BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: SUEI KAWASHIMA, 50, carpenter and taro farmer

Sueichi Kawashima was born in Waipio Valley on May 13, 1928. His mother was Hawaiian; she had been married previously so Suei has two half-siblings, as well as a full brother and sister. His father, a Japanese immigrant, spoke fluent Hawaiian and was a Mormon minister.

Suei attended Waipio and Kaapahu Schools (1st to 6th) and Honokaa School (7th to 12th). After high school graduation in 1946, he joined the Army and spent three years in New Jersey and Virginia. Back in Hawaii, Suei got married in 1950. That same year, he got a job as a truck driver, which he held for nine years. Since 1959 he has worked as a County, then a State carpenter for the Hamakua district. In addition, he has raised taro in Waipio part-time for the past 25 years. Suei was an aikido and a judo instructor.

The Kawashimas have three children and live in Honokaa.
Suei Kawashima's father, Sentaro, came to Hawaii from Japan at age 17. After working one year for Kohala Sugar Company, he went to Waipio to live. He helped build the Hamakua Ditch and then grew rice. As a side operation, he made okolehao, and sent it floating down the Hamakua Ditch to a partner in Kukuihaele in five-gallon glass jugs protected by a woven covering. Once he was almost caught with his still in the mountains by FBI "spies," but a woman picking maile threw the spies off the track and managed to warn him.

Sentaro Kawashima was originally a Buddhist, but at that time, the only church in Waipio was Mormon. He eventually became a Mormon priest and was often called on to hooponopono. He would rub people with castor oil and pray. His Hawaiian was fluent, and he also spoke some English. Since Suei's mother was Hawaiian, they spoke Hawaiian at home. He translated and interpreted Hawaiian and Japanese at the valley courthouse.

Suei's father felt that if you were good in your heart and your head, it was okay to smoke or drink.

Before he started farming taro, Suei's father raised mullet in a pond. To prevent thefts, he put guava branches in the pond at the edges. From his house he would flash his powerful 10-cell flashlight at the pond. In those days, one could see all the way down to the beach because no guava trees grew in the way. If poachers were at the pond he would shoot his gun--usually used on mynah birds--into the air.

After third grade, Suei left Waipio to live with his maternal grandparents in Kalopa, so he could go to Japanese school there. This continued until World War II.

During World War II, American soldiers who were stationed in Kawashima's yard in tents called Suei's father a "Jap." He remembers that when they came inside to use the phone, they brought mud into the house. The Kawashimas collected lots of coconuts and bananas for them to eat. Neither parent could sleep nights for fear of the soldiers.
Suei was in the Victory Corps during World War II; the schools cancelled Friday classes so the students could work.

Suei said that Sam Mock Chew's mother and half brother, Hiram, were riding a horse in the Wailoa Stream once. A flash flood came and knocked both off the horse, sweeping them downstream. Hiram survived, but the mother's body was found the next day in a culvert.

In those early days, no one made coffins as a business in Waipio—people helped each other make coffins. The box was made of 1-by-12 lumber and wrapped with black cloth before being buried. Most of the valley people attended the funeral of a valley resident. The ministers were often either Sentaro Kawashima, or Victor Hoapili Huanicio. Graves were dug near the mountains, as the valley floor was always too wet.

Suei recalled that the valley donkeys and buffaloes used to chase the children. If a donkey bit you, you were not supposed to pull away. Rather, you should use a blade of grass to tickle its nostrils; then it would release you.