come in with the rowboat. Same as Kawaihae, the same thing. Cattle have to be taken out by the rowboat.

JG: Were they loading cattle at Kailua or Hookena?

GA: No, I never believe they load cattle in Hookena.

JG: Kailua?

GA: Yeah, Kailua, they do, and Kawaihae.

JG: What about Mahukona? Was that sugar? Or cattle?

GA: No. That's only sugar. Most sugar. But Kawaihae and Kailua, they ship lot of cattle, because we brought cattle from Kona and Kailua.

JG: Did you ever go to Maui or Kauai on Inter-Island?

GA: I never went too far in Maui. As far as I went was Kahului. That's all. I never went on land. I mean to go around and see the town spots in Maui. I never been in that. I never done much running around in Maui.

JG: Did you ever go to Hana?

GA: No.

JG: What about Kauai? Did you ever take a ship up there?
GA: Kauai, yes, Kauai I guess I done a little running around in Kauai.

JG: How did you get your first job with Matsen?

GA: How? Oh, I have to go down there and apply.

JG: Did they have a hiring hall in those days?

GA: No. No, no, no. You go aboard and see whoever it is. The skipper. No, there was no hiring hall. There was no hiring hall no place. Only in the Mainland, they had a finkhall.

JG: What?

GA: Finkhall.

JG: Why did you call it that?

GA: Well, it's scab, I guess. There's no such thing as union.

JG: There was still no union when you were...

GA: Yeah, there was no union. There was a union, but they had no power like the way it is now. (Referring to Sailor's Union of the Pacific.)

JG: Did you have to join a union to get a job in those days?

GA: No. That's why they call it a finkhall. You go down there and get your card there.

(Laughter)

GA: Then all you have to do, just get down there. "What do you want, boy?" "I want to get a job." "What can you do?" "Oh, I can do this, I can do that." "Okay." They want a fireman for a certain ship, or they want a messboy, then, they fix up the card for you and you get a job. Everybody had a chance those days. Not now. No, no. Now you have to belong to the union in order to get a job on the ship, now you have to belong to the union. Now I hear that you have to be high school graduate. Is that?

JG: I don't know. I used to live with an engineer, but I know that you had to go down to the hall.

GA: Yeah, but now it's getting worse. It's rotating now, because there's so many people waiting that they let you go out for maybe three, four months, I guess. Yeah. Where before, when if you get on a ship and if you like that job, you like that ship, you don't have to leave. But now, it seems like, I don't know whether they can do that to any grade, I mean, any position, whatever position you hold on the ship. If you engineer, I don't know whether they can do that with the engineer.

JG: When you get this job on the _Lurline_, that was the first (shipping) one you got?
GA: Yeah. Yeah.

JG: How long did you stay on that job?

GA: Oh, maybe about two months.

JG: Then, what?

GA: Oh, I got another ship.

JG: In San Francisco?

GA: Yeah.

JG: And then, what was that ship like?

GA: It was Lukenback Line. They go to East Coast.

JG: About how old were you when you did that?

GA: I was getting little older, getting little older already. About 19, anyhow.

(Laughter)

JG: Nineteen is old?

GA: Getting old already.

JG: All this time that you were working Inter-Island down in Hilo and when you were going from Big Island up back and forth here, were the crews largely speaking Hawaiian?

GA: Hawaiian and pidgin English. I couldn't learn anything from that. I mean in the line of improving my English. No. But it would improve my Hawaiian, though.

JG: Because they're all kind (of people, not just Hawaiians).

GA: Because, yeah, they would speak Hawaiian and then I could learn. In the beginning, I could speak pretty good Hawaiian, but when I left for the Mainland I didn't speak it for 20 years.

JG: Did you have a real desire to learn English?

GA: Yeah. Yeah.

JG: How did you go about that?
GA: I made up my mind. I got to learn English in order to get around up there.

JG: Was this after you had gone to the Mainland or before you went up there?

GA: When I was up there. When I left here, I could hardly speak English, although I wasn't ashamed of myself, though. But when I get up there, and when I get among people and listen to the way they talk, I was afraid to open my mouth because I cannot keep up with them because my vocabulary was awful.

JG: Could you understand them, follow...

GA: I do understand, but I couldn't even write. I couldn't even spell. I can't even write. I can't even write a letter. That's the reason I couldn't write home, because I didn't even know how to start a letter. Oh, gee, man, I was really in a doghouse.

JG: How did you go about learning English?

GA: I used to take interest. Whenever I see people making a speech, I try to listen what they say. Certain words they use, I try to put that word in my mind. Whatever they say, I'm going to think about that word. Whenever they talking, I try to listen to how, the way they go about it. But my greatest desire was to learn English. I wanted to correct myself. I didn't want to talk like the way I used to. I didn't want to, I'm very much against pidgin. Although I still speak pidgin, but I'm very much against pidgin.

JG: Why are you very much against it?

GA: I don't like pidgin. Even my friends talk to me, I don't like it.

JG: But, why?

GA: I think, to me that's not the right way to talk. Even in my friends, some of them are high school graduates, some of them university graduates, go to the Mainland and come back, they still speaks broken. And I can't understand. For me, I cannot understand why. How come? Here, I didn't even have any kind of educational background, and I don't like to use this kind of way of talking. What I don't like is when the guy says, "No can." "I bin." I don't like that. I don't like that. No, I'm very much against that.

JG: Exactly how did you go about learning English?
GA: Well, I just put my mind in it. I had my determination, what do you call that. I got to change this way of talking, I think to myself. Since I came back from the Mainland I know, I'm not really—that is, that speak English language perfectly, but I try to do the best I can, but I never did use the word "no can." No, I don't like that word at all. People come talking, "Oh, no can. Oh, you bin go." I don't like those, you know. Maybe, people might think, "Gee, this guy's trying to be different from us or what." But, no. We go to school to learn how to speak English, although I never went to school, see? But that's what they go to school for, to learn how to speak English. Although I never went to school, but I know that's the proper way to talk. Pidgin English. I'm very much against pidgin English.

JG: Your first job on Matson was a busboy?

GA: Messboy.

JG: Did you have to use English much then, or did you...

GA: Well, I could get by. I could get by.

JG: What did a messboy do?

GA: Oh, work in the galley, serving the food, wash dishes.

JG: Did you take the food orders, or did they order...

GA: No, no. You already know what you going to eat. Whatever the cook tells you, that's what they going to eat. That's what they going to serve you. You just bring the food out, you see. There's not much to that. Although there's lot of good food. I never eat food like that before, until I got on that ship. It was good, good food and the meals was good. Conditions was good, but can't beat today. Today, you have linen on the table, even the sailors.

JG: Oh, they didn't have linen on the table?

GA: No, no. There's no such thing.

JG: Now, were you messboy for the...

GA: Crew. I was for the officer.

JG: What was your first impression of San Francisco?
GA: To me, it was great. Great. I thought San Francisco was something that's out of this world.

JG: What did you do your first day in San Francisco?

GA: Well, went ashore. Those days, they didn't have much radio, they didn't have much—well, they didn't have talkies at all. But they have lot of these silent pictures.

JG: About what year was that?


JG: How old were you?

GA: Seventeen.

JG: So it would be 1918.

GA: Yeah, yeah. 1917, 1918. Well, anyhow, they used to have pianos. Those pianos really sound. You can go up Market Street and two blocks you can hear the damn (makes piano sounds). Gee, I was thinking, "Oh, boy, this is what I wanted to see." Yeah, was really something, yeah. Really something.

