NELSON CHUN, 78, taro, lotus and water chestnut farmer

Nelson Ah Hoy Chun was born June 18, 1900, in Waipio Valley, the second of 10 children. His father Hin Chun (aka Ahina) emigrated from China in approximately 1895. After two years at Paauilo Plantation Ahina returned to China and then brought Kock See, his wife, to Hawaii. They later moved to Waipio and began raising rice.

Nelson attended Waipio School (1st to 6th grade) and Kukuhihaele School (7th to 8th grade). After school and on weekends, Nelson helped keep the rice birds away from his father's fields. In 1922 he went to the Mainland to study mechanics and carpentry. A year later Nelson returned to Waipio and when his father died Nelson took over the rice fields. In 1924 he married Ah Moi Chong. The 1928 harvest was the last rice crop in Waipio. Since then, Nelson has raised taro in spite of the 1946 tidal wave which wiped out his home and crops.

In the 1950's Mr. and Mrs. Chun and their four children moved out of Waipio into a house Nelson built in Honokaa. Nelson now drives daily from Honokaa into Waipio to tend his taro, lotus and water chestnuts.

Nelson's other skills include saddle-making and the martial art of aikido, in which he has a black belt. He is also an active member of the Baptist Church.
VL: This is an interview with Mr. Nelson Chun. Today is March 11, 1978. We're at his home in Honokaa, Big Island. I'd like to start and ask you if you know why your father came to Hawaii.

NC: He came as an immigrant. He worked in the plantation, Paauilo Plantation.

VL: What was he doing in China before that?

NC: I really don't know. Must be he rice farmer. You know they get just small portion. In China hard to own plenty land, you know. You had to be rich to own. That's why lately, the Communists took over and divide up the rich people's land.

VL: Do you know why he came to Waipio after Paauilo?

NC: I guess for work. He's a rice farmer so he came down Waipio to start a rice farm [late 1890's].

VL: Do you know how he started?

NC: No. I really don't know.

VL: How long was he farming rice before he went back to China to get your mother?

NC: That I don't know. I cannot remember that. That part I wouldn't know.
VL: Can you tell us something, what you remember about his rice farming?

NC: I know when I was a small kid, about six years old and we were working in our farm together. That's when I realized [he was a] rice farmer. All that time, when you small time, you wouldn't take notice of what the parents doing and all this stuff.

VL: So what did you do as a child?

NC: Help in the farm. Go weeding. Cut bank grass and all that stuff. We start young.

VL: Is this before you started school?

NC: No. I start school when I was five years old.

VL: And what kind of chores did you have to do on the rice farm?

NC: All kinds. First of all you start is cleaning the bank. Before they don't do it like now. Nowadays we just spray 'em with herbicide, the banks, and then clean the inside and we, of course, talking about taro. But rice same thing. Rice, we have to plow the land. After you plow, then you clean the banks all around. Then let the water in. Then harrow with horses. All with horses. Then of course, you have to harrow three, four times before you can break up the soil. After you break up the soil, then you have to prepare seed beds where you get the rice (seedlings) to start. It's really not easy work, you know. See, you get the high place where floods doesn't catch. Of course, Waipio floods our section always catch. Get real big water. But my father is pretty smart man, I think. He just can tell when it's going to be raining. He can plant rice so that he meets certain parts of the year that doesn't have storm. That's how lucky he is. Of course, maybe he can foretell more or less the climate.

VL: Now did he own the land down there?

NC: Uh uh, lease land.

VL: Who did he lease from?

NC: Well before Akaka used to. That's all Bishop Museum land. Bishop Museum get the lease of Waipio land and then the farmers worked under Akaka (who leased the land from Bishop Museum). Either crop share or pay rent like that.

VL: Do you remember this Akaka?

NC: Yeah. L. Akaka. Leong Kut is his regular name but the Hawaiians call him Akaka. Two brothers. One is Leong Chung I think. They have the store and they get the rice mill.

VL: So your father leased from them?
NC: Yeah. I really don't know the start. If they lease or whether he just plant and give him so many percent, crop share. That I really don't know how they make the arrangement.

You know, that Akaka, he financed the growers. My father is not the only one. Plenty you know. They have, oh I think six or seven companies down there. My father just have a small portion, about 10 acres or so.

VL: Do you remember who the other ones were?

NC: Well the big one, they call Hui Nui. That's a big company, so many people in there. I really don't know who the people are. We so young, those days, eh. You know Chinese they call 'em either Ah Sook or Ah Pak. As long as we know (them), we meet them (and say), "Good morning," or "Good evening," at that time. We don't know their names. Of course a few of them we know, but must be real familiar or if the family, before we know. Other than that, we don't know.

VL: These six or seven companies, they were all Chinese?

NC: Wait, how many companies? One, two, three. It's all Chinese; majority are Chinese. Of course there are a few Hawaiians. They get their own land that they cultivate rice too. They learn from the Chinese, eh? Like old man Olepau. He was planting rice.

VL: So this one company was Hui Nui?

NC: Hui Nui. That's the biggest. Hui Nui, the interpretation is "Big Company." Hui is company. Nui is big. If I'm not mistaken 12 people in the Hui Nui I think. But when they harvest time and plant time they hire a lot of people. They get about 20 or 30 people working.

VL: And the people they would hire, where were they from?

NC: Most of them from Waipio. Before, get plenty Chinese in Waipio. That's the only time they get work, when get harvesting and planting. Other than that they don't get work.

VL: Do you remember any of the other companies? Did they have names?

NC: One, way down (near the beach). The last one is called Sung Mau Sung Hee but the Hawaiians call it Muliwai because it stay way down [by Muliwai Pond]. That one (had) two, three guys, that company. And I don't know how big an area too. Even Hui Nui, I don't know how big.

VL: How many men did your father hire?

NC: Only harvesting and planting. That's the only time he hires. A few. Before they work more like help each other too, yeah? When you need men, so many go to your farm and finish your planting. Then the same gang goes to the other place plant like that.

VL: What did they get paid?
Shees, the pay is real small. I think it's $1.00 a day or something like that. Of course, they give you three meals. Harvesting time, four meals a day. Harvesting is hard work. You start in the morning. Half an hour after that you get soaked wet. All the clothes wet. And that clothes won't dry until after work because I don't think they get one hours time, including lunch. After they eat the lunch and everything, they have to go work already. About an hours time. Sometimes rush time, only half an hour and they have to work already.

VL: What time did they start in the morning?

NC: From dawn to dusk. It all depends. Like harvesting time, maybe they start about half past six. All depend on the seasons. Spring time, that crop would be the thing, yeah. The summer and the winter crop—you cannot call it winter because it didn't hit winter yet, yeah?—fall crop. The summer crop take a little bit longer because get more chance to grow (there's a longer growing period) but winter crop (has) shorter time. How much shorter I don't know. I know it is shorter.

VL: So you had how many crops a year?

NC: Two crops a year.

VL: So these men, they were living in the valley? Where did they live?

NC: Most of the time live in the valley.

VL: Did they share housing or what kind of housing did they have?

NC: All rough lumber buildings. Wooden shingle roofing; no ceiling. Just hope no rain.

YY: Were they family men?

NC: Very few family men. Hui Nui is all single (men). Muliwai get one that married, with children too. Of course, get other families working too. Like Sammy Chang; he died already. He's younger than me. His father used to farm a small portion, a few acres.

VL: So these people. Did they live together in the same house? The single men?

NC: Single men, maybe five, six in one house. They don't have rooms you know. Just like one big hall and the beds all, more like dormitory, something like that. Nowadays dormitory (has) only a few beds. Not like before. I know when I was up in automobile school [on the Mainland] our room had six beds.

VL: Now when your father hired the workers. Who cooked the four meals?

NC: My mother cooks.

VL: What else did she used to do?
NC: She has a lot to do. When get rice (season) time, you have to scare the birds away. She used to work on that. You know, get the cord where you pull, get the can to make noise (in order to scare the birds). She works hard. She cooked and she still get time to sew for the people. They pay her so much for one shirt or da kine Chinese pants they used for work in the rice field.

VL: What kind is that?

NC: Pants more like pajama kind. But instead of that thing (cord) for tie, that thing (top) is wide (and loose) and they just pull certain way. They twist certain way and fold it (and tuck it in) and it stays. Doesn't drop down you know. (Laughs) I think before I said, "Gee with these people, some rascal guy (can) just pull, eh, the pants drops off."

(Laughter)

VL: It wasn't a string then?

NC: No, the top, it's open. It's made out of flour bag. Either flour bag or muslin. You know how pajamas are, eh? Loose under but on top is wide so they just...I don't know, I forget how that thing go anyway. I think it's twist around once that thing, you catch the two, you twist it around then you fold them two times, I think. It stays though.

VL: So she would sew those for the working men?

NC: Yeah.

YY: How about the shirts. What style were they?

NC: Shirts? Regular American style shirts and some open front, more like coat style, eh? They make out of...I don't know what kind cloth you call that. Printed stripes on kind of thick, not so thick as hinahina. You know what is hinahina? Not so thick as that, though, little bit thinner.

VL: Did she have a sewing machine?

NC: Oh yeah, hand. Not foot machine, just with the hand kind. And she's good in sewing too (and embroidery work and quilting). She made Hawaiian quilts. I forget how many she made but I know each child has one. So 10 of us in the family, get 10 [quilts], eh?

VL: What else did she do with her day?

NC: Well, she keeps the books too. My father used to keep but, you know, when a fella work hard, eh? He come back and he's tired and everything. Sometimes forget, eh? So my mother learned how to write Chinese and everything. She keeps the records.

YY: You mean in the process of keeping the books, she learned how to write?
NC: She learned to; she doesn't know how to write before. She can read little bit but doesn't know how to write. So she learned how to write. Chinese write just like Japanese characters. It's hard, it's not easy. I tried it. I knew quite a bit before but now I can hardly write my name.

VL: Where would she go shopping for food?

NC: No, she doesn't go shopping at all. My father do the shopping. Of course, there are stores, we stay way down [toward the beach] and you know where Leslie Ahana's [aka Chang] place is? That used to be Akaka's place (store).

VL: Up close to Hiilawe?

NC: Yeah, yeah, you know where you get two cement pier before? The thing was washed away already. Leslie Chang's. That used to be a store and the liquor house right next.

VL: So your father would go shopping.

NC: Uh huh.

VL: Were there other stores in the valley at that time?

NC: I don't know. I think that the only one that time. Then afterwards get one other one started. And get one coffee shop.

VL: So that time, what kind of food would he buy?

NC: I don't know. Mostly Chinese food, canned (or dried) stuff. Chinese they seldom eat meat. They eat mostly pork. So every so often they kill one pig. Like harvesting time, I think every week they kill one or two pigs because plenty people working.

YY: Did your father raise the pigs that he killed?

NC: Some. And we had to buy because he cannot raise so many. Especially harvesting time and planting time. He have to buy every once in a while. He started with 10 acres but afterwards when the pig companies gave up everything, he took over the lease and he planted, pretty big for work you know. (He cultivated more area so employed more men.) I think all that lower section except way the other side, the swamp place, (from) that Muliwai one (through) all this side [Kukuihaele side], get a good 60 to 80 acres.

YY: He had 10 acres in the beginning and then when the others pulled out he picked up another 50 acres? Another 60 or so?

NC: More I think. He took that big company one.

YY: Hui Nui?

NC: Hui Nui, yeah.
VL: Why did they go out?

NC: Not profitable. And you know how Chinese those days, if they get three, four hundred dollars they go back China.

VL: So the Hui Nui folks went back to China?

NC: Yeah, some went back to China, some go down to Honolulu work. They said better pay down there and everything.

VL: Do you know about when that was that your father took over there [Hui Nui]

NC: I really don't know.

VL: You were born already?

NC: I think I was around either 12 or 14 years old. I'm not quite sure though.

YY: What kind of methods did your father use? Did he use scientific methods in planting? Or different ceremonials?

NC: I don't know. In those days everything is done by hand; planting, harvesting, everything. There's no such thing as machinery. Even plowing and all those things. Plowing, you use two horses and two people manage that (the team). One is the driver and one holds the plow (which he manages by himself). Harrowing (requires) one fellow who uses a horse. A harrow is easy to manage. Like the planting is all hand work. You pull the rice (seedlings) first, tie them in bunches, (then distribute them in the patches for planting), then plant. Maybe two or three fellas use line [cord or string]. They pull the line [across the patch] and two lines they plant (guide rows). And the fellas who plant the rice plant six rows come down (guided by the two rows that were planted first). Get space for six rows because that's the only way they can get them straight. But before that they used to plant free hand. For instance, this is the patch, this fella he start from here. He put one stick over here. He start over here six, he come right down here, he hit that stick. That's how good they are.

VL: I don't think I understand.

[See diagram]

NC: For instance, this is the patch. This is the bank here. He measure (from left to right). Chinese is six-three (6 feet 3 inches). I don't know, Chinese foot is, how many [American] inches? I forget how many inches. I think either 15 or something like that. Chinese one foot, haole is 15 inches I think.

VL: Chinese foot is longer, yeah?
A guideline cord is set up between A and A'. One "line man" starts at point A, and another starts at point A'. The two men work towards each other planting rice seedlings every 12 inches (American measurement).

When they meet at point A' they move to point B' (6'3" away--Chinese measurement) and begin planting rice seedlings while moving away from each other. This continues until all the vertical guideline rows are planted.

Then someone, facing the closer bank, starts planting from point Z. He follows the direction of the arrows. He plants six seedlings per row; the six plantings are made without moving his feet, only by stretching from left to right. He then takes a step backwards in order to plant the next row of six, this time stretching from right to left.
NC: Yeah, yeah. And Chinese get only 10 inches to a foot. Their inches are wider so I think get space enough for six [rice plantings]. You see he plant one row here, one row there. The other planters come in the middle. This one get line, you know the cord, they pull so they can plant straight.

VL: So there's six rows. They plant one row next to the bank?

NC: I'm not so good in drawing. Or you get line here, one, two, three, four, five, six here. For instance, this is the bank, here. This is one. He going leave the space like that and measure so get six; one, two, three, four, five, six. Then put one stick that poke down, get the cord straight down this end, poke. Then they start to plant like this. They plant this way and come back this way. Otherwise you have to waste your time. If only get one line. So they make two lines [guidelines]. Everytime they flip this one over, they flip the other one over, then they come. Two fella plant. If two one fella one end, they plant, they meet so they do it this way, they come back and they pull this line, they make enough for six then flip the cord over the plant. The fella who plant come down, they plant all this six like this. The plants go like this; one, two, three, four, five, six, till here. Then they plant about three, four or five plants (seedlings).

YY: Bundled up? Are they bundled up, did you say?

NC: They bundled up big, you know (you take the plants from a big bundle). You have to use your fingers to push it (the plants) out. You know how rice grow, eh? One seed get one plant. So you pull either three or four or five or six, I don't know how many. I forget. Majority is about four or five. They pull out like that, they put them down, you see. We say four. You pull four, you put here one, one bunch. (Seedlings are bundled and tied 2/3 up. The top of the bundle is trimmed before planting.)

VL: So you put four in the same puka?

NC: One hole. No, no more hole!

(Laughter)

NC: This thing is dirt, all dirt (the ground is muddy and soft). You just press it down, you know. You get the plant like this, you put your fingers (thumb and fingers hold base of the plant and push the base into the mud), you push down like that and you go like this so she stay
like that. The dirt close itself.

VL: So you grabbed it by the base of the plant.

NC: Yeah, you make sure you don't bend the root part. Otherwise he die. So you catch like that and you poke 'em down with your two fingers go down, because the thing is soft. Your two fingers go down the thing then you bring your finger up and the rice stay because the dirt is going to close up. You don't plant it too deep, not more than one inch, less than an inch down. So you plant one, two, three, four, five, six, like that and from over here you come back one, two, three, four, five, six planting this way. All the way come back. You back up every time.

YY: So while you're going this way, you're also going that way. You do one, two, three, four, five, six.

NC: All this way planting. Because you get six, and then you get to make the space the cord come right straight down. Then this one plant one, two, three, four, five, six. You hit in the middle here. And this fella, he hit in the middle, then he come this side. Of course, the fast fella do more than half, the slow one. Not every fella same speed you know. And then it's back breaking if you don't know. But if you know how it's easy. That's why people say, "How come you don't get backache?"

You have to know how. Like us, we pull taro, we don't get backache. George Farm say, "Ho, I don't see how you can stand, I get backache."

I say, "You standing wrong."

He say, "Why?"

I say, "You stand square to the taro. You put one leg in front, one leg behind, you get more leverage," I told him. I don't know if he do it now or not.

VL: And with rice, how do you stand?

NC: I show you how. [NC gets up to demonstrate] For instance, here. Here is the thing. This get rice already, this get rice [points to two imaginary rows of planted rice on either side of him]. Then I stand like this, you see. You got to stand like this. You go one, two, three, four, five, six [makes as if he is planting--plants six without moving his feet]. You stand the two rows over here and two rows this side, two rows this side, six rows. Then you start to back up this way. Then you back up this way, then you come back, then you come back this way, then you come back this way. That's how it goes. You have to back up.

(Laughter)

NC: You cannot go forward, you know. But the one who planted the line [the long vertical lines], those ones, they go forward, because the ones
plant the lines instead of backing up like that, the line come like this, you plant like this, so everytime you plant one like that, your step come like that, go like this, then you go like this, then your step go like this.

VL: Then you cross over. [The long vertical lines are planted by moving sideways and crossing one leg in front of the other.]

NC: Yeah, yeah.

VL: What line is that?

YY: Every sixth, yeah?

NC: Six lines. Every six lines get one line.

YY: So the line that's planted first here and the other will go in between?

VL: So this is done first?

NC: Yeah.

VL: These long lines across the field are done first and then how wide and how many plants do you get in that distance across and between each one?

NC: I think. This space is pretty wide. Chinese get six and three and get six rows in there. Let's say about one foot (apart). Chinese one foot.

YY: So this distance is 6 feet 3 inches. Chinese.

NC: Of course, all depends on the land. Some fella six-two, some fella six-one, like that. It all depends if a fertile land, goes six-three. And if the land not so fertile, they go six-two, six-one, like that. One inch counts a lot.

VL: Why is that?

NC: I don't know. You know, for instance, you plant things...if you plant them near, if the soil is not rich, before they don't fertilize; only afterwards they learn how to fertilize. First time they don't. That's why they go six-three, most of the place, because they can fertilize. If the soil is poor, then minus one inch, minus two inch, or minus three inch; even minus four inch, sometimes.

VL: So they're closer together.

NC: Yeah, closer together. Of course the poor land will never get so much rice, the yield is poor.

VL: Now they would plant it close so that they could get the same yield?

NC: They don't exactly get the same yield, but at least not too far off.
VL: So the closeness has to do with getting a similar yield rather than crowding the plant makes it better, or something.

NC: No, it's not crowding. Close you get more, yeah?

YY: More plants.

NC: Yeah, you get more plants. You see when the plants, this way is closer, this way going be closer too. For instance, if you plant one foot this way, maybe you plant eight inch this way or nine inches. Then instead you plant eight or nine inch because this row is thin. Doesn't look so good because get them wide so you have to go a bit more narrow so get more plants in there.

VL: Now this distance is, how much?

NC: We say about 15 inch. No, no, not 15 inch.

VL: Would that be American foot?

NC: That's what I was talking now. Let's say about 12 inches.

VL: And then the whole thing is how long? The whole distance.

NC: All depends on the patch. How wide the patch is, how long the patch is. We used to plant, maybe three, four, five, up to 10 patches. We take long one time right down from patch to patch, right down. Instead of planting one patch first (we did) all the way, one time plant all.

VL: How come?

NC: Faster, eh? (You don't have to go back and forth so many times.) Then you go plant and then go back come again, plant, go back come again. You get long place for go one time go down. You jump over the bank, keep on jumping over the bank all the way.

VL: So, how would you decide how big to make the patch?

NC: The patches are there already. It all depends on the grade of the land. Before days they don't have tractors, so for grade the land is hard. They have to use horses. For instance, (if) the land slope this way, they can make only so much then they bring down the dirt from the high to the low (section), then they get it level. And rice is one thing (if) too much difference the rice get drowned. You don't get enough water the upper one won't grow, it won't get water. So you have to get them to the level.

YY: Now, the seed rice. Where was that planted?

NC: They would get seed beds in special patches where (the water) can drain off fast, (or) can let water in fast. That thing, you have to keep the rice in bags, maybe 50 pounds of rice. He have to calculate how much per acre. They just know how many pounds to one acre or that area they
need so many so they can scatter the seeds. For instance, this is one whole patch. They make the seed beds in rows so that when they get the rice ready to scatter (the men can walk in between to scatter the seeds). Because they have to put them (the bags of seeds) in the water for about day and a half to two days. Then they bring them up and then they have to (scatter them in the rows of seed beds). Winter time, they have to use little bit lukewarm water, pour over like that, scrape 'em up like that and pile 'em up again and then cover the bag. That thing, as soon as he see the thing (seeds) start to sprout, then they scatter in the seed beds. Beds really level. Something like this floor level.

YY: So they would just throw it.

NC: You just catch the thing and go like that (gather a handful and scatter). You have to know how to throw so he spread. And if you don't spread them even, some place too thick, some place too thin. The thick ones they going be tiny and the wide ones they going be big. And that patch when they scatter the seeds, every morning they have to dry the patch (drain the water), let the water out, let the sun catch and that's when the person got to be there because the rice birds go for 'em. You let 'em dry then, the first few days only they dry about two or three hours. If rain, you have to let the water in already because the rain catch, the rice doesn't root yet. The rain catch and he's (the seed) going turn. As soon as he root and grow, get an inch or two, it's easier. After it gets about, say three inches, then you don't have to worry, you just keep the water low; say about half an inch water, an inch water like that and leave 'em go. But you have to check every now and then, maybe once or twice a day you have to look. Don't let 'em get dry. That takes nearly a month, 20 some-odd days, before you ready to pull the rice (seedlings) to transplant. Before the time for transplanting, you have to dry the patch. Maybe today you dry about three, four hours, then you let water in again. Then the next day, four or five hours, then you let water in again. Nighttime they don't drain the water, they let the water in. Only daytime they dry. For about a week. It all depends on the seed beds. Some seed beds easy to get hard. Some slow to get hard. Because if you don't get it hard enough, when you pull time, it's hard to pull; the roots come long. You don't want the roots too long; just short kind.

VL: When you scatter the seeds, it's dry?

NC: No, get little bit water. They harrow the land and after, they let the water in. They make the ditch first, the space to walk, (then make the beds), say about six or eight feet one row. Over here get one ditch about half a foot wide, I think. And the next bed like that. So I scatter this, you scatter this, one fella one.

VL: Six to eight feet wide?

NC: Seven to eight feet.

VL: And then how long?
NC: All depends on the patch. They make the full length of the patch. Because only need 10 acres. We need only one small patch you know. The patch is, I think, not more than 1,500 feet. That's enough to plant the 10 acres. I don't know how they calculate the thing but my father, he knows. Because we don't take interest.

VL: So do you know how many pounds he bought to scatter on that seed bed?

NC: They figured all that out. Maybe that patch get three or four or five rows. They figured out so many pounds of seed (for) each row. I forget how many. I used to know that because I took over when my father passed away and I calculated everything myself. My father passed away in 1922 so I took over until 1928 (which) was my last crop. Doesn't pay. California rice was wholesaling for $2.90 and it cost us $4.50 to produce a bag.

YY: Did you buy your seed from California?

NC: No, no. The seed--every crop you keep so many pounds. They're not California rice, you know; they're the long kind.

YY: Long-grained rice?


YY: Was this the kind that Chinese have traditionally planted?

NC: They call them red rice. Home cooked, eh? Red rice. Not so long (ago) they used to get some Chinese rice down Honolulu. They call them see mew that one the grain is real long. That one (ours) is in between that and the California rice. Just a little bit longer than California rice and yet not long like the see mew. See mew is still longer.

VL: Do you know where he first got his seed from?

NC: He got it from Akaka. I don't know where Akaka gets it from. Must be from China; imported I think.

VL: Did he also get some financial help from Akaka?

NC: All. All financial help. Otherwise I think we cannot make it a go. They finance the whole crop. Then (we) take the rice up there, they figure out how many pounds rice, so much a pound, and they pay you. Then they deduct all what they advanced and they take. Of course you get a book, eh? Every time you go up there what you take they jot it down. You get one book, they get one book, so there's nothing to forget.

VL: Was your father able to make a profit?

