BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY:  RACHEL HALL, 62, taro farmer

Rachel (Kaohi) Hall, Hawaiian-Chinese, was born in 1916 in Honolulu, but moved at an early age to Hanapepe, Kauai. She is the third of 17 children. She understands Hawaiian.

Rachel attended Eleele School on Kauai until the eighth grade. Then she held various jobs as a telephone operator, babysitter and ironing machine demonstrator. She also helped with her parents' taro and rice farm. In 1941, Rachel moved to Oahu and married her first husband with whom she had three children. They were divorced in 1950 and Rachel later married a second time. She and her second husband John Matson operated a poi factory on Queen Street. Widowed in 1965, Rachel is now married to Joe Hall.

Since 1945 Rachel has been raising taro at her farm in Waihee, Oahu. She still works in the fields everyday. She also sells poi, kulolo, and other Hawaiian foods at a Downtown market.
Tape No. 4-2-1-78

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Rachel Hall (RH)

February 9, 1978

Waihee, Oahu, Hawaii

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

[Also present during interview, Charlie R ppun (CR) friend of Rachel Hall's.]

VL: This is an interview with Rachel Hall. Today is February 9, 1978.
We're in Waihee.

[Note: Rachel has been talking about her mother's stepfather who blew up
his hand while fishing using gunpowder to kill the fish.]

RH: Well, I don't know. All I know is powder, that's all. I think that
they didn't throw the thing fast enough and then it blew up in their
hands. So, that was the thing that, you know. And all they did is
wrap it up in the bag and walk all the way home. It's so funny, huh.
Yeah. So, that's how it happened. My grandfather. Yeah. But on my
father's side, no, I don't remember. But on my mother, yeah. Just

VL: And do you speak Hawaiian?

RH: No.

VL: How about Chinese?

RH: No.

VL: So you folks spoke English at home?

RH: Yeah. My mother always spoke Hawaiian to us but we always answered her
back in English.

YY: So you understood it, then?

RH: I understand, yeah. I understand anybody talks Hawaiian to me, I know.
Yeah. Because even my grandfather. But, we'd always answer them in
broken English and try to make them understand what we are trying to tell
them.

VL: What is the school in Hanapepe?
RH: It was Eleele School. Up on the hill.

VL: That goes to what, sixth or eighth?

RH: Eighth grade.

VL: And then, so your first job was as that...at the Eleele Telephone?

RH: That's the telephone... Really, I did other things before getting to that job. But I think I would stick to that telephone operator [as my first job] 'cause I used to go out and demonstrate those, ah, they were irons. You know, those big irons where you---I went out to demonstrate how to use the iron.

VL: You mean to iron clothes?

RH: Uh huh. But, no, these were the roller type. They have it. They still have it yet. It's something like the presser. You know? And then, it rolls. And then, you just put your clothes in. But, you know, your shirts, your sleeves, your pants, you have to just know how to turn them to press that. So that was the first job. Of course, I did the baby-sitting jobs, too, you know. But, that wasn't important. I think the telephone company, that really..

YY: Did you baby-sit for family as well as friends?

RH: Friends.

VL: What would they pay baby-sitters in those days?

RH: Oh, just a few dollars. It was really very small.

VL: Yeah. Just a few dollars a month or what?

RH: A month. Then, I worked in the cannery but the cannery was even worse. You work so hard, eh. We were only making eight cents an hour at that time. That's all we made.

VL: What was your job in the cannery?

RH: Trimmer. I trim, I pack. And only eight cents and from 6 o'clock to sometimes we work up to midnight. You know?

VL: No overtime? (Laughs)

RH: That's overtime, but still eight cents, eh? And, end of the month when you get paid, it's only about $20. (Laughs) And yet, with all that, that was almost, just plenty money for us. Eight cents an hour. Then I think, the last year was 12 cents. Then I got this other job and that was it. But still when I work for the telephone company it was cheap, but little better. You don't work as hard, you know. You just push your plugs. Yeah.
VL: So how much did they pay you?

RH: Well, I really don't know, but, it was cheap pay. But, I was making more than my sisters because I was getting paid by the hour 'cause I was relief operator. And I made more hours than them. (Laughs) So, I made really more. And it went on for about a year and then I got a permanent job with the telephone company. When I got here [Oahu--1941] they told me I could apply for this telephone company out here, so. I wanted to but then when you gonna have babies you gotta go on leave. So, I says, "Oh heck, why should I?" So, I didn't go back to the telephone company.

Then in 1945 I started a business out in the market. Fish market. I started selling fish. And then, I think...

CR: Where'd you get the fish?

RH: From Hakipuu. All the family from Hakipuu, ah, Calvin's [Hoe] family, brought me fish everyday. Everyday. They were regular fishing people. And, I never missed a day without fish. And by the hundreds of pounds they used to...

CR: Nets, they used?

RH: ...nets.

CR: Are they all from that area?

RH: All over. All over.

CR: What kind of fish?

RH: All kinds. Wekes, mullets, awa. All the different kinds of fish and was plentiful that time. Every morning they would bring me a whole batch of fish. Even the akules they bring in by the tons. And I used to go out all night icing them. And, in the morning, early, I would wholesale most of the fish out.

CR: They clean 'em too, or...

RH: No. They just brought it to me as is. And then, I would sell that all out. But, I did more wholesaling because the fish was too much for me to handle. And when you wholesale, well, half of the day, then I'm all through. Then, after I got through, then, I think five years later, I could have gotten a job with the university.

VL: Doing what?

RH: Mail clerk. I went through all the professors. (Laughs) I don't know how I got that much nerve to go through all of that, but, I did. And then, I left. I went home.
VL: What do you mean you "went through all the professors?"

RH: Oh. The questions that they ask. You know, to get the job. My qualifications, eh.

YY: So, you were interviewed by...

RH: By all the professors.

I shook, you know. (Laughs) But, I didn't care. I says, "Well, I don't think I was qualified for the job anyway." You know, so I just went through it. But, when I got home, the telephone rang. And when the telephone rang they told me I got the job. (Laughs) I change my mind right then and there. I says, "No, it's not for me." (Laughs)

CR: Why'd you change your mind?