JG: What was your first foreign port outside the United States?

GA: Let's see. I stop in, what they call it, Havana. Puerto Rico, I mean. What the hell is the port there? San Juan. That was of course foreign port.

JG: How did you feel about that port?

GA: Well, different. But I tell you my greatest ambition to see when I was young was Alaska.

JG: Did you ever get to Alaska?

GA: Yeah. Yeah.

JG: How old were you then?

GA: Oh, I was pretty old then. I was about 27, I guess. Twenty, let's see, 23. No, I was about 24, I guess.

JG: When you shipped out on the Lurline, were there very many Hawaiians on the ship?
GA: I think there were two.
JG: Just two?
GA: Yeah. Maybe two, yeah.
JG: So, you didn't have much chance to speak Hawaiian?
GA: No, no. They belong to different department. One was a engineer and one was a quartermaster.
JG: How long did you stay in San Francisco? Did you turn around? Did you stay on that ship?
GA: No, I got off that. I got off the island ship. I got a what do you call it, a Lukenback Line. I think it was Henry Lukenback.
JG: And that's the one that went to the East Coast?
GA: Yeah, went to the East Coast. Then after that, I got on many other ship. I can't even remember.
JG: What kind of a job did you have on that Lukenback?
GA: Same kind.
JG: Mess?
GA: Yeah, mess. And I got, later on then I went as a seaman. As a deckhand. AB (Able-bodied). Not AB. Ordinary. Ordinary at that time was only getting a dollar a day. I mean, dollar an hour. Let's see. Thirty dollars a month. Compared to now. What they getting now? About $800. The job that I was getting. $30 a month, they getting $800 now. Yeah.
JG: Lot of changing.
GA: Yeah, shee.
JG: What was the biggest change that you noticed during the years you were shipping out?
GA: Well, it's the wages.
JG: The wages.
JG: When did the unions begin to be effective?
GA: Well, I was in the 1934 strike. That's when the union started. In the 1934 strike.
JG: Where were you at that time?
GA: San Pedro.
JG: Were you living there, or shipping out?

GA: Shipping out from there.

JG: Were you a member of the union before that strike?

GA: Well, I was in the union some time ago, but as I told you, the union then didn't have any foothold those days. You pull a strike, it doesn't mean a thing. They wouldn't recognize you at all. Where, now, it's the main thing, now. It's the union.

JG: When they had that strike in 1934, how did that affect what you were doing? How long were you tied up?

GA: Well, we were still shipping. The conditions were still the old conditions, 1934. That's when they opened the strike. That's when they started the striking was 1934, but the conditions, the improvement of the conditions didn't start until around 1935. The wages start going up. The ships' conditions was getting in better shape than it was before.

JG: That was the result of the strike?

GA: '34 strike?

JG: Yeah, the '34 strike brought these changes.

GA: Yeah, yeah. The '34 strike, yeah.

JG: Now, when the strike was actually going on, how did you take part in it? Did you picket?

GA: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. It's rough sometimes when you run into, oh, strikebreakers. You have to get down there and, what you call it, mob them. Or get them off the job and then there's a big riot goes on. Oh, lot of them that I took place at. It was not so easy. Yeah, but when you start from the hall, you got a lot of fight, but when you get down there people with clubs, everything running around the place. Oh, gee.

JG: Now those were the strikebreakers that had the clubs?

GA: We had clubs, too.

JG: You had clubs?

GA: Oh, yeah.

(Laughter)

JG: You got in some pretty violent fighting.

GA: Oh, yeah.

JG: Did you get hurt in any of them?
GA: No, no, no. Well, I make sure that I not going to get hit by any of those clubs. Heck no.

(Laughter)

GA: Lot of my friends got hit, but I never got hit. No, no, I'm too smart for that. I might be a stupid guy, but I'm not going to let no club hit me on the head.

JG: How long did that strike last?

GA: I don't know, about seven, eight months, I guess.

JG: How did you live during that time?

GA: Easy picking. Easy picking. That was just about the Depression isn't it? Yeah, the Depression was just about getting out, I guess. So the government was helping us, giving us food commodity. They was giving us so much food that I didn't want any more.

(Laughter)

GA: Oh, gee, man, the food. There was a lot of food distributed around by the government. But, because those days we on the picket line, they used to have places where they issued food commodities for the welfare people, I guess, so we was allowed to go there and get our pot.

JG: What do you mean, your pot?

GA: Well, they had a gunny sack full of all kinds of stuff in there; cheese and everything. I can't remember. I know cheese. I know. (Laughs)

JG: You didn't want the cheese?

GA: Got cheese in there, got eggs in there, bread and everything. Gunny sack about that high. The guy used to ask me, "How many?" (Laughs) They don't give a damn, you can say, "I want three." They give you three bags. "What you going to do with it?" Oh, gee, so much food. So much food during the Depression. But sometime, oh, many, how come there so much food when supposed to be a Depression?

JG: What about your rent when you were on strike? How did you pay that?

GA: Rent was pretty hard. Yeah, was pretty hard. We had to scrape, scrape. But those days our rooms wasn't so high. You could get rooms for half a dollar. Half a dollar a night. But you can rent a house for $18, see, but you get about three or four of you get together, then you can rent a place pretty cheap, $18, so that wasn't too bad.

JG: Talking about food, when you first went on the Matson did you miss your Hawaiian food?

GA: I never did miss Hawaiian food. Never.
JG: Let's back up even further. When you were a kid did your family eat what's considered typically Hawaiian food?

GA: I guess so. Yeah.

JG: Poi, lot of fish...

GA: Poi, fish, that's right.

JG. And when you were on the ships down in Hilo, what kind of food were they serving?

GA: Hate to mention. It was bad. Bad. Was really bad. Was just poi and stew.

JG: And when you were Inter-Island?

GA: Yeah. When I went Inter-Island. And then when mealtime there was no regulation at all, You just go there and it's first come and first serve. It's your choice. If you can take it all, that's up to you, because they ain't going to look for somebody else. If you get there first, you can eat it all yourself. You take it. It's just too bad.

JG: When you got on Matson, was there any kind of Hawaiian food at all on the Lurline?

GA: Yeah, they had poi.

JG: So you weren't cut off from it immediately?

GA: Nah, I didn't keep up for it. It doesn't bother me. I think today, we hardly eat poi at my house. Only sometimes when she (wife) say, "We going have poi?" Oh, I go down buy a dollar's worth. That's enough.

JG: But you didn't miss it at all?

GA: No, I never miss any Hawaiian food. No, I was brought up on Hawaiian food. When I was baby, that's all I live on, Hawaiian food. But when I went to the Mainland, I didn't miss it. No. I didn't miss the islands, either.

JG: You didn't feel anything at all that you missed?

GA: I didn't miss nobody. I didn't miss (Laughs) nobody but—oh, I used to think about my parents, but I didn't miss the food.

JG: Once you went away on the Lurline, how long was it before you came back?

GA: Oh, let's see, no, I didn't come back on the Lurline.

JG: No, I mean, when did you come back?
GA: Oh, you mean this last time?
JG: No, no. How long before you came back to the islands, anyway, after you...
GA: Oh, I don't know. 1940, 1941.
JG: So you left about 1918 and you didn't come back till 1941?
GA: Yeah, 1918. I didn't get back here till 1941.
JG: So that was 22, 23 years.
GA: Yeah.
JG: When you left here, you went on the Lurline, then you got the Lubeck...
GA: Yeah.
JG: ...and then you went to New York. Did you ship out of New York for a while?
GA: Yeah, ship out from New York.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO.