NC: You know rice farming is small profit. The profit is real small. That's why if you lose one crop, it takes you two, three crops to get back to
your feet. You know what I mean by losing? When get storm or something like that. When get storm you going damage the crop. When you damage the crop, you won't get the amount of rice.

YY: Would you describe what a storm would do?

NC: Oh yeah. Now, for instance, if you plant the rice and everything, flood come down, set mud. He going cover up so much (of the rice) going slow the growth of the thing. And after that that thing (the rice) is going grow up so high and then (will have) more stalk than seed and doesn't get so many grains on one plant. Another way you lose is when the rice is nearly ripe and when the wind come or the rain come, either one. The wind come, it's going to knock 'em down or the seed (grains) is going to fall down. If you little more ready for harvest, the seed is going to drop. And if heavy rain come, if the crop is nice and get three, four hundred seeds (grains) on one plant. I mean one single plant, you know. Get so heavy, it bends, if the rain get on heavy, that thing is going to slip down. When it slips down, I don't know why the rice is lighter. Plus, it takes more time to harvest because when it falls down it goes generally go one direction. It fall one direction. And instead of cutting two (at a time) like this, they have to cut one by one.

YY: So every time there was a storm then you would worry?

NC: Oh yeah. That's why I say I wouldn't go into rice again. I say, "Gees, when it rains, your heart pounds; when it winds, your heart pounds." Just keep pounding, thinking, "Gee, how much am I going to lose?" That's why I say I wouldn't go into rice, even if get good profit now.

VL: Did anything like that ever happen to your father?

NC: Oh yeah. You know one time? After he cut the rice and everything (12 men spent a whole day cutting rice). Not even bundled yet. One flood came down, sweep 'em. Twelve to fourteen men one whole day, cutting, the flood take 'em all away.

VL: And then what happened?

NC: What can you do? Just drop tears, that's all. You can't do anything. Nature's work. And you think the one who finance you is going to pity you? You pay for what you borrow.

VL: Did your father borrow every year from Akaka?

NC: Well, it's not borrowing money so much as except to pay the workmen, eh? It's the food. You go up there (to the store) and you take the food like that. He had to buy anyway from the store. But instead of paying cash they charge them up until the crop comes. I don't know. According to what my father tell me, Akaka make so much profit on his groceries--his food supplies--so much profit compared to other stores.
But what else can you do? The other store is up Kukuihaele. Who like walk up Kukuihaele and get the food? Too far, eh?

YY: Was Akaka respected by the people? What were their feelings toward him?

NC: They respect him all right because at least he's kind enough to finance the people. Give you the food and pay the workmen and everything. And then have to wait how long (to get his money back). No interest charge you know. Of course, the interest is all already (calculated) in there eh? You can figure on the groceries like that. Maybe if you supposed to make 50 percent profit, maybe he's making 100 percent. Who knows? Those days, the people, they're not smart enough to figure out how much that thing cost and how much his markup is. Like us, we can know more or less how much the markup is of the stores.

VL: So your father would harvest twice a year, and those two times he would pay Akaka?

NC: Yeah. Well, all the rice goes to Akaka. Because it have to go there; that's the only rice mill. They have to mill 'em up there and every­thing. They buy the rice paddy and they mill. They buy the rice with the husk and everything. They go up there, they mill. Akaka mill himself and then he sell out (the milled rice). He makes that much profit again.

VL: Now he sets the price that he's going to pay for the rice?

NC: Yeah, he sets the price. Of course, they know more or less what the market value of the polished rice is. Then the raw rice going be so many percent. I think you get the rice with the husk. After you get them all into polished rice, everything ready for marketing, it's only 63 to 67 percent.

VL: The weight?

NC: Yeah, if you get 100 pound of rice paddy, you get only about 63 to 67 pounds of clean rice, finished, ready to eat (cook).

VL: Do you know what the price was for 100 pounds; what Akaka was paying your father?

NC: I think it's 2-1/2 cents a pound. I think was something like that those days. Because the land is Akaka's. You don't have to pay the rent. Of course, they set the rental price and they deduct.

VL: So then, from the total that Akaka owes your father for the rice, he subtracts for land rental and food and what else?

NC: Money, advance for pay the workmen. He (sold) general merchandise, you know. They get clothing and everything. Of course, those days, no such thing as ready-made clothes. All is you had to make your own. They get only the cloth.

YY: Can you describe what the mill looked like?
NC: It's powered by water. Big wheel, water wheel. Get two, one big one and one little bit smaller. And inside the rice mill get the shaft. The shaft is about 16 to 18 inch, I think. But get eight corners (to the shaft) and get 2 by 4 (timber) or something, I forget what size, go through that shaft. Long like this. See the thing, spin like that. He hit that, what you call. He get one post go that way. Get one stone pounder at this end and he get one pin over here to hold the timber so that the thing can go up and down. The rice is (in) one round stone. I guess you seen in Japan they have that, I know. You know the kind they use to pound with the hand, the kind they make mochi with. But Japan one, they use hand; they pound with the stone. But that one (in Waipio) the power, the water. The shaft spinning like that because one, two, three all go like that. One go down, this one come up, this one go down, that one come up, like that, keep on like that.

YY: So what part of it is put into that? The rice? The husks?

NC: Yeah, the rice with the husks. They get one big wooden (gadget). I don't know what you call it. Anyway, that one he take off so much of the husks and then he have to use the strainer like that and strain the rice, no husk go down. And whatever the ones with still the husks on you throw off (to) one side. And the one without the husks, that's the one they put in that big container. You see that stone pound, keep on pounding. That thing is set certain way. It has a metal plate under. I guess must be steel plate or that one more like the Chinese wok but only shallow and it's only about 12 or 13 inches (in diameter). They set 'em in that stone pot. They set that thing in such a degree that every time the thing hit down (the stone pounder), the thing jusk keep on moving. He hit down, the thing move little bit. He hit down, move little bit. You'd be surprised, everything (the brown rice) he come white. You know what they use 'em for, I think. More ready for I think. They put little bit ashes inside (add to the brown rice). That's one keep 'em white. (The ashes make the rice become white faster.)

VL: So how much can you put inside that?

NC: I think about 100 pounds.

VL: But it's only 14 inches?

NC: Fourteen inches is only that iron plate. That stone is big you know. That stone is nearly 20 inches wide in diameter and it's about a good 16, 18 inches deep. It's thick about like this, you know the outside.

VL: Is that round also?

NC: Yeah, yeah. It's all rounded and it's more like one ball, you cut 'em in half or something like that. And the under part they set. The thing get groove so that they can set that iron plate in there. And they set that stone stuff a certain degree, so many degrees. Every time, that thing doesn't hit in the center. He hit right near the side.
He hit like this, naturally the rice going move; every time you hit, move. Keep on like that, that thing go, just go.

VL: Then what was the hammer-like made out of?

NC: Stone. You see, he get a thick one. I forget how wide. I think it's six inches wide, though. And how thick I forget. And at the end he get the stone. I have one but I don't know where I have 'em now. And I still have the big stone stuff. I get two. But that's buried in the dirt. I don't want to take 'em off, somebody will steal 'em. That thing, even before, it cost about $40, $50 to make one. So nowday price, I think cost you about $200, $300. You know Frank Frazier? He has. He took the rice mill. He get one down Matsunami place before. But was cracked, eh? So he say, "That doesn't bother me. I'll glue 'em. Nowdays glue, one drop can hold one ton."

(Laughter)

NC: So naturally, he get 'em glued. I think the wife use 'em for plant flower I think. And good for souvenir too, eh?

VL: So the mill had how many of these...what did you call them?

NC: Sheez, I don't know. I really don't know.

VL: And so, how many did the mill have?

NC: Get eight. Four in a row. The big wheel had four and the small wheel had four.

YY: Where did all the parts of the mill come from?

NC: China. But the water wheel is made, I think, in Waipio.

YY: By Akaka?

NC: He get good carpenters too, see. Because Chinese real good carpenters, you know. For build up house like that. In no time they put 'em up. You'd be surprised, when they build house, the scaffold. You see how they put the scaffold up? But I wouldn't dare go on top though. But they go. I said, "Ho, when we build house and we make scaffold, we make sure he solid." But theirs, only bamboo only. Just tie them up and they put up the house.

VL: Did Akaka have a family?

NC: Yeah, he had. I don't know if Akaka's family is in China. Only the younger brother one stay over here.

VL: Did he have a wife?

NC: Yeah. He get a boy too. The boy was a school teacher, Chinese school teacher. Was Honolulu. He died...oh, quite long ago already.
YY: So the mill is no longer in Waipio?

NC: Oh, that thing is busted long, long ago. I forget how long ago, already. You know that house, Lau Kong house? Behind, he get one small shack. I don't know if still there. Where Sonny Ah Puck used to stay. I don't think he stay. The lumber is from there, you know. From the rice mill. You'd be surprised. Those Chinese, those days, how they build that water wheel. More like engineers, you know. They can calculate how much water go in and everything. How much power to go. They build a flume all the way up for ditch. Put ditch from (Hiilawe) come down, then get certain grades. Then they put the flume (in).

YY: What stream?

NC: Hiilawe stream. From way up, all by the side of the hill, they dig all the way. One ditch come down until he hit the rice mill. You know where the rice mill is?

YY: I have a vague idea.

NC: I don't know if I can find the place now. Ought to get some cement stuff over there. But to find the place is real hard, I think.

YY: Down below from the Chinese cemetery?

NC: Yeah, yeah. It's little bit below. He get one old house over there. You noticed that? That's Ah Choy's house, the one who take care of the rice mill.

YY: Ah Choy Chang?

NC: Yeah. You know Ah Choy Chang?

YY: I've heard the name.

NC: His wife is Hawaiian. One of the daughter was school teacher. Grace Choy.

VL: Now all these Chinese workmen. What would they do for recreation?

NC: Gamble, I guess. Must be. They get, you know, the table like that and they play something like dominoes. What they call that? Tin¬gnau, Chinese call them. It's more like dominoes but different arranging. They get all red dots and white dots on top that stuff. I don't know how that thing works.

VL: They would do this in their homes?

NC: Down the company, they get the eating place. After eating, they get the table cleared off. Everything is clean. Of course they don't play big time games. Just for the fun of it.

VL: Where did they play?
NC: By the company place. They’re Hui Nui (workers) eh?

VL: What kind of place was this? I don’t understand.

NC: For instance, you get two houses, yeah? One house they use ‘em for kitchen, eh? Get I think three or four tables. Round tables. One table seats about 10 people. And if you move (the chairs) little bit out, you can add another one in; you move little bit out, can add another one in, you know. Round table. That’s why the Chinese say, "Round table you can put up to 15." And Chinese they use chopsticks, eh? So they can either place the food in the middle (or) set the food in the middle like this (two sets of food, one on each half of the table). This side one set, this side one set. The people from this side take this set and the other fella from the other side take different set. They eat like that. So they clear that after they eat, and use that table. They play dominoes or ting gnau. They play cards too. All kinds.

VL: So this was the Hui Nui, had these two buildings.

NC: Three buildings, all together.

VL: What were the other ones?

NC: The other one was where they sleep. No rooms, only hall. More like one big hall. More like the dance hall. No rooms. The only houses that have rooms are the family houses.

VL: And who would cook for them?

NC: They get fellas who cook. Well Hui Nui get one man to cook. He does nothing but cooking.

VL: And when they weren’t hired by Hui Nui, when it was not planting or harvesting season....

NC: Still yet, that fella is a part of that Hui Nui, that cook. He is the owner, part, one of the company.

VL: And then what would the men do? Could they still live there when they weren’t working?

NC: Those who are not working does not stay there. Even working time they get their own place to stay.

VL: So only when you work you can stay there?

NC: No, only the one who own the Hui Nui. That’s the only fellas who stay there. Of course, sometimes they bunk together just for overnight or two nights like that. Two fellas in one bed. You know their bed? Just a few pieces of 1 by 12 (lumber). That’s all they get.

YY: Off the floor?
NC: Yeah, about three feet, I think, above the floor. They get the horse (bench) like that, two. And then they place the board on top.

YY: Anything on the board?

NC: They get mat. Only mat, you know? I don't know how they can sleep.

VL: What kind mat?

NC: You know the Japanese-kind mat? The Chinese get too, eh, but the Chinese kind is kind of wide. The Japanese one is about this wide, eh? You know the kind they go beach with? Same kind. Straw mat. Hard to sleep, you know. It's all right if you sleep only on your back. But when you like move sideways it's hard; catch the hip bone, eh? Hard.

YY: How about smoking opium?

NC: Oh yeah, some of them smoke. That thing is more expensive than gold, you know. In weight. Cost more than gold. And yet, they smoke that. How you like that?

YY: Did you ever see? Can you describe it?

NC: I saw them smoke. It smells good too. Smells real good, you know. No, I haven't tried. I don't want to.

VL: Where would they get this from?

NC: Some fella would peddle 'em. You know the kind opihi shell, about this big. Half a dollar, just one little speck. Just enough for two time or three time you smoke, that's all. You know that thing? The pipe is long, say about this long (16 inches). And in the middle get one, what shall I call it... I don't know how to describe it. The shape is like this.

NC: Come up like this, come like this, over here get more like one small little thing like that. This (cup-like) thing is hollow and he get one small hole at the bottom. And up here (the top) is wide. I think the hole is about quarter inch on top. They use the cloth and plug 'em into that bamboo pipe. Plug 'em in there. And when they prepare the thing (opium), they get one (special opium) lamp with oil and light up. And they use one wire, must be wire or something. They roll that thing [over the flame] more like cooking. That thing come big (puffs up like bubble gum) and then they put 'em on the part near the small hole. They play with the thing. He come down (shrinks) and then put on (puffs up) again.
More like cooking it, eh? After that, then they stuck 'em in by the hole (with a needle-like wire). The hole is real small, just enough for the needle. They poke the hole, they press the opium in, they pull the needle out so that the opium still yet get smoke. They put that hole to the fire (on top of the lamp); they suck, they smoke that. Good fun, though, you watch.

VL: Is the opium, then, inside?

NC: Opium stay outside of that (cup-like) thing; come like this [he draws a picture]...come like this...then come like this...not flat, you know. Over here get one small little hole. This one is open. This one is attached to the bamboo. This end is closed, I think. And over here get opening. That's where they suck the thing. So, they get the opium right here in the hole. You have to get the hole. If you plug the hole, get nothing. That's why they use that needle (to push it through). They make the thing more like dough. They put 'em in on top the needle, they stuck 'em in, they hold 'em down with the hand and pull 'em (the needle) out. So the thing get hole, eh? And the thing stick. And when you put 'em over the fire, the thing (opium) start to melt (and puff up). You just suck. They suck in. Ooo, they get long winded. They don't rest until that thing go right in, far.

VL: So the opium is over the hole?

NC: Yeah, yeah. Over the hole. And that opium has a little hole too because from the needle. Otherwise he (the opium) cannot go in, eh? And with the suction over here, the fire under here, they suck that thing and that thing (opium) start to melt like that. The smoke that they sucking is not the opium, you know. The opium going be more like charcoal inside here. And, you know, they call
them san cha, the second one. They take this out from this side (of the pipe). They get one wire and go like that, more like one (small scoop). I don't know what you call that. They scrape 'em inside (of the round container). They take that out and they put water or tea. They mix that and they drink that. Uhhh, I don't know what they get out of it.

YY: They scrape the inside of this little hole?

NC: Not the hole. The thing (san cha) stay inside (the container). When they smoke, the thing (nicotine) going cake up, maybe in the long run get quite a bit inside cake up. So from on top here, they take 'em off from the pipe. This opening (on the end side) is bigger eh? So they put the thing inside, they scrape 'em.

YY: What kind of material is this made up?

NC: Clay. Easy to break, you know.

VL: And this is made up of what?

NC: Bamboo.

VL: And this attached is a hole in the bamboo?

NC: I think it's only bamboo and they make the hole and they use cloth around here to make 'em fit.

VL: To make the clay part fit in the bamboo?

NC: Yeah, the bamboo, the hole is slightly bigger than the clay stuff. So, he put little bit cloth around that opening and then put 'em in (connect the pipe to the clay container).

VL: So, half a dollar they would pay for....

NC: Two, three smokes.

VL: You mean two or three (VL inhales) puffs?

(Laughter)

NC: Well, one puff is pretty long, you know. But they have to hold their breath until everything goes in, you know. If you don't know how to smoke you going spoil because you cannot suck 'em all and the rest going be wasted. You cannot rest. You get to know how to control your wind, eh?

YY: Did all the people sit, one next to another and pass it along?

NC: No, nearly everyone get their own.

VL: Did they smoke often?
NC: I think once a day. Evening time. When they don't have that they look more like one dope, more like half dead. After they smoke, oh how lively. They come real lively, you know.

VL: Did they drink also?

NC: They always had drinks. Chinese always get drinks.

YY: What kind?

NC: Ng Ka Pei. They call 'em. Mui Kai Lu. Two kinds. Ng Ka Pei is kind of more like whiskey color and Mui Kai Lu is white. Mui Kai Lu. Mui is flower, eh? But it's peach, mui, peach flower, they say. And the other one is Ng Ka Pei. Ng is eye. Ka pei is that kind hat bark, bark of the tree or something like that. I guess maybe the liquor get the bark in there gets the color, eh?

VL: Where would they get the liquor?

NC: Akaka get. That's why Akaka make money all ways. That's the only liquor house down there. And another liquor house is the one by, you know where Sammy Mock Chew stay [Kukuihaele]? That's the daughter's place. The one in front of Roy Toko. You know where Roy Toko stay? Right in front, he get one, who is that? That Kanekoa boy [Ronald], he married to a Mock Chew [Cynthia]. That's the house [formerly owned by] the one who own the saloon. And that's owned by [J. J.] Silva.

VL: These Chinese men, did they ever have women?

(Laughter)

NC: Sure, they had those! You know, those days, women, they used to go around. Plenty Hawaiian girls, plenty of them just for pleasure. Not married, though. Just for pleasure. And sometimes the Japanese ladies go down.

VL: From where?

NC: From Kukuihaele or Honokaa like that. Those days cheap. Oh, you pay 50 cents only. Nowadays not. But before, 50 cents is big money compared to now.

VL: Were these young women?

NC: Yeah, young, not too old. Twenty some-odd years, 30 years.

VL: How would they come down?

NC: They walk down. They get men to go with them. Bring 'em down.

YY: And then did he take part of the 50 cents?

NC: That I don't know. I really don't know. Maybe he's the one that control the lady, eh? What they call that now? A pimp or something like that?
VL: Pimp. Did these ladies come down often?

NC: That I don't know. How often. Like us, small kid. We don't know what they doing and anything. We don't know what sex is, those days.

(Laughter)

VL: And would these Chinese men ever come out of the valley?

NC: Oh yeah, they come up to Honokaa, to the Society. You know, that church over there. They used to get parties like that and they get big gamble over there. And, you know the police, they don't catch them because they in cahoots, I think. Tip 'em or something like that.

VL: What was the name of that Society?

NC: I don't know. Hung Ka Society, I think. I really don't know. They get the name. I forget. If you ask Leong, maybe he know. You know Ah On Leong?

VL: Was your father a member?

NC: Mmmm. Oh yeah, he joined afterwards. About one year or so.

VL: Did they have to pay dues?

NC: That I don't know. You cannot join, just tell, "I like join." Got to get somebody to recommend you and that fella has to more like be a bondsman, or something like that before you can get in. And he must be a member of the church first before he can bring other fellows in.

VL: And then when you were a child, what did you used to do for recreation?

NC: All kinds. Dances, baseball, going out with girls, all kinds. (Swim, duck hunting, pig hunting, fishing.)

VL: How about when you were very small?

NC: School days?

VL: Yeah.

NC: Oh, most time baseball. Dance like that.

YY: How about catching birds. Did you used to catch birds?

NC: Oh yeah. You know, after the rice (was) bundled up and everything. You pack them home and not ready for thrash so they pile 'em up, eh? All stack 'em up like that. The rice (bundles) sit all one side. The birds used to come and eat. I grab my net, I go sneak
around from behind. I throw the net right over, catch 'em. One hit, 600, 700, 800. One crack, you know.

VL: What did you used to do with the birds?

NC: Eat 'em! Good eating birds, you know. You ever try that, boy, you won't eat any other birds.

VL: How did you prepare it?

NC: Don't you skin 'em. You skin 'em, doesn't taste good. You skin 'em, no fat; the fat is on the skin. You de-feather that, pull 'em off (pull off the wing tips). Cut the head, throw 'em out. Then you get shoyu, salt, little bit sugar. You marinate that. For about an hour or so. Then you use egg batter and we flour, eh? You dip that bird in the batter. Deep fry the thing. Real, the bones, you can chew 'em, you know. The bones come little bit (brittle), of course, not too soft. The big bone cannot eat, but the small bones you can chew 'em. Good eating birds. But the thing is to clean 'em. To de-feather that. Aa, that's not easy job.

YY: Did the kids do this work?

NC: Oh yeah, they like eat, they got to work. You know, my brother, the one died, Ah Kong. He's fast with his fingers, you know. He can clean two, three, we cannot clean one. He's real fast. Even my mother cannot beat him.

VL: You just pull the feathers out?

NC: Yeah. Pull the feathers out and you cut 'em open from the back. Don't open from the front, you know. Open from the back. Then you take off guts, wash everything. Then you face 'em down on the chopping board. You just slap 'em with the knife, da kine Chinese knife. You slap 'em. You smash the bones; they come flat. You prepare 'em. After the thing is marinated, you use the batter. You dip the thing in the batter, you deep fry 'em. You can without batter can too. Without batter doesn't taste (so good).

END OF SIDE 2.

TAPE NO. 4-5-1-78, SIDE ONE

VL: Okay, you were saying about the frogs.

NC: Hm. You ever try frog legs?


NC: Where you get--wait--where's that?

YY: My brother and his friends used to catch frogs in the river--Honomu.
NC: Oh, you Honomu girl?

YY: Uh huh.

NC: Oh.

YY: How did you used to catch your frogs?

NC: Torch. Was lots of fun. If you don't know how you cannot catch it. You see, you spot a frog over there. You know who George Nakagawa is?

YY: Uh huh. [Now deceased half-brother to Rachel Thomas, another interviewee.]

NC: You see, he tell me, "Nelson, let's go catch frog."

I say, "Okay, let's go."

Then he say, "You know what. You hold bag, I catch."

I say, "Okay." So, he get the flashlight, eh. And so I say, "There one." I used to be sharp, you know. Before he reach the frog the frog run away. Second one, same thing. Third one, same thing. I say, "George, we waste time. You hold the bag, let me do the catching. You don't know how to catch frog." That's what I told him.

Then he say, "I like you see catch if you so smart."

I say, "I will show you how to catch."

"All right," he said, "there one."

I say, "Okay." I put the light over here. I just slap 'em like that. I pick 'em up. He go slow like that, he try to catch, you know.

The frog run away, eh. And me I just run one time, I slap 'em right down. I bring 'em right up. I just pick one by one. One time my workman, the old man, he tell me, "Hey, I hear plenty frogs calling." The time, you know Olepau's patches? He used to be under us. We get the lease for that three patches. He say, "I was cleaning grass. I hear the frogs make lot of noise right the other side where--the other side of Lau Kong--of course now it's all grass there. Before it's taro field, eh. And after they harvest, they didn't plant. Get plenty pukamole growing and all. But clear under, eh. And he say, "I get plenty frogs."

I say, "I wouldn't go there. Spooky place." Because the hillside is spooky. Get plenty graves, eh.

So he say, "You know, I go with you."
I say, "Okay. If you go with me, we go." So I get the bag and everything ready. We go. He took one bag. So he went. Yeah. About two hours time, I tell, "We go home."

He say, "How come go home so quick? Wait little while."

I say, "I cannot carry any more."

He say, "What you mean?"

I say, "Look my bag." I get 14 dozen in there. In two hours' time. (Laughs)

VL: How old were you when you did this?

NC: Yeah, I was only about 20 or so. Not even 30 years.

VL: And then what would you do with them?

NC: We used to ship 'em Honolulu. See. And when we like eat--I used to get the small, little frog house, eh. And outside he get the screen up and get a pond [screen is around pond], eh. They can go in the house and come out (in the screened area) like that.

YY: Oh, so when you catch them you would just have them alive. Put 'em in the bag alive?

NC: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Crawl. All alive. We don't hurt 'em. The frog come like this. Behind that you catch 'em right between here. That's where. And that's why if you don't know how to catch, you cannot catch. If you catch the head part then he going to slip right off; he go away. Lot of fun catching frogs. Takeo, he was catching downside Umi. So after I come back I left the frogs in the frog house. The old man get not even two dozen, you know. I get 14 dozen. Then I tell, "Takeo, how many you catch?"