RH: I don't think I was able to do that type of work 'cause I didn't have the education. I didn't have and I don't think it was right for me to take it. I could have learned. Yeah. But, I felt I wasn't able to accept the position anyway, and go through. (Laughs) Yeah, the telephone system, yes. I could have handled it. But...

CR: You were still selling fish, then, at that time?

RH: Yeah, but very little. You know, I was eventually giving it up already because the fishermens were all, ah, giving up fishing.

CR: How come?

RH: Oh, I guess, not enough fish to keep going.

CR: Were you living in town then?

RH: In town.

CR: How did they get it to you?

RH: They brought the fish up to me. Every morning.

CR: The pali was there?

RH: The old pali.

CR: Everyday they brought...

RH: Everyday. And sometimes I would meet them at the pali. If they had another load, I would meet them at the pali. And then, I would pick up the fish there and then go back. And then, the next load they would bring it right back to me.
CR: What, they had a truck?
RH: Yeah, uh huh.
CR: How long would it take 'em to go?
RH: Oh, not too long. Just what we do now. How we travel now. Uh huh.
VL: So how many years did you sell on the open market?
RH: Ah, 1945 to 1950. Yeah. And then, I turned over to the taro business. That's when I started the taro business.
VL: Oh, 1950.
RH: Yeah. That's when I divorced my husband and the man that I married later, he owned this place [Waihee]. He had the taro fields. He had a poi factory [Lehua Poi Factory].
VL: Where was the poi factory?
VL: In town?
RH: In town. That time my husband was kinda sickly, so, he say, "Let's give up the poi shop and just raise taro." So, that's how we moved out here.
CR: Was the poi he was making was all from his own taro?
RH: No, we bought taro outside.
CR: From where?
RH: Oh, all different people.
CR: All over here [Oahu]?
RH: Yes, but before the war [WW II], there were big manufacturers, you see. And, at that time, there was so much taro. And, they had taro from all different people. From Waiahole, Kahaluu, Kaneohe. Kaneohe had lot of taro during my time, you know. So, that's where he picked up the taro. But, I wasn't in that business during that time. I only came in in 1945. Little by little I move in here until 1950.
CR: How much poi were you making? How many bags of taro?
RH: Oh, we were cooking about 10 bags a night. And then, during the weekends we would cook about 20, 25 bags. That all depends because at that time
we had lotta orders. And, those days, the poi was about 10 pounds for dollar, 15 pounds for dollar. They had a price war at that time, you know. Everybody is trying to beat and at the time we had McCabe's, Sakai, Honolulu, Waimea [poi factories]. We had about six poi factories at that time on Oahu. So, everybody fighting, you know. Trying to sell as much because there was so much taro, eh? So, this one would raise the price. The other one would go, you know. Till it had to come to a stop.

VL: Who was the biggest processor?

RH: Waiahole. Waiahole and Honolulu. We were only small at that--my time, because I didn't want to wholesale the poi outside. I didn't want that because you have to sell it on consignment and lot of waste. You know, if they don't sell it, they just pay you for the poi that they take.

VL: So, who did you sell your poi to?

RH: No, I went out and I sold my own poi. I have my own stall at the market.

VL: Oh, down at Chinatown?

RH: Yeah. I went out, I bag my own poi and I sold my own poi. Even if I sold two, three barrels, why, that was better than selling wholesale to outsiders. Yeah. So, gradually, I cut down really to maybe every other day I cook 10 bags.

CR: What was your brand?

RH: Lehua Poi. It's still Lehua Poi today. Because he [her second husband] was the first one to really get the lehua taro.

YY: Was yours a lot redder?

RH: Yeah, the lehua taro is red. And he was the first one.

CR: That's the same kind as Haleiwa [Poi]?

RH: No. That's not lehua. They have, they just had the Haleiwa poi. Yeah.

CR: But you still have your own label?

RH: Well, I handle his [Haleiwa Poi's] taro but the market there [i.e. the stall name] is still Lehua Poi. My business.

YY: You sell it to someone, the person who bought your business?

RH: No, the one who bought my business died. He died. So, he gave up. So, Haleiwa took all of our taro. But, I never change the name of the business and it's still Lehua Poi.
CR: So, they bag it for you and put "Lehua" on it?

RH: No. I just buy it. I just sell Haleiwa Poi now.

CR: But the stall was "Lehua?"

RH: Yeah. My stall is... the business and everything is still under Lehua Poi. That's the name.

VL: So, when you say he was the first, you mean your husband was the first one...

RH: First to raise lehua taro. And all the whole area was all lehua taro. All in this area here was all lehua and piialii. And the poi was red. Yeah. Then gradually everybody start raising the lehua taro. The red taro. Ah, it was on account of the color. The red color. And that was all.

VL: How did he decide to raise lehua?

RH: Because everybody wanted red poi. So, he went to Maui, he got all the huli from Maui. And then, he planted and planted and planted and then, till he got rid of all the white taro and the whole area was nothing but lehua. And that's how everybody start getting lehua.

VL: Did he buy the huli from growers?

RH: Yeah, I think he must've bought. Yeah. It was before my time that he start getting all the lehua. Then when I came into the picture, he had nothing but lehua and piialii. That piialii is red. Yeah. Beautiful color that piialii. Really nice. Yeah. When I have luau orders I use all the piialii taro. 'Cause really beautiful. Nice pink. Yeah.

YY: So both of these have a red, reddish color?

RH: Uh huh, uh huh, uh huh.

CR: Do you still have that?

RH: A few of the huli I have here and there. (Laughs)

CR: How come? What happened to that?

RH: Ah, for commercial, not too good.

CR: Why?

RH: Ah, I don't know. That piialii. But, I like to go back again and....

CR: They're small?
RH: ...plant them. No, they good. But, sometimes, I don't know, just lolliloli [soggy]. I don't know what causes that, but. But, I don't mind going back and get back all that, you know...

YY: Different taro.

RH: Yeah. Good eating taro too.