JG: It was 1941 before you came back?
GA: No, I left here in 1917.
JG: So you were only 16 when you shipped out?
GA: Yeah, 1917, I was 17 already.
JG: So it must have been 1918?
GA: No, my birthday's July. I left here after July. I was 17 already.
JG: And that is when you shipped to the Mainland?
GA: Yeah, yeah.
JG: You shipped out of New York for awhile, and you went to Hamburg?
GA: Yeah, Hamburg.
JG: As you traveled around the world, did people know that you were different looking or something like that and ask you where you came from ever?
GA: Yes, I had trouble with that, but...
JG: You had trouble with it?
GA: Yeah, nobody took me for Hawaiian. That's one thing. Nobody took me for Hawaiian. What I used to pass for Turkey (Turkish), Mexican,
Indian, Puerto Rican and sometimes they used to take me for Japanese. Yeah, but not one ever took me for Hawaiian.

JG: Did you ever meet Hawaiians when you were traveling?

GA: Yes, I met a group of Hawaiians.

JG: How did you react? Were they surprised to meet you?

GA: Somehow, somehow, yes, they were, but I already had put some years already in the Mainland, so wasn't too strange for me when I met them. Only thing they were surprised because I wasn't crazy for Hawaiian food. And they used to have Hawaiian food that they had prepared themselves.

JG: Where was this?

GA: Place called Stockton. Stockton. You know where it is?

JG: Yeah, California.

GA: Yeah, Stockton, yeah.

JG: What kind of Hawaiian foods were they preparing?

GA: Anything you want.

JG: Poi?

GA: Poi.

JG: Laulau?

GA: Laulau.

JG: Where did they get the makings?

GA: Right there.

JG: They grew it themselves?

GA: In the country?

GA: Well, Stockton, I guess you call Stockton the country. It's a country town, anyhow.

JG: How did you feel about them? Did they make you feel like kind of homesick or something?

GA: Well, I enjoy their company, but they don't make me feel like I'm home. No, I enjoy their company, though, but they don't reminds me of home.

JG: You never did feel homesick?
GA: No. No.

JG: What kind of things did these people do up on the Mainland? These Hawaiians in Stockton?

GA: The ones that I met up there, they work on the farm. Most of them work on the farm, I guess, for the---are you well acquainted with Stockton?

JG: Not really. I know where it is; I've been there.

GA: You ever heard of that Delta?

JG: No, I don't think so.

GA: Well, the Delta (Agricultural Company), they own most of the farming. So they work for the Delta. As maintenance. They have an ark. They travel all over the river. About 40 of them on this ark. I work on that ark with them.

JG: That's fancy. This was what a flatboat?

GA: Right. Like Noah's ark. You ever seen Noah's ark?

JG: Yeah.

GA: Well, something like that. Yeah.

JG: Do you remember what river this was?

GA: The San Joaquin River.

JG: And what did they do, just go from one end...

GA: Yeah, well, this Delta, they own all the islands in there. And that's all they (Delta) do. Farming, mostly it's potato. And onion. These people, these Hawaiians on this ark, they do all the maintenance work. They go out, clean the irrigation ditches, levees, whatever they tell 'em to do. The way this ark travel, when they want to move 'em to certain island---I don't know how many islands they have down there, maybe ten islands--whenever they want this ark to go to certain island, the tug come out, tows this ark to this certain island. They tie up there for about a month, I guess. You just stay there and take care of this island. Do all the maintenance work, whatever they want. They want a ditch cut through here, you go and dig that ditch. You want to dig a levee, you go, and that's all these Hawaiian does. They have Hawaiian food on this, that's all they have on this ark. They call it "Noah's Ark." (laughs)

JG: What about raw fish?

GA: Raw fish, the same thing. They catch 'em right from the river. Catfish.

JG: Who was the cook that prepared this?

GA: Hawaiian fellow.
JG: One guy all the time?

GA: Let's see. No, I guess when he goes out on a spree---sometime when we get paid, when they go out on a spree, they don't come back for about week.

(Laughter)

GA: And you know those days, Stockton was a red-light town. You know? Oh, man, when they go out, gee, they forget to come back. But, I tell you, I ate Hawaiian food on that ark. Better Hawaiian food than I ate back here, I'm telling.

JG: How did you meet those Hawaiians?

GA: Well, I was working on the American Hawaiian, the American, so I got off in San Francisco. So I met some of the guys, they already on the beach. They say, "Eh, you want to go with us?" "Where to?" "Oh, we're gonna take the..." what the heck's the name of this ship anyhow? They had a name for this, too, the ferryboat that run between Stockton and San Francisco. "We're gonna take the..." I forgot, T.C. Walker, I guess. "We're gonna take the ferry." "Where you going?" "We're going to Stockton." "What going do up there?" "Well, don't know, but there's some Hawaiians up there. We probably can land up a job."

JG: Now these were Hawaiians that...

GA: Yeah, I'm talking to. There's about six of them. They're the ones told me about it. I don't know anything about Stockton. I'm just a new timer. So, I say, "Okay. Let's go." Gee, when I got down there, I met some of these Hawaiians. Boy, you talk about me 77. They were 77, but they had beard down to here.

(Laughter)

GA: You know, I'm talking about me 77. I'm 77, but those guys was 77 and had beard. Shoo.

JG: That's that hard Mainland life.


JG: What year was this?

GA: That was the year, I think was 1927. That was the year that Lindberg took off, because we were right around the corner when they said that. I heard them talking about Lindberg, he landed in France. I think was 1927. And "How's it? How long you been here?" "Oh, heck, I been here since 1913." 1913 they went Stockton.

JG: To work?
GA: No, same as I; went on a ship and finally landed in Stockton. They don't want to move from there, because they got a home. That Noah's Ark was their home. See?

JG: Did they actually live on that ark?

GA: Oh, yeah. I worked on that ark. I live on there.

JG: You had quarters?

GA: No, we had dormitories. We all had our bunks.

JG: About how many worked on that ark?

GA: About 40.

JG: Were there any women on there?

GA: No way, man. That was like a nightclub on payday, was like a nightclub. You talked about women, oh, boy, everything. Payday, oh, the foreman goes in town, he brings aboard. We don't have to go town, oh no, no. In those days, there was no liquor, oh, but liquor was flowing like today. They had all kinds of liquor. They call it Jackass. You know what's Jackass.

JG: No.

GA: Never heard Jackass? That's corn whiskey. They had wine. Oh, I never drank so much wine. Those days, those days was good wine, not the kind of wine you drinking today. That was all home made. Home made wine. You take one glass, ooh, boy, you feel so good. So good. Oh, boy. Especially when they bring all this bunch of women on.

(Laughter)

JG: Good times.

GA: But I tell you one thing, that they used to serve better Hawaiian food on that ark then I seen when I go to these luaus.

JG: Was that the food that they served most often?

GA: They were all Hawaiians. But if you want American food, there's American food.

JG: But everyday they served Hawaiian food?

GA: Yeah. But we don't have real poi.

JG: What did you have?

GA: Oh, made out of flour. Not the real poi.

JG: Not taro?
GA: No, no, is the flour. You know I had a hard time to swallow that thing. But when I got used to it, it taste like hotcakes. Yeah.