He say, "Oh, little more, one dozen."

I say, "What? You come over here first and we go after."

He say, "How many you catch?"

I say, "Fourteen dozens."

He said, "What?"

I say, "Oh, 14 dozen." And he was catching over there (and) I went behind after that. I caught more than him. When he came back, we came back together. I say, "How many you get?"

He say, "I think no more two dozen."

I say, "I get more than two dozen already." (Laughs) And only short while we went. And those days the frogs are big compare to
nowadays. If 14 dozen, real heavy, you know.

VL: How much would you sell them for?

NC: Before is $1.25 a dozen I think. The first time we shipped was only 75 cents a dozen, I think. But I lost money on that, you know. The fella who took the frogs from me, he didn't pay me and he died. He paid me so much, eh. How honest they are, I don't know. He say, "Oh, this shipment so many died." They don't pay for the dead ones, eh. How true that is we don't know. Well I figure I still make a profit, eh. So it's all right.

YY: Who did you ship to?

NC: Let's see now. To think of the name. Gee, I really forget.

YY: Oh, was it a Chinese restaurant?

NC: No, no, no. He only handles frogs. He sells out here. He buys from me and then he takes 'em out and sell to the restaurants. To any fella who like buy. See, he owe me so much. Then he cannot pay, eh. Few hundred dollars anyway. I think about $600, $700. About $600, $700 before is more like so many thousand now, eh. (Laughs) So, he tell, "Gee, I cannot pay you everything." Which I don't attach him. So, what he has--one lousy, junk Ford pick-up. That's all he get. Not even worth $100. So it's not worth the attorney's fee. Why should I? Just write it off.

VL: And when you were little, going to school, did you have any money of your own?

NC: Yeah, I have. I work and get some money but I don't generally take all. I always give to my mother, eh. And what I need, like we go school, lunch like that, That's the only thing we take. Other than that we don't take the money. To us money is useless those days.

VL: What kind of work did you do?

NC: I used to plant rice for the Hui Nui. The big company. After hours get through, eh. They hired me for plant the line kine, eh. You know, three of us, we plant. Then two fellas switch the line [move the guide cord]. Get three of us we plant. My own, I plant half. And the other two only plant half. And the day I don't go they had to put three fellas in there, in my place. Three extra guys to dig. They say, "Gee whiz." And you know how much they pay me? They were paying the workers $1.00 a day. They pay me only 50 cents a day. So the next crop come again, they ask me for go again. My father say, "You're not going. Why should you be going? You more than double their work and they pay you only half a dollar." And then the other fellas so slow. My father wen tell them.

They say, "Yeah, but he's only a boy. He's only 13 years old, only 12 years old."
So I tell 'em, "No. My father say I'm not going work. He says stay home, cut grass, feed the horses."

He say, "Oh, cut grass. You only short term. Only few minutes you cut one bundle already." We used to get rack. Get one cutting grass, too, for feed horses. Oh, we used to hire workmen. They brag if they cut half a day, eh. That's four hours. They got five mamaka they call it. Two bundles is one mamaka, eh.

They say, "Oh, I cut five mamaka today only four hours."

I tell, "What this. Well, I could try." I went up to seven. Bumbai one time I say, "Hey, I go search first (to see) what banks get good grass, everything. I could make a record." One time go up to 14. Fourteen. That's 28 bundles. Then they used to tell my brother, Ah Kong, he beat me out; he get one more than me. That's when I went up to the Mainland, eh. Then he say, "Hey, I break your record. I get one mamaka more than you." I came back. I tried to make it. I cannot. We not in trim, eh. Cannot.

VL: So only one season you planted rice for Hui Nui.

NC: Yeah, only one season.

YY: Then when you were young did you also sit in the towers to scare birds? Can you talk about that a little bit?

NC: Oh, yeah. You know, that's the worse job. Tedious job, you know. You got to get up early in the morning. Just daybreak you going out there. And you stay. That's the worse time, the birds hungry, eh. They come down (and were not afraid).

No matter how you try (to scare them, they wouldn't fly away). And little bit rain, that's another time. You know, when drizzle. Hoo--they not afraid. One time they got me so mad I went home I get the 12 gauge [gun]. I wen blow them down. Drop 'em. You scare 'em, eh. But still yet they come. But at least they get scared. They fly away. But they have to fill their stomach before they go home to nest. Nighttime just before dark you see them going. Hoo--by the thousands. Going. Flock in the thousands going flying. And in the morning you can see them coming down just like...airplane is not so fast, I think. That thing sweep down like that. Hoo--real fast.

VL: Can you describe the tower and the lines?

NC: Yeah. That tower has four sticks, eh. Posts. High. The tower is about 16 feet I think. Anyway from 12 to 16 feet about the ground. And then that's another four or five feet more up, see, because you get the platform over there (to sit or stand on). That, on top part we used to put a bag to shade out the sun, eh. Get so many bags. We sew 'em together. Cover on top so that the sun won't hit us. And then get all the line, eh, all come to that place (the tower).
That take care of so many, I think maybe about 10, 15 lines, eh. Get all cans and rag tied on. You strip rags—you tie on. Every time you pull, that thing shake. The birds scared, eh. And that noise. The birds scared. They fly away. And that stand (tower) --you had to make 'em solid because it shake, eh. And we make steps for go up. Not really step but just board. You just climb on top. Go on top. From morning time, as soon as dawn you there. And you don't get your breakfast until somebody come relieve you.

VL: Now each line has the cloth strips.

NC: Cloth. And get the can at the end.

VL: Only at the end?

NC: Yeah. Because one line cannot control two can.

YY: And what's in the can?

NC: Either kukui nut or stone. You know kerosene can—the five gallon can? You see, one corner they punch hole. They put wire (through to make a loop). And get one small, little opening. They drop, maybe it be four or five kukui nut in there. And that can hangs this way (on the pole), eh. Every time you pull, it going shake, eh. It makes the noise, like that. And the birds get scared, they fly away.

YY: And how much were you paid? Those who worked doing that—how much were they paid?

NC: That's our own place so we don't get paid. (Laughs) All family kine, eh. I don't go for work outside scaring birds. That's not easy job, you know.

VL: And then this covers 15 fields then? Each line goes where?

NC: Oh, all depend how many. You see, more or less we first we put so many only. So the birds get so stubborn, get so used to, they not scared. We add one more in the middle like that. That's how we get about 15 lines. First maybe seven or six, or eight during that time. As soon as the rice get little bit more mature the birds get more used to the can already. And the thing is they come down anyway whether you like it or not. They just dive in between the space and go eat (the grains).

VL: You had 10 acres and one tower?

NC: No. Ten acres. We get two. One at the house. The house one no need tower. From the veranda he pull. Because the house is little bit higher. (We just attached the cords to the post on the veranda.) It's not tower. It's just on the veranda, eh. We get post. Da kine post. Thing had 'em tied 'em to the post. This post get. This post get. (Tied the cords on) two post. You pull this one. And then if they go on that side, you pull the other one. Because the
opening is only about, I think about eight feet. Get one post here. One post here.

VL: So those two would cover the 10 acres.

NC: Yeah.

VL: The one in the tower--how were the strings hanging inside the tower? Could you pull all at one time?

NC: No. Was too heavy. The string is cord, you know. I think it's number 42. Pretty heavy. And it's long. It's about, I'd say a good two-three hundred feet long. And get that guava stick you put "Y" like that, on top [guava stick in a Y shape]. You poke the stick down to hold the thing (the can), the line come in between over here. We get one string tied on top here [across top of "Y"] so that that thing won't jump up, eh. Then from the can he (the cord) come all the way (to the tower). In between that one we tie some rag on. Strips of rag.

VL: So you can only pull one at a time?

NC: You can pull two or three. But why pull two or three if only that section get bird. And you pull only the section that get the bird and pull down. You pull like this, eh. They go for the next one, you pull this one. They go for the next. You pull this one. (Laughter)

NC: Pretty soon they land in the guava. So they go into the guava instead of coming to the thing, eh. And they try to watch. If you not there, little by little (flock by flock) fill one time. Maybe about 10, 15 or 20 one time come, go inside, eh. They try to sneak in. So you keep on scaring (shaking the cans to scare them). Keep on. You have to be wide awake. Otherwise they be eating before you know.

VL: Then who would bring you breakfast?

NC: No. They don't bring. One fella come relieve you. You go home, eat, then you come back again. Because those days we don't like eat cold food, eh. Not like nowadays, all cold lunch. Before always home lunch, warm food.

VL: What kind of food did you used to eat?

NC: All kind vegetables, meat. Hot meat, but pork, eh. Or chicken.

YY: What? Chinese style?

NC: Yeah. All is Chinese cooking. That's how I learned how to cook. From my mother.

YY: Did you ever used to cook when you were young?
NC: Oh, yeah. When I was six years old I know how to cook rice. And then after that little by little I learn how to (cook) common kind of dishes. Like cooking watercress and all da kine. That's duck soup. (Laughs) That's just like playing. I don't know. Cooking is just like playing to me. Some fellas say, "Gee, I worry. I don't know what to cook. I don't know what I going eat."

I say, "Oh, I can name you 101 kind." Sometime I stay shopping for vegetables.

They say, "Nelson, what you going to eat tonight?"

I say, "Oh, anything. The thing I like eat, I cook."

So he say, "For instance?"

I say, "What you want to know for?"

He say, "I don't know what to cook. I don't know what to eat."

I say, "Gee, get so many stuff. You don't know what to eat?"


And then he say, "Gee, where you get the stuff from?"

I say, Honolulu.

Then he say, "I don't see any up here."

I say, "No. You got to go to the Chinese store down Honolulu."

YY: Did your brothers all learn to cook, too?


YY: Did Ah Kong [another brother]?

NC: Ah Kong waste time.

YY: Dai Ho?

NC: That's worse. Right now he just better learn how to cook his own breakfast. Other than that he's waste time. They all bookworms. Dai Ho and Ah Kong. All honor roll students though. From high school to university. The two of them. One-two. One-two. Every time. (Laughs) First-second. First-second.
VL: Those days, were there certain things that they wanted girls to do and certain things they wanted boys to do? And things were considered girls' work or women's work?

NC: Not our days. Our days if they can do it, they do it. The girls, well, the girls hardly work. Of course they work little bit but I don't see hardly work. But they don't work like the boys. They slow compare to the boys.

VL: But they would do the same kind of work?

NC: Not in the field. For scare birds like that, they'd go. Other than that I don't think so. They don't plant rice.

YY: How about your mother?

NC: She doesn't. She try to go out one time. Try to cut rice. Just for the fun of it. But she cannot. Cutting rice is hard. Dai Ho is good cutting rice. One time Ah Kong was telling, "Oh, if I can hold so many thing (clumps) like you folks. You folks cannot catch me (beat me)." So one time Dai Ho said, "Now you can hold eight."

He said, "Go ahead. We race."

Ah Kong look at him, he say, "Just because you faster than me that's why he tell me (to race)." Dai Ho is fast cutting rice.

VL: What do you mean he can hold eight?

NC: Eight (clumps of rice). You know, you plant one, two, three, four, six (seedlings and they grew up to clumps), eh. One is called one bunch (or clump). So you can hold eight bunch. We cut four rows one time, you see. You go catch two (at a time). Two, two, eight. The hand full already, eh. So you got to turn that thing. Turn this way. Then you get to cut 'em like this. The straw this way. This part with the rice there, you spread 'em on top like that. You know what I mean?

VL: No. Can you explain again?

NC: You know the rice. All growing, eh? You take two (clumps) at one time. The sickle is go like this (slightly curved) and then turn. And all get teeth, small kind teeth. All what you do is push this one (the clumps, and bend them slightly) with the back of the sickle. The back of the sickle you bend like that, you bring 'em in (hold clumps with left hand) so the two is about the same (the grain portions are about even). Then you cut from under. One time you go like that. You cut the two (clumps). Then you catch the other thing and cut the two like that, (until) you get eight (clumps) in there. Then you turn the clumps this way, you push your hand up then you catch near to the place you like cut. Then the sickle stay right near here (where you're holding). If far you cannot cut 'em (neatly). Got to be pretty near. You push the sickle like that.
He cut so much you pull 'em back, he cut all the straw, the behind of the straw (cut the straws by pulling the knife toward you). The rice is tall, you know. Not like other place; Waipio rice tall. So you only take so much like this on top with the rice. (Cut about 20 inches from grain portion.) And the (bottom half of the) straw is spread under (to form a cushion or base). The straw will spread about like this wide (two feet). Then you put the rice, you turn (your hand and spread) the rice (on the straws). If the grain like this, you turn like that and the sun catch. Going dry, eh? Then after that (in afternoon) you bundle it (the grain portion). Take home. You bundle about 60 to 70 pounds, I think, on bundle.

VL: You bundle [the rice] with the straw?

NC: Yeah, with the straw. The rice with the straw. You pile 'em up, eh. You pull about three small, little pile about like this high. And you set one, you know the bark of the hau tree?

YY: Uh huh.

NC: That we used to get every time, eh (always kept a supply of ilihihau). That thing is about five feet long. You put under. You put one bunch (of rice) under. You see, here the rice and here the stalk like that. You put 'em (the strip of hau bark) about two inch away from the rice. You put the straw over here. You put one bunch. The second bunch you put 'em little bit more this side. You get the under part stay over there, eh. And the third one (bunch) you pile 'em straight. Real tight. When you carry the thing comes straight (and will not fall apart). If you put 'em (the three bunches) even together the middle one is going to slide out. You know, eh. You no understand?

You know why. The rice, they had to bound, push the rice. Pile 'em up, eh. You pile up so much small bunches like that. Say, three you bunch, eh. You get your three rows that you have three bunch (from three rows of rice you will get three bunches). The middle row you put one (strip of) bark of the hau tree on top. Yeah, (then) you put (one bunch rice) on top. One bunch. You spread 'em certain angle. Then the second one you put on top but little bit, maybe about 1-1/2 to 2 inch behind of the first bunch so that the seed can stay little bit more inside (nearer the center). And that third one you pile straight (down over) the second one. Then you bundle 'em. Tie 'em up. You put surprised. After you tied 'em you only twist one time like that, you tuck 'em in, eh. You carry the thing (two bundles on a mamaka) doesn't drop.

YY: Now this bark of the hau tree, did you soak it in water?

NC: Oh, yeah. You have to know how to take off (strip it off). Otherwise if you don't know how to take the thing is stiff, eh. You cut the tree the length you want then you split with the knife. Get little bit. Then you turn 'em over like that. You got to make it come down like that. (Strip the bark) straight down. You know,
the bark. Go like that. So that he come all soft, eh. Then after that you soak 'em in the water. Then you dry 'em up. But rainy day that thing (bark) is slippery, you know.

VL: Now who would go and do this?

NC: The hau?

VL: Yeah.

NC: We buy 'em from the Waimanu boys used to make that. Because Waipio hardly any. Only from Waimanu had. Waipio get some. Sometimes we used to go get too. But not enough, eh.

VL: Uh huh. Could you use it over again?

NC: Oh yeah. It all depends on the climate too, yeah. After you use 'em so many times, the thing going rot, eh. Maybe good for two crops though.

VL: So people that lived in Waimanu did that?

NC: Yeah. That's Hawaiian boys. The Hawaiian boys there. Those Hawaiian boys they know how to plant rice, you know. Because they used to work with the (Chinese). Waimanu used to get rice too. And they ship the rice to Kohala side, eh. On the flat boat they take 'em to Kohala.

YY: Were there Chinese in Waimanu who raised rice?

NC: Chinese? All Chinese and Hawaiian boys work.

VL: The Hawaiians in Waipio that grew rice. Who were they?

NC: I know Olepau used to grow rice. Old man Fred Olepau. That's the father of this boy here, the Olepau down here. He used to grow rice. He and who was the other one now? He and his brother. Two of them anyway. And Henry Olepau.

VL: And were there others?

NC: I don't think so.

YY: Rice was cultivated in the lower portion of the valley. And where was taro? Or did taro....

NC: Yeah, they get taro from way up side. You know where the Chinese temple is. Right across. Little bit down. All the way up [the valley] is taro. All the way down is rice.

VL: Did the Chinese people and the Hawaiian people get together much?

NC: In what way?
VL: For fun or socializing?

VL: What did people think with the Chinese marrying Hawaiians?
NC: No difference, I think.

VL: You know the Chinese--did they practice customs that they brought from China? Celebrations?
NC: Oh yeah. You mean the holidays--Chinese holidays?
VL: Uh huh.

NC: Every time. Even us during our time when we get rice. About eight or nine times a year we have a gathering together. Get party.
YY: In relation to rice? The Harvest Festival or things like that?

VL: And then what would you do?
NC: They cook. And the boys gather together and get eat.
VL: Cook what?
NC: Chinese dinner. Like get chicken, duck, chop suey. Some kind of fish, some kind of vegetables. All kinds. You get about seven, eight kine stuff on the table.

VL: And then would all the Chinese of Waipio get together?
NC: Oh, New Year already, every Chinese has their own.
YY: Uh huh. So these were family gatherings.
NC: Yeah, yeah.

VL: And then were there other things besides these holidays? Other Chinese customs--say religious?
NC: Yeah. Some of these holidays are religious holidays, you know. They get certain thing. That's how they used to come up to the church, eh.

VL: And the Chinese temple in the valley. Was that still going when you were small?
NC: No, no. That temple, my father was the one started that. It used to be one way the outside. So that one all broke down and everything. So nobody think that, my father said, "Ah, let me start." So he get the people together to make one book for donations, eh. Everybody dig up so much, put down. I think all our brothers get our name in there too because each of us give so much, eh.

VL: And who built it?

NC: Some carpenters. I don't know who though. We get so many carpenters. Chinese, most of them know carpentry, you know. Those old timers, eh.

VL: And then what kinds of things would you do at the temple?

NC: Just pray. That's all. There no such thing as speech or anything. No, no such. They just roast one pig. Go up there and sacrifice and all those stuff, eh. And then after that, they chop up the pig so many fellows, so many shares. They figure out how much expense everything. Each one package so much. They take 'em home and eat 'em.

YY: Was there any offering at the cemetery?

NC: Yeah, get.

YY: Of food?

NC: Yeah. Once a year.

VL: At what time of the year?

NC: Chinese, March I think, or April. Around there. This year, I think, it's April 5. American or April 5. Chinese is still March, eh. Either February or March--Chinese day.

VL: And then what would you do?

NC: Just go up there (to the cemetery). Set the thing. And just say a few word of prayer. And then you burn that--I don't know what you call that paper stuff. First you set the incense, eh. And then the candle. And then you place the tea, then the liquor. Then you put the food over here. Then they offer.

YY: And the food was pork?

NC: Pork, chicken. No meat though. No beef. That's one thing they don't use beef. They used fish. The use the pork, chicken, vegetables, liquor, tea, orange, buns like that, eggs.

YY: And so they left the food and returned to their homes?
NC: Yeah, they take 'em home. Eat 'em. You know, sometimes I think it's superstitious. After you take 'em home, then they offer like that. They say that thing (spirits) already eat and everything. How can you tell if they eat or not? That's one thing I cannot see. They say they eat. How can you tell me they eat?

VL: You mean they said that they ate it right then?

NC: No. You see, after you set that thing. As if nothing been touch. I don't even see anything. And yet the folks said, for instance, that party you go sacrifice grave, eh. He said that they ate their thing already. What happened? The food is same thing. The taste and everything is still there. I don't see any change. I don't know if they really are there or not. You believe they are there? I don't think so. I don't know though. But I tell you one thing. My mother, one time. You know, one old man died. Mock Chew's place. Old man Batalona died, eh. Passed away. Andoi, he was the one I saw took 'em up and buried. So he buried [Batalona] right next to my father. You see, my father's grave go like this, eh. All the graves go like this. I don't know why he bury like this. Slant like that. He bust the corner of my....My father get double box, eh, the coffin. Then one outside coffin. He bust the outside coffin. And then my mother say, "Gee." She call me by my Chinese name, Ah Hoy. Then she said, "Last night I dreamed father came back. He says somebody wen rob him. Broke his house. You try go up the grave, if there's anything wrong over there."

I went up there look. Yes, must be something wrong. So I ask Andoi. I say, "Eh, Andoi. When you bury that old man over there? You never broke anything?"

He say, "No."

I say, "You never find board or anything?"

He say, "Yeah, one piece board like this long." That's the outside coffin.

I said, "Redwood?"

He say, "Yeah."

I say, "You bust the coffin of my father." And the thing was right next to my father. So I call Dr. Carter up. That time Dr. Carter was taking care of the cemetery everything. I tell, "Eh, Dr. Carter. What can I do? That Andoi he bury that old man. You give 'em the stiff for bury, eh?"

He said, "Yeah."

"He bury old man right next to my father's grave, and he bust the outside coffin. I going move the grave."

He say, "Can you?"
I say, "Sure. That thing is not teak. I going put one (crow) bar. I going yank 'em the other side." You can push 'em, eh. It's not solid. Soft yet. So I went over there. I wen push 'em. I stuck the bar inside. Bend 'em. Keep on pushing until he move off. Set 'em back. You see, that's one thing. I don't believe in dreams and everything yet, that dream was true. That shows they still over there. That's one thing I cannot see. I tell my mother, "Funny. Died so many years and still yet he said that it's his house." I cannot see it.

VL: Now, the Chinese in Waipio, did they use Chinese calendars still? And all Chinese measurements?

NC: All Chinese calendar. They know the American date but they still use Chinese calendar.

VL: Would they get newspapers from China?

NC: No, from Honolulu. From, what they call that? Sun Chung Kock Bo, eh. That's the one, New China Daily, eh.

VL: Was printed in China?

NC: Printed in Honolulu. But they get China news and all da kine too. Not all, some.

END OF SIDE THREE.

END OF INTERVIEW.
VL: This is an interview with Mr. Nelson Chun. We are at his house in Honokaa. Today is April 2, 1978.

But first, if we can talk about the [1946] tidal wave? Can you tell us what you were doing that morning?

NC: It was April 1st... April fool, you know. I had breakfast and then two of my workmen and I, we went up, I would say about 300 yards away, (to) the patch way up there.

VL: From your house?

NC: From my house. The house is way down, eh [toward the beach in Waipio Valley]. I think it was around 7 o'clock in the morning and my wife blew the horn (when it is sounded at odd hours, not lunch or quitting time, it means an emergency). You know what the horn? So, I tell them, "Gee, what's wrong?" When I looked down, (toward the beach) I stood up from where I was pulling taro and saw all the water going over the river banks, so I knew was tidal wave.

But most time, tidal wave just come one or two or three [waves] at the most, see. I never come across tidal wave get 10 waves! So, I tell my workmen, "Let's go home." So, the old man followed me come back, but George Nakagawa, he went up (the valley) instead. So when I reach down, just before I reached the house (by) the patch just planted, (I noticed that) the waves took off all the young taro already.

I look at the fish, ulua, cutting the water. So when I came back, I tell my wife, "I'm going to block the outlet, then I'll get my net out, catch the one (on) the other side."

She said, "You better watch out."

I said, "Yeah." And my boy was up the roof taking pictures. I grabbed the net out and I watched the fish go in there and
the water is so dirty, they cannot see. The fish is more like blind, already. I said, "As soon as you hit the bank, you bound to turn around and when you turn around, then I'll whack you." So just about the hit the bank and get my net ready. I was watching the fish, waiting for him to turn around.

My boy yelled from the roof, "Daddy, look down!" There were waves coming up. I swung my net on my back and I started make my way home.

My wife was on the porch, she tell, "Throw the net away!"

So I tell 'em, "No, I think I beat the wave." So I ran into the kitchen. Our kitchen is separated from the house, (but connected) with the hallway (to the main house.) I had to open the (first) kitchen door, get in, close that door; open the other (back) kitchen door, get into the hallway--of course, I had to close the kitchen door--then I opened the parlor door. The waves came, one big timber hit the T & G floor, knock off one whole (hallway). In no time, the water was bed high, to the bed, so I tell, "Gee it looks like... we better get away from here."

My boy said, "Another wave's coming. It looks like it is going to cover the house."

I said, "Gee it's bad if it covers the house because...." No, before that, he [son] was on top, one wave came. That wave started rip the floor, took the kitchen and hallway roofing away. The kitchen went clear of the whole thing.

VL: It broke off from the house?
NC: Broke off from the hallway. You get a hallway about six feet and (it) just went off, all wrecked into pieces. My boy said, "This one looks like going cover the house."