VL: So, when you were living in Honolulu and your husband had the poi shop, did you come out here to help farm?

RH: Oh, yeah. I had to. (Laughs) I would come out, work in the market. Yeah, I'd sell my poi in the morning about, after lunch I leave. I come out to the farm. And then, maybe I could do little work or I'll pick up a load of taro and then I'll take it back to town for the next cooking. And, that's how, we spent too much time on the road. And the fields had to be taken care of. We had working people but sometimes they work, sometimes they don't work, you know.

VL: How many did you have?

RH: One, two...three. Three Filipinos.

CR: Was Johnny [Matson, her second husband] out here all the time?

RH: John? Yeah.

CR: So, he would stay out here?

RH: No, he was working. That's why nobody was here. He was with the Inter-Island Drydock. He was a boat builder and, only when the Inter-Island Drydock went out of business that he had put a little more time in the fields. But, he still had the working men, you see. He would just come down and give them orders, you know. Tell them how many bags, what to do, and see what they wanted and then, he'll... He really depended on the working men to raise the taro.

CR: Did they live here?

RH: Yeah, out right in the back of Akeau Store [now Hygienic Store]. Right across of ah, Clifford [Wong, another taro farmer]. The rice mill was there and...

CR: Behind the Hygienic [Store]?

RH: Yeah. Right where the dairy is. We had a house there for the working men. We have two working men out there. And then, we had a house out here on the road. Another one was living there. But, when the highway came in, '67, they burned down the house.

VL: How did your husband get this land?
RH: This was lease land. This was lease land from the Bishop Trust. And, was about, I think he started from 1926. He got the lease from 1926.

VL: How many acres?

RH: He had 28 acres [and] 19 acres. Yeah, but, only this area that when I came into the picture we planted taro. The below area, the Filipinos planted taro.

VL: That was for their own...?

RH: No. They planted and then we bought all their taro.

VL: Oh, oh. So, you were planting on how many acres?

RH: I would say about 28 acres.

YY: Your workers, were they planting taro for you full time or did they work sugar?

RH: No, full time. Full time. They lived here. And then, we had a Chinese working man, too. That's where Fraiola is living. That one acre there, we had a Chinese man there. And, I learn a lot from him. The Chinese way of planting.

VL: What is that?

RH: How the way that we do it. You know. But, we listen to them. And they tell you, you have to plant it and you dry the fields. Then you, you know, then you have to weed and all of that. It's almost the same process as how the Hawaiians did.

CR: How did that man know?

RH: 'Cause he worked for John all his life. 'Cause at the time John had 32 Chinese people.

VL: Early, like in '26?

RH: When he was---earlier part. Yeah. That's the early part, that's from him telling me and what everybody told me about his life here, 32 Chinese. But, you know, at those days it was so cheap, huh? You just buy food for them and everything and all of that, you see. That's what he says, you know. And whatever they want, he gets for them. Just so that they have a place to live and they have, you know, they can plant and do their own.

YY: Were these people who worked for him family men or all single?

RH: No. All single. Yeah.
CR: Where did they come from?

RH: I don't know. I don't know. I didn't even ask him.

VL: So, when you came along they had three Filipino men and one Chinese. How were they paid?

RH: By the week. And they were getting, when I came, they were getting $3 a day. And then, $5 a day, you know. When things got a little better, and then, I think $8 a day was the highest.

VL: When was that? Do you remember?

RH: Ah, my husband died in '65. I would say somewhere between '60 and '65. But, at the time, we decreased the area of our taro planting because it was cheaper to buy the taro than to have working people. Because the taro was so cheap. It was only about $2 [per 100 lb. bag]. Even the early part when I came in in 1950, '45, '50, was only dollar and dollar half. You see.

CR: One cent a pound.

RH: Yeah. You know, that's all we paid for the taro and the taro was good, good taro. And the bags were just full. Not like today. Today the bags are not full.

CR: How come it was so cheap?

RH: I don't know. Everything was cheap, I guess those days. Yeah.

CR: Was everybody buying it?

RH: No, nobody was buying it.

YY: There was alot at that time, too?

RH: Was too much. I think it was too much taro that the factories couldn't handle it. Couldn't handle it because even when I came in, that fields where you folks have now [on her land], you can see the hole of the taro, you know, when there's no more taro you can see that the taro was so big. And just like it just stayed there and rot because you cannot use it fast enough.

VL: You folks had taro that would rot because you couldn't use it?

RH: That's my husband's time. But, when I came in was just about rot already, you know. Too much taro, they can't use it. People wasn't buying poi that fast, because why. Why, 15 pounds for a dollar, why, that's how many days. You don't have to buy all the time. And even the luaus. Luaus a whole 150 barrel is that. Only $10.
Oh, wow $12; I couldn't get over it, you know. When I think of it now today, oh, the poi was so cheap. Cheap, cheap.

VL: How long did your husband have the mill on Queen Street?

RH: Gee, I don't know when he got the poi factory. But I guess when he started planting taro. I really don't know.

VL: And then, when was it pau?

RH: In 1960. We gave that up in 1960.

VL: Why?

RH: He was sick. He had a stroke. He had a stroke about four times, so I didn't think it was worth it. And at that time he was in his 70's. So, and that going back and forth, nah. That's how I sold that, ah, you know where the fire department is [Waihee]? That's how I sold that 10 acres up there. 'Cause he was sick.

VL: So then you cut down your acreage?

RH: Cut it way down.

VL: To about how much?

RH: Now it's only about acre and a half. I would say almost two acres. Since he died I took it over myself and if I had a working man, well, maybe I would have kept all the area, especially on the other side where I still have taro. After he died in '65--'66, '67, '68--I think I gave the fields up in '69.

VL: Did you still have workers working for you after you gave up?

RH: After my husband died. No. I had one but he was just off and on. Off and on. He came when he wanted to. When he needed money, he'd come. (Laughs) But other than that, I did it all by myself.

VL: So then who did you sell to?

RH: Higashi took my taro all the time. After I gave up manufacturing my own poi. Higashi took all the taro. That's the poi shop right here. Then, ah...