JG: What about families. Did these Hawaiians have a family any...

GA: Lot of them have family.

JG: Were they Hawaiians, or haole?

GA: The wife?

JG: Yeah.

GA: Yeah, haoles, Indian, Mexican. Yeah. I know lots of them had haoles, though. Yeah, they live good.

JG: Did they have Hawaiian music?

GA: There was more Hawaiian music there, real ones, than the one I seen over here. Real music. Real Hawaiian music. Something like I love. You know?

JG: Now if they had all this Hawaiian food and all this Hawaiian music, did they want to come back to Hawaii?

GA: No. No, you couldn't get them guys to come back here.

JG: What about speaking Hawaiian? Did any of them speak Hawaiian?

GA: Yes, yeah.

JG: Did they speak Hawaiian to each other?

GA: Yeah.

JG: Very often?

GA: Well, sometime when there's young fellows around there, they don't speak Hawaiian, because probably these young whippersnappers cannot understand, so they speak a little broken Hawaiian.

JG: But most of the time, they spoke Hawaiian?

GA: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. They was the old timer. They still know their Hawaiian, though. They still know their Hawaiian.

END OF INTERVIEW.
JG: With George Ai at his home in Punchbowl. 1977. The first question I wanted to ask, how many brothers and sisters did you have?

GA: Gee, you know.

JG: You had three brothers and a sister, or was it the other way around?

GA: What did I tell you at the beginning?

JG: Three brothers and a sister.

GA: Shee, I was going to tell you I had six brothers and six sisters. (Laughter)

JG: Rascal. Could you describe the taro patch one more time?

GA: The taro patch.

JG: It was at King and Gulick Streets, right? How large was it?

GA: Did I say 100 around? It could be 100 by 100, or 75 by 75.

JG: Were there other taro patches?

GA: You know, I wasn't too bright those days. I never went to school.

JG: Oh, you're bright. Were there any other taro patches in that area?

GA: No, I don't think so. Indeed there were, but I don't remember.

JG: Were there other garden patches?

GA: No.

JG: What about small taro patches?
GA: There were lots, but not around there, further down.

JG: Was this a commercial **taro** patch?

GA: Yeah.

JG: You sold to the **poi** factory?

GA: Yeah.

JG: Were there many homes in that area?

GA: There were homes, but scattered. Not too close together.

JG: Semi-farm area.

GA: Yeah.

JG: (Refers to information on previous tape) Now, the ark. How long was the ark? Approximately, how big?

GA: Let's see, how long was Noah's ark?

JG: I don't know. I know they say something about one being 40 cubits, but I don't know what that is.

GA: Let's see, what did I say? Thirty this way?

JG: No, no, you said something bigger than that.

GA: I think about 30 this way and about 45 the other way. Did I say that? I've forgot now. Anyhow, wasn't too large. But, I think that's the best bet; 30 this way and 45 or 50 the other way or so. Not very large.

JG: You said that there were 34 or 35 people working on it.

GA: Thirty-five.

JG: And all of them Hawaiians, but one.

GA: But one. He was a Mexican.

JG: And you were telling me that you gambled for recreation? What kind of gambling went on on that?

GA: I don't know. Let's see, we had strip poker, five-card draw, seven-card (draw), blackjack and dice.

JG: If you were playing strip poker and they were all guys, that was kind of dull, wasn't it?

GA: It was a sight. (Laughter)

JG: And who was organizing the games?
GA: The foreman. He was in charge the whole thing in the line of gambling. Recreation, anyway.

JG: Was he acting as the house? Did he get a house commission (percentage of winnings)?

GA: Yes.

JG: What other kinds of recreation did they have?

GA: Other kind of recreation. Well, we had women that plays, that's one of 'em.

JG: The foreman brought 'em out?

GA: That's right.

JG: He got a commission?

GA: (Nods yes). And then you take your pick. Probably he brings up about three or four, not many, but with 35 people the four was pretty busy. Or five, whatever it is. So, that's some of the recreation.

JG: What else?

GA: Swimming.

JG: What about booze?

GA: Booze? There were plenty of booze.

JG: What year was this?

GA: Oh, now, the year. The year, let's see. About 1926, I guess.

JG: Was Prohibition still on then?

GA: Oh, yeah.

JG: Where did the booze come from?

GA: From bootleggers.

JG: How did they bring it out? In bottles?

GA: They smuggled it. Yeah, in bottles.

JG: How did they smuggle it?

GA: Well, underneath the water. They have the submarines over there, anyway, submarines where they keep 'em under the water and keep away from the prohibition officer until they leave.

JG: You mean one of these little submarine deals?

GA: No, no, they just hide 'em any old place, under the water or any old place, because they're in the river all the time. Till they
scram and then they drag them up.

JG: Did they bring 'em out in bottles?

GA: In jugs.

JG: And what kind of booze was it?

GA: Jackass, corn whiskey.

JG: Do you know where it was being made?

GA: Oh, yeah, being made right there somewhere around Brentwood (California). Town called Brentwood, not too far from where we are. I guess about 50 miles.

JG: And how often would they bring the booze up to you?

GA: Oh, any time we want some. Any time we pay for it. The people on the ark do a lot of drinking and so did I.

JG: Every day, or weekends?

GA: No, weekends. Sometimes during the week. People do a lot of drinking, though. That whiskey wasn't too high. Wine bottle was $2.00. A gallon would be about $5.00. Full gallon. And I would drink a whole gallon, those days. I liked it. But I never go crazy like some these people around here, though.

JG: What about Hawaiian music? Did they on their off hours sing any...

GA: Yeah. There was musicians on there, too. Oh, yeah, we had musicians on there that would make that, what you call that around here? The Ohana, what you call it? Sick, yeah.

JG: Were they singing older Hawaiian songs?

GA: All the old Hawaiian songs, the songs that Aila sings.

JG: Songs from the early 1900's.

GA: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. I asked Aila one day for a song he didn't know. Those people were singing 'em. You know? "Maunakea." See, I ask him, but he sang me the other "Maunakea," which isn't the one.

JG: You mean there are two versions of that?

GA: There's two.

JG: Do you know the words?

GA: Yeah. Oh, yeah.
JG: Could you write them down for me?

GA: I could write a few words. I don't know the whole song.

JG: Well, as much as you remember. I'd appreciate having them. What else in the way of Hawaiian songs that you remember...

GA: I used to enjoy their singing, because they had harmony, old time way of singing. They didn't have this kind of funny voice that you hear nowadays, a great big man singing like a woman.

JG: No falsetto.

GA: No, no, no.

JG: Do you remember when falsetto...

GA: Oh, they started a long time ago. They were probably before my time, too, but none of them on the ark used to sing the falsetto way of singing.

JG: What was the age range of those people on the ark?

GA: At that time I was about, let's see, 26, 27. When it's 1927, I'm 27 years old. When it's 1926, I'm 26. You see I cannot forget, 'cause whatever the year is, that's how old I am.

JG: Were there younger people than you on the ark?

GA: Let's see. I think I was the youngest.

JG: And you were telling me the last time I talked with you that there was a man with a long white beard on there. So, I guess he'd be the oldest.

GA: Yeah. But I think I was the youngest. Let's see.

JG: Why did those people come from Hawaii to the Mainland? Do you know?

GA: They were whalers at one time.

JG: Oh, most of them were sailing men?