I says, "Gee, cover the house. You better get inside. It's better to die in the house than....nobody can find our body if we stay outside." I never think the house was going to wreck because it is well built.

So he said, "No, it won't cover the house. It will reach about the window high." And that's pretty high because the window is about seven feet from the floor (to) the top of the window. Another foot and you hit the ceiling.

So all of a sudden I hear a crash and I said, "What happened?"

He said, "We sailing!" The whole house went. That house has five cement pillars under, all bolted down, not bolted
but all wired. So it carried the house, the cement went a little while and drop off. The pillars, some of the pillars stay and some of the pillars drop off. So I think about a hundred, yep, little over a hundred yards from where the location of the house was, the house settled down. And the waves started to recede and then I look and I said, "Hey, we better get away." So I jumped down the wave. The water was still chest high, a little higher than the chest.

Then I tell my wife to jump and she says, "No, I won't jump. I can't swim."

I said, "No, we have to go." At that time, Takeo came up. The Filipino. He asked if any of us got hurt and I said, "No."

He said, "Where you going now?"

I said, "Oh, we better run. We better go up."

He said, "Wait, I go get my money and my clothing."

I said, "Look down!" Another wave was coming over the sand dune. So he follow us. In fact, he went ahead of us. With one other Filipino, he went ahead. So one Filipino cut short down to Emmalia Young's house, but we cut upside, the higher place.

He said "That house (Emmalia's) went, just like Kona wind. He said when he went go to hold that wall, that wall drop off. When he turn around this side, this wall drop off. The whole thing went off. Lucky he didn't get hurt. And the house settled way up by below Olepau [around mid-way up main valley floor]. That's where the house landed. Then our house stop where Emmalia Young's house was originally. We start to run; we went to the upper side and we get to that cement where Andrew [Mancao] park the back hoe now. Over there has only small kine guava trees, say I think about two inch or three inch in diameter. That's all, small. And there were only few trees, so I was trying to make my way to Olepau's house. When I turned away, it [wave] was so near. My wife and the old man and my boy was behind of me. Takeo and I were in front and I was holding the baby, about less than two years old at the time. So I tell my wife, "Climb the tree." So my boy climbed way up high and the old man climbed the second one and my wife cannot get up because the tree will come down, so she stood on one tree, has the branch, a little over one foot above ground and she stayed there. She stayed there. Get two trees right near each other. She hold, hang on the tree. Then Takeo climbed the other tree that's about a good 30 to 40 feet away from
where my wife was.

Then I look at the wave and said, "Geez, going to cover me." So I told him, "Takeo, hold the baby." So I pushed the baby up because I was afraid that the wave would throw me off. I can swim, but I cannot save the baby. So I held the guava tree and at the same time, I was fighting the grass and all the shrubs, those things, so that it won't knock the tree. I was standing first and after, when the waves came, it struck me clear. My legs all go off (the ground.) Only my hand holding the tree so when the waves started to recede, I looked and said, "What happened to my wife?" I asked Takeo.

He said, "Gee, I don't know. I cannot see your wife. I only see your boy stay pulling the grass and the rubbish away." So I started swim down and he (son) said, "Jump on top the grass. It is faster. You can ease down faster. "You know, the grass thick like this, all cover that place. So I jumped on the grass and when I went down, my boy was taking off [grass and rubbish] and then my wife's leg was pinned between the two trees. You see, the branch go like this: the two trees come together like this and the other tree come together. So she work out and I went try to get her leg out, struck the branch, pushed (the trees apart) as much as I can, tell her she pull her leg. All black and blue, so I said, "We have to go. I know it's sore, but we have to go." Because another wave was coming over the sand dune already.

As soon as we make to around Olepau's house, that section over there, our house went clear inside that stream and wreck up, just like one Lancer box matches. Just like that. It all go to pieces only the floor left. So from there, we make our way right up to John Kanekoa's place. You know, where Harrison Kanekoa's house [Waimanu side of valley—higher ground]. I think Robert [Kahele] stay in the upside house. So we slept there. The next day, Matsunami carne down. No, the same day. Matsunami carne down. So he said, "Mr. Wisherd send me down to look for you." I was thankful he thought of us--- he's manager of Honokaa Sugar.

So those Hawaiians over there say, "Why only think of Nelson Chun? How about us?"

"You folks safe. You folks way up here." That's what Matsunami told 'em. The next day, I went up to Hilo and my brother. Because my brother came over (to meet us). We stayed there, slept overnight. I look at Hilo; was worst hit than Waipio and yet people get courage.
Some of their family died, too. So they still get courage to start all over. So I tell my brother, "I'm going back. I'm going to see what I can salvage and I'm going to start all over again." So I went back. Of course, it takes money and it takes time.

VL: You said before, you lost six houses in the tidal wave?

NC: Yeah. Of course, three house, (two) 2-bedrooms, and the other one is just small shack, individual fellows stay. Actually, is warehouse, but they get no place to stay, so they stay like a house. And only our house is big, our house is five-bedroom house.

YY: Where was this big house located?

NC: You know where Bronco stays now, where Takeo stay? That first shack down, right in front Joe [Kala] house [near the beach on Kukuihaele side of valley]. Cross get one shack, eh? That's our warehouse there. So I fixed that for Takeo because he was crop sharing with me and he has no place to stay. He tell, "Will you fix this, make one bedroom and then I can stay?"

I said, "Okay." So we move all our things out from there. We get pack saddles and all those things, and he stayed there.

VL: You lost everything in your house, then?

NC: Practically everything.

VL: Were you able to salvage anything?

NC: Well, certain things, worthless kine. The good things, like money and all those, were all gone. You know, I just brought back $2,000 from the bank to pay off the taro growers. That's all gone. I have money in the ledger and I keep money for the old people where, that's their life savings already. They expect to go back China with that money. Three persons. One has 800 so much, the second one 400 so much, and the other one 200 so much [dollars].

VL: They kept the money with you, like a bank?

NC: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I didn't want to put it in a bank because any time they go back, I cannot tell when they go back. I said, "Put it in the bank. Get interest."

They said, "No, don't put it in the bank." They don't want me to put it in the bank because they are collecting Welfare,
too. So those days Welfare is only $4.50 a month. Four dollars and a half a month is good-for-nothing now days. So all that money was gone. I gave them all back, you know.

Who, oh, Frank Frazier was the banker up here, Sheriff Rickard, Dr. Carter. I think Dr. Carter is still living down Honolulu. They told me, "You don't have to pay what tidal wave takes away. Because that's Act of God. That's not your fault."

I said, "Gee, how would I feel if one of them hangs himself? I'll be just like a murderer." I told them.

They said, "No, it's not your fault."

I said, "I know it's not, but it's easier for me to pay them than keep me worried." So I paid. Then I started all over again planting. I had a real good crop. One section I get about, well, the first harvest's supposed to be around 2,000 to 3,000 bags. I get 6,000 bags all together. Three thousand bags could be harvested right along until the other 3,000 was ready. The first crop of 3,000 bags I haven't taken off even a single bag. It goes right back to the dirt. No market.

VL: Was the taro still there, or was it all washed away?

NC: No, this is after the tidal wave. I replant. I go all over again.

The tidal wave one, I just forget. We were pulling taro then [when the tidal wave hit]. Do you know where Andrew's [Mancao] section is? All that section was planted and the taro was real big (6-7 pounds each). He [Nelson's son] got so disgusted he joined the Army (laughs). Ready for harvest, you know, and the taro was really big. You know, one taro get six to seven pounds. Some of the taro were still there but cannot be used; the salt water got them.

So I start all over again, planted, and got about 6,000 bags. The first 3,000 bags I didn't pull any, and the second 3,000 bags, I only harvested about, I think 1,200 bags, that's all.

VL: Now why was that?

NC: Market. No market.

VL: Oh, I see.

NC: Everybody was planting it. Those days market was always flooded. That hit me more hard than the tidal wave. The
tidal wave hit me, but I still had money in the bank, and I drew out the money and went right ahead. After that, I went [$]5,000 so much in the hole. To get out of that 5,000 took me a long time. I didn't dare plant, eh. I only planted a few hundred bags.

VL: Why was the market always flooded?

NC: Everybody planting. Oahu has its own taro, Kauai get its own, Maui get. I was dealing with [name deleted] (a poi factory on Oahu). The manager, [name deleted], he buys the cheap taro where the land was condemned and he bought all those taros cheap. So he didn't buy any from me.

VL: Why was the land condemned?

NC: I think for subdivision, or something like that. Building houses. That's where those taro planters, Honolulu taro planters (were).

VL: Oahu?

NC: Yeah.

VL: You said one time about he [the manager] promised to buy so many bags from you?

NC: Yeah, that's the very time. After that, I planted some more. I go down see him. That's the very time I went down, after the [1946] tidal wave. He said, "You plant a hundred bags a week for me."

The wife said, "No, too much. One hundred bags is too much, 75 bags all right. We cannot use 100 bags because we have other taro.

I said, "Okay. I'll plant 75 bags a week for you. You make sure...."

He said, "Oh, I'm sure. When the taro is ready, you let me know."

I said, "Okay."

When the taro was about one month more to harvest, I called him up. I went down [to see him] six times. Every time, he tells me, "Oh, you wait another month or so." Keep on like that. Every time, I didn't get any satisfactory answer from him.
One day I stopped at Honolulu Poi and talked story over there. Honolulu Poi was nice enough, he told John Loo to take from me when he was short of taro. Don't buy outside taro. He was giving me [ordering from me] 20 bags or 40 bags a week. That was good, so it kept me going. Of course, I had quite a bit of taro left. That's the 1,200 bags. No, that's not. That's afterwards, I think. So, he took them from me and ordered 20 to 40 bags a week.

Then he called me up one day. He came up one day with, an accountant, John something. Expensive man—$25 an hour. So he came up, talked to me...

VL: Tottori [owner of Honolulu Poi]?

NC: Yeah. Ernest [Tottori] came up, talked to me and of course, his accountant talked with me. They stopped in Maui first and then they came to my place. His accountant talked to me, "Ernest, I want you to turn that lady off and take from Nelson."

Ernest said, "Oh, I cannot take from Nelson because he has so much."

The accountant said, "You don't have to take all." You take any amount you can use, so it's better for you to deal with Nelson because I talked to him 10 minutes, better than his talking to the other guy one day." That's what he tells. Then he says, "I know he's an honest man just by talking to him."

He said he could not give me the answer now. He says, "You wait. I go back Honolulu and then I'll give you my answer."

So the next day, when he went back, he tell that wahine on Maui, because the Maui wahine was giving him all the bad taro, the watery kind and giving the good ones to Waiahole Poi. So when they stopped there (on Maui) they asked the lady, "Is that taro going to my poi factory?"

She said, "No, this is for Waiahole."

He said, "How come you give Waiahole all good taro and you give me the junk taro?"

She said, "Cannot help because that's my poi shop all the time. I have to give him the best I get. If you want, you take, if you don't want you don't have to take." That's what she told him, Ernest, so the accountant got mad.
VL: So [name deleted] (the other poi factory) had been buying the condemned poi...

NC: Taro.

VL: ...taro and didn't buy yours?

NC: No, he didn't. So Honolulu Poi was taking from me for a while because when Ernest went back the next day, he called John Loo to get in touch with me and tell me to go to Honolulu. He said, "This time he come down, it is for his own benefit. He doesn't have to run around like how he go to [name deleted] place."

I said, "Okay. I'll go down." I went down. He call his accountant to come down and talk with me. He talk and everything settle up.

Then he say, "One thing I wanted to make sure. If you deal with me, I don't want you to sell any taro to any Honolulu factories, because it is our competition."

I say, "Okay. Who else going to take? [Name deleted] won't take."

And he said, [name deleted] will ask you, if he runs short."

I said, "No, I don't think so."

So, when I came back, about a month after that, he [Tottori] called up one morning and tell me, "Nelson, how much more more taro you get?"

I said, "Oh, I get quite a bit. About 700 bags up Olepau's place and I get about 2,000 bags down side."

He said, "You keep all that for me."

I said, "You sure you can use them all?"

He said, "Yeah. And don't sell to any Honolulu poi factories. You can sell to Hilo, but don't sell to Honolulu." Because I was still dealing with Puueo Poi [Hilo].

I said, "Who in the world is going to take from me from Honolulu if you don't take?"

They tell me, [name deleted] will call you up. He's going to be short of taro."

I said, "Oh, good, but I don't think he get the nerve to call. If I were in his boots, I wouldn't call."
He said, "You don't know [name deleted]. He get the nerve like a brass monkey." That's what he told me.

I said, "Are you sure?"

He said, "Yeah."

Sure enough, a week after that early one Monday morning, [name deleted] called up. It was around 6 o'clock. "Nelson?"

I said, "Yeah."

He said, "You send me next week 100 bags taro."

I said, "What taro?"

And then he said, "I thought you got plenty taro."

I said, "Taro cannot grow forever. You didn't take, all rot."

He said, "How about the other ones, the later ones?"

I said, "That one I sold all to Honolulu Poi."

He said, "You take 'em back. I give you $1 more one bag."

I said, "I don't do such business. How would you like it if I sell to you and take it back just because the other fellow give me $1 more and I sell to the other fellow. You don't like that, eh?"

He said, "Yeah. Hard to talk."

I said, "Sure. Any businessman wouldn't do that."

Then he tell me, "Well, cannot help. Who else get taro up there? Waipio get plenty?"


He said, "You going to make arrangement tell them send me 100 bags?"

I said, "I don't do business for the next man. You want, you call 'em up."

He said, "I don't know their number."
I said, "You call the operator. They tell you their number."

VL: Did you ever deal with [name deleted] again after that?

NC: Never. He called me two times. After that, he still called me. I said, "No, I cannot do such business. If I sell to you and I take the taro and sell to the other fellow, you don't like that, too."

And then he said, "Oh, yeah. It's hard. You cannot find some for me?"

I said, "I told you that I don't do business for the other fellow. I do my business for my own only." So he came up, he scout Waipio. He went try to look for dry land taro. I don't know if he got any or not.

VL: Did you ever deal with Kalihi Poi?

NC: No.

VL: Only Honolulu, on Oahu?

NC: Kalihi Poi I think during Sakai's time I give 'em one or two... I don't know. (It was) called Waimea Poi. That's now Kalihi Poi, yeah?

VL: Was Waimea before?

NC: Yeah, Waimea Poi. I don't know. Old lady was the one running the poi shop. Of course, she get workmen, but she's the boss.

VL: Did you ever deal with her?

NC: Yeah. Only short while. Only when she run short (of taro). I don't think it's more than six months. Every time when she run short, she call me up and she want so many bags.

VL: So mostly you dealt with Honolulu Poi?

NC: Yeah. But when I deal with Honolulu Poi, I never deal with any other poi shop. I used to send a few bags to Kailua Poi [Kona]. Kailua Poi shop used to get one and I used to send a few bags every week. Give them about 20 bags a week, I think.

VL: When you were dealing with Honolulu Poi, did you deal through the agent, John Loo?

NC: Well John Loo has always been the agent. We just, tell how many bags (to send). Of course, the money part they
send directly (to us), and sometimes they send John Loo all the checks and John Loo pass it out. Right now they send all to John Loo. Before, they send directly (to us).

VL: Were you ever dealing with Honolulu Poi when Ginji Araki was the agent?

NC: Araki and John Loo were agents, two of them.

VL: Together?

NC: Yeah. Because Araki controls so many planters, see, and John Loo has so many planters.

VL: Different planters?

NC: John Loo get mostly his own family side, eh.

VL: And then you also dealt with Puueo Poi?

NC: Yeah, for a while.

VL: Now, the price of taro, did you think that it was always fair, the price you were getting?

NC: Well, I think it was fair. I get no kick. I won't say it was not fair, although now up here [Big Island], they are paying $.15 a pound and Honolulu paying $.12 a pound. He said, "He cannot raise the taro [price] because you get so many growers, see." You get Kauai, you get Maui.

VL: So in the past, whatever they gave you, you would take as the price?

NC: I didn't, I never did ask for price. I figure a sure market is better than you looking for price. Of course, I could sell outside and make more money, but what is the sense? When you make the money now and next crop you lose it, it doesn't make sense. I would rather have a steady market.

VL: And they always bought as much as you could sell?

NC: He took all my taro. Honolulu Poi, he told John, "Whatever taro he get, you harvest all his one. Don't let his taro rot." Of course, I helped him out too, when he was short of taro, I pull my taro a little bit young, you know, just to supply him. He appreciate that. He said, "That's the kind of grower I need. When I'm in a pinch, he's right there."
VL: This is the father, the older Tottori? Later on, the younger one took over, right?

NC: Yeah.

VL: So you are talking about the older one?

NC: No, the younger one (Ernest), is the one (who) deals with me. The first guy was the old man, but Ernest was the one who took over. Then he deals with me. The old man is still working, huh? No?

VL: I don't think so. Was there ever among the farmers in Waipio competition to sell their taro?

NC: Well, most of them, they get their (own) agents. Like Araki get so many and Araki take their taro and sell it Honolulu Poi.

VL: So you were always able to sell yours?

NC: Uh huh. Since I deal with Honolulu Poi.

VL: Were there other farmers who were not always able to sell theirs?

NC: That, I don't know. Maybe some of them were not. Some of them get some throw away. One time we had so much, we had to cut the price. Ernest came up and he said, "The regular price for this thing [regular order]; the extra taro, you get a lower price."

VL: So you folks did that.

NC: That's the surplus taro, you know. We fill with our regular steady order and then whatever extra, we have to give 'em for less.

VL: And then would he sell the poi for less, though?

NC: Well, he figure on, he sell it cheaper.

VL: So the price of poi in the market would come down?

NC: That, I don't know. We don't inquire.

VL: I want to go back to the time you went to the Mainland, early, early, to Missouri.

NC: 1921, I think.

VL: Now, did you go to high school here?
NC: No. Grammar school. Eighth grade, that’s all.

VL: So between 8th grade and the time you went to the Mainland, what did you do?

NC: When I was up in the Mainland, I was taking up automobile, studying at Sweeney Auto School. So I didn't like the greasy part of the course. I liked the electrical part but not the mechanical part. I know, I can handle a car all right. Those days cars were easy, not like nowadays, complicated. You don't get instrument, you cannot work. Those days you can fix car with hardly any tools. Like Model T, I used to strip 'em and put 'em back, but nowadays cars, you ask me to strip 'em, I wouldn't dare. And I took up welding. I took up vulcanizing, too, and then after that, I figure I better go into carpentry, so I went in six months carpentry school.

VL: Why did you decide to go to the Mainland in the first place?

NC: I wanted to be a mechanic. Automobile mechanic. So when I found out that the job was so greasy and everything, I didn't like it.

VL: How did you finance your schooling?

NC: My father help give me the money. In those days, a few hundred dollars last long, not like nowadays. A few hundred dollars is just a drop in the bucket.

VL: When you went to the Mainland, what was your first impression, your reaction?

NC: You mean when I reached there? Well, I don't know. I get plenty friends, too, get plenty of local Honolulu boys there, so I feel at home, but I didn't like the place I stayed because you cannot keep a white shirt white because we were right next to train station, that Union Station, with trains everyday back and forth. In those days, they burned coal, I think, or something like that. Oh, that shirt! You hang 'em up and next day all brownish color already. And if you hang 'em up two or three days, they come black. So smokey, eh? Because our school is just across the road from the station, big building, ten-story building. We stay in the dorm, eh, six persons (to a room).

VL: And then what made you decide to come back?

NC: I didn't like the climate. The changing of climate sure get me. I was sick for a while, and that's how I knew
one Chinese doctor who was a poor doctor at the start and then he came to be millionaire after that, on account of the flu. Because that's the only Chinese doctor over there, in Kansas City. The flu—not a single Chinese died of the flu, you know, that time when the first flu hit the States. The Army people were dying everyday, so there was one big shot, Colonel or something like that, General or maybe, but he was so sick and the doctor gave up hope and said, "Get no way cure you." Giving up to die already.

So his friend told him, "Why don't you try this Chinese doctor? I haven't heard of a Chinese dying of the flu."

He said, "Oh, I'd do anything. Do you know of any?"

He said, "I know of one stay way down but how good he is, I don't know. You can try."

He said, "Oh, I try anything."

So he went down talk to this doctor and this doctor say, "Oh, no. I won't handle Army people. I don't want to get sued. If you die, what?"

He said, "Oh, I give you written thing that if I die or anything, you don't have to worry. Nothing will happen to you."

Then he say, "Okay, but one thing I tell you. If you want me to be your doctor, you have to stay my hospital." His hospital only six beds. That old man, and he's a poor doctor, you know, he charge so cheap, the Chinese [patients]. He hardly make any money. So when he came there, he said, "And you eat what I give you. You cannot eat your food. You eat my food."

He said, "Okay." So he came down, stayed there. In week he was well already, strong. He said, "I can go home?"

He (the doctor) said, "Oh, no. You cannot go home. You gotta stay, or bumbai you get relapse, get worse. Relapse, you will die. I cannot cure you any more." And that's true, too, but I think main thing is that he wanted to make a little bit more money (laughs). That's the main thing.

Then he said, "Okay, I'll stay."

So he stayed and when he said, "Okay, now you can go home." That was one week again.

That's two weeks he was in the hospital and he said, "How much I owe you?"
He say, "That's all?"

He say, "Yeah, that's plenty."

So he wrote him a check $150 and he wrote him another check $250. He said, "This I give you as a present." Tip like, eh. $150 for his fare and $250 for his tip.

END OF SIDE ONE.

SIDE TWO

VL: So can we just repeat a little bit about when you came back from the Mainland and took over from your father at the time that he died. He had, you said, about a hundred acres leased land. This was leased mostly from?

NC: From Hawaii Irrigation Company. I think Kuikahi has some land and Olepau has some.

VL: That he leased. Do you know how much it cost him to lease that?

NC: No, I forget. When I took over, I still forget, too (laughs). It's so long.

VL: And you said that he had only half an acre in taro?

NC: Yeah, about half an acre.

VL: And little by little, you put in more?

NC: Uh huh.

VL: Where did you learn how to raise taro?

NC: Look around, ask people, the old-timers. I used to go and pull taro with the taro growers just for the fun of it. Because those days, they get some strong fellow, they carry the taro, two bunch taro. They carry it, they lift, put on top the arm over here [forearm] and then throw on top [shoulder]. Then he get one fellow by the name of Tom Kua. He's a big Hawaiian guy. He just swing 'em like that, he put 'em on top, without putting on top here [forearm]. So those boys know I am strong, but they don't know if I get heart or not, so he kidded me, he "I like see the rice farmer do like what Tom Kua did."
I said, "Well, how did he do?"

He said, "You know, he lift the taro, he just go like this. He put 'em on top here [shoulder]."

I said, "Don't put on top here [forearm]?

He said, "No." You know, most of them, they swing, they put them on top here, then from here they swing them on top.

I said, "No, I cannot." So when they went back for lunch, I tried. But I get different art. I just swing like that, I go like that and thing came up right on my shoulder. So I tell them, "You think only Tom Kua can and we cannot. Tom Kua is big. That's why he can. Two hundred over pounds, he ought to be able to lift it up."

He said, "It's no use talk because you cannot."

I said, "Just for that, I'm going to try." So I looked for the bunch that doesn't have too many big taro. You know, the small taro not so heavy, although the bunch is big but it's not so heavy as the big taro. The big taro, small bunch, but heavy. So I picked where they get the small kine taro.

I said, "Here, watch 'em." I put 'em on top.

They said, "Heh, you did it."

I say, "Yeah. I didn't even put on top my arm." So I showed them I can put it on my shoulder, too.

VL: Was this before you went to the Mainland, you did that kind?

NC: No, no. When I came back.

VL: So you learned by asking?

NC: Yeah, asking and watching how people do. I used to go watch how they plant taro, how they....

VL: Who would you watch?

NC: Gee, I forget. Get so many taro planters, the working men, you know. Akioka, he get so many working men, Mock Chew get so many working men.

VL: You would watch Chinese or Hawaiian?
NC: Chinese. All Chinese. Hawaiians, they don't get too much taro. They only plant enough to eat. Very few get taro for sale, you know. Only afterwards, recently they get more Hawaiians plant taro for market. Taro is a lot easier than rice. I wouldn't go into rice again—never! If I had to, I don't, because I know I cannot take it because you had to worry so much. You worry when the heavy rain come. You worry when wind come, especially these kine winds, strong wind like day time [it had been a windy day]. When the rice is ripe, when wind like this comes in, you think how much grain going to drop down. I wouldn't grow rice again. And when heavy rain comes down, the rice all going to slip down and it's funny, the rice come lighter. They're not so heavy, plus hard to harvest. Instead of picking two at one time, you have to pick one at a time and plus, it is hard, too, on the back.

