JOHN LOO, 51, County Road Department supervisor, taro farmer, and Honolulu Poi agent

John Nakanelua Loo was born in Waipio Valley on July 5, 1927, the oldest boy among 15 children. His mother, Hawaiian, was from a long time Waipio family. His father, half-Hawaiian, half-Chinese, was employed by the Hawaiian Irrigation Company.

As a boy he worked in his grandfather's taro patches. At about age 13, he moved out of Waipio Valley. John went to Waipio Elementary, Kukuihale Intermediate, and Honokaa High School.

After high school graduation in 1946, in order to avoid the draft, John joined the Civilian Army Transport in Honolulu for two years. After this he returned to the Big Island. In 1951 John served in the Korean War, receiving a medical discharge. He and Margaret Rodrigues were married in 1953.

Since 1956 John has worked for the County, and he has raised taro in Waipio on a part-time basis since 1958. In 1961 John took his brother's place as agent for Honolulu Poi.

The Loos have a married son and a grandson, and make their home in Honokaa. John is a bishop and an elder in the Mormon Church.
VL: This is an interview with Mr. John Loo. Today is June 23, 1978. We're at the church in Kukuihaele.

Let's see, I remember that before you said that your family goes back four generations in Waipio. Is that right?

JL: Four generations, that's right.

VL: Which side of the family is that?

JL: My mother's side.

VL: Can you tell us a little bit about your mother's parents?

JL: My grandfather's name was Paul Hanai Nakanelua. My grandmother's name was Haliaka. Hattie Haliaka Mahoe.

VL: Were they both born in Waipio?

JL: I'm not too sure but I'm pretty positive that they were both born in Waipio. I'm sure my grandfather came from Kohala at one time. But I think he was born in Waipio. So was my grandmother. On my mother's side.

VL: And that was the grandfather that was an elder in the Latter Day Saints church?

JL: Elder at the church.

VL: Do you remember him?

JL: Oh yeah, I do.

VL: Can you describe him?
JL: He was a big man. Lot of poise and he was kind and real gentle, like all Hawaiians maybe. When he joined the church he left his drinking and made him a better man, I think. But, somehow... members of the church don't drink or smoke during the entire year. But with him, holidays are special time, he would take maybe one or two. But he was a good man. Actually, he brought up a good family.

VL: Were there any other members of his family or before that, that were ministers or were elders in the church?

JL: I'm sure there were others. But on his family, he was the only elder of the church. And he had five sons. And all of them were, except one, is a member of the church. Right now, there's Paul-- Paul is the oldest--and Dan. Leslie died and James is still living.

YY: How many sisters were there?

JL: One sister. I mean, one daughter. That's my mother. Oh, he had another daughter but she was married to Luther Makekau. I don't know if you know the Makekau family, they in Hilo. But she died and my mother [was] left. Not too big of a family because just one daughter.

VL: How about on your father's side?

JL: I don't remember too much on my grandparents because I really didn't see them.

VL: Were they also in Waipio?

JL: My grandmother lived in Waipio. My grandfather on my father's side was in Waipio too also. But he came from China. And I didn't see him actually up there. He died before I....so was my grandmother. But my father had three sisters living in Waipio. And he also had two brothers but both of 'em I didn't see. They died before I knew them. Only my aunties, I knew them.

VL: Now, all of these relatives that you had in Waipio, where did you folks live?

JL: We lived right at Napoopoo. Napoopoo, that's on the east side of Waipio. My grandfather lived on the west side of Waipio, Kaau.

VL: Kaau, which grandfather is this?

JL: That's Nakanelua. And he has a place down there too.

VL: So in your house, how many people were there?

JL: There's six boys, two girls and two boys. That's 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

VL: Children?
JL: Ten of us that was born in Waipio. Without going to the hospital that was. My mother gave birth right at home. And I think mostly at that time, they had midwives and my aunty was one of them so it was easy. And on the 13th child she had to go in the hospital. He was big that's why. He was about 12 pounds so he had to go to the hospital. Yeah, he was a big boy. That's Chuck, I don't know if you met him, he's big.

VL: Did you also, in that house that you were living, have aunties and uncles?

JL: No. We lived with my dad. We had a big table like this and we would sit down and eat. And that was nice.

VL: Did you folks own land in the valley?

JL: We did. At that time, my dad had that parcel. We had about five different parcels of land.

VL: Where were these parcels? How did you get them?

JL: Right in Napoopoo. I don't know how he got them but it was under his name. And finally, as the years went by, we sold all them, kept one parcel. That's the one I got now, we still got that.

VL: Was the Mormon church still active, when you were growing up in the valley?

JL: Yeah. I was the active. When I got to age of eight, which we usually baptize people, and my father was a staunch Catholic. He was a Catholic. But he told my mother this, "As the children come, then you go ahead and baptize them and bless them in the church. And when that time they ready for baptize, to baptize them in your church." To the Mormon church. At that time, it was only called the Mormon church, that's all. People just thought that the Mormon church was a Hawaiian church, but it was....now days, we just call it Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. But at that time, Waipio, they just called it Mormon church.

VL: Was there a church in the valley?

JL: There was, there was a church. Big church.

VL: Where was that?

JL: Right in Napoopoo. About 400, 500 yards away from our area, towards the road. It was a big church. My grandfather came to be the president of that church but I couldn't remember. There were some other people before that. But I didn't come too active in the church. I was just that way, that off and on.

VL: Did you go every Sunday?
JL: I believe, when I was little boy, I had to go every Sunday. But, as I grew up, no.

VL: Do you remember about how many people went to church?

JL: Yeah, there were on the average of maybe 60, 70 people.

VL: Mostly, they were what?

JL: A mixture of Hawaiian, Chinese people. We had missionaries come from Honokaa down to our area. But we had lot of people down there. Mr. Kawashima was also a member of the church, he was a member of the branch [this word unclear] at that time. I remember.

VL: Did you have one regular person every Sunday, to give the sermon?

JL: Yeah. My grandfather was the president but the program of the church was always conducted by him. And our speakers was always chosen by other people. Like how they do it today. Just about the same procedures that they do.

VL: Did the church ever have celebrations, when you were still in the valley?

JL: No, we did not. We didn't celebrate any particular thing. I don't remember. We just went for Sunday School and that's all.

VL: Bazaars?

JL: No, we did not make bazaars. I don't think so. I really cannot recall that.

VL: So outside of Sundays, did you folks ever get together as a group?

JL: Oh well, there were special days, like Fourth of July, 11 June. There was lot of, really lot of people there. And it was always a great celebration.

VL: Can you describe it?

