BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY:  JOE KALA, 64, taro farmer

Joe Kala, Hawaiian, was born in 1914 in Waimanu Valley, the youngest of 13 children. He was immediately hanai-ed to his aunt and uncle (Robert Kahele's parents). He grew up speaking Hawaiian and English. When he was of school age (approx. 1920) his parents, the Kaheles, moved to Waipio Valley where Joe attended Waipio Elementary School. Then when the Kaheles started working for the plantation they moved up to Kukuihaele. Joe switched to Kukuihaele School and eventually completed the fourth grade.

Joe apparently moved freely between Waipio and Kukuihaele. He chased rice birds for Nelson Chun, did hoe-hana work and hauled sugar for Honokaa Sugar Company, planted trees for the Forest Reserve, and worked for the Board of Health until he was laid off in 1944. After that he decided that self-employment was best, and he began farming taro.

When not tending his taro, Joe builds boats, fishes and hunts. He lives in Waipio Valley.
NOTES FROM UNRECORDED INTERVIEW

with

Joe Kala (JK)

April 2, 1978

Waipio Valley, Big Island

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

[Note: Joe did not want to be tape recorded, so Yukie took almost verbatim notes. What follows is a reconstruction of the interview, based on her notes and our recollections. The passages in quotes are verbatim.]

VL: Did you have land in Waimanu?
JK: Yeah, 10 acres.
VL: Real parents?
JK: Yeah.
VL: Passed on by their parents?
JK: I don't know.
VL: Adopted parents?
JK: They had lease land. And right now I have only three acres.
VL: The other seven acres?
JK: "There was this lady, Helene Hale....she used to be chairman....she brought over papers and maps.

She said, 'You have three acres over here.'
I said, 'I have seven more.'

She said, 'No show on map.' That was crook-up by Solomon Burke. My old man signed papers; he could not read English....He could read Hawaiian."

[Burke asked him to sign papers that would give him the right of way (to get to his land). Burke gave him $1. But the "crook-up" was that he had Solomon Kala sign the land over to him for $1.]

When she went back she write one letter to me, to meet her in Waimanu. She would go by helicopter.

"We had to go together. What if I go and she no come."
[Joe was going to show her the copper plate with his father's name on it--and acreage he had.]

JK: The land is not valuable, but I pay taxes. Just 10 of us own land over there. Bishop get little bit. No government land, all private owners.

VL: Did they want to take the seven acres for the County?

JK: No, no, no.

YY: Helene Hale was chairman (mayor) of Hawaii County but later became a realtor.

JK: My father said, "The land will take care of itself." Six months after the transaction Burke died.

VL: Was there some kind of connection? Between his death and his crook-up?

JK: Something like it. Yeah, they grew taro. The land was down the trail, seven acres to the beach.

VL: Was it an ahupuaa?

JK: Ahupuaa--that's right. Ahupuaa is a landowner. Bihopa--you know who that? Bishop.

VL: Ahupuaa runs land [mountain] to ocean.

JK: "[Joe's] adopted father raised taro for family use. All Waimanu people raised taro for family use. Not like here."

VL: How much did he harvest when you were small?

JK: I don't know.

VL: What do you remember best about childhood?

JK: "That time I didn't have growing spirit. When I was young I didn't think what was good, what was bad."

VL: Did Lucy and John [hanai siblings] go to school?

JK: They were older and went to school in Waipio. They stayed with family there, aunties and uncles.

VL: So when you were six your whole family moved to Waipio? Still a lot of people there in Waimanu?

JK: Yes.

VL: Did you go to school every day?
JK: You know kids, sometimes go, sometimes stay home; I was like that too. But school is good.

VL: Did your parents know you stayed home?

JK: I stayed home--my mind is like still in Waimanu. It was like that until I got used to it.

VL: Did you learn?

JK: Real lousy.

VL: Did you learn to read and write?

JK: Yeah, but not so good. It was hard living then. Make only 50 cents a day. My father (?) worked for Chun, Akioka; pull grass, raise animals. My mother weave hat and sell them to the people. Very cheap! Twenty-five cents a hat. I don't know how long it take to weave hat. My father worked for other persons. Go right around, go right around.

VL: Did you folks raise your own taro?

JK: Poi was very cheap those days. Right now $10 worth only quarter [only cost a quarter before]. Bought poi from Akioka. [Raised taro in Waimanu, but not in Waipio.]

VL: What about vegetables?


VL: What kind of food did you eat?

JK: Taro, fish, poi, rice. Rice was $3.50 for a 100 pound bag.

VL: At 50 cents a day, $3.50 is a week's work. That's a lot. Did you ever go hungry?

JK: Oh, no, there was fish in the rivers. You bring home only enough for your family; not like today, you bring home all you can get.

VL: Those days, were there any restrictions on fishing in the river?

JK: No, no restrictions. [VL probes]

Oh yeah! Akaka was a big shot. He had a lease and he stop the people from fishing. Had a Hawaiian guy who had a case with Akaka. He [Hawaiian guy] sold his land just to get the money just to keep them [the case] going. He won.