VL: So after 1928, you went all into taro?

NC: All into taro.

VL: Were you able to use the same patches that you had from rice?

NC: Some of the patches, not all.

VL: How did you change to taro?

NC: You have to plow up the land and everything. Taro is easier than rice. Rice, you have to plow every time and harrow and then plant. But taro, once you get the patches ready for planting and after the crop you don't have much trouble. All you do is just harrow. You don't have to plow. In those days, we never did fertilize until afterwards when we learned the value of fertilizer.

VL: So early part...

NC: We only rely on the water.

VL: Where did you get your huli?

NC: We go to the taro farmers' place and pull. You pull and take what you can pull. Of course, some of those taro growers, they are nice. You go pull, you take what (huli) you can make. Sometimes they pity us, they give us a few bundles.

VL: How did you decide what variety of taro to grow?

NC: Well, those days, I had all uaua taro. I never did plant apii taro. Apii taro is the white taro. Uaua is the
gray one. The gray taro, uaua, get more to a plant than apii.

VL: More to a plant?

NC: To a plant. You plant one, you get plenty small ones. apii, you plant one, you get only, lucky you get five, six, and sometimes you get only one or two. Of course, you always can make plenty, if you know how.

VL: How is that?

NC: Fertilize. You know, one time, Mock Chew [father of Sam] is an old timer already, and one time I went up his place to make seed and he said, "You see, old timers like us. Where you can find apii taro get five or six keiki? Only Mock Chew get."

I said, "Five, six keiki is easy. I get some get ten."

He said, "Oh, how much can you tell a lie? I was born and raised in a taro patch. How can you tell me such lie? Where you see apii taro get more than six, seven keiki?"

I said, "I get more than ten."

He said, "I like see how much you can tell me a lie. I like see the taro."

I said, "Okay, you come down. Someday you come down and I show you the patch."

Sure enough, one week after that one early Sunday morning, he was coming down and he's fond of coffee, so every time he come down we drink coffee. So when he reached down I said, "You want to drink coffee?"

He said, "No, no, I not going drink coffee yet. I like see your apii taro. You remember you told me you get more than ten keiki."

I said, "Sure, I get more than ten keiki. You come, I'll show you." So we walked and we were talking on the way.

He said, "Where's the taro?"

I said, "A little more we reach. This is the patch. That's apii, yeah?"
He say, "Yeah, that's api all right." He look, he say, "Heh, that's something. Maybe small kine. Cannot use."

I said, "Go feel 'em."

When he feel 'em they about duck egg size already, the small ones. He said, "That's the first time in the history. How do you do it?"

I say, "I don't know. Maybe nature gave me that I get that much." But actually, it's the fertilizer (laughs). You fertilize you get plenty.

VL: What kind of fertilizer?

NC: Those days we were using ammonia, and then the second one we put in was...sulfate, no, it the other one? I forget. First, we used 10-10-5, then after that, we used 5-10-10, the second application. 10-10-5, that's what make 'em grow, that's the one get plenty small ones (keikis) come up. And 5-10-10, that's the one that makes the root come big, the corm.

VL: Now, what gave you the idea to use fertilizer?

NC: The University Extension people came up and they say, "You fertilize, you get more taro."

I say, "Yeah, well, we'll go try." Sure enough, you know, I get one patch where I experiment on rice and that's the same patch I had taro.

So you know, University said, "You try, you put...."

I say, "How much fertilizer you have to put per acre?"

He says, "Oh, we recommend four bags." Four bags those days was a 100 pounds a bag.

I said, "How many application?"

He said, "One application."

I said, "Okay." So I tried. We always get about, I think, 200 some-odd bags, 220 or 230 bags with that one acre land, which is considered poor (land), not too much taro. So I said, "Got to be more than that." So when I fertilize, I get about 100 bags more, (a total of) 300 many bags. So
I said, "Gee, I used to experiment on rice. I double the amount and get a lot more rice, so I'm going to try on the taro." So I tell the workmen, I say, "Put eight bags in there."

They said, "You crazy or what? Last crop you put only four bags, now you put eight bags. How you going to control the taro?"

I said, "What do you mean?"

He said, "If it grow wild, what you going do?"

I said, "I dry 'em."

"If you dry 'em, you won't come down, what you going to do?"

I said, "It will come down."

Now the first, I told 'em, I close the water earlier and it will come down, and he say, "What if it don't come down?"

I say, "I will dry it."

"What if you dry 'em it doesn't come down?"

Then I say, "I throw 'em away because if it is going be watery, cannot use?"

He say, "Oh, rich, eh? Big area like that and throw 'em all away."

I say, "Experiment."

He say, "Why don't you experiment on one small patch?"

I said, "No. It's worthwhile experimenting on the big patch. I had rice, I experiment on this patch." So they put the fertilizer; they (were) grumbling at the same time. I said, "No mind, put 'em in." So they put 'em in. Gee, I was afraid, too. Twelve months that thing still dark green, you know, 13 months, 14 months, still green, supposed to be little more and ready. Eighteen months can harvest, you know, (with) gray taro. Gee, 19 months time and just start to turn yellow. I say, "There you are." But it was 20 months before I can harvest. I dried that thing up for little while. I get 470-over bags. I say, "You see the difference, that much more." So after I harvest that, I put another extra bag in there, doesn't pay, only get
two bag extra taro, so I said, "No, that's too much already." So I put eight bags at the most per acre.

VL: When did you first start doing that, about?

NC: That's one date I forget.

VL: Before the [1946] tidal wave?

NC: Yeah, before the tidal wave.

VL: In the thirties?

NC: Yeah.

VL: After you pau rice [1928]?

NC: After pau rice. I was all in taro so many years already. You know, we used to plant taro different from nowadays. Nowadays, we space every one evenly. Before, we plant two and then wider space and then two near together, and the other two separated a little bit wider.

VL: About how much space between the close ones?

NC: Fourteen to 15 inches, I think, and the other one is about 19 to 20 inches wide space, but nowadays, we space 'em all about the same, about 17, 18 inches. Some poor patches, not rich kind land, maybe make it more narrow.

VL: And then before time, how did you plant the next row?

NC: In between. The first row, we go at it two, and the other the two right over here, the two near one, and then the other two near one like that. When you look all angle, it looks kind of straight. Not exactly straight, but nice kine curve. We call it straight because doesn't go zig-zag.

VL: Now back early in those days, was the size of the patch any different from nowadays?
NC: Well, before most the patches are small. Afterwards, I says, when they have tractors, I'm going to bust up all the banks at once. Not too much difference in grade. I get 'em all level then make 'em into big patches. Like that big patch right in front where Leonard's [Takahashi] shack is, that's close to two acres. That used to be seven or eight patches.

VL: And each patch, the seven or eight, what was the source of water? In the seven or eight patches, did each patch have its own inlet?

NC: Oh, yeah. From patch to patch it come down. The first one feed the second one, the second one feed the third one, like that. And we get one extra ditch by the side there and that one feeds in when we want to lower, make the taro come down because you cannot always let from one place.

VL: So when you want the taro to come down, you have it [water] also from the side ditch?

NC: Yeah, because some patches we want them to grow yet. Because you don't plant 'em all one time. The patch we want to come down, we close the water, we put in from the side.

VL: So the water, was it from the stream?

NC: Uh huh.

VL: Did you make your own waterhead?

NC: We have one big waterhead that feeds all the upper land, and then our lower land, we get another waterhead of our own, because we wouldn't get enough water if only (from) the upper section. By the time the water reaches down, the water is so warm, it (taro) doesn't grow so much.
VL: So you had two?

NC: Two waterheads.

VL: And there were no farmers ahead of you then, that used that water?

NC: You mean my own waterhead?

VL: Yeah.

NC: My own waterhead was my own.

VL: But upstream, there were other farmers?

NC: Yeah. That's what we call the big waterhead. That one supply all the farmers, the lower section, from Olepau's place. That's where the big waterhead is. All downside, the water is all from there.

VL: So you made the seven or eight patches all into one patch so you could use the machine?

NC: Tractor. We have to hire tractor those days, the kine, from Andrade (in Honokaa). I don't have my own tractor. Like nowadays, I get, but we cannot, uh, our tractor too small. We cannot grade land with it. Ours is just for leveling and tilling and that's all what we need for now because the patch is already made.

VL: Can you tell us about the different water levels, at which times you would let water in and for what reason?

NC: Well, first, when you first plant, the water is only about anywhere from one inch up to three inches, because the land is not real level. So the water has to be running all the time, flowing. And as it (the taro) grows older, around eight, nine months, that's our section, then we slow the water down or raise the outlet little higher so the water come a little more deep. By the time it's around 11, 12 months, we put the water at least about three inches deep.

VL: Always flowing?

NC: Flowing, but we slow the water down. When too cold, the taro is not so good.

VL: What happens?

NC: Well, if it's too cold, it might come watery. The taro start growing.
VL: So you slow it down?

NC: You just close the inlet and don't let so much water come in. For instance, (the) three intakes are about a foot wide (each). We slow 'em down, we cut 'em down each time. Quarter way cut-off, then another quarter, and then that leaves only half and another quarter; use only one quarter more to do the last part. That's how we do it. You either raise the intake up, or lower the intake. When you lower the intake, the water comes more. Planting taro is hard, too. Plenty fellow can plant taro, but slow. It's just like cutting seed, too. At our place, when we cut seed, we cut very few taro on it, (i.e. only leave a thin area of meat when cutting the huli). But upper section (people), don't care (if) thick or thin. They don't care because the water is cold. Our place, if get too much taro on it [the huli], they just rot.

VL: So you cut the huli thin?

NC: Yeah, little bit taro (on it). You know, that thing has, anyway, he tell you where to cut. He [the huli] get the line over there, the growing part. He can see where to cut. Like us, we get so used to it. Some fellows, cut seed, with a knife straight down like that. Us, we just poke the knife down like that and bend 'em over [the corm is thus snapped off, rather than cut all the way through].

VL: So all of yours, you cut thin?

NC: Yeah. Every one.

VL: Then did you try other varieties, too?

NC: Well, we get now apii instead of uaua, because uaua get so much sick those days, see. I turn 'em into apii. Apii did better, so I kept growing apii. Now even apii get sick. So what can you do, no other variety. That lehua is waste time.

VL: Why do you think there is sickness?

NC: I don't know. Nobody knows. It is soft rot. Of course, the other one is guava seed rot. Guava seed rot, we know more or less, I know how to cure that. You fertilize, you lime up the patch first before you plant it and after that, you fertilize the thing before they start get keiki. Push 'em up. Even if you get a keiki only little bit under, the guava seed rot, if wouldn't go way up.

VL: Did you ever not have enough water?
NC: Sometimes, but then sometimes the water bust up so many times. The land dry for three, four days, five, six days, like that, but sometimes, it all depends on the growth of the taro, how old and sometimes it's good to get a little bit dry. The soil pack and the taro more solid. But then if it's young taro and it dries like that for so long, the grass going to come up and give you lot of work. You know, there are disadvantages and advantages in the water.

VL: What times would the waterhead break? After a storm or something?

NC: Yes, floods. Floods bust up the waterhead and you cannot fix the waterhead until the flood goes off. And sometimes there is so big a broke and the ditch is all filled with sand. That's why we are really careful with how we build the waterhead. We try to build it so that the sand won't come in.

VL: How do you do that?

NC: Well, instead of slanting that way, we make 'em square, right angle.

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VL: To the stream?

NC: Of the stream, you see. Block square like that and then the flood going to come straight down and water come over here. We don't make the waterhead so solid that it won't break. If big water, we'd rather have the waterhead broken then fix after a flood than shoveling sand. One year, Harrison [Kanekoa] and Smiley and some other people, John Kahele I think, the three of them they make my waterhead and they came back and say, "Nelson, I did a good job for you. I made the waterhead; guarantee won't broke."

I said, "Geez. I'm sorry you did that. I forget to tell you folks not to make 'em too solid."

He said, "Why?"

I said, "Because if the waterhead doesn't broke, we going to shovel sand. That sand all going in the ditch." I think not
more than two months after that, one big flood came. I think about three-fourths of the ditch was all filled with sand. Oh, our ditch is long, too. It took three fellows two weeks before they get the ditch clean. Shovel sand and throw 'em out. Sand and gravel, rather. Some sand, some stone, you know, all that stuff.

VL: So how would you make the waterhead so that it wasn't as strong?

NC: Don't pack 'em too much and don't put 'em too high, so in case the big water come, it goes over the top part. Don't let the poles go too high and don't pack 'em too solid so that in case there are rubbish those thing come hit that thing (the waterhead) and knock it off.

VL: What do you make it out of?

NC: Posts, get posts and you pack 'em down guava post. Now they using steel pipes and da kine, concrete bars, reinforced bars. You just pack 'em down so much. Don't pack 'em too far down so in case a flood comes, it knocks 'em off, and don't make 'em too high. You see, the top, we always have just enough to hold guava stick or whatever branches we put on, then we put the grass and everything to hold the water. In case the flood comes, it knocks the top off and then if too big a flood, it going to knock everything off, so as long as a portion goes off, the water is going straight down. If the thing (waterhead) is solid, naturally the sand will all go in our ditch.

VL: Now, you said Harrison [Kanekoa] made that for you one time?

NC: Uh huh.

VL: Was he one of your working men?

NC: Yeah. Harrison, John Kahele, and Smiley, the Filipino, the one stay in front where Shirly [Toko] stay. They were all working for me.

VL: How many people did you have working for you?

NC: What time?

VL: Say first in the beginning, when you first took over from your father?

NC: All depend when. (Rice) harvesting time and planting time we need plenty. We get about, harvesting time we get about over 20 people and planting time over 10.
VL: And then when you were full-time taro, how many would you hire?

NC: Three to four, sometimes five. It all depends on how much taro we have to harvest. Before, it was all by day work, not like now. Now mostly contract. Because if you go day work, you have to, carry all kinds of insurance, so you rather give out (on) contract.

VL: But those days, it was day work, before time was day work?

NC: All day work.

VL: Did you have to pay insurance at that time?

NC: No. The insurance only lately compulsory.

VL: So day work, how much would they get paid?

NC: Those days were cheap. I think it was $1.25 a day. First it was 90 cents only, or $1.00, or something like that. No, I think it was $1.25; 90 cents or $1.00 was rice time.

VL: But then when you went to full-time taro, it was $1.25?

NC: Yeah.

VL: Did that include any meals?

NC: Three meals a day.

VL: And so who would cook for them?

NC: My mother.

VL: So Harrison worked for you and Kahele and?

NC: Smiley. I don't his real name. I always call him Smiley.

VL: And then you had some others sometimes? You said five?

NC: Oh, yeah. George Nakagawa used to work for me. Solomon Kala, William Nakagawa, Sonny Ah Puck, his brother Herbert Ah Puck they used to all work for me. Get plenty others, but I forget. Plenty Filipinos been working. Takeo and I really forget their names. Filipino names hard to remember.

VL: Were there any other changes in the methods of growing taro from way before time and now, like you mentioned the planting?
NC: Yeah, now we space 'em evenly and it took me seven years to learn spacing--how wide for our section [of the valley] you know. The way I work mine, I try everything. It took me seven years to find out what is the best width from row to row and from plant to plant. It took me seven years to get the best. And that won't work on the mauka side, the upper side. Upper side, they get cold water. They cannot plant near. They have to space 'em wide because they get a lot less taro than we get per acre.

I used to get 600, 500, over 600 bags per acre. I think one time, Joe Young from Maui, had a big article written in the paper about getting 500 bag of taro per acre. So when he came by our place to look at our land, I congratulate him for a new comer beat us old-timers.

He said, "You know, it's not average 500 bags. That's my best land."

I said, "Oh, you pick the best land and get 500 bags?"

He said, "Yes."

I said, "Well, if you pick the best land, fine, but that's nothing. I get more than that."

Then he said, "How much do you get?"

I say, "I get one patch right here, I show you. Here, you see this patch."

"How big is this patch?"

I said, "44/100 of an acre."

He said, "How many bags do you get?"

I said, "279 bags."

He said, "What?"

I said "279 bags."

He said, "For 44/100 of one acre?"

I said, "Yeah. And now the other one is less than three-quarter acre. I get 425 bags. That one is in the record in the University of Hawaii. I experiment for the University on fertilizing, you see."
He say, "Nelson, did you pull that taro from someplace else?"

I said, "No."

He says, "How can you get 425 bags out of this patch? This patch is not even three-quarter acre."

I say, "Well, it's there."

He say, "Didn't you make a mistake on your thing? (recording)"

I say, "I had to collect that money. How could I let the poi shop go without collecting that money?"

He said, "You didn't pull any from any other place?"

"I get no other taro other place that can be pulled."

Then he said, "Gee, that's some record." I think they get 'em in the University, though. Must be in there yet.

VL: So your spacing methods will only work for your area?

NC: For the lower section. Anyway, from below Olepau, all that section, it works.

VL: And what was that spacing that works?

NC: That's uaua now, uaua taro. Fifteen inches plant to plant the near one. [the spacing is two plants near, then a larger space, then two more plants ......] That's the time we grow double, and then that wide one is 19 inches, 15 and 19, and the spacing is 27 inches line to line.

VL: So every inch...

NC: Counts, yeah. You know, I start from 30, all the way, come down, come down, I think, test and then plant. That takes time, you see. That's why it took me seven years.

VL: Are there any other changes that you have seen in methods of planting from before and now?

NC: Well, before we I don't know. Planting is about the same, I think. Hardly anything changes. Only we space now everyone evenly from plant to plant. Before, we get two near and then far.

VL: How about resting the field? Did you ever do that before?
NC: That thing doesn't work. You know I get some now, the one I harvesting. We didn't do crops for two years, a little more, three years. We didn't plant anything. And then we work on it. It still get sick. They say we didn't rest the land. I say, "It's been over two years and not been used. How do you account for that?" You know, the University guys, they cannot tell me. They came up and one of them is a doctor a Filipino doctor [Ph.D.]

VL: de la Peña.

NC: I don't know his name. Hard to remember names. The haole boy, he said, "Well, to tell you the truth, I don't know a bean about taro and I don't pretend that I know. I tell you the fact that I don't know." That's what he told me.

VL: When you let it rest, did it have weeds growing on it?

NC: It has grass and everything. Naturally, when you let 'em go, lay idle, you dry 'em up, grass going to come up. I think grass supposed to be good because just like cover crop, you plow 'em down.

VL: That's what you did? You plowed it under?

NC: Yeah.

VL: Before time, when you were planting, you know, the Hawaiians would plant sometime by full moon or new moon. That's when they would plant. Did you follow that kind of thing?

NC: That's all hooey. I don't believe in that.

(Laughter)

NC: You know, one fellow, William Kahele, old man, he tell me, "You know, Nelson, you wait till full moon, you plant it, the taro is round and big and you plant any ole time, taro is long and thin."

I say, "Who told you that?"

He say, "That's what our grandpeople, grandfather and everything tell us."

I said, "Those days are gone. You think if I give you one patch, you can make 'em round?"

He says, "Sure."

I said, "Okay. Here, that patch over there. One small little patch. That patch is deep. If you can make round taro out
of that, plant 'em that thing and take care of the water and everything; when the time come around, I give you all the crop."

"Okay, I'll plant 'em."

When he plant 'em, the taro come long. I said, "How come? You plant full moon time. Why is it it didn't come round?"

He says, "Those days. I don't believe 'em now.

And you know, another thing, the taro get sick, we chop 'em, cut 'em.

"You know, you plant the taro and you cut 'em like that without pulling it and without waiting until it mature. When you plant (again, it's) going to be same thing. What you going to do?"

I said, "I chop 'em again."

Then he said, he wouldn't go and chop you know, when I tell him go cut 'em for me. He said, "No, I wouldn't. God forbid people to destroy it once you get 'em."

I said, "It's sick. Cut 'em down plant new ones."

He said, "If you go cut first, then I go cut for you."

I say, "Okay." So I got a sickle and cut down three lines, one time I cut 'em right through.

He said, "Okay, I'll do that for you." After he get through that, he come back and he said, he called me by Ah Hoy, "Ah Hoy I tell you, you plant, going to be same thing. They going to be sick."

I say, "Yeah?"

He said, "What are you going to do?"

I say, "I cut 'em again. But you watch 'em. They going to be good."

He said, "Why?"

I said, "Because that stalk more like fertilizer."

When that thing (taro) rot, I harrow the thing, I going to lime the patch, then I plant. Oh, the taro came so nice that he said, "Oh, nowadays I don't believe Hawaiian style."
VL: So when you cut, you would cut how?

NC: You see, the plant grows like this, you cut 'em right down to the dirt because (there's) no taro yet, yeah, only the stalk come up. Young yet, it's only three, four months. Hardly any root on them.

VL: But you know it's sick already?

NC: Yeah, because it comes turn yellow and pale looking. You feel under, stay rot. You know, after you plant the taro, the taro where you cut [the huli] you get some taro. You feel under, it rot; it not supposed to be rot.
NC: Keamalu, the wife own that Umi section. And the wife, she say, "Hey, look at that Filipino." He's (Keamalu) on top the hill, eh? He look down. "Look at that Filipino, he cutting all the taro. He must be crazy." That's how he tell. Then I happen to cross over there.

He tell, "Nelson, look that Filipino. He cutting all the taro. He must be crazy, or what."

I said, "He not crazy. The taro is sick, that's why he cut 'em."

He said, "How did he get the idea to cut 'em."

I said, "He asked me what's the best thing. I said chop 'em down and plant again."

He said, "You're another one." That's what he told me, you know.

(Laughter)

NC: I said, "Why?"

He said, "Once you plant, you ought to let 'em until it mature."

I said, "How can he mature when he rots? When he get sick like that."

He tell me, "You think he [re]plant, he going get good taro?"

I said, "I think so. You know, the stalk is going to make more like fertilizer and everything." Sure enough, he never did get rot. He nearly double the amount of taro from that patch. And Keamalu was surprised.

He said, "Gee whiz. After all, all Hawaiian way is all gone already."

I said, "You see, more full the taro."

Because lots of things, I don't believe in Hawaiian, you know. Like, for instance, fishing. If you go and you turn around and come back to the house again. They said hard luck, this and that, and all of that stuff. One time, I get so many boys working with me, so I tell, "Eh, we knock off little bit early. We go fishing."

They said, "Okay." So we went to the house. That was about 2 o'clock, I think was. We quit about half past four, you see. That time was 2 o'clock. I said we get two hour fishing, plenty enough. Go catch mullet. So I pass around chocolate. Pass around the box, some of them take one, some take two. Bumbai, I go turn around. The door slam, the box turn, they (candy) all fall down.
He say, "Hey, hard luck. We better not go fishing today." That's what Solomon was telling me. That's Ruth's husband. He died already.

Then, when we start walk out, they carry my net. The long gilling [pala] net. Then he say, "Eh, where the bag?"

I said, "Eh, I better go back get 'em." You see how I was? So I ran back and get the bag. And the bag get plenty fish scale inside, I turn 'em upside down, I shake 'em, clean 'em.

They said, "More hard luck." That's what they tell me, you know.

I said, "Why?"

He said, "You shake out all the luck. We not going catch any fish."

You know when the chocolate fall down? Was 13. I counted. I said, "Eh, 13 more chocolate left."

He said, "You see, another hard luck number." Thirteen, eh. He said, "You'll never."

I said, "Nah, we going catch 13 fish first." I tell him. The first set we go. And sure enough, when we hit the first one, we got something like 11 mullet and two oopu, (which) makes it 13, eh? I say, "You see, I told you it's 13."

Then he said, "Oh, Chinese, they sure don't care, no?"

I said, "Yeah, we going catch plenty mullet." So we go further. I said, "We round that." You know, get plenty guava branches everything. I said, "We round [up] that one enough." So we round that one. I shake the guava throw off the branches, everything. Oh, we get over 60 there. One crack. Over 60. I said, "Enough, go home." Only little over an hour we went fishing, we get enough already.

Then I said, "How you like that? Hawaiian Style? Now, Chinese style, not Hawaiian style." I tell 'em.

Then, he tell me, "I think you right."

VL: Are there other Hawaiian beliefs, with relation to taro? Things that you not supposed to do or supposed to do?

NC: Only the planting. They said full moon time, plant. And then, what was the other one? And once you plant, you not supposed to disturb 'em. Until he matures. I think that's all.