VL: What was the name of it?

RH: Higashi Poi factory. Maikai Poi. And then, we moved to Waiahole Poi factory, and he [owner, Sakai] ran into trouble there on account of the waste running into the stream. So, they clamp down on him. So, he says he's giving up the business. So, he sold his business to Haleiwa. Yeah. And then, Haleiwa still taking all of my taro.
VL: Did you ever have any trouble selling them your taro?

RH: No. They really took all the taro. Every bit of it.

VL: And then, how would they determine what they would pay you?

RH: Whatever everybody else is being paid. It's not that we ask for what we want, you know. If they feel that that's what it is, they pay us.

VL: Did you ever think it was too low?

RH: Well, I don't know. All the years that they have been paying me, I just took it for granted that it's better than nothing. (Laughs) I getting paid, getting a few dollars, you know. But, when things got too high, especially the fertilizer and then all the sickles and the equipment for the farm. Gee, I felt that they should pay us a little bit more. You know?

YY: Yeah, it wasn't in proportion.

RH: No, no. You know. So, they paid. Yeah. They give us a little bit more.

VL: What kind equipment do you need?

RH: Oh, I need lot of sickles. I broke a lot of sickles. (Laughs) And the sickles for what we pay is about, these last ones I bought was $5.69. The highest I paid was $7. But, I like to get the good sickles, you know. But heavier sickle, so you pay little bit more. There's cheaper sickles but it's no use if you gonna use one or two times and then it's all broken. And it's not sharp.

VL: And you use the sickle for...

RH: Cutting the grass. Weeding. I need sickles. I need little odds and ends, you know. Tools. Well, I don't want to buy a machine because I don't know how to handle the machine. (Laughs)

VL: What kind of machine?

RH: Plowing machine, to plow the fields, you know. I like to try and get a weed-eater. (Laughter) All you do is just run the cutter like that and then you don't have to chop and chop and chop, you know. Because you really have to clean the banks. The weeds go in from the banks, eh. I spray sometimes and the poison that I buy now is $70 a gallon now.

YY: What kind of poison is it?

RH: Oh, it's Paraquat, but the early part I used to use the B-fertilizer -- the B-poison. You know, that's just to spray the banks and the... The B-fertilizer, it's very mild poison. There's too much weeds in
the taro patches, I would spray all the taro patches. 'Cause I was the only one working so I had to find a way that I could weed fast enough before they cover up the taro. You have more weeds than taro. (Laughter)

YY: And how do all the weeds affect the growth of the taro?

RH: Oh, they really affect it. You have to clean it up, especially when they're at the early stage. At the early stage you really have to clean it out. I think they just choke the taro. We have all kinds of weeds in the taro patch. And there's some that the roots are so tight that if you don't get it out, your taro won't grow.

VL: How do you replant?

RH: A huli. After you take the corm out, you take the leaves off, and that is what you replant.

VL: When do you replant?

RH: When I'm harvesting. And when I replant, what time? After I get a field ready, I replant right after I...

VL: You harvest the whole field one time or...

RH: I harvest as I go along every week. How many bags they take, they want. Well, they have been taking 10 bags from me every week. So, I pull that amount. And then, if I don't have enough, pull enough that I know there's space enough for me to replant then I replant it.

VL: How much space would you need before you can...

RH: Oh, I like to save the huli. I like to do it as soon as I know there's enough space for me to plant at least 10 rows. You get that much space then you leave a little leeway for your other pullings, you know.

VL: Have you changed your methods of growing or planting or harvesting since you started in 1950?

RH: No. I don't think I changed anything. Only thing that I don't use any spray. I go in, I try to keep my fields with water so that the weeds don't grow fast enough. Because as long as the patch don't have water you have plenty weeds. And fast. So, I try to keep 'em with as much water as I can so that not too much weeds. No, other than that I think I use the same process all through.

VL: And that is the process that you learned on Kauai or where did you learn that?

RH: Those were the same things they did on Kauai. That's what I doing
here now. Those are the things that I've learned from my husband and since I took over the fields, doing it by myself, I followed what they did. I tried to do exactly, you know, 'cause I wasn't too sure of myself during that time, you know, when first taking over. I cried a lot of times because I felt that I wasn't doing it right, you know. But, I tried it. Now, it's okay. (Laughs)

YY: Oh, that's wonderful.

RH: Yeah.

VL: You were saying last time that you learned some new things, like I think you said the Samoan people taught you, you know, you don't plant in the same place.

RH: Right. But, that's dry land. That's not wet land, like how we are doing it now. Ah, dry land, that's according to that Samoan, that this is the field [she demonstrates with her hands]. He says they lay all their fields with coconut leaves. Coconut leaves. And then, they go in and plant their taro, their huli. Yeah. They do the leaves because, ah, the weeds, and the leaves would keep the ground damp. Moist. And, right around the field, he would dig a ditch. This is the patch and he would dig a ditch, right around. And in that ditch there he would fill it up all with water. And that's it. And then, he plant his taro. The taro don't get any water because there's water seepage under-neath that keeps the ground. And that's how they plant their taro. He wants to show me--he wants to do one of my fields here and show me exactly how they do it, you know. And, ah...

YY: Oh, that would be an interesting comparison.

RH: Yeah, and he says, "You gonna be surprised about the taro." Well, I don't know. Maybe their soil there is different from our soil here. You see. So, and my soil now it's sour. It's not rich anymore not unless they till the soil first and then put in fertilizer. But I don't think they would do that. And then, after they harvest the taro, they will not plant the huli in the same place where they have planted the other taro. They would plant it in between.

[plant on the x's: one crop, and on the o's the next crop]

It's not in the same hole that they--this corm of taro. See, if they plant it this way, then next planting would be right in the center. And then in the center. But, not in the same area. So that would really have something. Because our area, maybe that's why we don't have too good of a taro because you
harvesting and you planting the same way. But, during my husband's
time, if we gonna plant it this way this time, the next time we
gonna plant it this way [vertically once, then horizontally]. That's
how he does it.

YY: Oh, like if you did it vertically this way, and you do it the... Oh,
I see.

