LLOYD KANESHIRO, 21, University of Hawaii at Hilo student

Lloyd Kaneshiro, one of five children of Sadako and Seiko Kaneshiro, was born on June 16, 1957, in Honokaa Hospital. He is a third generation Japanese-American. He was raised in Kukuiaele and attended Kukuiaele School and Honokaa School, graduating in 1975. He is now a junior at Hilo College majoring in agriculture.

As he was growing up, Lloyd worked in his father's poi factory and Waipio taro patches. During summer 1978 as part of his school requirements, Lloyd cut seed for Honokaa Sugar Company.

Lloyd's hobbies include spearfishing, judo, basketball, and baseball.
[This is an interview with Lloyd Kaneshiro. The date is June 25, 1978. We're at his home in Kukuihaele.]

VL: Okay Lloyd, can you tell us when and where you were born, first.

LK: I was born in Honokaa on June 16, 1957.

VL: And that makes you how old?

LK: Twenty-one.

VL: Can you explain to us what your job is right now, with the [Honokaa] sugar company this summer?

LK: My job is to cut cane seed which is used for planting in the fields after they harvest the mature sugar cane. So we cut the cane stalks—which is about eight months old—maybe, 21 to 24 inches in length. And just stack it in the bins. Not stack it, but just throw it in the metal bins, which holds over 2,000 pounds.

VL: Are you paid for this?

LK: Yeah.

VL: How did you get this job?

LK: Oh, I applied summer hire at the plantation.

VL: And why are you working at the plantation this summer?

LK: For one of our ag [agriculture] courses, it's required that we do some kind of farm work or some kind of....I guess some kind of job in a farm or something. So to fill that requirement, I working in the plantation.

VL: Would you have other choices of jobs to fulfill that requirement?
LK: Yeah. I think working in the taro patch could have fulfilled that requirement. But I chose the plantation instead.

VL: Why?

LK: Just that....see, since high school like that I've been working on the taro farm. So instead of putting that down, I wanted to....I guess, other people, if they work for their parents, they don't cite that for their ag requirements. Also, anybody can work under their parents' supervision and goof off and still use it for their requirement; but this way, I wouldn't be under my father's supervision. I would be under somebody else's. So that would make it more official like.

VL: Can you explain what kind of involvement you've had with your father's taro patch over the years? Like first, when did you first start working in the taro patch for him?

LK: Elementary school, I don't know when. We used to clean the taro patch, pull taro like that.

VL: You were pulling taro when you were in elementary school?

LK: Yeah.

VL: At that time, what did you think of taro patch work?

LK: Pulling taro, I didn't mind yeah. But cleaning grass like that, I didn't like that so much.

VL: And then in high school, what kind of help did you give in the taro patch?

LK: Mostly the same. Pulling taro and cleaning the taro patch.

VL: Did your feelings about cleaning the taro patch change when you got to high school?

LK: No. (Laughs)

VL: Of all the taro patch jobs, which is the best that you like?

LK: Pulling the taro. See, just the year before, I started taking care of one patch. See, what I interested in the most is, I like to grow things like that, and harvest like that. So I rather grow, like take care of a taro patch, and then harvest it, than to just, I don't know, take care of my father's things like that. Because, like when I grow things, I accomplishing something. Just like I started it, then I can see what I accomplished.

VL: On your own taro patch, though, you still have to weed right?
LK: But, see, I weed it maybe once a month like that. So most of the times it's free of grass like that.

VL: How much did you harvest from that patch then?

LK: I don't know.

VL: Did you get to keep the money that you got?

LK: Yeah, yeah. My father paid me.

VL: Can you explain why you're studying ag at the UH-Hilo?

LK: See, at first, I wanted to go in electricity or electronics. But at the University, they don't offer like, I guess they call it trade. Some kind of trade job. They offer that at the community colleges. So, that's why, for one year I tried electrical engineering. But I didn't want electrical engineering. So instead of that I switched to ag because I didn't want to go to a two-year college to learn about electricity or electronics at the community college.

VL: But you studied there for one year?

LK: Yeah. I took some courses for electrical engineering. Then, after that year, then I switched to the College of Ag.

VL: What would you like to do after you graduate with your ag degree?

LK: If possible, I would like to do some kind of job with the plantation. Or some kind of ag work. Maybe in Waimea or over here, in Honokaa.

VL: If it was with the plantation what kind of job could you get with your degree?