VL: Do you believe in any...do you have any beliefs about taro---that what you should do and should not do, like that?
NC: No. I think a farmer has to rely on nature. That's what my policy. Nature not with you, you just out of luck. One disease can sweep you clean, one flood can sweep you clean. Cannot help. Even you think you get this, stunt your taro and then you don't get even half the amount.

VL: Is it a matter of luck?

NC: It's not luck so much as...well, it could be. But, how can be every fellow get hard luck. When the flood comes, he sweeps everybody. It affects everybody. You cannot tell me everybody get hard luck. It's just nature's work. That's one thing you cannot stop. If a flood coming down, how you going stop? It's just impossible to stop.

They ask me one time, "What if was human being do that?"

I said, "I shoot that fellow down."

VL: Or like the Hawaiians would make offerings to gods.

NC: You know, one time, there was big flood. I was at the school cottage, that time. We were staying up there because tidal wave took our house away. Was one real big flood, and Sam's [Kaaekuahiwi] house is on the way. He took one bottle liquor and go way up there, open that thing (bottle) and throw 'em in the stream. Maybe it's good luck for him. It didn't damage his house that time. That, I don't know. I don't believe in such thing. Nature pick his own course, you cannot stop 'em.

VL: How about lotus and water chestnuts? When did you first start growing these?

NC: Lotus was after the tidal wave. Get only few plants left, so took me three, four years before I had the whole pond cleaned. I used to get 5,000; 6,000 pounds. But now, hardly anything. Only one small, not even one-fourth the area. Not even one-fifth, I think, the area open, eh. You notice how small that pond is now. Before, all (the way) from the bank (and a) little more all open. Right to the stream.

VL: Was lotus?

NC: Was lotus.

VL: How big was that?

NC: That's over an acre. And water chestnuts, I had before, only up by the house, I get maybe one small little patch. Only few hundred pounds.

VL: Now?

NC: Now, I get about 2,000 pounds, I think.

VL: A year?

VL: Can you tell us how you grow lotus, when you first started?

NC: Lotus, you have to plant, you know. (I) put 'em in, the first thing. Whatever is left. So, every year, by the time the leaves die off and (the roots are about) ready to grow (again), I dig the lotus. I transplant 'em here and there. Every year, he grow so much only. Then, after three years, I get the whole pond filled up. For three years, I didn't take anything. Not even for eating, you know. Just only plant.

VL: How do you plant? What part do you plant?

NC: We plant everything. The big one, the small ones and all. Like now, we only plant the small ones. Because the big ones we market. We market some of the small ones because the markets rather have the small ones than the big ones, because the Japanese say when they make certain things, they want the thing (lotus roots) round. They said, the big ones, you have to cut 'em in pieces, they don't look so good. After all, food has to have looks too, eh? You believe in that?

(Laughter)

VL: I just go for the taste.

NC: I believe in that, because with Chinese dishes, certain way you cut the vegetables and certain things, got to be (in uniform size), otherwise they don't look so good.

VL: So before, after the three years, you got your whole one acre of lotus?

NV: Yeah.

VL: Then, how much did you harvest every year?

NC: Cannot harvest all. Because by the time we started digging them, they already start to rot. Certain part of the year, only to certain extent it grows.

VL: When do you harvest?

NV: We start harvesting around November. When get plenty time. Sometimes, end of October, we start harvesting. Because you can sell more during the holidays. Christmas and New Year. After that, slow, the market. And yet, we don't get enough to ship to Honolulu.

VL: So how much do you get?

NC: You mean quantity or price?
VL: Quantity.

NC: About 2,000 pounds. No, I think more than that. I think over 3,000 pounds.

VL: Nowdays?

NC: Now? No. Last year, only about 200-somewhat to 400-somewhat pounds, I think. That's all I get.

VL: So before, how much money per pound would you get?

NC: Before is cheap. Before, the start time was, I think, not more than 20 cents or 25 cents a pound. Then, little by little, it goes up. Until one jump and it hit 90 cents, I think. From 60 cents to 90 cents, I think--60 cents or 65 cents, and hit up to 90 cents. Then, last year and the other year, was dollar. Wholesale price, you know.

VL: And all yours goes to Hilo?

NC: Yeah, to Hilo. To the supermarkets.

VL: What is the water need of lotus? How much water? What kind of water? And flowing?

NC: Spring water. Our place is all spring water. That's funny. One side of the spring has two sprouts. One side is brackish (water) and one side is fresh. Can you make out that? I don't know how that thing comes. Yet, one side you taste the water is fresh~ and one side you taste~ kind of brackish. Not too much salty, but you can tell the difference.

VL: So, does lotus always have to have a flow of water?

NC: Got to be flowing. Of course, I don't know. Maybe you can, as long as get water and so long the water is not stagnant, maybe it grows all right. Start time, the water (has to be) little bit low and then, as it grows older, the water (has to be) little big higher. Because, you know why? The lotus root is something queer. He hit right down to the hard dirt. Then he forms the thing (root). Never come on top. Except where the grass place. Then they (seem to) go for air, or what; they coming up. Toward the grass place. The ones under the grass (are) easier to take. As long as you feel 'em, you pull 'em, they all come out. But the one under, you see the thing grows like that. You got to take out the dirt from the top, then you take off the dirt from the side. Then you cut off the runners, the small ones. Then you put your feet under. You get that thing loose, then you pull 'em up. Otherwise, he breaks. (When) he breaks and hard to clean when the dirty water gets in (the holes of the roots).

VL: Do you do this all with your feet?
NC: Because certain place, you cannot reach with your hand. The pond is deep. Certain place, you can reach. As long as you can reach with the hand, it's okay. Easy to bring 'em up. But if cannot reach with the hand, you have to use your feet.

VL: How deep is the deepest part?

NC: I think this deep.

YY: To your chest.

VL: This is the water level?

NC: Yeah.

VL: Where is the mud?

NC: The water is only about three, four inches, when we harvest that. At the most, six inches. The rest is all mud.

VL: How can you move?

NC: You got to push off the dirt first. The dirt is soft, you know, mud. It's not the hard mud. Real soft. That real deep place get little bit more water. Not too much more. Only few inches more, that's all. Less mud. That's one thing with lotus. Good price, but the time to harvest, especially up here (during) winter time, eh? Real cold.

VL: And your water chestnuts. When did you start that?

NC: I don't know, I forget when we start 'em. We plant mostly for home use only. But get so much that it just as well market that thing. So little by little, I add that thing. Plant more and more. The downside patch, I plant taro. Everytime the flood catch, I say, "Oh, I'm going to turn that in, to see how it (chestnut) grows." When I threw some water chestnuts in there, he really come big. I say, "Eh, this is a patch for water chestnuts." That's how I started. At first, I get only one small portion. Little by little, everytime I dig, I get more and more. Each year get wider and wider.

VL: It was better for water chestnut than taro?

NC: Oh yeah, it is. Over there, that patch doesn't grow good taro. Everytime a flood come, he drown 'em. Too low.

VL: But with water chestnut, it doesn't matter?

NC: No.

VL: What is the most important thing with water chestnut?

NC: You have to get constant water. Never let 'em dry. Because when
he dries, it's going to be hard to dig. I fertilize that thing. If you don't fertilize, doesn't come so big, you know.

VL: So that small area, how much fertilizer do you use?

NC: About half a bag.

VL: Once?

NC: Once. When the plant get little flower, that's the time you fertilize. You can hardly see the flower. You see, only the stem come up. Only the tip you see little bit brownish stuff. Just like flower, anyway. Like now, he just grow. You cannot see 'em, but when come little big more, little bit older, then you can see the flower.

VL: A little bit about the old days in Waipio. Last time, you started to talk about the recreation there. The dances....

NC: Yeah, we used to get concert and dance every once in awhile. Lots of people come from outside districts. Come from Kohala, from Waimea, and even from Hilo, come Waipio go dance.

VL: What kind of dances?

NC: Just this regular dance. Fox-trot, two-step, waltz, all those kind. But very few people know that tango or the cha-cha, or heel-and-toe, and all that.

YY: Did you? Did you dance those?

NC: I only know waltz, fox-trot, two-step, one-step.

VL: Where did you learn those?


VL: These dances, where were the musicians from?

NC: Waipio get plenty Hawaiian musicians, you know. Plenty good singers and they really can strum the guitar and ukulele. They really good. In lessons, they're not too good. But music, oh boy, come natural.

VL: So they would provide the music?

NC: Yeah. And sometimes, the people from outside come (to play). They go help in, they put in some kind (of music) for dance. Concert, like that, they show off what kind music they get. But the singing, you cannot beat those Hawaiian boys, though. Their voice are natural. They really get the voice.

VL: How many people would come to a dance like this?
NC: Oh, crowded. The concert, mostly the older people. Get about 100 or 200, like that.

VL: For the concert?

NC: Yeah. All depends. Sometimes they put a benefit one, they get more people. But just ordinary, for fun kind, 100 over, close to 200.

VL: Would this cost money?

NC: Well, you had to pay (for) a ticket, eh, for get in. Fifty cents, like that. Sometimes 25 cents. All depends. And sometimes, just for fun, the boys get together and it's free.

VL: And then, you would dance, too?

NC: Oh yeah. I go as far as Waimea, Hilo, for dance, you know.

VL: Oh yeah?

NC: Yeah. Young days, eh.

VL: Did you have a car?

NC: Yeah. I get car since 1922. 1923? No, 1922, I already had a car. Ford car. Afterwards, change. I get one 8-cylinder, King Eight. Then afterwards, I get the Plymouth and a Studebaker. What was the other one? I get the Model-A Ford, too.

VL: When you went to Hilo to dance, would a group of you go?

NC: Oh yeah, two, three guys get together.

VL: These were your close friends?

NC: Yeah.

VL: The dances in Waipio, would the men ask the women to dance? Was there certain...

NC: Etiquette?

VL: Yeah.

NC: Just tell them, "May I have a dance with you?"

VL: Were there certain women that everybody wanted to dance with?

NC: Oh yeah, the good dancers. Some of them are good, and some even dance half-way, they throw 'em off. You know why? They (are) so heavy, you know. They tell, "Excuse me, eh." They take 'em back (to their seats and say,) "I get stomach ache." And never go back again.
(Laughter)

NC: But like us, we know the people, so well. We know them. We know who is a good dancer and who is not. So everytime we go dance, we just pick the good ones.

VL: Did they serve refreshments?

NC: No. No more refreshments, like that. Well, benefit kind, they have. They have ice cream and all those stuff. You have to pay for it. Cold drinks, like that.

VL: What would these benefits be for?

NC: Church benefit.

VL: Were there any fights at these dances?

NC: No. No more such thing. Of course, sometimes, some fellow get argument, like. They always squash 'em. Tell him to stop it. Sometimes a cop go down, too. If they get too many outsiders come, well then, one cop stay down there. So naturally, everything is quiet.

VL: Was there ever any problem between Waipio people and outside people?

NC: No.

VL: How about in Waipio? How did all the different ethnic groups get along? How did the Chinese get along with the Hawaiians?

NC: They okay. They mingle around. They even married. Chinese married Hawaiians, like that. Quite an amount of Chinese married Hawaiian ladies.

VL: Then, also before, you were telling us that Waipio had baseball?

NC: Yeah, we had one five-team league down Waipio. Baseball. Five-team league.

VL: Who started that?

NC: The boys. All get together. They say Kaau team, Napoopoo team, the Eagles, all those kinds.

VL: Did you belong?

NC: Yeah, I was in one. I played practically every position, except third base. That's one base I won't play. I don't know, I just don't like that base. The best I like is outfield. I either play centerfield or leftfield.

VL: Who were you folks' coaches?
NC: I don't know. My team, I coach and I was the captain of that team, too. Yeah, I was coach. Our team came up (one) of the best, though, out of the five-team league.

VL: What was your team's name?


VL: Where would you play?

NC: Behind the school. We used to go outside play, too. We play against one Filipino team of Kalopa. We play against the Waimea team. But we get licking up Waimea, though. They beat us. (With) Kalopa, we win 'em. Waimea, they get good, heavy batters.

VL: Did you have sponsors, for the team?

NC: No.

VL: How would you buy the equipment?

NC: Each one get their own. If you play certain base, you buy certain one. Except the catcher. That one is supplied by us. All the boys dig up, eh. The mask, the catcher's glove and all. That one is expensive. The rest is all, balls, those who can afford it (would) buy. Otherwise, they don't have to. But our team, most of the time, we don't ask every fellow to buy. Those who can afford can buy. Even the gloves like that, some cannot afford. We buy 'em for 'em.

VL: This was after you came back from the Mainland?

NC: Yeah.

VL: When did you get married?

NC: 1924, I think.

VL: And before that, did you used to date?

NC: Oh yeah, boys, they rascal.

(Laughter)

VL: How so were they rascal? What do you mean, "they were rascal?"

NC: Boys, yeah, as long as they see one girl, they say, "Let's take that girl out." This and that.

VL: What kinds of things could two people do on---where would you go on a date?

NC: Oh, anyplace. Go the place that has fun.
VL: Where has fun?

NC: All over. Can go to Kukuihaele, can go to Honokaa, like that.

VL: What---movies?

NC: Movies, go restaurant eat, and all those kine.

VL: Where did you meet your wife?

NC: Honolulu. She's a Kahaluu girl. It's more of match-making, the Chinese style. Chinese style is more like buying the wife. You had to pay so much for the girl's side, the boy's side has to pay. Of course, it's not buying. They have to buy the cake and all those thing to give out. So naturally, you have to have (pay).

YY: How was the match arranged between your wife and you?

NC: Oh, just one fellow tell so-and-so's girl, he think (is nice). He said, "I'll ask for you." So one day, go down (to Kahaluu), he ask and then make (the arrangement) Then they tell me certain thing (about it). I went down (to Honolulu). My uncle was down Honolulu. I was down there staying with my uncle. One day, I just get the taxi (to Kahaluu), take a look how she look like. Then come back.

VL: Then you liked what you saw?

NC: Yeah. (Laughs)

VL: How much did you have to pay?

NC: Ah, that, I forget. So many hundred dollars. I think just for cakes, and presents for their side. We were married at my uncle's place down Honolulu. Then come up here, we get party.

VL: In Waipio?

NC: Yeah.

VL: So did you know her very well before you married?

NC: I met her several times only. In fact, Chinese style, you cannot take 'em out. Those days, until you get married. It's not like nowadays. Nowadays, you can go with a girl any time. And get married any time without a consent of the parents. Before, no. The parents tell you what to do and the girl's side is worse. The girl's side, they cannot get out. After they get (to) certain age, they not allowed to go movie or anything until really get fellow responsible for her. Those days, very strict. They have to know the character of the person and all those kine. They study the person first. It's not like nowadays. Nowadays, you can, even you don't know the girl, as long as you talk
(nicely) and everything, pretty soon, you see that fellow going with that girl already. But before, no. If the parents say, "You get out. Don't hang around here." You cannot go there.

And before days, when you like a wife like that, or the girl like a husband, they have to find out what kind of character, what kind work and all those stuff. Nowadays, they don't care. As long as you get some money in your pocket, enough. So they live on love, too. But nowadays, plenty marry for money. I notice that. Why young girl marry a old man? Got to be for money, eh.

(Laughter)

NC: Otherwise, you think a young girl will marry an old man? Could be her grandfather.

VL: What kind of wedding party did you have when you came back here?

NC: Chinese party. Over 20 tables.

VL: Was it catered? No? Who did all the cooking?

NC: We get three cooks. Two from Waipio, one from Hilo. My mother is a good cook, too, you know. In fact, that one from Hilo is really not a good cook. The Waipio ones do most of the cooking and everything. The fellow only help cut up stuffs, that's all. The one who handles the cooking mostly is Waipio cooks. Waipio, they get good cooks, you know—Chinese cooks. My mother ran about the best down Waipio, for cooking. She can cook without tasting. Anything. Season just right. I cannot do it. I can cook but I have to taste. My mother just put certain things together inside (the pot). I say, "How do you know if it taste right?"

She say, "Try it." Taste right.

Some fellow say, "So-and-so cook without tasting."

One old man, he watch my mother cook all the time. And he say, "Sure, she doesn't taste the food."

He say, "How do you know?"

"I saw her. I watch her cooking all the time. I talk story with her, I watch her cook and everything.

She cook three, four meals a day. And just pick certain things, throw inside (the pot). And fast cooking, too. You never believe it, 20 minutes, you can get everything ready for eat. That fast, you know.

VL: She used to cook for all your father's laborers, right?
NC: Yeah. You know, firewood cooking is fast. They talk about electricity and gas, I think firewood is faster. Once you get 'em heated up.... Of course, gas is fast because instant. But firewood is fast, too. I know, one time, my mother, only 20 minutes time, she get tea for the people and the whole meal served, in 20 minutes time.

You know that big kind wok? That's what she use. Only two wok, she use.

VL: For your wedding?

NC: No. Wedding, how many wok they use. Four, five, I think.

VL: You had 20 tables all set up in the valley?

NC: Yeah, yeah. We get big house. And we get one rice house. That thing is about 40-by-32, or 30. Thirty-by-forty, something like that. Big warehouse. You know, round table easy. You set 10 fellow on one table.

END OF INTERVIEW
Tape No. 4-30-3-78 and 4-31-3-78

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Mr. Nelson Chun (NC)

May 26, 1978

Honokaa, Big Island

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

[Note: Mrs. Nelson Chun was also present during most of the interview.]

VL: This is an interview with Mr. Nelson Chun. Today is May 26, 1978. We're at his home in Honokaa.

So, were you a member of that Waipio Community Club?

NC: I was the secretary.

VL: Who started it, the club?

NC: The boys get together. John Thomas, I think, was one of them. Sam Kaaekuahiwi. Leslie Chang. Was quite a number of us. Herbert Ah Puck, I think.

Mrs. Chun: Who that now? Ragsdale. He stay Hilo yet?

NC: Yeah, Ragsdale.

Mrs. Chun: I think he lives in Hilo. Ragsdale. I think he the one form the club. Was him.

VL: What was the purpose of forming the club?

NC: Well, we used to get sports like baseball. Get the team, eh. At least, when we get a club, we get plenty people that are not ball players, they come help in too. They join the club. And the club, we get more chance to ask for things from the County.

VL: What kind of things?

NC: Like cleaning out the road and all those kind. When we call up, the club call up it's better than one fellow call. The club get plenty members. I forget how many members we get in the club. Quite a number.
VL: Do you remember about when that club was formed?
NC: That's hard to remember.
VL: About how old you were. Were you farming taro already? Rice was pau?
NC: Pau. No rice already. 1928 was our last rice crop.
VL: So the club was formed after?
NC: Yeah. I think around 1931. Around there, I think, we started. I really forget. I'm not sure of the year.
Mrs. Chun: Maybe Ragsdale know.
VL: So why did you join the club?
NC: I'm one of the baseball players too.
VL: Can you explain about the sports, how that worked? How was it a part of the club? What did you folks do?
NC: Well....they formed the club and they got so much activities. I think we have meeting every once a month. I forget. At the start was once a week. Then afterwards was once a month, I think. We raised money for baseball equipment and all those kinds. Because plenty of us, we get our own equipment. But some boys doesn't have.
VL: How many teams did the club have?
NC: The club has only three teams, I think. But they get outside teams too. Was a five-team little league down there. Small, five teams.
VL: And only three were from Waipio?
NC: No. I tell you, wait. Well, they are all Waipio boys. But some of them doesn't stay Waipio. Some of them stay other place. That time, most of those in the club are from Waipio.
VL: Was this all baseball?
NC: The five teams, they have at least 14 players each team. Need nine players only, at least 14 players. They separate 'em. They get Napoopoo. Then Kaau side get one team. Another team, they called the Eagles.
VL: Did you ever play other sports, besides baseball? In the club?
NC: Yeah, they get basketball. They get football too.

YY: What team were you on?

NC: The Eagles.

YY: Was that, now, a certain area? Did boys from a certain area of the valley join the Eagles?

NC: No. It's up to you to join. But mostly, if he stay Kaau, most of them would rather stay with the Kaau boys. And those who stay Napoopoo rather stay with the Napoopoo boys. But like us, down side [towards the ocean], only few people stay. So we pick up a name, so we called the Eagles. Get quite a number of us. In fact, our team was about the leading team.

VL: How often would you play?

NC: Every Sunday. Because other days you have to work. They practice some weekdays, in the evening time. Maybe an hour or so like that.

VL: They had to practice while it was still light yeah? You didn't have...

NC: No. No light. We play daytime only. No night games.

YY: What position did you play?

NC: Shee, I play practically every position except third base. That's one base I didn't want to play. I don't know why, I just didn't want to play that base. I was catcher first. Then afterwards, I played first. But I find out that I'm too short for first base. Of course, I can jump high and everything, catch ball. But still yet, when you get higher people it's better. So then I play second, I play shortstop. But the best position I like is play center field.

VL: Who was the best player?

NC: Well, we cannot tell. Each fellow....all depend what position you play. The team, you cannot tell who is the best player. Cannot. Certain day, one fellow can play better than the other. Some fellow get off days, they just can't hit the ball. Especially batting time.

VL: Now, when you played basketball, where would you folks play?

NC: In the park.

VL: They had courts?
NC: We mark out the behind. You know where the Peace Corps is? That's the baseball park.

VL: No, basketball.

NC: We played outside.

VL: You had nets?

NC: Yeah, we get nets.

VL: To join the club, did you have to pay a membership fee?


VL: How about dues?

NC: That's all you pay is just $1.

VL: And then, why in the beginning, did you meet once a week?

NC: Well, we have to discuss things, eh. What we need and all those kind.

VL: What did you decide about what you needed?

NC: First of all, the best game they have in Waipio is baseball. And basketball, only two teams. And football, only two teams. That's one game I didn't want to play.

VL: So you had to decide what equipment to get? What would you talk about at the meeting?

NC: Financial things. And lay out the games, what teams to play, and all those things. Then we also have, when the Waipio roads need to be cleaned, we assign certain fellow call up the County chairman. Used to be chairman, eh. Then we say we need certain road, certain sections need to be cleaned. Call them up.

Before it's good. I know quite a number of these chairmen, most of the chairmen I know anyway. And when we call up, they sure give us a hand. Like now is hard. Now, I don't know, get so much red tape.

VL: How did you get to be secretary?

NC: Well, they choose who and who like that.

VL: Who was president at that time that you were secretary?

NC: John Thomas was the president.
VL: Were there only men in the club?
NC: Yeah. Was only men.
YY: Were there any organized women's sports?
NC: No.
VL: Did you folks have by-laws?
NC: You mean the club?
VL: Yeah.
NC: Yeah, they have by-laws. But I forget how that thing go. All kind.
VL: Like, did you have to come to all the meetings or you would be penalized?
NC: No. They set up certain by-laws. I forget already what the rules. It's not too strict you know. Because they don't enforce the laws.
VL: Where would your meetings be held?
NC: At the school house. Used to get a three-room school down there.
VL: So how long did that club last?
NC: I don't know, only a few years. Only two or three years I think.
VL: Did you do anything else besides sports and repairing roads?
NC: I don't think so.
VL: How about when holidays came? Like Fourth of July?
NC: Oh, we get sports. All kinds of sports. Racing, riding horse. You know, they put up post like that, with the rope hang down and get a ring. You supposed to gallop the horse and put through that ring certain sticks. You put through. Get so many rings. You gallop the horse, one speed you know. You put through that, let 'em drop, then you put through the other one. Some horses they don't want to go near the pole, eh. It's not so easy. It looks easy but it's not that easy.
VL: You mean you riding along and you put the stick through the ring?
NC: Yeah. You ride, you galloping. Now, for instance, one post here, one post here, one post there. You get the thing hang over and you get the ring come down. You supposed to put the stick over and let 'em drop the other side. If you miss, well, you lose that many
points. The one who get the best get certain prize like that. They get all kinds. They get track meet; 50 yards, 100 yards, 220.

VL: How would you folks get the money for the prizes?

NC: Oh, we put on a concert.

VL: What kind of concert?

NC: Music and dance. That's all.

YY: Hawaiian music?

NC: Yeah. We get quite a number of boys, they good musicians you know, those days.

YY: Waipio boys?

NC: All Waipio boys. In fact, even now, quite a number of Waipio boys, they playing in, like you go Kona side. Plenty of them are Waipio boys, those musicians that play for the hotels and those things, night clubs.

YY: Do you remember any one who was really good, when you were young?

NC: You mean music?

YY: Yes.