RH: The next planting, he's gonna plant it this way, the opposite, you
see. To me it's almost the same thing as the Samoans, where you
don't put the huli in the same place, you see. Instead of doing
that, they do it the other way.

VL: So your husband's time, he did that?

RH: Yeah. That is what he did. So...

YY: That means then that he harvested the whole patch all at once which
would allow him to go different directions?

RH: Yeah, well, that's the reason at that time they harvested more taro.
You know. And they could do that. Whereas I don't harvest that
much, that amount of bags, you see. And then, the area is too small
for me to do that, you see. So, to save the huli I would have to go
back to the same way again, you see. But, I try to harvest my taro
so that I could do it the opposite. But, every time when I come in,
the children is already harvesting the fields and that's... You know?

VL: So, since you cannot do it the opposite way when you replant, did you
notice any change in your corm? Size or, you know, in the growth of
taro?

RH: Yeah, there's lot of difference. So, that's the reason why I
beginning to wonder, you know, maybe that is the cause of the taro
being small and maybe they are diseased, you know, because I'm doing
it over and over and over in the same area. The same thing. And of
which the Hawaiians never did that.

VL: Oh. How did they do it?

RH: They always did like how my husband did it, you see. And they would
always plow the fields up. Plow and harrow the fields. But, I don't
do it, you see. I cannot, you see. I had my buffalos to plow the
fields but I couldn't do it since my husband died. And then, I don't
have working men to do it. And I don't want to handle the animals
because I'm afraid. (Laughter)

YY: Do you still have buffalos?

RH: There's one of Wong's buffalos in here. Yeah. You see, I cannot use
the animals. But, if my husband was here, and he put the animal in
the patch for me, then I could work the animal. You know. But, to
go and get the animal, and bring it, and put all the harness and all of those things on, I cannot do that. I'm too scared, you know. Yeah.

VL: So he would plow the field and then, what?

RH: Harrow. After we plow all the fields, then we harrow. You see. And when we harrow the fields, then after that we level up all the fields, you know. Level it all up and pick up all the, whatever grass, weeds in the field there. We clear it all up. And, see that the water is just the right level, you know. Not too much because when you plant your huli when it's young, too much water, you drown the huli. So, you really only really need just about that much water.

VL: About three inches?

RH: Yeah. You know, so that you don't get the fields dry. And then, gives you time for the huli to root. And, so I don't know, maybe that's my problem now.

YY: Now over these years, have you seen any difference in disease?

RH: Oh, yeah. This year, this year, that's last year's crop. Yeah, it was bad. Oh, really bad. Yeah. I really don't know the real cause of it. I try to sit down and think about it. Try, but, I can't think of it 'cause we had that problem before .. But not that bad. Yeah.

VL: Was it loliloli or guava seed [a kind of rot]?

RH: Ah, guava seed. Guava seed. Loliloli, I didn't have too much problem with that loliloli. But, the guava seed and the taro rot, but the taro rot, I would take it that it's too old. You know, the taro is old already. And then rots. You know, like anything else when it's too old it's gonna rot. You know, anything you keep too long, it's gonna rot. I think the rot is that the taro is too old, or otherwise the huli has lots to do with it. You know. Because maybe some huli the disease has set in already before you plant it. Because some of the taro that you pull, you harvest, it's already rot. Maybe that, the next crop would be the same thing. Yeah. I try to think about it in that sense but I really don't know the real reason. But, the guava seed, yes, that I would really like to find out what's the cause of it.

Like the old-timers would say, don't let dirty water run into your fields, you see. Especially when there's flooding. And you know the dirty water from the stream and the streets and all of that goes into the auwais, you know. And then, goes into the taro patches. And they're very, very particular about that. The minute they know we gonna have a storm, they break off all the waterheads so that the water don't run into the fields. I notice that with my working people. They'll never miss. The minute they see little rain they go
for their waterheads. But, the crop, really, this year, it's really poor. Really poor. There's plenty to learn. I'm still learning. (Laughs)

VL: Are there any other things that you learned from other people that you remember?

RH: No. The only thing, when I went to Maui, I asked this man that was planting taro, how come his taro get so big? (Laughs) And really big his taro. So he says, the olden days the Hawaiians planted their taro according to the moon calendar. The fullness of the moon. And, I says, "Is that all?"

And he says, "Well, you have to take care..."

END OF SIDE ONE.

SIDE TWO.

RH: ...the moon calendar. In all the years that I've planted according to the moon calendar, I came out pretty good. That's the reason why I say, "Look at the moon."

VL: What should it be?

RH: Full. Full-moon. So that's the reason why I always get the moon calendar. The Hawaiian calendar. And I go according to the Hawaiian calendar. All the years I've planted since 1965, when my husband died, I planted. But, this past year, I neglected doing so. I just planted it when I wanted to plant it, you know. So, maybe, that's another thing, too. (Laughter)

VL: Did your husband plant when it was full-moon?

RH: No. Well, that's the arguments that we always had, you know. And, he says, "No." He says, "Go ahead and plant it. Because we have good fertilizer nowadays and the fertilizer will really take good care of the taro." You know, you have big taro.

VL: Was your husband Hawaiian?

RH: Haole. He's a Swede. He just has a little Hawaiian in him. But, he's wonderful man. Yeah. I only wish that if he was here he could talk more about the life and the taro, because all his life he lived with his grandparents and they raised taro on Maui. In Huelo. They have a big area of land there and all planted with taro. And there's three brothers took turn in planting the taro. And when he moved here to Honolulu, he got this land. He went right back to taro again. You see, so all his life he was a taro man. Yeah. But he never ate poi. Yeah. He never ate. Maybe he'll take a tablespoon-full of
poi and that's about all. But, he'd live on taro. He'd live on taro. He'll have taro with his raw fish.

YY: How did he eat it?

RH: We just boil it. We boil it and then, he'll eat it as is. Or, when it's too much, I'll fry it in butter and he'll have it with his steaks instead of potatoes. He'll have it with his steaks or chops, you know. Only taro. But, he never eat poi.