GA: Yeah, then they got too old and they thought they'd get on land, stay on the land. It's a lot more solid than rocking on the sea. And they were pretty old. Some of these fellows that I met up there, they were as old as--I was 26, some of them were 78. See, I'm 77 today. They were 78. And I learned plenty from them. Plenty from them, yeah.

JG: You mean about Hawaii?

GA: Anything. Anything. Doing things in Hawaiian, talking Hawaiian. Everything that is in the Hawaiian way. I learned from them. They taught me a lot of things that was very nice for me.
JG: Like what?

GA: To be good. Not to steal. Not to beat your wife up. Not to run away with another woman when you get a wife at home. Unless she takes off. I say, okay. See? All the good things.

JG: Most of them members of a church, or were they just good because...

GA: I don't think they ever sit in a church. I don't think they ever see the bell ring in a church. I don't think so. But, they were religious, though. They had their own religion. They were religious.

JG: After you left the ark, you said you went to Alaska.

GA: Oh, well, I went to Alaska before. 1926 was the first time.

JG: Was that on a ship?


JG: Sailing ship?

GA: Yeah. Windjammer.

JG: What was the name of that ship?

GA: Star of Holland. I think it was the Star of Holland. I'm not quite sure.

JG: Now who would that belong to?

GA: To the Alaska Packers.

JG: Was that hauling salmon, or what?

GA: Everything. You mean catching the salmon from the river?

JG: No, what were they hauling? What was the cargo?

GA: Salmon.

JG: Canned salmon?

GA: It's people and salmon.

JG: How many passengers were you carrying on that thing?

GA: Oh, heck there were lots. I'd say, oh, about, maybe 600.

JG: About 600?

GA: Yeah, because they were only taken for one cannery.
JG: That was a major passenger ship, then?

GA: No, it's a schooner.

JG: Did you say it carried 600 people?

GA: You even been on a passenger ship? And then they got what they call steerage?

JG: Yeah.

GA: Something like that. They're down under there like a bunch of cattle.

JG: In open dormitories?

GA: Open, you just find your own bunk. That's the trouble with the union nowadays. Now you don't travel like that. Now, you have your quarters. You have your bunk.

JG: So they hauled salmon and passengers?

GA: Well, when we go up, we got nothing. All they have is food and people. On the way back, well, they've got a load of salmon.

JG: Were you still a messman, then?

GA: No, no. I didn't work on the ship at all. I just went as a crew for the cannery. They hired me down below, down in Pacific and Broadway. You know where that is?

JG: Yeah.

GA: Skid row.

JG: Did they just come around...

GA: No, no, you see a sign. "You want to go to Alaska? Sign up." And then you can go there and bunk in there until they are ready to go. They take you in for about three months before they leave, because they want the men. Look for three months time, you got all that time to lay around. Nobody around.

JG: And they were feeding you?

GA: Feeding you. That's right. You got to find your way around in those days. Sometime when you way up the hills in like Idaho Falls, hey, time to get back there. (Laughs) Have to hurry to get the freighter coming down.

JG: Quite a bit of adventure then.

GA: Oh, I love it. I love it, I tell you. You know everytime when I hear a train go, "Whoooo, Whoooo," Oh, boy.
JG: There goes your heart.

GA: I tell you. I never was homesick. I never was homesick for the islands.

JG: Never were?

GA: No.

JG: Even all these Hawaiian people...

GA: No, they don't care about coming back. You know the ones that wants to come back? That just went up there for couple of weeks ago. Yeah. "Oh, I miss my poi."

(Laughter)

JG: When you went to Alaska, did you say there were five other guys that went with you? Five other Hawaiians?

GA: Yeah.

JG: And how long did you stay up in Alaska?

GA: About three months, I guess.

JG: That was during the summer?

GA: Gee, I forgot the month, now. Let's see. May, June, July. I guess so. We'd leave San Francisco around May. June. July. Return in August. 'Course I know we cannot stay there after October or few days before October, I guess, because the river gets frozen and then you never get out of there.

JG: When you came back from Alaska that time, what did you do then?

GA: You mean, in 1927?

JG: Yes.

GA: Oh, heck, I had lots to do. Roaming, roaming the country.

JG: That's when you went hobo-ing?

GA: Hobo-ing, yeah. I still had a lot of dough, yet. When I came back from Alaska, I still had a lot of dough, so I don't have to go hobo-ing.

JG: Did they pay you off in one lump sum?

GA: Yeah.

JG: How long before you had to start looking for work, then?

GA: Oh, I always was looking for work. Always looking for work. And even though if I had the money in my pocket, and if I think this is a easy pickin' I'm gonna take it till whenever I go traveling...
and I see a sign. Maybe "Fruit Pickers Wanted." Peach pickers or apricot pickers. What you call? What's this "asperagrass?"

JG: Asparagus?


JG: Cutters.

GA: Cutters? 'Cause you have to get down like that and get 'em from the ground. Oh, if you haven't got a strong back, you better quit the job.

JG: What kind of pay were they paying for that kind of work at that time?

GA: That's contract.

JG: What do you mean, contract?

GA: You got to finish the job in order to get paid. The job takes about three months. See, then they tell you we don't get paid till the job is over. How long it takes? Three months. Well, maybe four months. How much by the time when the job gets through? How much we gonna get? How much each person gonna get? Oh, probably gonna get, oh, $300. OH, that sounds good, $300.

JG: Plus board?

GA: Let's see. Yeah, yeah. Plus board, right. And there's other kinds of jobs. There was a fellow up there, I guess he went up there same time I did, maybe before me. Anyhow, right in this house I told him when I was in the Mainland I could name every fruit that grows in the Mainland. I think I pick 'em. He said, "Me, too." Remember. So I said, "How do you pick cantaloupes?" "Well, you just pick 'em." Oh no.

JG: How do you pick 'em?

GA: Maybe he helped pick a few from the backyard, but not to go pick with a big outfit. Oh, no.

JG: How do you pick 'em?

GA: You have to pick 'em by the slips.

JG: What do you mean by the slips?

GA: Full, three-quarter, half, quarter and all.

JG: You mean the box?

GA: No, the cantaloupe. When they tell you they want full slip, you just pick full slip. You see?

JG: I don't understand. What's a slip?

GA: Slip is the grade.

JG: Is that the size?

GA: Grade. Not the size, not the size.
JG: Quality?

GA: Quality, yeah. It's the quality. Well, you take full slip, it's full grown. It's ripe. It's ripe, that's full slip. Three-quarter, well, from San Diego, from Stockton, probably you can send it to Chicago. It would go. Then half, it goes all the way back East. See, that's the way the grade goes. Three-quarter, whatever you call 'em. So he said he picked 'em. I said, "How you pick 'em." "Well, you just pick 'em." No. "You know how you pick 'em? I'm gonna show you. So maybe when you go back again to the mainland"—this is the fruit, this is the stem. You just put your thumb there. You just go like that. She comes off, that's first grade.

JG: That's first grade.

GA: First grade, number one. But when you got to put a little force, three-quarter.

JG: Oh, I see, you do it by touch then.

GA: Yeah, by touch. See, this is the one. But you don't pick 'em. When they tell you, anybody tell you, "Oh just pick 'em like watermelons, just like any old thing," no. That's one fruit there's a different way of picking. All right, picking orange. How you pick orange?

JG: Don't know.

GA: You cannot go on the tree and pull 'em. Cannot. You have to take your snip and cut 'em.