There was mullet floating because no one can catch 'em. John Thomas knew that story. He told the children the story.

VL: Do you remember the first time you went fishing?
JK: Oh yeah! I remember I was 11; I used to go fishing with my uncle, in
the canoe, get oar, like that. I was sick like a bastard.

My uncle said, "You better lie down." The house was spinning. If
the ocean is rough and the boat stops, it rocks. Well, after that,
every time I go out in the small boat, paddle. I fish, fish, throw
out. Until I get used to. I go out my own self [alone]. I was a
young man. Paddle, hand line, throw up, keep on going. Keep on
going until I get used to. It took four or five months to get used
to.

VL: What did your uncle teach you the first time?

JK: It's up to you to look and learn. They no tell you. You look what
they do, that's what your learn.

VL: What kinds of things did you learn?

JK: Oh the way they fish, the hook. You have hand line, a main leader,
branch out hooks, a lead sinker. You put more hooks if active [lots
of fish].

VL: Did they ever scold you if you did something wrong?

JK: Not one of them scold. I learn what they do.

VL: What if you were a bad learner?

JK: Oh yeah, they say, "You waste; you no go. You fix your own, you stay
home."

VL: What kind of boat?

JK: Flat bottom boat, 13 footer, 14 footer. Had outrigger. It was low.
Paddles were made from inia tree. Made all by hand, all one piece.
The size depends on what you want. There were not smaller ones for
children (?).

VL: How did you learn to paddle?

JK: Just follow up.
VL: How much fish would you catch?
JK: All depend. If lucky day, all depend.
VL: What would you do with the fish?
JK: For family. If leftover, sell to outside people. Save enough, this much, this much, for a couple of days.
VL: How big was your family?
JK: Quite a few people. Cousins...all pile up.
VL: How much would you sell the fish for?
JK: I don't know.
In the summer we dry the fish. You split it in half and salt—not like salt salmon. You know just how much salt. Leave 'em overnight. In the morning you wash 'em out. Taste it [to see if salting is right]. Then, dry it for the day.
VL: Did you ever smoke it?
JK: Those people, those days didn't know about smoke. [Drying: two poles with a cord across—"just hang 'em up"]
[Hook for hanging:]

If you want to eat on the same day, okay, all depends.
VL: Where did you get the salt from?
JK: From the store. Kona people, I heard, make, but over here, no.
VL: What is the best time to go fishing?
JK: Summer, from May on, but all depend, get these trade winds, sometime stormy.
VL: What about the moon?
JK: Usually all depend. When the moon come up [points toward Kukuihaele side of valley] it's low tide. In the middle [points straight up to sky] it's high. When it sets [points toward Waimanu side of valley] it's low. Best time is when moon is up in the middle; the tide is up. Depending on the week, you get two low and one high tide or one low
and two high. You know what is menpachi? We use to catch those. The eye is almost like 50 cents! [About 15 inches long] Good over charcoal.

In winter time, if too windy, we no go out. Sometimes we meet a storm in the night.

VL: Did your boat capsize?

JK: No. Oldtimers they just know how to balance the boat; it never capsizes. By luck you get a clear day, and you go. Even though you run short of fish, that's okay, you have enough. Can fish in the river. In the ocean we use hand line; you drift. When it's real dark, you look at the wall [the mountains] and you know where [you are]. The mountain is dark, the valley is bright. Every fisherman they go by marker [in the mountains]. You can tell your marker to your friends or other Waipio people but not outside people. You catch menpachi at night. During day, we go trolling Honokaa or Pololu side. The yellow fin is ono--ho boy, real nice fish! The sashimi is like steak. The runaway [area between where boat is on shore and the ocean--where it will be pushed]--when you push the boat out--get lot of boulders.

VL: Did you have any ceremonies or prayers that you used?

JK: That's for the old people. It's just like a promise to give them good luck. I heard from my grandmother, they go by laws [fishing customs]. They no like the lady jump over the fishing gears. Japanese same thing. Some people they no like someone ask, "Where you going?" They get mad. They prepare [to go fishing] and someone ask that. They tell, "kulikuli"-- "You shut up." It's the fishing law. Certain fish they worship--that's their aumakua. They no catch, no eat.

VL: Did your family have an aumakua?

JK: My grandmother's side had shark aumakua. [Joe told of an incident that happened one night while fishing with Charlie Thomas, George Nakagawa and Henry Kala (older brother). George and Henry were in another boat. Joe saw the light from their boat getting smaller and smaller, even though Charlie had thrown the anchor down. He said George and Henry's boat light went "from bright to small." Joe let out 2,040 yards of line, but "it keep on going slack."