And even if poi I would get the fresh poi from the machine, make it into patties, and fry it in butter for him. And that's how he'll eat it. Yeah. But, all his life, when he died--he died when he was 74 years old. And, he was still in the taro patches at that time. He would be really, really, want to really talk about his life. And he is the one that knows all these people in Kahaluu. All the old-timers that raised taro in Kahaluu. He knows all of them. The old Hawaiian people. The Kalahiki family that raised taro. All of them he knew. And I would sit down and listen to all the stories that he would tell, tell me about. The old people and how they raised their taro.

VL: Do you remember any of the stories?

RH: Well, off and on. (Laughs) He spoke alot about taro growing. He was really the one to go right off. He would be the one to go to the Board of Water Supply or go to these, you know, to the board meetings.

VL: He would go to the Board of Water Supply?

RH: Yeah, like this problem that we having now,[water diversion by the Board of Water Supply, causing a shortage in Rachel's taro patches] he would be a good one to really--because he would know, you know. And he would know all the kuleanas and everything.

VL: In the past, were there any problems like that that he would be concerned about, you know, problems like the water?

RH: No, we didn't have any of that problems. We had so much water.

VL: You didn't have water problems?

RH: We didn't have. We had so much water. And the fields were all, so many fields that we had; no problem at all. No problem until they put the wells in.

VL: When was that?

RH: Gee, when was it? Last year we had the problem? Yeah, last year. Last year when they put the well in, I guess. When we went to court, yeah, it was last year. That was the only time that we never had a
trickle of water in the fields. That was my only problem. The water. Because you really need water for the taro patches. You really need water. Yeah. No, we didn't have no problem about the water at those years we had--we planted the ditches. And then, all the people below me, all had taro lands. Tsuha's, Yamashiro's, Nino's, all of them. All nothing but taro. And the, every year, about two or three times a year we would have all the farmer get together. We'd clean all the auwais, all this auwai all the way up, all the farmers would get together and clean it. Yeah. And, we have enough water. That's how much water we had to supply all of the farmer out here. And on the other end, there was enough water. We don't have enough water today. (Laughs)

VL: Why did those other farmers stop farming taro?

RH: I guess some of them were too old. And, the school took the place of where that was all taro lands is the school. Kahaluu School. All taro land. So, that much went out of business. Then, Serikaku's, they took Serikaku's lands too. They were all taro growers. And Tsuha. He felt he was little bit too old to go into the fields. And, so he gave up. Yamashiro, he was too old to go into the fields. So, left myself and [Seiyu] Nakata. Yeah.

YY: And so, all these people who were farming didn't have any children who were interested in continuing? The older people.

RH: Yeah, I think the--no. I don't think they children---only the Serikakus, but they took their place away for school so there's no more lands to go ahead and I think the children would have been interested in farming. But, I think they still are, but they not farming taro anymore. The have other--bananas and other things, you see. Yeah. And, Nakata. But I understand Nakata's lease is gonna be over about next year sometime, I think. But, I understand the boys [sons] want to go back to farm, you know. So, I was sorry to hear about Nakata's lease being over because that's their life, they like it. And then, now that the boys are interested in farming, that would have been a good thing, you see. Yeah. But, I think they'll have some problem with the land, I think. Yeah.

YY: Who is the land owned by?

RH: Schraders. Schraders is the landlord now. Yeah.

VL: So now, who cleans the auwai?

RH: Oh, Charlie [Reppun] just went up and cleaned the auwai last week. And, we clean all over here, but I go up and maintain the auwai. I do it. But, when it gets too tough, the boys [Reppuns] all get together and we go out there and help. Otherwise, if my children--my two boys--weren't building the sister's house then we all go out and clean the auwai.
VL: So, does your family help with the taro?

RH: Yeah, they do. My two boys does.

VL: In what way?

RH: They harvest the taro for me on Sundays. They do the harvesting and then, whatever I want them to do, the heavy work, like fertilizing and things like that, they'll do.

VL: I was going to ask about Kauai, when you were growing up there and working on your parents'--you said they had rice and taro?

RH: My mother had the taro fields. All of my aunties had the rice fields. And our taro patches were here and rice fields. And taro patches, you know, all over. And, that's how we got to learn how to plant rice, too. Yeah. But, my mother's taro fields were only for home use. Yeah. Well, in fact, I think all of them really planted. That was our staple food and then, like whatever you have you share with the next person. And then, whatever they have they share, and that's how we got along at home. Yeah.

VL: Can you describe where you lived and your aunties and the neighbors.

RH: We lived here. This is our home here, right in Hanapepe, right across of the swinging bridge. You go to town, you cross, and that's the second house, that's where we--that's our house, the big green and gray house. That whole area there was taro fields and in the back of the house, there's a highway and that whole area was taro and rice. Yeah. They were my aunties', my aunties planted it. Regular rice and mochi rice. And that Japanese people, farmers, they had their rice fields. It's a big area. Rice fields. And my aunties, close to the stream, they had all of their taro patches and their sweet potato fields. And the Chinese people and the church they had their taro patches. But, we all worked together.

YY: So, the whole valley was cultivated.

RH: All cultivated. If you go up to the lookout and when you look down into the valley there, they were all taro fields. Yeah. And, I had my cousins, they lived toward the Minihaha Falls and from the lookout you could see all their taro lands. Beautiful taro lands that they had. And their water came direct from the stream and went into their fields.

VL: Did they own the land?

RH: They did. And they still own the land today. Yeah. They are the ones that's have that problem with McBride's.

VL: Oh, oh, oh.
RH: That water situation up there. They are the ones. Yeah. They are my cousins.

VL: So, how many aunties did you have all farming?

RH: There was Auntie Rachel, there was Auntie Elizabeth, there was ah... (Laughs) And that Chinese people. And then, Hawaiians would say, that's my mother's first cousins but since they're old we call them grandparents. You know, the Paolis, the Palamas, all have their taro patches.

VL: So when you say that everybody shared, what did they share?

RH: Whatever we had, we share. If our crop is ready, and rest of the family, they not ready, we share. Yeah. We share. And when theirs is ready, we all share. But, the rice, no. The rice is whoever owns that field there, that's their--goes to the refinery and...