JL: Like having people come from Honokaa, down there to play baseball. Things like that, outdoor basketball. It was great. Lot of fun. Horse race, they had horse racing and all those things. Lot of things that they... especially Fourth of July and 11 June. Labor Day and, seems to me, like I could remember that we only lived with kerosene lamp. But Christmas, every Christmas, because we were close to the Thomas', somehow we had electricity go to our house. We used to run the electricity and put up a Christmas tree. And it was really great because having a Christmas tree in Waipio you know. With the electric light. It was nice. We looked forward for that.
There were a lot of concert and dances put on by various clubs. I believe the church, at that time, they had this youth organization. Well, they didn't call it Y-M or... they just call it a youth organization. They put on a lot of concerts and dances. This was when they had it going in Waipio schools. It was nice for the young people.

VL: Would this be like fund raiser for the church?

JL: Yeah, in a way. In a way they, I really don't know how they do it, how they went about it, but somebody was getting some money somewhere. But it was fun.

VL: Now, to concerts like this, were non-members of the church invited?

JL: Yes, always the whole community was invited to that.

VL: What kind of feeling was there towards people that were not members of the church?

JL: I think, Waipio, the whole community was like a family. Majority of the people there are either aunties or uncles or some relatives inter-marriage, and the whole community was almost like a family. And, the only really outsider at that time, maybe, was Ahanas. Other than that, they were all inter-marriage and... as far as I can remember.

YY: Oh, the rain.

(Taping stops due to noise from rain on roof, then resumes)

VL: Can you tell us how important the church was to your family?

JL: Well, I believe that, as a whole, the church have really... at that time, I guess we didn't know the real meaning of going to church. All we knew was that my father said, "You people, all you kids get baptized into the Mormon church." And that was it. But really, actually, I didn't know how true the church was or how good it was for us. But really helps us a lot, though.

I think my whole life in Waipio, what made our family good was my aunty. She was a good lady. She always taught the young boys to respect the elders. She always taught us that we should respect our elders. We never passed anyone without saying, "Good morning, Aunty," or "Aloha, Aunty," or something. Or our uncle. We had respect everyone and addressed them like that.

VL: Now is this people that are not related to you also?

JL: Yes, yeah. If we, they not related, we would always say, "Good morning, Mr. so-and-so," if we know them. As far as teachings of family life, in my family was really show respect towards others.
We were all brought up that way. Now, I kind of see that not too many, young people don't show that much respect towards others.

VL: You also mentioned before, that your grandfather raised taro.

JL: Yes he did, he did for his living. That was only his livelihood. Because taro was the most important thing that they needed.

VL: Did he sell this taro?

JL: He did. I could remember that he sell it to Kaneshiro, to Mock Chew. As they were raising their poi shop. Most of 'em was to Mock Chew, because Mock Chew was a miller at that time.

VL: Do you know, do you remember how much land he had?

JL: About two acres.

VL: And was that enough to support his children?

JL: Really, it was enough, because we could live on taro and fish in the stream was abundant. Not like now. And when anytime it would rain, boy there was lot of fish in there. All you have to do is just dry the taro patch up and you got all your oopu right there in the taro patch. Yeah.

We had cows, and also had our own milk. So it was easy. But, as far as my father, I could remember that he raised us--I know he mentioned to us--that his monthly raises was only $38, from 1929, 1930. He mentioned that was only $38 that he received.

VL: This was, what job did he have?

JL: He worked for Hawaiian Irrigation. And, at that time, he was taking care of the macadamia nuts, all the macadamia nut fields. I really don't know really, if he really had bad time, hard time. But, seems to me, we get along fine. We had enough to eat.

VL: Your father raised taro too, didn't he?

JL: My dad had a little portion. But see, he was one of them that had steady jobs down Waipio. And the job that he had, I guess he was one of the lucky ones. The rest had to raise taro.

VL: So the taro that he raised, did he sell that outside?

JL: He sell that outside, but most of it he would keep it for his family. And we made our own poi. My grandfather was pounder of poi.

VL: Well now, he lived on the other side of the valley from you folks, right?
JL: Right.

VL: But you would....

JL: He would just make the poi there and he would bring it over to share it with his daughter, my mother. No problem to that.

VL: Did your father also go up to the intakes, as part of his job?

JL: No, at that time, his job was just in the valley. He started to go up to the intakes in 1936, I think. That's when he had to take over the whole job, up to the intake in Waipio. Then, he made little more money from that, I really don't know how much. It was interesting to know that he was one of those lucky ones that had full time jobs.

VL: Most people in Waipio did not?

JL: Did not. They only had to raise taro and, wasn't election year, but maybe once a year, the County would fund some money down there, maybe PWA [WPA--Works Progress Administration] or FERA [Federal Emergency Relief Administration] at that time.

VL: You said every year, they would...

JL: Every year, well, every year they would go down. And the County would spend some money there. Clean the trails. At that time, just people walking and horseback, that's all.

VL: You mean they would hire valley people?

JL: They would hire the people from the valley, those without work. And they would work for maybe a month or so, and take care of 'em.

YY: Did they do anything maintaining the streams?

JL: No, the streams was all....well, the only maintaining that they did on the stream was down on the muliwai. And this was done by mostly the farmers. All done by hand, to take the stone away and dry that. And lower the stream down. That was all they did.

VL: They would take stones out of the stream?

JL: Yeah, just go get the water flowing more freely. And this was always done by the farmers, by Nelson Chun and all those farmers below.

YY: Up higher in the valley, Napoopoo area and even up above, if there was a flood or the stream got blocked up, who would take care of that?

JL: I think that was the cause of our house being damaged. Because
nobody, really, nobody took care of the stream. Right up until 1940. Trees just float up. That's why lot of the damage came.

VL: How did that contribute to damaging your house?

JL: As the flood got bigger, I believe that flood was really big and trees start coming down. Instead of flowing straight towards the stream, it just pile up. And water just detour and go to the lower portion. That's one reason our house got damaged.

VL: How extensive was the damage to your house?

JL: Oh, we lost the whole basement. It was thrown off the foundation. We didn't lose much but the house was still there. The ones that really lost was Ah Puck, they had to really move out. Ahana, water really went through their area. Water came through our area but after a while, it stopped and it got over to Ah Puck's house.

VL: What year was this?

JL: 1939, 1940. 1940.

VL: And so what did you folks do after the flood?

JL: Let's see, what did we do? We stayed there for a while, though. Then we moved to another house. Then my dad said, "Well, we should move away from Waipio." So we moved up, 1941.

VL: Why did he decide to move?

JL: That's when we decided to move.

VL: Yeah, what was his reason?

JL: Oh, because of the flood. Mostly, he thought that it was a total loss. His whole house was a total loss. And the stream was there at that time, see. There was nothing, nobody made an effort to hire a bulldozer or anything to detour the stream. So, for some time, the water was still running there. So we moved out. But then, later on, continue flood, that's when it came over to the original way it is. [By] Ahana's.