They discovered that their anchor had broken and they were drifting. At about 4 o'clock that morning, they came back toward shore. The water was "kind of choppy." Palahu (rotten) stuff was chopped up and thrown in the water so the fish could smell it. Then they saw a shark fin circling right around their boat. Joe felt something on his line "but I don't know what kind." It gave him "a funny feeling." Charlie suggested it was an oio, but it was "different feeling from oio." Then they saw it was a shark. Joe's brother yelled, "Gaff 'em!"

But Joe thought, "That's their place, not our place" (i.e. the ocean is the shark's place, not people's). He saw the shark's large blue eye, "He look at me." The eye was about four inches in diameter. Joe just cut the line and the shark "went right down" making breakers.
There was also a current and wind. "Charlie Thomas didn't see, he just put his head down" into the boat. "That was a test. After that I see sharks around me and they no bother." [Many people in the sections from the lighthouse to Kohala and from Waipio to Waimanu have a shark aumakua.]

VL: Did your family ever have idols of fish? Worship? Pray?

JK: That I had before down here. Down here they had one. The old folks, they no talk about that. Kind of too deep for them, too personal, taboo. Herbs, too, taboo.

VL: Could women go fishing?

JK: Yes, just as long as you don't have your period. If it's half way through, you wear ti leaf.

VL: How about pregnant women?

JK: Pregnant okay.

VL: What kind of bait did you use?

JK: Tako--you go with a torch, catch them on the rock with hand. Lay net in the river, out in ocean. Over here the river was real deep. The ocean floor changed since the tidal wave. You set round net to catch Kona crab.

[Joe took care of and raised his niece from when she was five months old.] "I kept her; we all stayed together."

VL: When you were sick, did you go to a doctor?

JK: I don't remember going to a doctor. When I had hemorrhage was the first time I go doctor. This is number 10 years [since hemorrhage]. [Actually more like 13 years from things he says later.] I had blood from the nose, blood from the mouth. That day we were cooking lau lau for Kelly Loo. I was keeping the fire. [My nose] drip, drip, drip. That afternoon I felt lousy. Robert said, "better stay here."

I lay down, I felt pressure (?) I went to bathroom, lean over, and wen blackout for two hours. When I woke up, all people around me. My white T-shirt was all bloody. People ask me if I want to go doctor. I tell, "I'm all right, I'm all right." I landed up in the hospital six days.

Dr. Okada asked, "Do you drink?"

"Of course I drink!"

The whole time only brothers and sisters could visit and only for three minutes. The second and fourth day it happened again [hemorrhaging]. They inject me like one guinea pig. I look in the mirror--just like
one broom stick. I want to go home. [But Dr. Okada made him stay a fifth and sixth day; if he wasn't better by the sixth day the doctor would have sent him to Hilo.]

For nine years I went rest, nine years. No beer, whiskey or wine. When I hit 60 [years], I thought, "I'm going downhill from now on." I started drinking again.

I was one of the [okolehao] bootleggers. I used to sell to Sheriff Rickard. We had a house [points toward beach]. You make kalua, same like pig, cook in the ground [the ti root]. Then you beat it, all brown. Put it in the barrel. You just know when [it's ready to distill]. The first five gallons is 175 proof.

Chinese, I used to like them better than the Filipinos. Once you treat them right, they're like family. Filipinos, they no understand you. Depend on the nationality. Visayan, Ilocano, Moro--some like from the jungle! The Moro.

Small time I was healthy boy. Before, we never get plaster and da kine. For cuts, use maile-hohono. For colds, use a steam bath--get blanket and cover. Boil lemon grass-lukini--for tea, for steam bath. It's something like Vicks. The old folks, they fix you but they never tell you what [how]. Certain medicine more used for day [time], certain medicine for night. You have to release [the nighttime medicine] before daylight [and vice versa]. Throw it in the water. That's two different things. Those kind of people [those who know Hawaiian herbal medicine?], they keep it until they go.

VL: What about kahunas?
JK: They like a doctor. They believe.

VL: Kahuna lapaau?
JK: They damn fools. That's old days. We no understand. I never heard about them until today.

VL: Did you hooponopono?
JK: I ain't kidding you. Once I went down Kona [about age 35], Honalii, I think. Had lot of chili pepper just grow wild. I just pick. I never know was someone else's property. I went fishing--I no more voice for one week. The whole week only tea, no eat nothing. Went back to Waipio house, Nakagawa said, "Hey brother, you look sick."

[Joe insisted he wasn't sick, but he felt lousy. Several times he tried to get up out of bed and reach for his gun to finish himself off. Each time, he fell back into bed. Finally someone took him to Kukuihaele. People looked like they had big heads and no bodies. Hoapili Hauanio prayed with him. He said, "You got your troubles from Kona." And Joe had not told him anything. He prayed for three days before he "came back." "People tell me, 'No pick other people's stuff especially Kona side.' From that time on I no like Kona for nothing."]

END OF INTERVIEW
WAIPÍ'O: MĀNO WAI

AN ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

Volume I

ETHNIC STUDIES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

ETHNIC STUDIES PROGRAM
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I, MANOA

December 1978