NC: Sam Lia was one of them. He's good musician. Joe Auna was pretty good. Sam Kaaekuahiwi was good too. Quite a number of good musicians. The Kiomaka family, most of them can sing and play guitar and ukulele.

VL: Now, you said you were the secretary-treasurer?

NC: Not treasurer, only secretary. Leslie Ahana was the treasurer.

VL: So as secretary, what was your job?

NC: Take all the minutes. Take down all the notes of what they have to say, what subjects they bring up and vote on whether you pass or no pass.

VL: Do you still have some of those minutes?

NC: Oh no. 1946 tidal wave clean up everything. I had quite a number of pictures you know. I even had pictures of the rice farm. Harvesting rice, thrashing rice, all those kind. And I have many pictures from when I was up the Mainland. Wen all gone.
VL: Why did the club only last a few years?
NC: People move away, eh.
VL: You mean even in the early 1930's they were moving out?
NC: Uh huh.
VL: Why is that?
NC: No job, eh. No work.
VL: Couldn't they work taro patch?
NC: Only limited amount, eh, people. They only need so many people. Waipio used to get quite a number of people. Compared to now. Now, only a few.
VL: But how about way in the upper valley? Couldn't they have farmed taro further up? Expanded the land that was being farmed?
NC: He used to go up to 180 acres [of cultivated taro land in Waipio], I think. No, I think over 200 acres. Little by little, it dwindles down. Till now, I don't know how many acres. Even my section, how many acres not planted? I think I get only about--include crop share kind--I think about 17, 18 acres, that's all. I used to have 34 acres of taro land. That's counting the crop share kind.
VL: So you think people moved out because there weren't jobs in the valley?
NC: Yeah. Not enough job. And boys, they go out to school. Because Waipio, I think, during that time was only up to sixth grade, that's all. And then, you had to go up Kukuiahae. Kukuiahae only up to eighth grade. Then, from there on, you either go Honoka aor Hilo or down Honolulu.
VL: After the club dissolved then, how did you folks...did you continue the sports team?
NC: Well, we play ball too, once in a while. But not like before, not like when the club was. But when the club was active, nearly every Sunday, you see the park full of people.
VL: And how about asking the County to repair the roads? How would you folks do that after the club dissolved?
NC: Individuals. I used to take over. Once in a while call up. Volunteer kind, eh. Just call up.
VL: At that time, were there certain people in the valley that were like leaders or spokesmen for the people of Waipio?
NC: Nobody cares to.

VL: Like Sam Kaaekuahiwi?

NC: You know, those teachers, those days not allowed to play politics you know.

VL: John Thomas?

NC: John Thomas is teacher too.

VL: When you were younger, before you went to the Mainland, do you remember where the Chinese people in the valley lived, mostly?

NC: Yeah, most of them lived right in the rice field section. And the taro field section.

VL: Which was where?

NC: Well, you know that road where Ahana's [Chang's] store used to be? That's called Napoopoo, eh. That section get plenty people living there.

VL: Chinese?

NC: Chinese. And, of course they scatter all over the valley though. Mostly, live down side. They get, Muliwai get quite a number of rice planters there. And then Hui Nui, that's "Big Company" they call, eh, that one get quite a number. And further up get smaller ones. One or two or three like that.


NC: No. And Napoopoo is [tape garbled]. And down that Hui Nui. Hui Nui has quite, although only 12 owners of the rice field, they have to hire plenty people during planting and harvesting time.

VL: Now where did the Hawaiian people live?

NC: Oh, they all mix you know. Can be one Hawaiian living here and Chinese over there. And the other Hawaiian, and the other Hawaiian, the other Chinese. Is all mixed. No difference whether you were Chinese or Hawaiian or Japanese. No difference. I think only one Japanese was down there those days, I think. One or two.

VL: Filipinos?

NC: Not a single one those days.

VL: Rice days [pre-1928]?

NC: No, afterwards [there were Filipinos]. But the early part, no.
Mrs. Chun: Remember, the rice time, remember you hire the Filipino lady for chase rice birds?

NC: That's right. That was the last.

Mrs. Chun: There were a lot of Filipinos down there.

NC: That's right, Densho was working.

Mrs. Chun: Quite a number of Japanese too. Like Kawashima, that Aoki, Fujii, Nakagawa, Nitta, and all of them. Quite a number of Japanese down there.

NC: No, the early part is only one I think. Kawashima was the only one. Then, afterwards Nakagawa and Nitta. Aoki came way after.

Mrs. Chun: Who was the tidal wave wash and he climb on that sand dune?

NC: Oh, Nakanishi.

Mrs. Chun: Nakanishi, that's the old one down there. And that one make charcoal, who was that?

NC: Fujii.

VL: And where did they live?

NC: Down the beach.

VL: Most of the Japanese lived down by the beach?

NC: No, no. Was scatter. Kawashima used to be way the other side, where Haa's house, below.

Mrs. Chun: Now the hippies stay in those places.

VL: Do you remember any Portuguese at that time? Or haoles in the valley?

NC: Portuguese, I don't remember any.

Mrs. Chun: Haole, maybe get part haole. Like the Hussey.

NC: Hussey is mostly Hawaiian. I don't think he's one-tenth haole.

VL: And at that time, can you describe what the valley looked like?

NC: Well, to tell you the truth, those days the valley is so clean. They used firewood for cooking. You cannot find firewood right in the farm, you had to go up the hill to get firewood. It's so clean.
Mrs. Chun: They said no guava tree down there.

NC: Even firewood. They have to cut.

Mrs. Chun: I remember, your mother said that they had to chop the lantana for cooking. And when she cook, she get dizzy everytime, because the lantana smell.

Hard to find wood. Guava tree.

NC: It's hard. They cut down even the monkeypod trees for firewood. And that thing, hardly any fire.

Mrs. Chun: Before, not too many monkeypod trees. Even I was up there, there's hardly any.

NC: Get up the mountain. What you mean?

Mrs. Chun: If mango tree, yeah plenty. They cut down the mango tree for firewood. Got so many.

VL: Did they cut the trees down because they wanted to keep it clear? Or because they wanted firewood?

NC: Well, they want to keep the place clear. Hardly any trees. They use the guava trees. The young time, they cut 'em down for firewood.

Mrs. Chun: You folks showing the picture. You know that rice mill? That [the picture] was taken from way down our place. Sometime you look up, no trees or anything. Hardly any trees, guava trees. Only those big trees, banyan tree and coconut tree. But the banyan tree fell down already. Is right by Lau Kong's place. The new housing. There's a big banyan tree, real big.

VL: At that time, did people have gardens?

NC: Oh yeah. They had vegetable gardens.

VL: Did everyone have, just about?

NC: Practically every one I think. They plant little for home use kind.

VL: And did most people keep livestock, like cows or pigs, chickens?

NC: Well, majority has. Nearly every rice farmer and taro farmer has chickens, ducks and cattle, horses, pack mules.

Mrs. Chun: Because they don't have to buy feed. They get the rice for the chickens and ducks. And every once in a while, they kill one
cow and they'll share. But they get order first, before they kill the cow. How much one share. That's what they do before.

NC: You know, $1 for five pound meat. That's real reasonable. Of course, you cannot take your choice. It's all cut up. Steaks and everything, all mixed. Stew and all.

VL: So you just pick what's there?

NC: They put 'em all line up. And they call by the name, see. Call, you go pick what you like. So many. Now, for instance, you like $5. See, they go around first, who like so much like that. And after they slaughter that thing, then they pile 'em, scale 'em all. So many pounds. Pig, same thing. They slaughter pig, you like buy so much, you can buy so much. But like the Hui Nui and those folks, when they kill pig, that's only for the workmen to eat. Not for sale. Of course, they will sell little bit to the farmers. But not to everybody, though.

VL: When rice was being grown, that's mostly in the lower valley, yeah?

NC: Yeah.

VL: So, in the upper valley?

NC: Taro.

VL: Now, was this home use patches or did they have a mill at that time too? For the taro.

NC: Yeah, they have their own poi factories.

VL: Even while rice was being grown?

NC: Yeah, when rice was growing, they have their....they used to pound with the stone. They get a big board, more like pig board. You know what is a pig board, eh. Well, that one is big. Two fellow, one fellow one end. They use the stone and pound.

VL: This is for selling?

NC: Take up to Parker Ranch. All around. They had to pack, they had to wrap that poi. Put the poi in a flour bag. And then wrap 'em with ti leaves. And then put in the gunny sacks. One dollar, I think, for 20-some odd pounds I think. In fact, when we have poi factory in Hilo, was $1 for 20-over pounds.

VL: So this is in the....while rice was being grown, they pounded poi that way? And to sell outside?

NC: Yeah.
VL: Who were the growers of the taro at that time?

NC: I think the biggest one is Akioka. Mock Chock, they call 'em. But the Hawaiians call 'em Akioka. Mock Chew is another one, second. That Akona and that Lum Ho was the smallest one. Of course, plenty individuals, they...

VL: These are Chinese growers then? Chinese?

NC: All Chinese. The Hawaiians, they only make for their own use. Only one Hawaiian make for sell. But only little bit, few dollars only.

VL: Who was that?

NC: Hanakahi. He has only one mule. And he ride on a horse and he lead the mule and pack the poi. Once a week.

Mrs. Chun: How come the poi shop moved all one place after a while [near Napoopoo, along Hiilawe Stream]?

NC: The Board of Health.

Mrs. Chun: You know they still have the cement. Right by where that Lau Kong's new house, behind there. Behind our lot, inside there.

VL: What is over there?

NC: Poi factories.

Mrs. Chun: Poi factory, the cement, where the poi factory. Three or four, yeah, inside there.

NC: Four. Four [poi factories were there].

YY: The foundations of the place.

VL: Who's was that?

NC: All. That's Mock Chock, eh, Akioka. Then where that small one is in between. I think is Akioka, then Lum Ho is the small one. Then Mock Chew, then Akona. Four. The Board of Health make them all.... they figure on the water is more clean, Hiilawe water.

VL: They made them move over there?

NC: Yeah.

VL: Before, they were where?

NC: At their own farm.
VL: So when they moved over there, did they share a building?

NC: No. Separate buildings. Four buildings. Each poi factory had one. Four foundations there. The foundations still stay, the cement foundation stay in there.

Mrs. Chun: The last one, Herbert Ah Puck, yeah. Run the poi shop. Sonny Ah Puck's brother. The Kukuihaele Sonny Ah Puck's brother. He was the last run the poi shop over there. Then Leslie's one, after that, he make by his house. He never go up there, eh [up Hiilawe]?

NC: No. No.

Mrs. Chun: He [Leslie Chang] make by his house, no, by the stream over there. But the flood wash everything away, house and all.

YY: Do you have any idea why the Hawaiians didn't make poi commercially?

NC: That I don't know. I don't know why they didn't make poi. That's what they said, "Something queer. Hawaiians, they eat poi. Not one single Hawaiians has big taro patches." All of them get only little bit. Just enough to eat and then little bit to sell. That's all they get. When you go eat and then you go sleep, they say, "You get the Hawaiian sick."

VL: When they pounded the poi by hand, who would do the pounding?

NC: The workers. The one who pull taro, I think.

VL: Were they Chinese?

NC: Majority Chinese. They get one or two Hawaiians go sometimes.

Mrs. Chun: No, get lots of Hawaiians that pound poi.

NC: No, I meant for sell. Yeah, because Akioka has his own thing. Only one Hawaiian I know work for Akioka. That was Tom Kua. But then, it was already machinery at that time. Grinding with a stationary engine. Akioka was running with water power, I think.

You know that write-up that Mrs. Ing put out? [Refers to recent article in the newspaper about the annual Waipio reunion banquet in which Mrs. Annie Ing was interviewed.] It says get 42 mules? I think that was an error. Nobody get 42 mules. Even Akioka. Big like that, eh, they didn't get that many. Even us. When rice, the most we ever had was 28 mules, working mules.

VL: Was there a barber shop in Waipio, at the time of rice growing?

NC: Only individual barber. He goes around, I think those who want to cut hair, he cuts and everything.
VL: Who was that?

NC: Tong Mun I think. One Chinese.

YY: What was his business like?

NC: Just cut hair, that's all. And those day, they charge so cheap. It's just enough for them to eat. That's all. No profit.

Mrs. Chun: Get one man down there, he doesn't work. He only catch fish and catch frog for sell. And yet he smoke opium.

VL: This barber, is that all he did? He just cut hair?

NC: Yeah. He cut, shave, he clean your ears and all. I used to help the old Chinese cut their hair. Trim 'em. That's what they say, "Put one bowl and cut 'em."

VL: Did this fellow cut the Hawaiian peoples' hair also?

NC: Yeah. Hawaiian.

Mrs. Chun: No, in the beginning, they don't have to cut hair. Because they get queue.

NC: Yeah, that's right.

Mrs. Chun: His father get and his older brother have. The one above him.

VL: Did you have a queue?

NC: No. My older brother, the one above me had.

YY: When did your father cut his queue?

NC: That, I don't know. I guess, must be....

Mrs. Chun: I think before he go school. I remember, your mother was telling me, that she got mad with him because he cut his hair. Because she wen keep hair for the souvenir. Long hair.

VL: For what?

Mrs. Chun: His mother keep his brother's hair long. He had long hair. And his father wen cut his hair. His mother get mad. The same time he wen cut his one, he wen cut the son's one.

NC: Hard to remember those things you know.

VL: How about the popular gathering places? Were there any?
NC: All depend for what. For gambling, the Chinese is noted for gamble. They always gamble down by Hui Nui, the big rice farm.

Mrs. Chun: But like them, they only play card. Just for the fun of it. Not gambling.

NC: Not card. More like that dominoes. Ting gnau, they call. That's what they play mostly. And then, up the store, upstairs for play.

VL: For gambling also? Ahana Store?

NC: Yeah, Ahana Store. Used to be Akaka [before it was sold by Akaka to Ahana].

VL: How about gathering places just to talk story? Did you folks?

NC: Yeah, the stores like that. They go to the store, sit down outside. They get benches outside, on the front of the store. Most nearly every Sunday, you see people sitting down, chewing the rag. Even us, we used to go up there, we used to bring our .22 rifle, go up just for target shooting and then all those stuff.

VL: Target shooting?

NC: Yeah.

VL: Where?

NC: Behind the school. Yeah, one time I was holding the rifle. That Ahana store, get two brothers, eh? Ahana and that older brother. We were sitting down, was Herbert Akioka and I, we were sitting down. He said, "I give you a case of soda water if you can pop so many clothespin on the line."

His sister gave me, I put up the clothespin. Ahana's wife get plenty clothespin. Hang clothes kind on the line. Ahana's brother tell, "If you can shoot out of that thing, your rifle get 15 shots. If with that 15 shots you can crack 12, I give you one case soda water."

I said, "Is it a bet?"

He said, "No, if you cannot, you don't have to pay anything."

I said, "Good deal. Watch 'em." One after the other, 15 shots, I pluck 15 off.

He look sick. He said, "Gee whiz, I didn't know you could shoot so good."

Even Ragsdale. One time, Ragsdale, the first time he was down
there. He's pretty good shot too. He ask everybody, "Who's good marksman down here?"
Bumbai, Hiram Auna told 'em. He said, "You like challenge?"
He said, "I like challenge the best." That's what he said.
And...
END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO
NC: He said he like challenge the best shooter down there, down Waipio.
Then Hiram Auna said, "You may be good but somebody else can be better than you." That's what he told 'em.
"Well, I like try."
So one day I was up there. He tell, "Hey, Hiram Auna said you pretty good with the rifle."
I said, "Not bad, but not too good."
"What you mean not too good?"
"Somebody always can beat me."
Then he said, "Let's go behind."
I didn't bring my rifle. He get a .22 too, so we went behind. With his .22, I outshot him. And he said, "Gee, you real good. You beat me with my rifle. I would like to challenge you on target."
"You want to challenge me? Okay, we go down the beach Sunday. You take 100 rounds, I take 100 rounds, we go down. First of all, we pick soda water cork."
You know, down the beach, we get the sand smooth up, near the ocean side. We stuck the cork half way in the sand. I said, "Now, shoot the cork, not the sand." You can shoot down and the thing fly off. You have to hit that cork. I said, "All right. After you shoot, keep the empty shells."
"What you going do with the empty shell?"
I said, "I'm going to line that one up."
"Line that one up?"
"Yeah. And we going to shoot that one."

"Okay."

So he went down with me one Sunday. We set the thing first. Good thing he went. He didn't shoot all. He get 15 shot, I get 15 shot. I take my own rifle, see. I shot 15 right clear off. Then I put the empty shell, not stand up this way, just place 'em on the sand.

I said, "I don't want you to skip. I want you shoot one after the other."

He said, "Okay." He wen miss quite a bit.

I shot every one.

Then, you know what is lehua flower? You see that, he get the white and he get red, eh. I get a flower. Then I said, "Well, next one, I'm going to put the lehua."

"Oh, that's duck soup." It's big, eh.

"No, well wait. I don't want you hit the flower, I want you cut the stem." And the stem is only this above the sand. "You have to cut that and drop the flower down."

"What?"

"I mean what I say. Don't shoot the flower. Cut the stem. Shoot the stem." And you know how small the stem is, eh. I think it's just like a little bigger than the safety pin size.

So, we get 15 too. I said, "You pick your choice. Either one you like." I mix 'em because we don't get all one kind flower. We get white and the pink. So I put 'em all.

And he shoot. He hardly cut any. Only few he cut. I cut every single one of 'em.

Then he tells me, "Gee whiz. I haven't seen a fellow shoot so good."

You know who Kekela? Used to be policeman. He's Camp Perry man, you know. He went up for marksmen's. I outshot him up the range. He tells me, "Gee whiz, Nelson, we should have taken you up to Camp Perry."

"I don't belong to the police department."

I used to be pretty good with the .22. In fact, we go hunting
every Sunday. Saturday, Sunday, eh. Puuwaawaa [this word is unclear on tape] side, we go shoot goat, sheep, pig like that. We have lots of fun.

VL: Where would you folks get the guns?

NC: The gun, we buy our own.

VL: From where?

NC: Sears Roebuck. They get all kinds. They get Marlin, they get Ithaca, they get Savage. I forget what was the other one already.

VL: From Hilo?

NC: No, from the Mainland. We order from the Mainland. Those days, no restrictions, eh. Nowadays, you have to get pass and everything. Permit before you can buy. And those days, you don't even have to register your gun. Except revolver, you have to get it registered.

YY: You mentioned using lehua flowers? Where did you get the lehua flowers?

NC: We used to get plenty down Waipio, our place. Where we grow. Not the kind lehua, the trees, the flower kind of round ball, more like paper flower.

VL: I don't know what kind.

NC: I don't know if still get any around someplace. I haven't seen the flower for long time too. Waipio, used to be famous. Plenty, all over.

VL: What happened to them?

NC: You know, they spray herbicide so much. Kill everything.

VL: What other kinds of plants did they used to have, that they don't have now?

NC: You mean flower plants?

VL: Yeah.

NC: They get the cigar flower. You know what is cigar flower, eh? Small thing. Get right by our house, the sidewalk, get some.

YY: The little orange flowers?

NC: Not...get the white and the pink, I think. Two kinds. They get carnation. We used to plant all kind. You know our house, I get a
five-bedroom house down there. Right by our house, the side, we get one flower garden. Get all kind of flowers. I get the seed from the Mainland.

That's something funny. I get plenty flowers here but I don't know the name. Until I look into the book. I cannot remember the names.

VL: Going back to rice, who was the most successful rice farmer?

NC: Gee, that, I don't know. My father is pretty good, because he has so much out of one acre. I think he produced the highest per acre. Of course, he has good land too.

VL: How about taro?

NC: Taro, I think Akioka. Akioka has taro.

VL: He had the best quality taro, you mean?

NC: Quality and size. Before, he get one other man, he plant. He get big taro but not the quality. I don't care how big the taro, you cannot use all, eh. Certain part you got to throw away. So it's useless. And instead of harvesting 18, 19 months, take him over two years before he can harvest.

VL: Akioka's, why was his so good, do you think?

NC: Well, he has good land. And he know know-how. He's an old timer. He's real good.

VL: Do you know what variety he was planting?

NC: Those days, mostly uaua taro. Now days, mostly apii. And they get some lehua. Before, get lehua, but very little.

VL: Why did the change occur, from uaua?

NC: Well, uaua doesn't do so good afterwards. Doesn't grow so well. Apii outgrow the uaua. And apii is faster crop, eh. Uaua, at least 18 to 19 months before you can harvest. Apii, you can harvest 14, 15 months; you can harvest already. And apii is heavier taro. But uaua has more quantity. Out of one plant, you get so many small ones—they call oha, the small ones. Some get 15, 20. We get some up to 30 oha.

You know one time, I had planted alongside. After we harvested, I left a few near the side of the ditch. I sent my workmen to go. I said, "You go pull two kumu." Two kumu is two plant, two plant of taro. The mother taro with all the small ones. He came back with one mamaka. You know, how they carry, two bundle, eh. I said, "You pull 'em all?"
"No, you tell pull two, eh?"

I said, "Yeah. You mean to say that's two?"

"Yeah."

Gee, you know how many pounds? Thirty-one pounds one kumu. From one mother plant, with all the small one. Thirty-one pounds. And I told him, I said, "Gee, this hard to believe it's only one. You sure you didn't pull any more?"

He said, "No, you go look." And sure. And he get four more left, you see. Because get six plants, so you pull only two, get four more left.

So I wen pull one of them, just for curious, I wen pull afterwards again. One myself, I wen pull one. I wen scale 'em, it's 30 pounds.

VL: That's uaua?

NC: Uaua. Apii, he'll never get that much. Apii, if you can get 15 keiki, or 20 keiki is real....

VL: How about now days? Present day, do you farmers ever compare the quality of your taro? Like you compare with [name of taro farmer deleted]....

NC: Nah. [Name deleted] never did get good taro. He may get the size but his taro is not too solid. You know what I mean by solid? Heavy, eh. Some taro may be big. Sure, when big, you get certain weight, eh. Naturally, the small one doesn't get so much weight. But that big one, when you grind into poi, that poi, you cannot mix water inside. Or maybe that poi is not up to standard. Got to be 30 percent solid, see. That poi maybe not even 30 percent solid.

One time, he get nice big taro. He send over to Puueo Poi. Puueo Poi was run by Lum Ho before. After cook and peel, he send 'em back, a few. He said, "Look your good taro. Gray color taro. Supposed to be white. Apii is white taro. How come he come gray? Because watery."

So when he send 'em down, I was up the pali. [Name deleted] said, "Nelson, look this. Lum Ho, he send back the taro. He tell my taro no good."

I look. "This taro's no good." I tell 'em.

He said, "Why?"

I said, "Loliloli. You try put in the water, he float."
He said, "Go on."

"Sure it floats."

So he stuck 'em in the water, you know. And that thing float right up. He said, "You folks sure old timers, eh."

"Yeah, we look, one glance, I see the color, I know it's not good."

VL: So today, who is growing good taro in the valley?

NC: We don't know. Every fellow get good and bad nowadays. Because get disease and all kind. Look today, I was harvesting. See, I get four patch in a row and this the last patch I'm harvesting. And it's supposed to be the best patch and yet it's the worse one. Plenty rot. Hundred pound kind, I used to get 100 over bags from that. Lucky if I going get 60 bags I think. Thing all plenty rot. The ones no rot, all right. The taro is good size, like this. And the small ones big like this. And some, get five, six [keikis]. Some seven, eight.

Taro is something funny. Look [Suei] Kawashima is just above my place. He lose a lot you know. I don't know. I think it's more the land than.... But how can you blame the land? Because my land, I didn't plant for over two years.

VL: Going back again, to before days in Waipio, can you tell us about a Chinese funeral? How that was conducted.

NC: Those days, they didn't pray (but had Chinese rituals--burned incense, candles, etc.,) When a fellow died, they put 'em up for people go see and pay respect. After that, they bury 'em. No such thing as prayer or eulogy.

VL: Where would the people go see 'em?

NC: At their house. Where the fellow die. Most of them, they die at their own house. They have no such thing as hospital where you can go.

VL: Does someone treat the body in some way?

NC: They die today, they bury 'em today or tomorrow at the latest. My father was embalmed, because my two brothers away in Mills School (Mid Pacific Institute) and my older brother was up the Mainland.

Mrs. Chun: Your older brother didn't come back, eh [for the funeral]?

NC: No he didn't. He cannot make it.

VL: Where was the embalmer from?
NC: Hilo. I forget the name though. One haole from Elmore Mortuary.

Mrs. Chun: He went to Waipio to embalm.