VL: Why do you think it was that people didn't go upstream to make that effort to clean it up?

JL: It was too hard at that time. Lot of boulders, big boulders. There was lot of....the stream was pretty deep, when was first started. And with all those boulders, no one could do it like that. I don't think anyone could do it without hiring a bulldozer or something like that.
YY: Going back to your father's job with Hawaiian Irrigation, how often did he go up to the intakes for this job?

JL: When he had that job at the intake, we used to stay up. We used to go up there and sleep up. My mother used to stay down here and my father was always up there during the week. Up to the day that flood damaged our house, my father was working two job, the intake and there. Let's see, no, he didn't go up that night. He couldn't had gone up that night because rain started at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. And when he thought about going up, it was too late already. About 12 o'clock, or so. Well, 10 o'clock at night. Then the water start coming towards our house. So it was too late for him to go out. But all during that time, he spent the week up there, up at the intake. And we would go up and help him.

YY: Was this, like there was a place in Alakahi?

JL: Yeah, that was our house before. It was beautiful. We stayed there. We would go up there and stay there. And from there, we would go all around and work the intakes. A lot of oopus that time. Big ones too. I remember, one of my brothers Robert. He's about, let's see, he's 46 now. When he was a little boy, just a little boy, and with my dad all the time because he was the baby. He was the boy that stayed with my dad all the time up at [the intake]...he used to keep him company. Then we would go up after school. Or we would get up there and stay up there during the weekend. And come back Monday morning, go school. And stay down here until Friday afternoon, we would go back up. Stay up with my dad. Was good.

We all had our own horses, so. Each one of the family had their own horse, each boy had their own horse. And there were always four boys with my dad always together, so we each had our horse. And we would come down to school and go back together.

YY: Did you have any exciting or scary experience crossing the river or anything up there?

JL: Oh, well, we had lot of experience of crossing the rivers. I remember one particular time when three of us boys were on one horse. And we crossed the stream. Well, the horse was a good horse. All I could remember, my dad said, "Whatever happen, don't get off the horse. Stay on the horse, stay on the horse. Don't get off." And we did that. Somehow, he walked and he stumbled, he stumbled in the water. But stumbling, and the water pushed him, the horse. But by hanging on to the horse, the horse took us on another path. But we got across all right.

My one experience with horses is that during the night especially, you don't have to worry about them. Just ride, get on them, and they'll bring you straight home. Without light or anything, they bring you straight home.
Yeah, I think during our time, I really say Waipio was beautiful. Not now. It was really beautiful. Trees weren't big, trees were small. And you could see across. Yeah. Now, it's really over grown. Taro patches more beautiful than now for sure. Really, Waipio was really beautiful at that time.

They had a rice mill, which I don't know, I hope you could get somebody to tell you folks about that rice mill. When I was born and what I could remember, there was a rice mill there. But they all stopped grinding rice at that time. Maybe the only fellow that you can get from it is Nelson Chun.

VL: When your father was working up at the intake, who would take care of his little patch of taro?

JL: We would, off and on. We would come down and, if it's to work the taro patch, we would stay down. Other than that, we would go up and stay up. And if the taro patch needed to be worked, my mother was always the one to let us know. "Hey, that taro work supposed to be done."

VL: What kind of work did you do on it?

JL: Same work that we do now. Harvest the taro, clean the taro patch. But at that time, we never used herbicide. Never. We did our work all with sickle. All hand. Herbicide was not used in our days. I guess there were lot of herbicide used in the macadamia nut field. What I could remember. Those were strong, really strong herbicide like arsenic and, you know, they were using that time. That was all during the plantation. But taro patch, no, nobody had to. All done by hand.

VL: What variety did your father grow?

JL: Apii, uaua. All depend what portion of the land he would plant it. If he would plant it at the top, next to the water, where the water flows, where it's cooler, he would plant lehua. In the middle of the patch, there a section, he would plant apii. And where the water gets little warmer, they'll plant uaua.

VL: In the same patch?

JL: Or the same area. Maybe he had three patches, he would plant one lehua, one apii and one uaua. Majority of the farmers used to do that. Their chief taro at that time was apii because apii was good eating taro, good table taro. The only reason they planted lehua was to make the color of the poi, that's all. That's about it.

VL: I'd like to jump ahead a few years, to when your brothers began farming taro. I think they started farming before you, right?

VL: How much earlier than you, was he farming?

JL: About three years.

VL: So that's about 1955?

JL: Yes. I just got back from...I got back from the service at 1952, and I really didn't start doing any work till 1953. And 1955, I got back to Honokaa; 1956 started to work County. Just about, yeah, he started about three years ahead of me. None of my younger brothers started taro, I think. No, I don't remember any of them starting. Edward was the first.

VL: So when Edward first started, what land did he use?

JL: He started off with a lease land from my aunty, 3.8 acres of land. That was his first taro. He farmed by himself. And then, he moved on and he got another parcel of lease of land mauka Waipio. That was a total of three, I think five acres he got up there.

VL: And who did he market to?

JL: At that time, they market for Honolulu Poi. But it was....see, they started that association. It wasn't the association, it was just a friendly, well, my brother Edward and [Ginji] Araki.

VL: They two started this....

JL: Yeah, both of them started, started to get this association together. Because there was lot of taro, and people [poi processors] were coming in and buying when they needed. When they didn't need any taro, they would just drop off. Taro was getting rotten. So then, Edward and Araki formed an association. And knowing that Honolulu Poi was going to come out and look for taro, this is how they started.

VL: What was the purpose of their association?

JL: To get this taro out. See, there was lot of taro in Waipio, but no market. Not enough market. People would raise and just rot away. And by forming this association, they could sell their taro at that time. So, this is one reason they did that. And, I believe, they were successful because Honolulu Poi came there. They came in and started to buy taro.

VL: Before, they were not buying from Waipio?

JL: No. They weren't buying from Waipio, because they had taro right from Haleiwa and all that area. And, knowing that Haleiwa had all those places where they're going to go, couldn't supply them, I think that's just the reason they came out. And I guess they knew...
that poi was someday going to be a good seller. And when they first started, nineteen... I'm sure it was 1953 or 1952, that was really good for Waipio because they were shipping a lot of taro out.

VL: Before that, were any Waipio farmers shipping away from the island?

JL: Yes. Nelson Chun was shipping to Sakai. I think this was Waiahole Poi. Nelson Chun was one of those big farmers at that time. They had lot of land. And he was the one that shipping out, but at that time, they didn't buy that taro regular. They only come and buy when they were short of taro. They would just come down and maybe buy about a couple tons and then just drop off. Nelson Chun was one of the first ones that shipped taro out.

YY: Then, before there was a steady market, what percentage of the taro went out?