JG: Oh, you cut them.

GA: You have to cut it. If you don't cut it, you get fired. You get paid by the box, see, probably twenty cents, thirty cents a box. So by pulling them, you get your box filled in no time. But you spoil the orange.

JG: How many boxes a day could you pick?

GA: Oh, I pick about, let's see, about 70, I guess.

JG: Oh, that's a lot.

GA: Yeah, 70 boxes.

JG: That's $14 a day, huh?

GA: Fourteen dollars, 70 boxes. The worst picking I did was cotton.

JG: Where did you pick cotton?

JG: Where's that?

GA: Oh, that's way down in the Imperial Valley. Calpatchia. You know where Calpatchia is?

JG: No, but I know where the Imperial Valley is.

GA: Oh, yeah, so let's see, we were getting paid, was that three cents or two and a half cents or two cents, well anyhow, I picked about 20 pounds, all day, from six a.m. to six p.m. I never can get used to that thing. Never can get used to it.

JG: That sounds like awfully hard work.

GA: Yeah. I never can get used to it. Yeah, and that was in 1925. I was just roaming, just want to see the country, what it looks like. But when we got down there, "Say, you folks pick cotton before?" "Oh, yeah, yeah," I said. (Laughs) These Hawaiians say, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." "You know how to pick cotton?" But none of us pick cotton before.

JG: How many of you were there together at that time?

GA: Let's see. Five, I guess.

JG: Five Hawaiians.

GA: Let's see, myself, one, two, three, four, five, six. Six. One Tahitian.

JG: Where did you meet these guys?

GA: The Tahitian? In San Francisco.

JG: And what about the Hawaiians? Where did you meet them?

GA: Oh, they all from the ship.

JG: They were guys you knew already.

GA: Yeah, they got tired of the ship, just like I did. They said, "Let's get around the country, do something." Those days there was no union. Their wages was cheap and everything.

JG: When you were roaming around looking the country over, how many states did you cover? Which states did you cover?

GA: I don't know how many states, but I went to almost all the states, I guess. I guess so, like I was in Alaska. When did Alaska came statehood? 1949? 1949 or 1950?

JG: I think it must have been 1950.

GA: 1950, well I was up there before it became a state.
JG: When you were looking the nation over, the country over, what areas did you find Hawaiian communities? Or numbers of Hawaiians?

GA: You know, when I was traveling, I went through Salt Lake. They told me there were lot of Hawaiians, but I didn't get to see 'em, because they were too far out of Salt Lake. They had a Hawaiian, what do you call it? A community up there. Lots of Hawaiians. But I didn't get that far. I didn't get to see 'em. I wanted to get there, but where we were, where the train stop, where Salt Lake is, I bet it was about, maybe 200 miles. It was too far. It was up in the hills someplace. So, I didn't get out there. But that would have been the most Hawaiians if I ever got there. They told me that Hawaiian families was establish out there, probably about, oh, ten families. So I didn't get to see 'em up there.

JG: What other communities did you meet Hawaiians in?

GA: That's all I see. Around the seacoast, like Baltimore, well, there's a couple there.

JG: How did you meet the Hawaiians in Baltimore?

GA: They were on a ship, they got off and settled there. They didn't go back on the ship any more.

JG: But how did you meet them?

GA: Well, I met them on the ship, when they were still working on the ship.

JG: Oh, I see, and then you just called on them.

GA: Yeah, yeah. New York, the same thing. People that used to work on the ships and then they got off, they got enough of sea life they got off. And Boston, same thing. And Brockford, Maine, lot of them, they got tired, but they left the ship before the union. But anyway, they stayed till the union. They were pretty old. They were too old for it, just like I am. Be too old.

JG: But you knew several Hawaiian communities on the West Coast?

GA: Now, those days, Hawaiians were scattered. Like you take Oakland, probably Oakland, but they were scattered. There were a lot of Hawaiians in Oakland, but I didn't get to see...But I'm not afield, I didn't get to see all. But you take today, they have a what you call it? A society that they all belongs to this society and they all meet.

JG: How many years did you do this wandering around the country just looking it over?

GA: Everytime I got a chance up there, whenever, and no matter what it is, if I make up my mind to go here, I'm gonna go.

JG: Did you go back on the ships after 1927?

GA: Yeah, the same conditions.
JG: When did you go back on the ships?
GA: 1927, 1928, 1930, 1932, then I didn't go back till the strike.
JG: In 1934 when you went back to the ships, where did you ship out of?
GA: San Pedro.
JG: On what lines was that?
GA: The Hammet Line.
JG: Was that an American line?
GA: Yeah.
JG: And where were you running then?
GA: Up to Vancouver.
JG: And what was your job at that time?
GA: Seaman.
JG: Do you remember what your union dues were at that time?
GA: The union dues at that time, gee. I can't think of it now. Dues were about $3.00, I guess.
JG: A month, a year, what?
GA: A month.
JG: So you were paying about $36 year dues. Did you stay pretty much on the ship for a while after the strike?
GA: Yeah, I stayed and then, 1940 I made up my mind to go to Alaska again. To come down here. When I got here, that's when I couldn't go back again.
JG: Why did you decide to come down here?
GA: Vacation.
JG: Had you been home since you left in 1917?
GA: No.
JG: Let's go back to this last trip to Alaska. Were you on a ship up there, or were you working up there?
GA: Working.
JG: In the cannery?
GA: Yeah.
JG: Had you seen a lot of changes since you'd been there the last time?
GA: I guess so, yeah. There were a lot of changes. Yeah.
JG: And when you came down here in 1940, when did you get down here?
GA: When the hell did I come? I came here October, September, October, November. When did they have the Pearl Harbor?
JG: Pearl Harbor was in December.
GA: December the what?
JG: The 7th, 1941, yeah.
GA: December 1941? Well, I came down here in 1941, then. Oh, 1941.
JG: In the summer time?
GA: No, I was here about two months before they attacked Pearl Harbor.
JG: Were you visiting your family, or friends?
GA: Yeah.
JG: Do you remember the attack on Pearl Harbor?
GA: Oh, yeah.
JG: Where were you then?
GA: I was home. I was working at Ford Island, although I wasn't on the job. I was home. When they attack.
JG: When you came home. you came on vacation, but you got a job?
GA: Let's see how it was. No, no. I got a job. That's right, I got a job. Then they wouldn't let me go back. The job was frozen.
JG: How long did you intend to stay when you came down?
GA: Three months.
JG: So you were just looking for temporary work?
GA: Yeah.
JG: What kind of job did you have out there?
GA: Mechanic in the---construction people that was doing construction work on the Ford Island. I was working for them in the garage.
JG: Where were you living the day that Pearl Harbor happened?
GA: I was living in Kalihi.
JG: Did you see the attack?
GA: Well, I seen the planes flying, and heard a lot of racket going, but I never thought there was something like war going.

JG: Had you heard any talk about the possibility of war here?

GA: No.

JG: What about on the Mainland before you came back here?

GA: Yeah, I heard.

JG: On the Mainland they were talking about it?

GA: Yeah, they were talking about it. I heard rumors on the Mainland that there was going to be a war between the Japs and the United States. Yeah, I heard rumors.

JG: How did you feel when you knew we were at war?

GA: How did I feel?

JG: Yeah, what were your thoughts? You know, when they...

GA: I didn't get excited. No, nothing to get excited about. I wasn't excited, only that I couldn't go back, which I wanted to go back.