YY: And then was there a mill nearby?

RH: Not nearby. They would take the rice to Hanalei. That's as far I could remember was Hanalei. We would thrash the rice right there on the farm. They would bundle up all the rice and put it around this thing with the horses. And the horses would, they would run the horses all around the--you know, step on the rice. And then, you know, all those--the grains would fall off and then we'd take out all

VL: The husk.

RH: The husk, the thrash. Take it all out, shake it all out. And then, we'd spread the rice out. Dry it, you know, on the big canvas and then when it's dry they'll bag it and they'll take it away to the mill.

YY: Did the thrash go back into the field?

RH: No, they burn the thrash. And, during those days, well, we would all get together and get the rice thrash and put it into a bag to make mattresses, you know.

YY AND VL: Oh, oh, oh.

RH: Something for you to sleep on and, but no. They burn the...and then right into the fields and then they plow it over again.

VL: So how much rice did you folks have? How much in rice?

RH: No, we didn't have rice. My aunties' rice fields, gee, I don't know. About three acres, three acres or more that she had alone. Yeah. And then, the rest were all different farmers. Everybody--every farmer
had an area of rice paddies out there. But, everybody worked together. There was no money involved for labor. If I am ready to plant, everybody would come in and plant all that rice. Yeah. The only thing they do is lunch. Yeah. And, when time to weed, everybody comes in to weed. And they would take only about an hour or so, you know, because so many. So many farmers out there.

VL: How many?

RH: Oh, boy. So many. (Laughs) And, then, when you go right through, that's one field already. And then, the next field you go right through and that's all pau already. Really, sometimes when I sit down and I think, picture of how those people were—terrific. Yeah.

VL: So, even, not just relatives would help but neighbors.

YY: Community.

RH: Neighbors, all the farmers there would help. All the farmers. I don't say "Oh, I'm gonna help you and, you know, you help me." No, we all got together. There was a togetherness in doing the work out there. Yeah.

VL: How would you let them know that you were ready today to weed or plant?

RH: Parents all get together and they'll know. Yeah.

VL: Did they have meetings?

RH: They had meetings. They only have to say that "I'm ready." And they don't have to be told...

YY: Oh, isn't that a wonderful way!

RH: Yeah. They don't have to be told. Everybody knows. Okay, you're ready. Yeah. Everybody would come.

VL: What if two were ready at the same time?

RH: They'll take all that. But there was never two at the same time because everybody gonna do it. Everybody's gonna do it. If everybody's fields ready for weeding, everybody's going to do it. Yeah. It doesn't take a day. Yeah. Because the togetherness there, you know.

VL: You ever have anybody that, one time they didn't come 'cause they had something else to do or you know, was there anytime when somebody didn't, couldn't come?

RH: Well, there were lots of times that, maybe if they were sick, or maybe
there was something important that they had—or something else happened like that, you know. They didn't come. But, that wasn't, you know, that couldn't be helped, so nobody said anything about it.

YY: So, generally, there was a feeling of sharing and harmony among all the people.

RH: Uh hm. Among the people there.

VL: And then you would provide lunch, whoever...

RH: Whoever. Whose fields they working on at that time, they prepare the lunch.

VL: Who would make the lunch?

RH: They had to prepare the lunch. (Laughs). I would say, maybe the families. They would always get together and get things ready before they go out to work.

VL: Now is this men and women working in the fields?

RH: The men had their own course to do. The woman had theirs—the woman folks is planting, and weeding. I think the men folks have their other—preparing the patch, getting the plowing, and harrowing, you know. But, they all worked together.

VL: So, if you were weeding, then, you would only call the women to come weed.

RH: You only have to ring the bell and everybody knows it's weeding time. Planting time, you know. Thrashing time. And then, when time to cut the rice, harvest the rice, then everybody gets together and that's when the men have to really go in and you know, they would bundle into big bundles, like that and tie it all up and pile it, pile it, pile it. And the men goes with a stick, you know, and they poke one, they poke the other side, and they they put it on their shoulders and then they take it to where it's to be thrashed. That's the men's job.

YY: How about children? Younger and say, children about 10. Did they have any jobs?

RH: You know, really, when you come to think of it, you thinking about children, it's just like we never seen any around, because the older folks are always the ones that's in the fields, you know. Yeah. Sometimes I think about it and we get together once in a while with the children, you know. And, we talk about it. Say, "Gee, but we didn't see you around. You wasn't anywhere around."

VL: What about when you were a child? Did you have chores in the field?
RH: Yes. In my mother's taro patches we had to do it.

VL: What did you do?

RH: Clean the taro patches. Plant and harvest the taro and put that bag of taro on your back and take it home and cook it. Yes. That's the life I lived. Oh, yes. We had to harvest the taro.

VL: How old were you when you started?

RH: I would say I was young at that time. Ten, and eleven, twelve. Ever since I could get my feet in the taro patch, I think, I've been in the fields. Yeah. And that's how I learned how to plant, you know, but not taking interest in it. It's that you have to do it. You know. And, then I remember when I have to carry that-- put that bag of taro on my back and walk home. And you know, when you walk on the banks of the taro patches, eh.

VL: How heavy was the bag?

RH: I would say almost 100 pounds, you know. And sometimes my mother put half a bag, you know. And then, you take half a bag. But long ways to go to reach home to the cooker. And then, we cook the taro. And then we will get up early in the morning and then my mother would get everything ready, we would peel the taro. And at that time we have to pound. And then, my mother would wait till after school, then we'd come home, and the taro is ready to be pound. So that...

VL: So, the children pounded that?

RH: I did. I know. I did. My brother and sister was in school. Yeah. But, I know I did all of that work. I think I was the only one that really did the work. And then, we would pound the taro.

YY: Did you used to sing songs while you do it?

RH: No. But, my grandfather did. You know.

YY: You remember any of those songs?