JL: Well, not much. Maybe 20 percent. I don't, I really... not much. See, we had four poi shops down there. They were grinding their own taro and ship whatever they had. See, there were lot of taro land. All those waste land that you see now down there, where Nelson Chun, almost right down to the stream. Right down to the muliwai, it was all taro. Where Toledo is there, there weren't taro, there was just guava bushes. Majority of the taro was raised down this area. And it would go all the way down where that stream, as far as where Matsunami. Across of Matsunami, it was all taro. And, so that's the reason Nelson had all those land and he really had lot of taro. Mock Chew, well, they raised because they were supplying Parker Ranch. And up until that time, those were the big farmers.

VL: So the four poi shops in the valley could not take all of the taro that the farmers...

JL: They could not, they could not take all. Because there were a lot of taro. And the taro at that time was just... I really don't know how much, it was 75 cents a bag, 75 cents for 100 pounds of taro. Or $1. I think, when I could remember, it was 75 cents.

VL: Now, when is that?

JL: That was in the 1940's. I remember my dad, just before we came up here, he said that he had a good price. He had dollar-half [$1.50] a bag. He said that was the best he ever got. I don't know how much it would come to, just about a cent and a half a pound. For a pound. But yet, that was good.
SIDE TWO

YY: With Mr. Kalani?

JL: Kalani.

YY: And he worked for...

JL: Yeah, because that's what happened. They grind their taro in Waipio and deliver it all to Waimea.

VL: When your brother and Araki started this association, were there any valley farmers that were selling to Hilo or Kona?

JL: Yes, I believe Kanekoa was selling to Hilo. Puueo.

VL: Which Kanekoa is this?

JL: William Kanekoa. Mock Chew....no, at that time, not. Because they had their own taro.

VL: So at that time then, was Honolulu Poi the only real outside processor that came into the valley?

JL: Honolulu Poi and Waiahole Poi. They were the two that came from outside. Waiahole was first, but then Honolulu Poi started to come after. And when the association got strong, they supplied Honolulu Poi. And they supplied Honolulu Poi with up to, let's see, 3,000 pounds a week. No, not 3,000....300 bags a week [30,000 lbs.]. Then it was a 100-pound bag. And they, all those taro was going to Honolulu Poi.

VL: Do you know more details of how that association was run?

JL: No, I really don't know, because I never joined them.

VL: You weren't farming at the time?

JL: No. And when I started to farm, it wasn't with the association.

VL: About when did the association dissolve?

JL: Cannot give you the exact year, but you should go get it from Harrison. He was one of the chief. Well, maybe I can, I started 1961. Did I say 1961?


Because he had lot of taro, he demanded for price. And Honolulu Poi couldn't come up with the price, so he said, "Well, if you don't come up with the price, then I won't ship you the taro." Just plain words like that.

So Honolulu Poi said, "If you don't do it, well, I can't do anything. You have to just drop off."

But it was kind of hard because, gee, Araki was a good man. He did a lot for Waipio, by going and... then my brother took over. But he took over for a little while and then we shipped. Not as an association, we shipped as a family, through him and Honolulu Poi.

YY: At the time that your brother and Mr. Araki were working together and shipping taro to Honolulu Poi, what was their role? Were they dealers or agents?

JL: They were, well, I can't say they, there were two agents. Both of them were agents. One, because of a family deal. Edward, because of his family. Mr. Araki would take care the rest of the farmers. Edward, because he was involved in that, but he would take care his family's taro. All the family's taro would go to him and to Honolulu Poi. And this how it went, until I took over.

VL: With two agents, were there...

JL: Yeah, there was a quota system. They gave them a quota system, where Mr. Araki had to ship so much and Edward so much. If Honolulu Poi was going to take 300 bags, then both of them would split.

VL: Evenly?

JL: Evenly. Then, if Edward could not fill up his order, Mr. Araki would fill up the... Usually, Mr. Araki would get more taro because he had more farmers. On Edward, he was just taking care the family. This is the year 1960. That's when my other brother started to raise. Kelly.

VL: Was Honolulu Poi paying two different prices?

JL: No, same price. Same price. I believe, at that time, when both of them were agents, Honolulu Poi was paying, I think, 5 cents a pound. Yeah, 5 cents; 4-1/2 to 5 cents a pound. And that was the same price that they paid at that time.

VL: When Mr. Araki asked for a higher price....

JL: This was when he demanded for 6 cents.

VL: Oh, uh huh. Did you think that was a fair demand?
JL: Well, I think it wasn't fair to the poi shop. It wasn't fair to the poi shop because knowing that they needed the taro badly, I guess, Mr. Araki been into business so long, that he knows all those things that should be done. Us, being young, I thought that wasn't fair.

But, also, at Honolulu Poi, Ernest Tottori, being a young boy just starting out, managing the father's poi shop, thought it wasn't fair so. And, I guess, at that time, I thought also Edward, if Honolulu Poi market 'em and the poi shop don't make any money, we won't make any too. Because they weren't paying 6 cents in Waipio at that time, see. Honolulu Poi was paying the best price they could, at that time. I think Hilo was paying about 4, 4-1/2, 5 cents. Or 5-1/2 maybe.

The only reason Mr. Araki asked for more, because he had the taro. And by trying to put pressure on the poi shop he felt that he could have got that.

VL: Was taro short, that....

JL: They knew, taro was short. Taro was short. He knew that if he asked for what he would get, he would really get it. But Honolulu Poi just said, "Well, if that's the way you do it, we'll drop you off. We'll just drop you off." And then I felt sorry for him at that time, because had lot of taro.

VL: Is this, you mean, his own taro?

JL: Yeah, his own taro. Because he had lot of taro.

VL: What happened to the farmers that he was agent for, once he was dropped?

JL: They stayed with him for a while. And gradually they dropped off, and majority of them moved over towards us.

VL: Then, did he try to find other outlets?

JL: Yeah, he started out and he had little outlet for in Kalihi Poi. Up until 1968 or 1967, when I was agent, I helped him out. I knew he had lot of taro but I couldn't see him raising lot of taro and get nothing for 'em. So, I shipped a lot of his taro out also.

VL: When he was first dropped off as an agent, did he lose a lot of his taro to rot?

JL: Oh, he did, he did. He lost quite a bit. Because nobody would take it at that time. He lost quite a bit.

You see, like Nelson Chun, I could see him before, they raise a lot of taro and don't have a good flow. Honolulu Poi was really good
to us those days. When my brother dropped off and I became agent, we really, although we didn't have the best price, at that time was 7 cents a pound.

VL: What year did you become agent?


VL: And it was 7 cents a pound then?

JL: Was 6 cents first. When I became agent, was 6 cents. Then was 6-1/2, then 7 cents. Seven cents, we stayed on for quite some time. And that was good money.

VL: So the price eventually did come up to what Araki had asked for?