JG: Why did you want to go back?

GA: You see, I never told you half of my story yet. I was married.

JG: So you had family at that time on the Mainland.

GA: Yeah, I was married. That's why I was planning to go back. And then, I had my things stored away. And that's the reason I wanted to go back. That's the only reason I wanted to go back. And then this fellow that I knew, when the Second World War broke out, and a lot of this defense work start going on, this friend of mine, he got promoted where he was working in the shipyard. I used to know him. So he wrote me a letter that if I should go back, he'd give me any job I want.

JG: This was in Oakland?

GA: Yeah, in Oakland. That's the reason I wanted to go back also. But I couldn't.

JG: When you came back before the War started, when you first came back, what did you notice most about Hawaii?

GA: Little change. There was change.

JG: What did you feel about what you saw?

GA: Oh, I didn't get excited.
JG: But what kind of feelings did you have about it? How did you come back, by plane or by ship?

GA: Ship.

JG: What did you think about the waterfront, about Kalihi where you had lived, about the town itself?

GA: Yeah, there were a lot of change, a lot of change, but it didn't get me excited. No, because my mind was still for the Mainland. That's all I had, my mind for the Mainland. I didn't care what they do out here. It didn't bother me.

JG: What about the people? What did you think about the people? Had they changed?


JG: What about the way they lived? What did you notice most about the changes in the way people were living?

GA: Gee, I couldn't, you know why, I didn't take interest in those things about how the people were living. That didn't bother me at all. That's the reason I didn't find any difference. All my mind, all I was thinking about is to get back when I'm ready. I wanted to get back.

JG: Well, why did you decide to come down here?

GA: My wife wanted.

JG: Had she ever been here before?

GA: Yeah, she was born here.

JG: Oh, I see, she had family.

GA: Yeah. I didn't want to come. She wanted to come.

JG: What kind of sightseeing did you do when you came back? Any?

GA: Well, in fact, I didn't care to see anything around the island. I wasn't excited about anything around the island.

JG: Now during the Second World War, you got here at the time of the bombing, so you kept on working out at Ford Island. Did you work there till after the War?

GA: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

JG: How did that affect your life? Were you driving to work? Ride the bus?

GA: Boat, driving, riding the bus, and riding, going to work with people, sharing.
JG: As you look back on the War, what is your most vivid memory of what was happening here during that time?

GA: You mean, what was the most exciting?

JG: Well, what stands out the most?

GA: Well, one thing, I was in favor of Martial Law. I wanted Martial Law. I'm for it.

JG: All the time, or just under that kind of...

GA: Yeah, I don't mind if they have it today.

JG: Really?

GA: Yeah.

JG: Why?

GA: People getting really out of line, out of line, where our police cannot handle. Yeah, that's one thing that I really want during the War, Martial Law, yeah. Because I find things was all in order. You don't see much drunks on the street, you don't see people fighting so much, you don't see these rape around. I think I'm for Martial Law.

JG: You said you were living in Kalihi. Did you live there all during the War?

GA: No. No, I move over all different sections.

JG: When did you get this place up here?

GA: This one here?

JG: Yeah.

GA: When was it? About ten years ago? Yeah, ten years, about ten years ago. What was ten years ago? What is this?


JG: That was quite a while after the War.

GA: I was here when I was operated on.

JG: In the house?

GA: Yeah, in this house. The house was tumbling, was just about a shack, dilapidated and almost falling. And I have to go be operated.
JG: Well, now when the War was over in 1946 or 1947, whatever it was, what did you think about going back to the Mainland at that time?

GA: Yes, I wanted to go back to the Mainland.

JG: Why didn't you? What made you decide to stay here?

GA: There were problems. (Laughs) I'm not ashamed of my problems, they're nothing to be ashamed of. No, but I had problems, problems that don't have to fight over it, but something that have to be taken care of.

JG: So you decided to stay here, anyway. When did you make your application for Hawaiian Homestead?

GA: This here homestead, it belongs to her son. We made it for her son. We went and got it, but for her son. We don't own nothing here. We don't own nothing. We just fix the house, just stay. But the whole place belongs to her son. We too old to own any land.

JG: Oh, they won't let you own...

GA: No, no, they give it all right, as long as you're qualified. I'm qualified.

JG: You're a hundred percent.

GA: Yeah.

JG: (To wife) And how much Hawaiian are you?

GA: She's only quarter.

JG: Only quarter. Your son has to be half.

GA: So we still planning to go to the Mainland. She and I, we still planning. We plan to go.

JG: To stay or to visit?

GA: To stay.

JG: What is it about the Mainland...

GA: I like the Mainland. She likes the Mainland.

JG: What do you like about the Mainland?

GA: Clean.

JG: Physically clean?

JG: Well, it's a good thing everybody doesn't want to live here, we'd be so crowded, we'd sink.

GA: No, but I don't know whether I will have this opportunity to go back. I don't know, but I like it. In my heart. I told her many times, when everything is taken care of, I hope the day comes, we both go to the Mainland to live.

JG: Where do you like the best on the Mainland?

GA: We plan to go live in San Pedro. One horse town.

JG: You have friends there?

GA: Yeah.

JG: Do you have any relatives there?

GA: No.

JG: But that's where you'd like to live the rest of your life?

GA: Yeah. There's only about, I guess, 15,000 people live there. But from there, I can make my move. Travel, whatever, wherever I want to go. That will be my headquarters. Want to go to North Pole, that'll be my headquarters.

JG: Let's go back to getting this house. This house you got, then under her son's name~ and you moved in here about 1968?

GA: 1966? 1968?

JG: And you've done all this repair, the two of you?

GA: It's not quite fixed yet.

JG: No, I can see that you've done a lot of work here, like the ceiling. Now its all clean and painted and everything. You got a lot of plants outside.

GA: Shee, he's gonna take over when the time comes. So we plan to go. I hope I'll be in good physical health.

JG: You're waiting till you feel better physically?

GA: No, no, no. I'm not waiting. I'm waiting just for time, 'cause I still got a lot of things to take care. Not problems, things to take care. Things. Problems is all gone already. (Laughs) I took care of that already. We have no problems now, just things.

JG: It's a matter of words because things and problems, just words you apply to it. So you've been doing all of this repair work...

GA: Right.
JG: How do you feel about living in Papakolea?
GA: I have no complaints, maybe little here and there, but I think I would rather live somewhere else.
JG: What would be the reason for wanting to live someplace else?
GA: One is the neighbor's not so hot. I mean, they're a little odd, little things that keep you irritated. Not the big people, but the kids. See, you go out there, sometimes they have a party here, they goes and sits on her car. All the parking and everythings on the trunk. Ruins the pain, the paint on the car. Damage the car for good, scratches the car. Little bit of things, gets you irritated.
JG: Do you belong to the community association here?
GA: No.
JG: You don't take part in those...
GA: No.
JG: Do you belong to any clubs or groups?
GA: No, the only club I belong is the USA club.
JG: What's that?
JG: You were never in the military?
GA: (Shakes head)
JG: Did you belong to a church?
GA: I belong to all church.
JG: But it's never played a role in your life?
GA: All church, yeah, all church.
JG: Now I wanted to ask you. All these years, if you never felt homesick for Hawaii, but you've always met with Hawaiians and you've always done things with Hawaiians, how did that always come about if you didn't have a feeling for coming back or a feeling for Hawaii?
GA: No matter where I've been in the Mainland, people I associate with most is the white people, haoles. They are my friends in the Mainland, no matter where I go, they are my friends. Some of them, I don't even know them, only work for about two hours. We talk.
"Oh, you're Hawaiian?" "Yeah." "Oh, gee." Next day, "George, I like you to come to my house for dinner. My wife is gonna have a good roast." Oh, well. Here we goes to North Carolina, I don't know these people from Adam. "Where you folks staying?" "At the hotel." "Go and get your things, bring it down here." The husband tells me, "Make this your headquarter. Go wherever you like and make this home, this house, your headquarters." You talk about Hawaiian hospitality, I'd rather have the Mainland hospitality.