LK: I don't know. But I hoping....see, I'm interested in the drip irrigation system that they're setting up. So if they do accept me after I graduate, then I want to do something with the drip irrigation if I can.

VL: And if you were to start something in Waimea, what would it be?

LK: If I do get some kind of job in Waimea, I want to do something with the....maybe inspection or something.

VL: That would be inspection of what?

LK: The crops like that. But I think to do that you need some kind of, maybe you might have to go to some kind of school like that. To be an inspector.

VL: Would you go on for further education, then?
LK: Yeah. If it requires further education I would. And that would be the same for plantation too. Because I don't think they have....I think they have maybe only one course in irrigation offered at Hilo. So maybe, if I have a job in the drip irrigation system, maybe I might have to go to [the University of Hawaii at] Manoa for maybe further studies.

VL: Do you think you'll always live on the Big Island?

LK: Yeah. I don't want to move from the Big Island. And, if possible, I want to stay out here in Kukuihaele.

VL: Would you consider taking over your father's taro business?

LK: Yeah. If nobody else take care of his business, then I might take care. But I rather have, like take care of his farming instead of the poi business.

VL: Why is that?

LK: I guess, like, I like to grow things like that. So I rather take care of the crop business than the poi manufacturing business. (Also, because taking care of the poi business, you would have to do a lot of paper work and bookkeeping, and I'm not too good at doing that kind of stuff.)

VL: Have you worked in the poi shop too?

LK: Yeah.

VL: What were your jobs there?

LK: Peeling the taro and putting the taro in the cooker.

VL: Some people have said that young people don't like to work in the taro fields because it's too much work. So they're not going to take over. Or it's too dirty. What do you feel about that?

LK: I don't know, it doesn't bother me that much. Because I always liked to grow things, so it doesn't bother me if I work in the mud, in the water like that.

VL: So you would take over your father's taro patches if no one else were taking care?

LK: Yeah. And maybe after I graduate, then I can take care of more taro patches.

VL: Of your own?

LK: Yeah. So that he has more time with the poi shop.
VL: Do you think that young people should be encouraged to go into the taro farming business?

LK: I guess they should, because... well, I don't know. The young people should go into taro to keep up with the old ways. Also, a lot of people like poi now, and I think there's a shortage of taro. So I guess younger people will go into taro sooner or later (with an increase in the price of taro). But taro farming is hard work and anything can happen to the crop during the 15-months growing period, so you are taking sort of a risk if you depend solely on taro farming. Maybe that's why most of the farmers use taro farming as their second source of income.

VL: Do you think that there's something that the government or the University could do to encourage young people more?

LK: Yeah. I think if they offered courses in growing taro, I think maybe young people would get more into the taro farming. Because, I don't think there's any courses offered anywhere, in taro farming. In Hilo, there isn't any.

See, lot of the younger people around here, their father owns couple taro patches. So if maybe they offered courses like that at the University, then maybe more of the younger people, they would get interested in raising taro. Finding out how to grow better crops.

VL: You mean better than, say, what their parents could teach them?

LK: Yeah. I guess, maybe learning more about how to grow using different fertilizers, different methods of growing them. And, I think in Maui or someplace, there's....I'm not too sure but I think there's a person who does research on the taro. Different varieties of taro.

VL: And you think that that research could be taught through a course?

LK: Yeah. See, if they set up a place where you can grow taro, then at the same time, they could do some research on how to grow better crops and prevent the taro from getting diseased.

VL: What do you think is the future of taro in Waipio now?

LK: I think that more people will start to raise taro. Because the price of taro is going up. And I think, like, they're finding better ways to increase the size of their crop and the size of the taro. So that they get more out of their work.

VL: Right now, are there any obstacles to young people in this area farming in Waipio?
LK: I guess, they have to...see, much of the older guys, I guess they have some kind of lease on the land. So if the younger people want to grow taro, they have to either buy the lease from the older people or they have to go to the Bishop Estate.

VL: Is that a problem, getting land?

LK: I guess for the younger people, maybe.

YY: How about the idea of sharecropping?

LK: Yeah, I guess lot of people do that.

YY: Do you think it's profitable, for the younger person?

LK: Yeah, I guess if he's just starting out. And he don't know really too much about...then, like one person can help out on the other person.

YY: You mean one younger person can help out another younger person?

LK: No, I mean like the more experienced person can help another younger person. Then maybe after he get couple years of experience, then he can go on his own.

VL: Do you have anything else to add?

LK: No.

END OF INTERVIEW