NC: Yeah, he came down. You know, the worse part of all is that he make me pump the blood out of my father.

VL: Why did he do that?

NC: I don't know. He didn't know I was the son. He tell me, "I want you to use this thing." He fit in everything. All what I do is just pump. Back and forth. The blood shooting out. That affects me though.

After I get through that, I tell, "Shee, you shouldn't have let me do this."

"Are you related?"

"He's my father."

He said, "Gee, I ought to have more sense. Ask you first who you are, before I...." It's too late already.

VL: But most people weren't embalmed?

NC: No, most fellows no. Just, as soon as they die. If they die today, if they get chance to bury 'em today, they bury 'em today. Otherwise, next day.

VL: Where would they get the coffin?

NC: Oh, they make 'em. I used to make 'em. That thing is just rough lumber and covered with black cloth. Not the kind fancy kind. It was just rough lumber. That thing goes like this. Like this, then come slant out. This part is tapered. The head part, this end is small. Come to the shoulder part, little bigger. Then this part, the body come long. Regular coffin.

VL: It comes out toward the middle and down again?

NC: Yeah, yeah.

VL: But there were, for the Chinese, no ceremonies? How about incense?
NC: Oh yeah, they burn that. That kind, they burn. They burn that. And you know da kine paper stuff. That they have. But I mean prayers like that.

VL: How about minister?

NC: No. No Chinese minister.

Mrs. Chun: And, da kine, they go pai san, eh?

NC: No. This fellow die, eh, the funeral. Pai san is the kind memorial day kind. They go get pork or chicken or whatever. And go up the grave. That's just like Japanese using the certain kind food they leave. Fruits and all those kind. Same thing.

VL: How would they take the coffin from the house to the graveyard?

NC: Carry. Four fellows carry. You see, the coffin go like this, eh, come like this, like this. They get the two bamboo like this. The rope tied to the thing, eh. Right to the...

VL: Bamboo is this way?

NC: Lengthwise. This way. They tie over here. You tie the rope, you put under the coffin. Then on top, tie the two, so the two sticks stay on top, the two bamboo stay on top here. And then tie over here.

Mrs. Chun: Two rope, eh?

NC: Yeah, two rope. Front and back. Not at the end you know. They around here someplace. To balance the thing. And then four fellow carry; 1, 2, 3, 4. In fact, two fellow can carry but Chinese style, they like four.

Sometime carry, the thing funny, eh, more like spooks or what. That thing come real heavy you know. That's true you know. Certain time you go, all of a sudden the thing so heavy, you can hardly move.

VL: Then, would a lot of people follow....

NC: Yeah, people follow. Family, the relatives, the friends like that.

VL: Then who would dig the hole?

NC: Some of the boys. Some Hawaiian boys, sometimes Chinese boys dig. All depends. They get paid for digging the hole. Some of them go help kind only.

Mrs. Chun: You know when Dr. Akioka's mother died? I went too. You
know from their house, way up? They carry down, then they go up
the cemetery. Quite far you know. Yeah? Had about one mile no?

NC: More than one mile.

VL: Did they ever use a horse and carriage?


VL: Was the Hawaiian style of funeral and burial different?

NC: Yeah, they pray. They get ministers.

Mrs. Chun: They chant and all that kind. Different. And they put
flower. Chinese, they don't put flower.

NC: Chinese, they burn candle and the incense. They get da kine paper.

VL: How about churches? Did you go to church as a young man?

NC: Chinese church?

VL: Any kind of church.

Mrs. Chun: No Chinese church. They have a temple, Chinese temple.
They have Protestant and Catholic and Mormon and...

VL: Which one did you go to?

NC: Oh, practically every one.

VL: Why did you go around to different....

NC: I don't belong to any religion.

VL: But did you go every Sunday?

NC: No. Only once in a while.

Mrs. Chun: They believe more on the Chinese way. They always go to the
Chinese temple to pray and all da kine.

VL: You did that?

NC: Yeah.

VL: What occasions would you go to the Chinese temple for?

NC: Only New Year time. Only New Year time we go.

VL: And why would you go to church at other times?
NC: Oh, just curious.

Mrs. Chun: I know your mother went to the Chinese temple. Once a year they would roast one pig and they would go over there pray.

VL: Did a lot of the Chinese working people go to the temple?

NC: Yeah, practically everyone goes once in a while. My father, he's pretty good with that bue. When he ask for certain thing, he used the two pieces of wood made out of sandalwood. That thing, if one faces down and one face up, it means certain thing. Two face up is different, two face down is different again. If they stand sideways different again. Of course, you have to know how to interpret the thing.

VL: Who would do that for your father?

NC: My father.

VL: Oh, he do it himself?

NC: Yeah. He pray, then he start to drop the pair of wood blocks. He lift up like that and you drop 'em down. It all depends how the blocks face, eh. You have to understand that before you can interpret. Yeah, I don't know anything about it.

VL: At the Chinese temple, was there someone there all the time?

NC: Yeah, somebody takes care.

VL: Not a minister?

NC: No, no. That's the barber, the one cuts hair. He stays right over there.

I know Frazier [former Honokaa Sugar Company manager] took all the brass stuffs from over there. They get big kind, more like gong, eh. They hit, make noise.

VL: What was that for?

NC: I don't know. For when they pray certain thing, they use that, they hit.

VL: You know that co-op, the cooperative, the poi co-op that was started [by] Ginji Araki?

NC: Hmm. I didn't join. Yeah, plenty fellows ask me.

VL: And how about the more recent Waipio Taro Growers Association? Were you a member of that?
NC: You mean this late one? I don't think it's in force, eh?

VL: Not any more.

NC: That's [Merrill] Toledo and all those. I don't know anything.

VL: You never joined? How come?

NC: That time, I'm already half retired. I told them. I said, "I'm already half retired. Don't expect me to join." I know it wouldn't last.

VL: How did you know that?

NC: Because I can tell the people, how they work. Now, for instance, you talk about him, he talk about the other, the other talk about the other. That thing will never work. If they all in harmony, all right. Then you can go. But when you talk about him and he talk about the other guy, how can he make it a go. It's just impossible.

VL: From the beginning, they were like that?

NC: Yeah. And some of them, they don't like that certain fellow's attitude and all those kind.

VL: So was there ever a time in Waipio, when all the farmers did cooperate with one another? Did that ever happen?

NC: Some. Not all. They help each other. Like our lower section, Kawashima and I, we always help each other. Before, when Takeo stay, same thing. And Olepau them. We always help each other.

VL: In what way?

NC: When they run short of seed, we give 'em the seed. And we don't charge 'em. We make the seed, everything, and they come and get it.

VL: So why is it that you folks were able to cooperate?

NC: We not the greedy type. We work together. Look. I get tractors, Kawashima use my tractor. I don't charge 'em anything.

VL: Also, does it have to do with because your patches are close together, you feel like neighbors, more friendly?

NC: Well, it's more peaceful. He helps me. You see, when I'm not here, I go for vacation, he helps me take care of my water and all those stuff. Like my animals, sometime he help move around and all those things. That helps, you see. Like certain time, when I'm
not able to plant my taro, he help me plant. Quite a number of times he planted for me.

VL: Well, you're neighbors up here in Honokaa also. You and Suei [Kawashima]. Yeah?

NC: Yeah, he's right up here.

You can tell a person more or less. If he's the kind, all for himself, that kind people you better not get mix it up with them. Everything, they want for their benefit only. Not for the next man. Like us, we don't care whether it benefits us or not.

VL: I wanted to ask you a few questions about today, now. How many acres are you leasing now?

NC: You mean taro land? Or all?

VL: All.

NC: Shee, you get me. I really don't know exactly how much I get.

VL: Approximately.

NC: Wait. I get the paper over here I think.

(Taping stops, then resumes)

VL: So, now, we have added up that you have about 28-1/2 acres from Bishop, leased. And about two from Honokaa Sugar. Plus 1-1/2 that you own. And that you farm about three acres of your own taro and sharecrop about 13 acres.

Now, the lease, what are the terms of the lease?

NC: Year by year. I wrote down, ask them if they would give me a written notice, whether they going sell their land or not, within the next five years. They won't let me. They said they cannot tell. And they still working on it. Studying around the land. They want to sell the whole Waipio, you know. But nobody wants to buy the whole thing. The State like buy a portion of it but they won't sell a portion of it. They like sell everything. And the State like for parks, eh.

VL: So only year to year you know?

NC: Uh huh. No lease either. You pay the rent and you.... That, any time they can tell us, give us notice. You pull this crop, you leave 'em alone. That's why I didn't care to open down side one. But when they cannot give me a satisfactory answer, why should I open? I rather just pay few dollars rental and forget it.
VL: Now, the 1-1/2 acres that you own, when did you buy that?
NC: I don't know. Cannot remember.
VL: Was it a long time ago?
NC: Long time.
VL: And who did you buy it from?
NC: Herbert Akioka. Dr. Akioka's brother. He died up the Mainland. You see, he want to sell but Umi [a section of land] belongs to him too. That one below belongs to him. So Cuelho bought 'em. Cuelho wants to buy that place. So he asked me if any fellow want to buy, he want to sell. I think Umi and that place. So I told him, I asked that Cuelho said he would buy if reasonable. So he bought 'em. Then, I tell him, "I would buy him. All depends how much."

He said, "Well, since you help me sell the other one, I'm going to give you for more like a present like." It cost me only $350 or so. That's all. Was so cheap, eh.

VL: Was this before the war? Before the [1946] tidal wave?
NC: Yeah, long before that.

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 4-31-3-78; SIDE ONE

VL: How about the quality of the land that you're leasing for growing taro? What kind of quality is it?
NC: All kinds. The ones I planting now, supposed to be all good land. Like the one crop share and all. Supposed to be all good. But the one I want to open, that one is cheaper land. Production all depend on the climate. If get floods like that, big floods like that, then going damage a lot. Then taking chance, eh. Then if like these few years all right. No big floods so if you plant, you get two crops out of it already.

VL: How about the quality of the soil itself?
NC: It's good soil. It's good taro land. But only trouble is low.

VL: What do you mean, "low?"
NC: Way down. Just so many feet above sea level, eh. And then, every foot counts.
VL: How come?

NC: Higher elevation, less chance of flooding. Even, you know that shack where Leonard [Takahashi] built? That big patch and that lower patch. The lower patch, every once in a while the flood catch. But the big patch doesn't catch. You see, that big patch...

VL: Right next to each other.

NC: Yeah. That big patch is only few inches higher than that. Not more than half foot higher than the second one, I think. And yet, it doesn't flood that one so much. You know, that taro grows to certain height, the flood doesn't catch. Just so long doesn't cover, not so bad. He cover the leaves, that's going to damage the taro. And the kind damage you cannot see. Until you harvest.

Some fellow say, "Oh, that thing still growing nicely."

I said, "Wait till you harvest. Then you'll find out."

Then, plenty people didn't know that.

VL: What is the taro like?

NC: You see, if the flood doesn't catch 'em so often, the taro grow all the time, has big taro and heavy. If flood catch 'em all the time, he going stunt 'em. Because all the leaves drop off. Naturally, the taro won't grow so big.

And that thing, after you harvest, he say, "Gee, last crop I get so much. And this crop I get only so much." And that caused by flood. That means without disease. Like now, disease, you cannot count. You don't know what happened.

VL: How about the quality of the sunlight in that area?

NC: The best. Our section is the best sunlight. That's why, our taro, when go to the poi shop, they always get $2, $3 more poi out of one bag.

VL: What does the sunlight....why is it the best?

NC: Taro is something funny. The more sun, the less rain, is better than more rain. Some fellow tell me, "Shee, all dry spell," this and that. "I bet it affect your taro?"

I say, "The taro grow better." Because the water is running all the time. And you get better quality taro too.

VL: And what about the quality of the water?

NC: Our section is pretty good water. We get direct from the stream.
And the one, the upper section, get... of course, we have to get through the ditch, come right down. From the stream, come right down.

VL: So it's pretty good land then?

NC: It is good land. I used to work with the University. I worked seven years with the University. Fertilizing, spacing, and all those stuff. That's on my section only.

I said, "I experiment for you. But don't expect this to work on every place. This the best that I can get from my place."

VL: Did they give you anything for helping with the experiments?

NC: Everything under my own. And they get the credit.

VL: Did they tell you how to do the experiment?

NC: All by my own.

VL: How about now days? From your three acres or so, how much do you get in a year?

NC: In a year? No, taro you cannot count by year. You got to count by the crop. I haven't even figured. I never even take a look of it.

VL: Are you harvesting every week, throughout the year?

NC: Practically every week.

VL: And how much do you harvest? How much per week?

NC: About 24.

VL: 24 bags?

NC: Yeah, 24 bags a week.

VL: And you harvest almost every week?

NC: Not all year around. I forget what time I start. Wait, I try take a look.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

VL: How many sections do you have?

NC: 1, 2, 3, 4.

VL: And what are their names?
NC: Let's see. Leong Pung is one, Yong Ti, Look Mau, Ung Mau.

VL: What do they mean? The names.

NC: Yong Ti is the....uh, used to be seed bed, rice seed bed. That's why we call 'em Yong Ti. And Look Mau is...Chinese, one acre is 4-4/10 mau.

VL: Oh. Look Mau? Six [mau]?

NC: Six, yeah. But it's more than six.

VL: The first one was what?

NC: Yong Ti.

VL: What does that mean?

NC: Rice nursery bed.

VL: And Look Mau.

NC: Look Mau is the name I call, near to its size. But it's more than that, it's two acre, I think. But I don't know how they call 'em Look Mau.

VL: Did you name that patch?

NC: No, no. Name from before. The old Chinese.

VL: From rice? When it was in rice?

NC: Yeah, when it was in rice. And the other one is Leong Pung. Leong Pung is the name of the person that first cultivated that section taro.

And the other one is Ung Mau [five mau]. That's the one I experiment one year on rice. No, no, several crops of rice on that patch. And after that, I experiment on taro. That, fertilizing in that patch. I double the fertilizer, the workmen grumble at me. They say, "You must be crazy." This and that and all those kind. "What if you cannot make 'em come down?"

"I dry 'em."

"What if you dry 'em, it doesn't come down?"

And I say, "I throw 'em away."

"Throw 'em away? So many hundred bags and you throw away. Rich man, eh?" This and that and all those kind.
VL: What does Ung Mau mean?

NC: One acre is four, _si mau_. _Si_, four, 4-4/10, eh.

VL: One acre....

NC: ...equals 4-4/10 mau.

VL: Oh, I see. So this is little over one acre then? Ung Mau is five [mau]?

NC: Yeah. That one is exact one acre before. But now I enlarge 'em little bit more. I push the bank over. Because the other patch is kind of low. And that one hard to get water, so I get the tractor, push all the dirt to the lower patch. Extend the thing. Now is little over one acre. Before is exact one acre. But, I don't know how, the Chinese call 'em Ung Mau [five mau]. And the other one. Two acres, they call 'em Look Mau [six mau]. That's one thing I cannot reason out. Don't make sense. Because the two acres, 8.8, eh? Why tell six?

VL: And it was one acre only?

NC: Yeah. Supposed to be 4.4, eh? That's why doesn't make sense. But still yet, the name is there. So I follow up with the name.

VL: Do most of the farmers name their patches like that?

NC: Most of them get this....oh, they say certain section. But no name, eh.

VL: We can look at that later, after the taping is pau. Because I still want to see how many bags you harvest.

And you're still selling to Honolulu Poi?

NC: Yeah, some. I supposed to sell all to Honolulu Poi, but the price is so much difference, eh.

VL: From what?

NC: Locally [on the Big Island]. they paying 16 cents a pound. And Honolulu [Poi] is paying only 12 cents. That's four cents a pound difference. That's too much difference; 100 pounds is $4. But I know, Honolulu Poi wouldn't like it if he hear I selling outside. Because he short of taro too.

VL: Oh. Before, you were telling us that he [Tottori] said, "Don't sell to outside people."

NC: To, down Honolulu. Down Honolulu.
VL: Oh. He still goes by that rule?

NC: That, I don't know. I would think. Because he's short of taro and here I selling outside. But if he give me, if just a cent different I don't mind. But four cents difference is too much.

VL: Why don't you sell all to your local dealer then?

NC: Then he'll be crying. Then, when I get plenty taro time, where am I going to sell? Because, like locally, if they get plenty taro, they don't take from us. Because they get taro land themselves see. Just because short, they buy from us. I don't know. This Kelly Loo, he said that Kona Poi Shop give him 19 cents one pound. You see how much difference? Because 19.... that's seven cents different per pound.

VL: Your income, how much, what portion is from taro? In other words, let's say, your income, you have some from water chestnuts, some from Social Security maybe. And some from taro, some from lotus. How much is from taro?

NC: Majority is from taro though. Well, like Social Security, I get pretty plenty too. Because like now, I don't get too much from taro because I don't plant too much. But still yet. The crop share and everything, I think quite a bit.

VL: And you go down every day?

NC: Yeah, practically every day.

VL: How many hours do you spend down there every day?

NC: Five, six hours. Sometimes four, five hours.

VL: What are you doing most of that time?

NC: Cleaning the banks. Weeding inside. Pulling taro. Yeah, water chestnut is over. You know, water chestnut, last week was the last crop, last week. Last of the shipment. Only ship 45 pounds. Whereby I supposed to send over 100 pounds.

VL: And the biggest problem with taro today is what?

NC: The disease. That's the worst thing. That's why, we cannot tell how good our crop is. And how much we going get out of it. All depends on nature, that's all. You can't fight it.

VL: Who do you think should be solving that problem? The rot.

NC: The farmers themselves. They supposed to solve their own problems.
The University cannot help us. They never did give us a satisfactory answer.

VL: And so, what do you do?

NC: I lime 'em. Not lime, but, you know that kind coral? That's just like lime anyway. You lime that thing. Then I go fertilize it when real young. I push the growth. I don't know how it's going to turn out.

VL: Did you ever think of quitting?

NC: Quitting? I don't know. What am I going to do? I have to need my exercise. I rather work than just be jogging around and all those stuff. I think working better. You get benefit out of it.

VL: Even with all the rot, you're not discouraged from growing?

NC: Well, mine, the rot is not so much as other farmers. Mine just started rot when it's around 11 months. At start never did. Was growing nice.

Every fellow come see mine and all those. They say, "No need fertilize," this and that.

I say, "I ain't taking any chance. Everybody's one stay rot. I better push 'em. Make 'em grow." And lucky I fertilized. Otherwise, going be worse.

Because certain section out of the patch, one section, just for curious I leave 'em. I don't fertilize that, in the middle part. That's the place rot the most. Today, I wen harvest. I said, "You see? If I wen fertilize all, it would be better." But I see, he grow so nicely, I leave that spot. Just to see how it turns out. And that very spot rot's most. I think out of 10 taro, lucky I get one or two good. The rest all have to chop.

VL: Would you like to expand your acreage?

NC: No. I wouldn't. Because I'm too old anyway. Cannot work.

VL: Now, would you like to see your children continue growing taro, in the future?

NC: I don't think they would like. They work a good job and everything.

VL: Uh huh. But would you like it if they, would you like them to?

NC: No, that I cannot say, "I would like them to do," the things. It's up to them. Taro, if you don't know how, it's hard work. But you know how, it's easy work. To me, it's just like play. Some fellow,
they try pull taro. Back broking and all that kind. To me, it's just like nothing. I can be pulling taro the whole day, I don't get back ache.

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

NC: I think it's good. Because not only Hawaiians eat poi. Plenty of us eat poi. And besides that, poi is good for certain people that's allergic to certain things.

VL: Will there always be enough young people to farm, though?


VL: Willy Whitehead?

NC: Yeah. You know him?

YY: Lynn's husband.

NC: Yeah. Lynn's husband. He goes in too. He told me, "I told my wife to ask you long ago, to give us one area so we can crop share with you.

And she said, 'No, I better not ask.'"

I said, "No, I didn't know you care to [farm]. If I know, I'll give."

So he start with one patch. Shirley gave. And Shirley was taking crop share with me. So Shirley said, "Never mind, I give you one patch."

So I told him, "You working pretty nice." I say, "Willy, one lousy, small patch keep you every time down here. You have to come down. You want one more patch?"

He said, "Gee, I'd love to get one more. Especially, at least this size."

"Here, I give you right next, the big one."

And then he said, "How many bags?"

"Over 300 bags before. I don't know now."

"Why you don't know now?"

"You never can tell how the taro going come out. If he get rot or not. That's nature's work. You cannot do anything."
Then he said, "What would you do?"

"I would lime 'em and fertilize the thing. Push 'em up."

He said, "Well, if you can do that, I'll do that too." So he took over one patch, the big patch right next the one he planting now.

VL: You sharecrop?

NC: Yeah. Shirley tell me, "Shee, if I knew you want to give out that patch, I would ask you first."

I said, "Remember, she's your sister. You get enough for your thing already."

"No, I like one more."

So I pity her. I say, "Okay, I give you one more up here then." So I give her one more patch.

VL: Your three acres, do you do that all by yourself?

NC: Yeah. In fact, I help Shirley plant hers. All hers I planted.

VL: She's not included in that three acres?

NC: No. Now, I wouldn't get three acres. Because I gave off two patches already.

VL: And how about the future of Waipio? What do you think will happen in the future?

NC: You mean on the farms?

VL: Farms. What would happen to the valley?

NC: Shees, that's hard to tell. It all depends on Bishop Museum. If they going sell out that thing, I don't know who is going to get hold of the land and how they going think. If they let the farmers work like Bishop Estate, well, is not so bad. But if they going jack up the price everything, I think plenty people going drop off.

VL: Do you think they should let the farmers stay?

NC: I guess so. Because what they going do with the land? It's not good for other crops because it's all wet. Hard to drain. Not unless you spend money to straighten out the streams. That cost over $2 million before. That's what they estimate. I think they spend, how much, $15,000 I think, surveying only. And they figure out, around $2 million. That's before. Now, I don't know. Now with price, things way up, eh.
VL: Would you like to see the valley remain in taro farms?

NC: I guess so. That's the only way, the only suitable crop. Of course, there's some land where you can drain 'em and then plant another thing. Like macadamia nuts and others. But the Kona wind, the Kona storm. That's the thing bothers the macadamia nuts.

VL: How about things like the restaurant in the valley or, you know, like the Ti House?

NC: The Ti House, I don't see why they like stop the restaurant thing. That's one thing I think....the people come around with the petition, ask me to sign. I say, "You folks crazy or what?"

He said, "You'll be sorry, if you ever let them. The tax of your land going way up." This and that.

I said, "All the agriculture land are zoned. If they going zone the residential and the agriculture land....each has it's own rate."

And then he say, "Gee, we never think of that."

"You folks listen to those fellows who tell you something and you folks don't find out."

I don't know, some of these people, one fellow tell 'em something, they believe. The other fellow tell 'em something, they believe. They don't study that thing, they don't analyze things. I said, "Before you accept the thing, just find out first."

He said, "How can we find out?"

"Ask around. Ask somebody who knows."

Then he says, "It's not so easy."

"If you don't know who to ask, well, it's not so easy. But if you know who to ask, it's different story."

VL: You think that a restaurant would be a good thing for the valley?

NC: I think it is. At least get more people go around. Get something for them to eat and everything. Like this, when they reach down, they don't get any food, they have to rush all the way back. Away from the valley, eh.

VL: So you don't mind visitors coming in to the valley?

NC: No. That's what some fellows tell. "Gee, you get, pretty soon other fellow come in, they take over your land," and all of those stuff.
I said, "Who wants to take over the land?"

And it's not so easy. Once you establish anything, the landlord would rather have the old tenants than the new ones which they don't know.

VL: What does Waipio mean to you?

NC: Well, it means a lot. That's my birth place. I like Waipio. It's peaceful. Of course, I don't know the future too much. And I hope nothing happens. Plenty outside people moving in, eh, and they buying land way inside the hillside, those houses. I don't know what kind people. I hope they're all good people. So far no trouble, though. They mind themselves anything. Some of them good workers too. They pull taro, they clean patch like that. Good people.

VL: Are you talking about the young hippies?

NC: These ones are not hippies. These are all people, they went to the war zone and they came back. And some of them come visit, and I think they like the place so much they stay back. The first ones, they call hippies, are those who, they don't want to go to the front, eh? To the war zone. And they, I don't know, some, they don't even want to work.

VL: I just have one more question. And that is, what have been the happiest times in your life?

NC: I really don't know. I'm satisfied all the time.

VL: Do you have anything else you want to say? About the valley, or growing taro, or your life?

NC: I don't think so.

END OF INTERVIEW