JG: Then you've always felt very well treated up there?

GA: Yeah.

JG: Have you ever experienced any kind of discrimination on the Mainland from being Hawaiian?

GA: So far, no, I have no complaint about discrimination.

JG: That hasn't been a problem area?

GA: Although I been down in the South during my hobo days there's a lot of...

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

JG: On the ships when you went to...

GA: No, I never had no trouble. No, I never was discriminated.

JG: On the ships that you were on, in different parts of the world, did you ever meet with groups of Hawaiians outside the United States?

GA: No, no, I only meet the ones from the ship.

JG: Now Mrs. Ai has a son. Did you ever have any children?

GA: Oh, yes.

JG: Are they here or on the Mainland?

GA: No, they're on the Mainland.

JG: How many children did you have?

GA: About three, four.

JG: That's kind of a casual attitude.

(Laughter)

GA: Oh, yeah, somebody ask me, "How many kids?" Oh, I got all kinds of kids. Some with blue eyes, some with black eyes, pink eyes, brown eyes, every kind. They're somewhere.
JG: Were you married more than once?
GA: Yeah. (Holds up six fingers)
JG: How many times were you married? Six times. This is your sixth wife?
GA: Yeah.
JG: This seems to be a good selection, though.
GA: Yeah.
JG: Took a little practice? I mean, took some practice on your part to pick a good one.
GA: Yeah, good, very good. My last wife was a Hawaiian. The other one that I came from the Mainland with was Filipino. One was Portugese.
JG: One time you said you had a Mexican wife, didn't you?
GA: Yeah, I had a Mexican wife.
JG: Haole wife?
GA: Yeah.
JG: Where did you meet this wife?
GA: This one? Over here.
JG: Oh, over here. Has she lived on the Mainland?
GA: No, but she's got three daughters on the Mainland.
JG: Would they be living near where you'd like to live?
GA: No, far away from me, where I want to go. Far away, although they would rather see me come live close by, but my mind is made up. Not because I don't want to live close to family, but that's in my mind already, what I want to do.
JG: One of things that I've noticed is that, at a meeting, that you speak Hawaiian pretty good apparently. I can't judge that well, but at least from what other people say, you speak good Hawaiian. You carry on conversations, and you put some value on Hawaiians knowing Hawaiians. How come you still have an interest in that? I notice you speak very good English. Do you know why you still value the Hawaiian language?
GA: Why I take interest in Hawaiian language? I'm Hawaiian; probably that's the reason I take interest in it. But that is, to get homesick about Hawaii, I don't have that strong of a faith, but I will fight for Hawaii, and for anything that Hawaii wants, I will go for it. Sky's the limit.
JG: I want to ask you how you feel about Hawaiian Homes land and not only the current administration of them, but going back, and how the Hawaiian Homesteads have been handled. What do you think about that? About the past and the present?

GA: The Hawaiian Homes land. It's a good thing when they started this thing, but it's not handled right.

JG: How do you think it's handled wrong?

GA: The way I feel about handling it right is because a lot of people on the land is not qualified.

JG: Now by "not qualified," why do you mean?

GA: Either they don't have enough Hawaiian, or they just put in there because favoritism. And people been waiting so long. They don't get close on the list, they still far away, and that's the reason I say it's not handled right. But I don't know about this administration, but whether this director is doing the right thing. Some say she is, some say no.

JG: Do you think that the qualifications for Hawaiian Homes land should be dropped from one-half to one-quarter? Or do you think it should stay at least at one-half?

GA: I don't mind one-half. I guess quarter is all right, but I like to see half, though, because a quarter you're gonna have a lot of quarter. You don't have enough land. Well, a quarter is all right, if it runs in the family. Like, first the leasee, (when) he drops out, your son or whatever it is, heir--there's another word, the successor--if he has a quarter, it's all right. But not to go and fill up an application and you only got quarter.

JG: Not as the first grantee.

GA: Yeah, yeah. I don't agree with that. No.

JG: Now about groups like ALOHA (Aboriginal Lands of Hawaiian Ancestry), and the Hawaiian Coalition, and those groups, what do you think of them?

GA: That is, in doing anything for the Hawaiians?

JG: Well, do you think they are doing anything for the Hawaiians? Do you think they're effective?

GA: Whatever they say is all right, but I don't think they have any power, any strength.

JG: Do you think that they should get land, or money reparations?

GA: I don't mind, if they can get it.

JG: But do you think it's just? Do you believe the Hawaiians have it coming to them, in other words?
GA: You know one time, when they say about the people losing the land, and these people come in and take the land away from them I don't know whether they go the land for nothing. They must have either made some kind of deal, or, even if they gave a bottle of wine for an acre of land, they gave something for the land. And if you're so stupid as that to give one acre of land for a bottle of wine, whose fault is it?

JG: I guess theirs. What about the way that they're going about Kahoolawe? What do you think about Kahoolawe?

GA: No, I still believe the military owns that land, that island. I believe the military owns that. These people are just making a mess. They're starting something that's not worth it. No. These people goes out there and all they do, now what they going to do with the land? What they going do with it? They got to have the State to come in.

JG: Do you think there should be efforts made to teach the Hawaiian language, teach Hawaiian history in schools?

GA: It's good, but are there any that will take interest in it?

JG: There's quite a few now.

GA: Pretty hard. Pretty hard. They don't take interest at all. Maybe handful might. Yeah, it's a good thing, but when that thing has come over they will try to attend, or try to make an effort to learn or take part. So, I'm for the Hawaiians, yeah. But how come I don't get homesick and all this kind of things, no. Hawaiian food doesn't bother me, the land doesn't bother me. As long as I have my health, I don't mind to live forever. I told this to everybody, I don't mind to live forever, just so I don't get sick. I don't mind getting old, it don't bother me, but when you get pains here and pains there, that's the thing that bothers me.

JG: You must spend quite a bit of time on the house working. What else do you do with your time?

GA: I'm always occupied, always busy. Always something to do. If it isn't outside, it's inside. If it isn't inside, it's outside. If it ain't outside, it's on the roof. If it isn't on the roof, it's in the basement. So I'm always doing something. But to build a house, I got to have her. I cannot build 'em with just myself. I cannot. No, I got to have her. I cannot come down any old time I want. But this here Cadillac (refers to wheel chair) sure did help me a lot. Up there with that hot sun up there, although I got to have my beer up there. The more beer I drink, the better I can work. That's right, although this perspiration just run all over my body, but I can work better.

JG: And you actually climb up on the roof and repair?

GA: I got another room I got to tear down. You come over when I'm just about ready to bring it down. Oh, yeah. I'll show you. I'll bring
it down. You come and watch and you'll see she and I, she and I on the roof. Oh, yeah. You never see a 77 year old man up on the roof.

JG: Not very often.

END OF INTERVIEW.