JL: It did come. But gradually, gradually it came up. But at that time, was little too, kind of a rush deal.

YY: At that time, when your price came up to 7 cents a pound, what was the price in Hilo?

JL: Hilo was paying 7 cents also. And if taro would get really short, Hilo will come up with 8 cents. They always come a cent better, better than us.

VL: When you started farming in 1958, you had already been working for the County for a while. So, what made you decide to try taro part-time?

JL: Well, I thought maybe too much leisure time, spare time. And keep myself busy. And I was one of those guys that thought about working. So, I didn't want to spend my time just working for the County eight hours and doing nothing. Majority of County workers at that time, all had farm. Well, not taro farm, but some had cattle, bought cattle ranch. Let's see, majority of them had cattle ranches. And some started out with macadamia nuts. So, that was kind of young for us, so I said, "Well, we better start getting something done, no." The best thing for us to do is go back and raise taro. So that's what.

And to make me go back to taro was because there was market for it. I knew at that time that whatever taro I would raise, Honolulu Poi will take it. So I think this is the reason really behind it, that I should go back and plant taro. Because there was a market for it.

VL: How much land did you put into taro, when you first started?

JL: Two acres. That was a two-acre plot, right by the Chinese church. This was a land from my aunty. I leased it from her for two crops.
Then I bought the place out outright from her. She decided to sell it so I bought it from her. That was my first area.

YY: Do you still own that area?

JL: No, I sold that. Was little too much problem, so I sold that to Toledo, Merrill Toledo. And at that time, I lived at Kukuihaele, see. Where Merrill is, that was my house. We decided to build a new house, so we sold that house and the land together.

VL: Then, in 1961, when you took over from your brother, why did you brother stop being an agent?

JL: Well, he moved to Waimea. And when he moved to Waimea, it was little too hard to go back to Waipio. And he thought, well, if he move to Waimea, and instead of he be the family tie, that he would let me do it. He was going to spend some of his time in the ranch. At that time, my mother got the ranch too. Well, in fact, he spent some time with the ranch. And he thought, maybe he would go and raise cattle instead of raising taro, because he was getting all this problem with Mr. Araki. So he figured he should drop off. So I took over at that time. But that's the reason I took over.

And more so, I got to know Ernest and being that I live at Kukuihaele, he would come and stay with me. I think this is more of a reason why I really took over.

VL: How often did Ernest Tottori come down to Waipio?

JL: Well, a good part of him is that he would visit us practically every month or every two months. He would come down and see what was the situation here. See how the taro is, what he could do to help. And, I think, this is where the Waipio farmers was kind of in support of Honolulu Poi. Because he would come down and see the situation.

If there were lot of taro, he say, "Well, John, maybe I could take another skiff or two and then get all this taro out." And when we get it all out, he would say, "Okay, we slow down." I think that was the best part of Honolulu Poi. Because they would come down and see the situation and see how the taro was. If there was lot of taro, he would take it all.

VL: So was there ever a time when you could not market your taro? Where there was too much.

JL: No, there was no problem. No problem. As far as marketing, from that day on till today, we had no problem. Now, the problem is that we cannot keep up. As far as marketing our taro, we had no problem.
VL: I want to ask you a little bit more about the details of being an agent. First, can you tell us what the difference is, between an agent and a dealer, and a middle man?

JL: Well, like in my part of being an agent is just an in-between. Me and the farmers and the poi dealer. Just that they using me as a buyer. That's the guy to do the field work.

VL: What do you mean, "field work?"

JL: Like seeing how much taro I can get for that. If they give me a quota of 200 bags, it's my job to see that I get them 200 bags. But the best part of being an agent is, if you there, you can always see how much taro is coming in.

And you also must plan for your whole year quota. See, I sit down with Tottori, Ernest, and we plan the whole year. Which month we need more taro, which month we don't need that much taro. When we come to Christmas, we need lot of taro. January, we need lot of taro. February, we can slack off. The plan, this is where the agent come in. My job is to be the middle man, not like other dealers but someone which Honolulu Poi can get in contact with. I guess that's all an agent should be.

YY: Then, since you need more taro on certain months, like December/January, then do you organize the farmers to grow so that...

JL: Yes. When I started out, we really organized. We had farmers planting according to our needs. We would tell them we need so many bags in this month, so many bags this month, so many bags this month. When one slack, we just say, "We don't need too much taro this month so you folks plan according to this." I would keep a record of how much taro each farmer would get and pull according to what.... And this was a good deal.

Being an agent also, I'm paid by the Honolulu Poi too. I get paid by the amount of bags that I ship. So, maybe, for every bag I ship...for the first time, it was 20 cents a bag. This would come directly from the poi shop to me. Well, they had to...like what Ernest told me at that time, we must pay you, in order for you to work. This is not like you just say, "I want this and that." I was paid by Honolulu Poi. And I still paid by Honolulu Poi.

YY: Then, in terms of your pay, when you started as an agent in 1961, how much were you getting then?

JL: Oh, I think it was about 10 cents. Ten cents for a bag. Yeah, I believe it was 10 cents.

VL: I thought you just said 20 cents. When was the 20 cents, then?

JL: That came up, I think, about five years or so after I started.
VL: Are you still paid by the bag?

JL: They still pay me by the bag. Whatever I ship out, they pay me by the bag. Now, it's 30 cents a bag. And I don't set the price, they do it themselves. "Well John, you deserve how much." So....

VL: Okay, that's an agent, and I'll come back to that. What is a dealer? How is a dealer different from agent?

JL: I never know. I don't know who else claim themselves to be dealers, but I really don't know what's the difference between dealer and the agent. Maybe they're the same.

VL: I think that with the dealer or middle man, something about they buy the taro and then re-sell it. Could be at a higher price.

JL: Could be that. Yes, that could be it. Let's see, who did that? I think Nelson Chun did that one time. He would buy it from the farmers and sell it. Then, I think they classify that as a dealer. Or whatever, or middle man, or....

VL: Agent is different?

JL: Agent, we don't go like that. Agent is just, that I'm paid by Honolulu Poi.

VL: Was this the same with Edward? Was he also...

JL: Same, same, same thing.

VL: So you tell people when they should plant?

JL: Yeah. During their real peak years, I tell them when to plant and how much to pull. Well, I still do, I still tell them how much to pull, in order to keep my quota going. We like to tell them what to plant, when to plant, but right now we're just short so we just keep planting.

And I started out with 18 farmers. I had four full time farmers and the rest all part-time farmers. So we had to adjust ourself.

VL: Then, would Honolulu Poi tell you what varieties they wanted?

JL: Yes, they told us not to raise....at that time, when Honolulu Poi came in, they had lot of uaua and lot of lehua. But I guess they could see that Maui could raise better lehuas than us, or Kauai could raise better lehua than us, or Maui could raise a better taro. But they wanted our apii. That's the taro they wanted.