RH: Yes. And, well, you know the songs that he used to sing, not the kind of songs we sing. They would sing, they would oli. I don't know if you know. That old Hawaiian way of singing. Oli. You know. And they would oli and you know, and then pound, you know. And, now when you think about it, that's right. And then he would tell us, "this is the way to do it. Don't put too much water, otherwise the poi is going to get all lumpy." Talk in Hawaiian, "Do it this way. This way." You know. So, when I think about it now, I'm glad. I'm really glad now that I--if I have to go back and do it again, I can. I be able to. Yeah.
VL: So he taught you how to pound poi, your grandfather did?

RH: My grandfather. Yeah. He would, you know, start us off a little. He pound it, you know. He say, "You mash it all up first." "You keep putting until you know you have enough that you gonna pound. Then, you pound it slowly." He says, "Take your time. You pound it slowly so that you can smash the taro fine as you could." And then he says, "Turn it over." You know. Then you have to push your hand under, you turn it over. Then you pound it again. And then he say, "Turn it over again." And we turn--pound, you know.

YY: So, was your poi pounder your size?


YY: It was big enough for you to...

RH: For me to handle. Yeah. My poi pounder was my size.

YY: Who made it?

RH: I don't know. I guess my grandfolks had all their poi pounders. You know. And all we have to do is just try to fit--see if that thing would fit our hands, eh. At that time our hands was small, eh. So, we had the small pounders. But, when I got older I used a big pounder. I prefer the big pounder because you could really pound it, you know, with the big pounder.

VL: So then after you pound it down some more, then what?

RH: You pound it, you keep on until it's fine. He'll see that that poi is fine. And, then he would say to kumele the poi. That's a Hawaiian word of mixing the poi. See? Then he would--we would get the--put water in it and then just slap it, just like kneading dough. And he would knead it, knead it. He says, "Keep on going until I tell you it's enough." You know. And we would knead that poi all up until it's all fine. Then he would say, "That's enough." And then we'll put it all in the barrel..

VL: And then how long would that last you for?

RH: A bag of taro would last us about a week. Yeah. That's 100 pounds of taro. Yeah. Would make us quite a bit because when you cooking, just one bag of taro, you don't waste too much. But when you cooking 10 bags of taro, you have lot of waste, you know. Smash, with nothing left, you know. So, we made quite a bit out of one bag of taro. That's last us about a week so we have to do that every week. Every week.

VL: How many people would it feed? Just your family?
RH: Just our family. Everybody make according to how big their family.

VL: You had a big family.

RH: Yeah, we did have. Plus my mother had some children from Honolulu, too. She took care quite a bit, about five of them.

VL: And plus 17 [children of her own].

RH: Plus 17. Yeah. Plus my uncles, you know. But, we had a big place. Yeah. And, could house everybody. So we have to plant our own and do whatever we can. (laughs)

VL: So when you were going to school, after you came back from school, you would have chores?

RH: Oh, yeah. That's when we started our taro fields. If I wasn't doing taro work in the taro fields, then they were other gardens--we had chickens, we had pigs. And, cows. And plenty work to do. And, all farm. Everything, farm. (laughs) That's all after school. We had no play time. No play time. Everything was work, work, work.

VL: And then when you were working did you also help, when you were working for the phone company?

RH: Hm. Whenever I was off, there was always something to do. Until my mother gave up the taro patches. We planted but not that much. Was only enough. Yeah. And then, my aunties were--they gave up all the rice fields, you know.

VL: How come?

RH: They were getting old, too. Yeah. And the other Chinese people. When I left Kauai there were hardly any farmers left. Yeah. Gave up all the rice fields, the taro patches. And, the other Chinese family, they got old. So, they gave up everything. Now, in that area there, I think there's only one Japanese man that's planting taro, that's Miyabara. And that's right in the back of our house. And, across the stream, below Eleele School, there's, I think, oh, I forgot the Japanese name. They raising a lot of taro. Nonakas. No, they all pau. They not raising no taro. All vegetables now. But now, if they have to go in and raise taro they'll make more money now. The money now is good. But, no lands now. And no water, too, I understand. Our aawai there used to be plenty water like how we had here. That's why when my mother came out here I asked my mother to come out here to see whether what she thought about this lands here. That when these lands were out on sale. And when she came and she saw the water, she says, "Oh." She says, "You have plenty water here. You know how to do the work. Why don't you buy it?" You know. "Because you can," she says, "You can."

So I says, "Okay." So, that's how we got the place.
VL: Now when did you buy this land?


VL: And before that...

RH: Was lease.

VL: ...your husband was leasing. Do you know how much he was paying?

RH: $22 a year.

VL: For all the acres?

RH: All the acres.

VL: You said there were 19 acres down the road?

RH: 28 acres here. We had only this area here at that time. 28 acres. I think was about 20 acres. Five acres there. Yeah, I think about 20 acres. The whole area that we bought was 28 acres. But, portion of that place there where the fire department is, that belong to Nino at that time. Then the rest of the lands we had it all in taro, plus all over here. Plus all over on the other side. All in taro.

VL: So that 28 acres, you said, $60,000?

RH: $63,000. (Laughs) That's what we bought in 1950. Yeah. 28 plus 19. $63,000.

VL: Yeah. (Laughs) And now you have 11?

RH: Now I have 11. At that time, my husband and his son went into business with this land. They bought this lands at that time. See, partners. So, he'll take half and then, the father takes half. But, he [son] didn't keep up with his end of the bargain. So, that's the whole story. So that's how whatever we have left. So my husband says to sell it. He said sell it and keep this portion. He says, because this is the place that where you get water, you'll always have water. And the place below you won't have water. So, he was right. (Laughs) He say, always get, like you have the water head. So, he told me to keep it. But, when he was sick I told him he can do whatever he wanted with the lands. And he can do whatever he wanted with the money because he live long enough, he work hard enough, he can go right ahead and do whatever he want. Yeah. He sold those acreage down there. But I say, whatever is left, why, I'll take over in case. Yeah.

END OF SIDE TWO.
WAIPU'O: MĀNO WAI

AN ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

Volume I

ETHNIC STUDIES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
ETHNIC STUDIES PROGRAM
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII, MANOA

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