VL: Why is that?
JL: That apii. Because it was good table taro. The best table taro.

VL: So they wanted it for table?

JL: They wanted us to raise that because they wanted to sell it as a whole. The Samoans would really go for our taro. The moment they look at the taro, they knew what kind of taro was that. They would buy it. You'll put the lehua, you put an apii, you put an uaua on the table or on the market. They'll go for the apii because it's a good eating taro. Now, they cannot. They just take any taro because they short.

VL: But before, they would tell you what variety they wanted, and you would tell the farmer?

JL: Really. We always had a meeting. And he would openly tell the farmers that plant apii. Well, he knew all the time that the market was there, they had a raw taro market. They could use that [apii] as a raw taro market, they could use that as a poi. The small ones would go for poi, the big ones would go for raw taro.

VL: So this did require farmers to change from lehua and uaua, to apii?

JL: Right. Gradually, you see now, right in Waipio, the latter part of 1960 and the early part of 1970, up to 1972, only apii. Never had lehua. Now, lehua is coming back.

VL: The time of the change to apii, how did the farmers feel about that?

JL: All farmers get their....some of them would say that apii would not grow. This certain section is too cold, or it's too warm. But, I think, maybe that is one reason we got all this sickness. Maybe. I don't know.

VL: How's that?

JL: Apii been all right, they could grow it in the cold side and they could also grow it in the warm. Apii could not take the weather so much. Like uaua, uaua could take a warmer water. The patch get warm, uaua will hang on too. Maybe this is the reason why we got all this sickness, I really don't know.

VL: Did most of the farmers change over?

JL: They did. They agreed to it because apii was faster to grow. They could, instead of waiting for uaua, they would wait for 18 months. Apii, they could grow it in 14, 13 months. So this is the reason, they went to a faster crop. Another reason why they went to apii, it was faster.
VL: Did Honolulu Poi, when you became agent, did they have agents on other islands too?

JL: They did. They had agents on Maui and agents on Kauai. On both sides, Waimea and Hanalei. These two still have it now.

VL: Did they give a different price for a different variety of taro?

JL: I really never check up. Us, in Honolulu Poi, they did not. But, I think, Hilo, they did. For lehua, was a better price than apii. They had the color, they wanted to get the poi. I never checked with Kauai, whether they had a better price than us. Because I'm not one to go and try to find out. I trusted my poi shop, Honolulu Poi, that he would give us a fair deal. Maybe they were getting a better price, because as far as taro....but according to him, he says, "No." I think we getting the better price than them.

VL: So you don't go check up all the poi shops for their prices?

JL: I don't.

VL: If a farmer wants a higher price for his taro, what can he do? What could he do?

JL: Well, right now, all this time when I meet with Honolulu Poi, Ernest, I would remind him about the price.

VL: You mean the farmers come to you and ask you to talk to him?

JL: Right. I wouldn't demand for it. I said, "Well, we'll let Honolulu Poi decide. If they make money, we should make money. If they don't make money, if they don't take our taro...." See, at that time, I always thought about volume. It was better to ship out 100 bags than shipping 10. Because, I thought, well, you raising taro and raise 100 bags and sell only 10, and the rest spoil. I think kind of foolish to raise taro. If you going raise taro, raise 100 bags and get it all and get whatever you can for 100 bags, you can always continue and plant again. That was my thought behind being an agent.

VL: ....uhm....lots of questions.

YY: We haven't asked for the price now.

JL: Price now, we getting 12 cents. That's really the lowest price in Waipio. That's the reason why I, poi shop knows about it, and you cannot control. You cannot control no farmer now. Not even my own family I can control. They all ship the taro out and they are also shipping out to somebody else. I think the price now, at Waipio, is 18 cents.
VL: Yeah, we was wondering if Honolulu Poi price is the lowest, why would people stay with Honolulu Poi.

JL: For one reason, Honolulu Poi been good. I think this is the only reason. For the old farmers, those who been with Honolulu Poi for some time, it is because when we were in trouble, when we started, no one took our taro. Honolulu Poi came down and they said, "Well, we'll take your taro." I think this is one reason why the faithful farmers, old farmers, will stand. And, another reason being that my aunties, being that I'm their nephew, they'll stay with me for a while. Until, maybe.... But, we not shipping as much as we should be. But, whatever taro the family has or whatever taro my farmers have, we ship it out. As far as the price, when compared with others, that's a lot of difference. And, Honolulu Poi knows about that.

But see, the reason they not too anxious to, they can get lot of taro from Kauai and Maui. Maui and Kauai, they don't have this price. They don't have this. They don't talk about price. That's one thing about Kauai, they don't talk about price. They talk about volume, how much they can ship out. Because they're big farmers. They have 10, 20 acres. And, if you talk about price and you don't talk about volume, then you're not a farmer.

VL: But, I would think with the shortage, that it's sort of the farmers....

JL: We may have the shortage here but not in Kauai. Kauai can supply, they not having the problem that we have. I think, the only reason Kauai won't be able to supply is because labor problem. They have the land, they have beautiful land. I think you been to---they got beautiful land. And it's much easier for them to farm than us. We got this Waipio and that's one setback for the farmers. Because transporting the taro, takes you almost a dollar to get it up to the pali. So, you see, Kauai, they not worried about that. It takes them only 10 cents or so to get it on the bank. Truck just pick it up and off they go.

YY: Do they need four-wheel drives on Kauai?

JL: No they don't. Well, they have four-wheel drive but it's all flat land. Just bring the taro out and off the taro go.

VL: How many farmers are you an agent for now?

JL: Now, there's nine of us. And myself, 10. Ten of us.

VL: Do you still have a quota to fill?

JL: Yeah, I do. Right now I have a quota, I always had a quota. And, sometimes the poi shop call for more. Won't be able to go it, but.
VL: What happens when you can't supply the quota?

JL: I just tell 'em I can't. And usually, they always ask when can I get more taro. That's all I being asked all the time. Now. Where can I get more taro.

VL: Still on price, it's 12 cents now?

JL: Twelve cents a pound right now. Twelve cents a pound.

VL: When was the last increase?

JL: Last year. It was 11 cents up till May. It's been one year now, 12 cents. So we expect to get another cent and a half, maybe, this coming year. We would like to get it. But I think we're going to get it.

VL: Does Honolulu Poi pay 12 cents for it's Kauai taro?

JL: I don't know, I really don't know. Maybe they do. You see, Waipio, we pay the farmers 12 cents to get it to Kukuihaele. To Yubon [Maehira]. Maybe Honolulu Poi pays them [Kauai] 11 cents or maybe 12 cents just to get it on the bank. Because they don't have this transportation that they get. So maybe they got a better price. I think, even if Kauai has, say 11 cents on the banks, they still make more money than us. Because we'll have to pay another cent to transport that taro up. So whatever they get, I'm sure it's more than us.

VL: Is each of your nine farmers responsible for their own transportation up to Maehira?

JL: They do. Yeah.

YY: Is Mr. Maehira working for Honolulu Poi?

JL: He's our hauler. He's been our hauler all the time. He hauls all our taro. And also, he's our farmer too, so.

YY: So his hauling company is specifically to haul taro?

JL: Yeah, that's his business. Well, his business, that's for sure. He started out with trucking for, well, not only Honolulu Poi but to haul groceries in. Being that he was the only trucker that we had here, we asked him to haul our taro both ways, Hilo and Kukuihaele. And he's been that hauler ever since.

YY: So he is paid by Honolulu Poi?

JL: He gets paid by Honolulu Poi. Whatever bag he ships and whatever charges he makes, Honolulu Poi will pay him for that. See, our
system is good. And one good thing about Honolulu Poi, they never--like on paying--they would pay you the moment you make your statement. All I do is, as an agent I'm not a buyer. So as the agent, all I do is make out the statement and Honolulu Poi will make checks according to what I do, whatever statement I make. And the checks will come to me, individually. And then I'll pass it out. Only Mr. Maehira will make his own statement and send it in directly and they'll pay him directly for his hauling. So we have a good system for paying, as far as paying. Now, more so, they ask us to get our statement in before the 10th so everybody will get paid before the 20th. Always. And this is one thing good about Honolulu Poi, they never set back their payment. Payments are always on time. I don't know about the other poi shops but.

VL: Are you responsible for distributing bags and string?

JL: When we started out, yes. But find that the bags, Honolulu Poi is responsible for the bags. The strings, the farmers, each farmer will be responsible for their own. I used to do it when we started out, be responsible for the strings and their tags. But that would take a bit of time. So Honolulu Poi felt that I think it's about time the farmers would take care of their own. So we let the farmers take care that. And the bags, we'll take care that.

VL: So, do you receive bags from...

JL: I do, I do. I receive bags from Honolulu Poi and distribute to the farmers.

VL: Are these new bags?

JL: Well, we started with these burlap bags. But burlap bags don't hang on so long. And, I think it was the year 1972, well, maybe 1970. When we started with these Japan bags. And they've been good bags. They could last for, oh, I don't know how many shipments so far. Ten shipments.

VL: What is that made out of?

JL: Shee, I never really look at that bags. What, they straws or what, but they're good bags. Really strong. The best part of these bags is that they hold the dampness. They hold the dampness of the taro so the taro don't get dry. With the burlap bags, the taro used to get dry so we couldn't pull them early. With these bags that we have now, the dampness stay in it. So even three or four days, five days before we get it to Honolulu Poi, the taro will still be kind of damp, not dry.

END OF SIDE TWO
VL: As an agent, do you inspect the farmers' taro for its quality?

JL: Well, my responsibility is to see that they get the weight. Right now, we've been shipping 100 pounds bag. And sometimes, people don't...see, we never come to grading. Farmers, we never did grade our taro. All we did was raise our taro and whether we have good taro or loliloli taro or cut taro or whatever it is, Honolulu Poi would pay the same price. We never grade our taro. And I guess it's because of volume, time. If we ship out good taro, they do it over there, just take off the good ones and sell it [raw and whole]. Others, they just send it to one mill and poi. And, I guess, if we...because we've been sending pretty good taro from here. And until lately, two years, three years now, taro been spoiling, so. But all the time, we've been sending good taro.

VL: So you never had a complaint from Honolulu Poi, about rotten taro?

JL: Well, once in a while they would...no, never did have a complaint about rotten taro. Only the complaint that we had was on weight. Some farmers would not give the required weight. So for this reason, they bought me a special scale and said, "Well John, you try and scale it. Tell the farmers to do this." But, you know, Honolulu Poi did something good for Waipio. Waipio, before, they used to fill up their taro in the bag. All the small taro first, and then they take all the big taros and they poke it together, bag 'em up. They never used cans. We were the first one to come and use cans. At one time, we used four cans. For 100 [pound] bags, we use four cans for 100 pounds. Now we use three cans. As long as we can get it up here, 86 pounds, we satisfied.

VL: You ship in 80-pound bags now?

JL: 80-pound bags.

VL: So you make sure it's over weight by six pounds?

JL: About 86 pounds at Maehira's. By the time he get dry, he get to Honolulu, he should be about 80 pounds.

VL: Whose idea was that to use the cans?

JL: Honolulu Poi. Because they did that in Maui. Then Maui was the first to use cans because they didn't see any reason why they had to....no, I think Kauai was the first....because they didn't have to haul it, see. When we started, we had to haul our taro from Waipio all on horseback. So you had to fill it up pretty solid so the solid bag is easier to load than the loose ones, you know. But then, when we first came and we said, "Use cans," the majority of the farmers didn't want that. They thought that was not the right way to do it.
Some of them said, "You cannot get 100 pounds in there."

"You can if you want to. You try, you can."

Then, we decided 100 pounds was too heavy. We not getting any younger. And I think...I think about Honolulu Poi and they pretty good. They said, "You not getting younger, John. So why don't we use 80 pounds?"

At first, I said, when we brought that 80 pounds, Nelson Chun was one of them says, "Naw, 80 pounds no good. It takes too much time."

I said, "Well, load three bags on the mule." They said they had to use more time coming out. "Well, why not you load three bags on the mule, instead of two bags." And if 80 pounds a bag, if three bags, not much. The mule carrying a little more than 200 pounds, so he did that.

But now, as old as he is, he tells me that, "John, it's a good thing you folks came with 80 pounds." Because you go ahead and handle 20 bags of 100 pounds at my age now. Pretty heavy. Eighty pounds is easier, 20 pounds lighter so easier to work. I think, give me an extra year for farming maybe.

VL: Now, each individual farmer doesn't have a scale right?

JL: My farmers all have scale. All they doing is just scale if they pulling the first patch. By scaling one can--they have this hand scale--by scaling one can, they'll know just about how much to put right through. I don't know if you witness Duldulao.

VL: Not really.

JL: They use a scale right through. Charlie Thomas, they use a scale. My brother Kelly use a scale. And, I think, Fred Olepau, they used to use a scale. And it's easy. I used to. Once I scale my taro, I would know how much.

VL: Did it ever happen that taro that was promised to you never got sold to you because someone else bought it?

JL: Lot of times.

VL: What did you do in that case?

JL: Well, I don't know, I'm not....still, this is one reason I always remind Honolulu Poi and I like to be an honest dealer. Try not to make waves. Like I said, the price of taro has really brought that subject up many times. People would say that they have so many bags. When the time comes, you say, "How come, only 20 bags," or so. "Where's the rest?" Maybe they sold it outside. But I can
see that majority of my farmers not big farmers and they out, it's lot of work, hard work.

And I always tell Ernest that now, because of the price, pretty hard to control that. "You can come up with the price, I'm sure they'll stay with us and ship all their taro."

And Ernest always been good to us, and he says, "Well, if they have to go, they'll go. Nothing we can do. Just do the best you can." And that's all I'm trying to do, do the best I can now.

But I think if I can, well so far, Maehira has really proven that this new method of fertilization will increase our... and I think this crop of mine will show that even though we got little acreage, we can produce just as much taro as bigger acreage.

VL: Can you tell us a little bit about the experiments that you're trying with your taro?

JL: This experiment we trying now, we're trying to use calcium, more calcium. We using Super Phosphate and potash and urea. And what we trying to do is put this all in the ground, before we even plant it. And, really, a fertilizer man will say maybe it's a waste if we use urea right away. But, being that this is on a experiment basis, I find this here, as this is the first time I've tried it. And, to me, I think the taro is looking better. Much, much better. I know if I can keep up with what I'm doing now, I'll have a better crop.

A recommendation from Dr. de la Pena was 800 pounds of Super Phosphate, 600 pounds of urea, 600 pounds of potash, per acre. And calcium was 1,500 pounds. Yeah. Per acre. But right now, I'm giving a little more than that.

VL: Isn't that quite expensive?

JL: It is. But, for that area of mine, I say it's a two-acre lot, and the most I've gotten from there was 300 bags. Two acres, 300 bags was the most I ever got from there. I think with this fertilization, it's only a matter of $800, to plant those two acres. $800 that I spend. And I think I'm going to get more than what I, I going to pay off that. I think I can get close to 400, maybe 500 bags from that area now. I really think I can get that much. And if I do, for one first experiment, would be a good crop for me.

Mr. Maehira, talking about this experiment, he was the first one that started. To tell you how good that fertilization worked on his area, his crop, the first time he planted his crop, he had 265 bags from that patch. One patch. And the second crop when he had that problem, he had only got 56 bags. Now he put a little fertilization in that, he got 385 bags. Now that's, to me, he told me
that it's way up. He's in the profits, he's making money. And you could see, the part is, that he pulled, he did take his taro off at 11 months. He started harvesting at 11 months. Which he could have left that to 12, 13 months and he would get bigger taro.

VL: Did he have any rot in this 385 bags?

JL: He did have little rot, just a little rot. Not too much. And now, this second field, the second time around for this experiment, he's got a terrific crop. Nice.

VL: And he tells other farmers what his formula is?

JL: Right. Right now, I think only I know about and I think William Kanekoa knows about it. And I think, well, some like Merrill Toledo, they know about it. They using fertilizers but maybe they not using as much as us, but they've been using for quite some time.

I think this will be a good thing for us to bring taro back.

VL: How do you feel about the future of taro in Waipio?

JL: Well, taro is still there. But the work force, I guess. I guess people going to [tape garbled] working will be....only the strong backs will stay back. Because it will go down unless some crazy people will come down and raise taro. Why I say crazy, because my son will not go down. So I don't know what generation will stop. It's good to see young people going back. But, like I said, my son won't go back and plant taro. He wouldn't want.

VL: Would you like him to continue the family tradition?

JL: No, I don't think so.

VL: Why not?

JL: It's too hard. I think it's too hard.

VL: But for three generations of Loos have farmed.

JL: Three generations. You see, with my son, their generation, nobody. The only family may continue is Kelly. I know, I think he's the only boy will continue. The rest, I doubt if they would like to. I would like to see them, in a way. Doing some little hard work, maybe good for them.

VL: How about the future of the valley, what do you think will happen to Waipio?

JL: Well, real hard to say now no.
VL: What would you like to happen in Waipio?

JL: I'd like to see them continue planting taro. Because it's been a good crop for us, good product for the state. Me, I don't think we should stop raising taro. I hope somebody can continue raising taro.

VL: Do you think it's important that taro be raised at all?

JL: When you look at it, the cost of taro, if I had a choice of raising my family between taro and rice, then I would rather go on rice. Because the cost of taro now, and poi, is so great. You buy a dollar poi and you can hardly feed your family. But if you buy a dollar rice, you can feed your family. Poi is going to a place but it's so costly. And, I think, as far as talking to Honolulu Poi, to Ernest, he says, "They'll be a decline in poi for sure." But he really don't want to see poi go down. But he said, maybe it's not his time and poi will really go off the market. But he hope it won't.

VL: If poi were more plentiful and cheaper, say as cheap as rice, then what would you purchase?

JL: Sure, then I would go for poi. Because you can use the taro, you could use the poi. And lot of things in your household. You could use the leaves, you could use the stalk. But now, if I buy a dollar poi, two meals, just my wife and I we can eat it all up. And it's so little and it is so costly. But still, lot of people go and buy poi. They still do. Because it's so short, maybe that's the reason.

Now, like Honokaa, I think they just grinding once a week. Poi is just once a week now, only Fridays. Some stores get it twice a week, Thursdays and Fridays, or Tuesdays and Fridays. But Honolulu, you still can get poi. There's lot of poi. Hawaii here, we really running short. Really running short of poi.

VL: Do you have anything else you'd like to say, about taro or your life? Or Waipio?

JL: All I can say now, Waipio is a much, much different way of farming. It was harder in the olden days. It's little easier now, especially using the truck to go down. But it's expensive. Before, the only way you could raise taro in Waipio was go down there and haul it out with a pack mule. Now, you just drive down with a jeep. But still, people not too interested. Lot of barren land down there now. But not used.

VL: How about if these young haoles wanted to go into taro farming? How would you feel about that?
JL: Like I say, if people are interested in planting I'd like to see it. We have these young boys, haole boys, like Bill [Luhnow]. They down there. We have Gloria Ainsworth, she married a haole boy. They go down there and they bought a piece and they raising. And, I think it's good, really good. Somebody is trying to keep up.

I feel that taro is, for me, a side business. It's a good thing for us. Keep us busy.

VL: How much time do you put into your taro now?

JL: Total of maybe 10 hours a week. Ten hours a week.

VL: And can you estimate what percentage of your income it is?

JL: Being an agent and a farmer, it takes about....last year I made $6,000 from the taro. Well, you figure I made $6,000. Kelly made $15,000, you know. Just being part farmer. But that's only raising taro. I made, yeah, $5,000 last year. But that's being agent and whatever I raise. So if I can raise about a thousand bags a year that would be terrific for me. Even 500 bags. For part farmer would be really good. That should really make my spare time worthwhile. Not only worthwhile but make it really good for me.

VL: Okay, anything else?

JL: That's about all I can....

END OF INTERVIEW