BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY:  RACHEL THOMAS, 60, taro farmer

Rachel (Ah Puck) Thomas was born in Waipio Valley in 1918. Her mother, pure Hawaiian, had been born in Waimanu Valley. Her father, a Chinese immigrant, was a rice farmer in Waipio. Rachel attended Waipio Elementary School (1st to 3rd grade) and Kukuihaele School (4th to 8th).

After eighth grade, Rachel worked in the Ah Puck family poi factory until approximately age 18, when she went to Honolulu. There she met her first husband, Mr. Lau Kong (a Waipio boy). They returned to Waipio, got married, and had nine children. When she was about 37, Mr. Lau Kong died. Rachel got jobs in the Honokaa Poi Factory and Harris Laundry. She later married Charlie Thomas, another Waipio boy. Together they had three children.

Rachel worked from 1960 to 1975 in the Ono Ono Poi Shop and has been farming taro with her husband since about 1957. At present, they go into the valley almost daily; their home is in Kukuihaele.

Rachel is an active member of the Mormon Church. She has been a member of the Hawaiian Civic Club and the Waipio Taro Growers Association.
TAPE NO. 4-23-1-78 and 4-24-1-78

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Mrs. Rachel Thomas (RT)

April 8, 1978

Kukuihaele, Big Island

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

VL: This is an interview with Mrs. Rachel Thomas. Today is April 8, 1978; we're at her home in Kukuihaele.

Where in Waipio were you born?

RT: Do you know where is Duldulao's taro patch? Right below.

VL: Waimanu side below?

RT: No, no. Right around there, below. You know where is the Chinese church; but now it's broken? Right around there has two taro patches, I think for Kanekoa. Used to have a house there.

YY: What was that area called?

RT: I think that area was called Kunaka.

VL: And where was Napoopoo at that time?

RT: Napoopoo is, you know where Gilbert [Chang]? That's Napoopoo, coming toward Kukuihaele side, that section. That's Napoopoo.

YY: Do you remember your house?

RT: I do.

YY: Can you describe it?

RT: You mean the house that I was living in? When my mother gave birth me? That house was a little small house and we raised chicken, we raised ducks, and I remember that house had only one bedroom and a living room, a little porch, and my father raised us with two boys and two other sisters. One of my sister is a, what you call that? Half sister? And one of my sister is adopted by somebody else.

VL: And all of you stayed in one bedroom?

RT: Well, my mother and my father sleeps in the bedroom and us children sleep in the living room.
VL: Did you have beds?

RT: We didn't have beds. Only my mother and my father had bed, but we didn't have bed.

VL: What kind of bed did they have?

RT: Something like a wooden bed. You know, those Hawaiian bed they bin used to call koa bed.

VL: What does that look like?

RT: They have four sticks on four corners and they have boards.

VL: What kind of mattress?

RT: I think those days they had mattress like grass, to me. That's the kind of mattress. But us children, we sleep all on the floor. We didn't have a bed, we didn't have mattress. What we had is just a put sheet on the floor and us children had our own blanket and pillow and just go sleep.

VL: Was hard, no?

RT: Oh, it was hard. Our living was poor. My father was a rice planter, my mother was a housewife; she didn't work and after he....rice was all pau that time [by 1928]. Then he started working taro, raise taro.

VL: Going back a little bit, did you folks own that house?

RT: No, somebody else's house.

VL: Do you know if you paid rent?

RT: That I don't know. I think we were living free because my father was working for that particular man. That's why we had that house.

VL: Who was he working for?

RT: Well, he's a Chinese man and gee, I forgot his name.

VL: Rice farmer?

RT: Taro farmer. I remember taro farmer, but before that I don't remember so good when he was raising rice because I wasn't born that time, so I don't remember. Maybe my mother and him was living someplace else, I don't know. My older sisters would know.

VL: Do you know about your mother's background, where she's from?

RT: My mother is from Waimanu.

VL: Did she ever tell you anything about Waimanu?
RT: She used to tell they used to come to Waipio and walk, they don't ride horse, walk back and forth. They used to come on canoe and those days is not like now, rough, the sea is rough. Those days, the sea is calm. They say it's easy to ride the canoe to come to Waipio. Never had hard time.

VL: What else did she used to tell you about Waimanu?

RT: They used to stay there and raise taro. Taro was their food. She used to live with her grandparents and she said what they did was raise taro to have poi, and for food they go and fish in the ocean. Throw net or get opihis. And they have breadfruit beside taro.

VL: Did your mother go to school?

RT: I think my mother didn't go to school because Waimanu didn't have school. I don't think she went to school.

VL: And she was Hawaiian?

RT: She was pure Hawaiian.

VL: And how about your father's side, what do you know about him?

RT: Well, my father, he told me when he came to Hawaii, first he came to work for the plantation. That's how he came to Hawaii.

VL: He came straight to Big Island?

RT: To Big Island, he said he came to Big Island to work on a plantation.

VL: Honokaa?

RT: Honokaa. And then, after that, he went to Waipio and grow rice. That's when he met my mother and I guess they got married.

VL: Your mother was married once before; do you know about that?

RT: My mother was married to Nakagawa, and I used to ask her how come she married my father when she was married to Nakagawa. And she said that Nakagawa, he was working in Waimea, Kamuela. Gee, I don't know, I forget those people he was working for. But he went back to Japan. When he went back to Japan, he left my mother back home.

YY: With children?

RT: Yeah, with children, with four: George Nakagawa, Nellie Nakagawa, Ruth and William, left them four back. That's how my mother divorced him and got married to my father.

VL: He never came back?

RT: He didn't come back. And got six of us with my Chinese father.
VL: Do you know anything about getting a divorce back in those days?

RT: No, I don't know. I didn't ask my mother.

VL: Back to the house that you were born in, did you folks have a garden?

RT: I don't remember we have a garden. Only taro.

VL: Can you describe Napoopoo, like what was there as you walked along the road?

RT: Get that Kaaekuahiwi's house, that house was there, and as you going up to the Peace Corps, that trail going, as you going up on your right hand side has a small store. That's the store I remembered, when we were going to school, there was a Chinese store. That's where we used to go buy bread for lunch.

VL: Do you remember the name of it?

RT: Lui Hing, L-U-I H-I-N-G. And as you come further more, you know the river, I remember...I didn't remember Araki's house, then didn't have that house. Before you come to Hiilawe Stream, as you coming to Kukuihaele side, on your right hand side had a little house there, owned by Hussey. And right on the river, as the water coming down, has that big palm tree; you folks see one big palm tree growing in the river? Has a little ginger bush? Well, when you folks go, you take notice. Our house was there. That house was my brother's house, but we were all living there.

VL: When did you move there?

RT: That's when I came about 13, 14 years. Coming to Kukuihaele School. That's my brother's house. He built a house there for us family; father, mother were living there, my sisters. And as you come further and down across us, it's that Ahana Store; that's Gilbert's [Chang] grandparents, that's their store. Keep on coming, where [Steve] Mochida is [now] over there, that house is there but a little smaller house, the house was smaller. That was a new house, they built. That was Loo's house [before it became Mochida's]. And you come further more, on your left hand side, that's the Thomas' house; that's where my [present] husband, his grandparents lived and he lived there too. And right across, see that new house is built, our house, that's my father-in-law's house, Lau Kong. That's where I was living with my [first] husband; we got married, we were living there with my father-in-law. That's where I raised my children, that house.

VL: Did Napoopoo have any churches or temples?

RT: Had Mormon church right by that new house, by that, I told you my father-in-law Lau Kong; right there has a church, Mormon church. And right across Kaaekuahiwi used to have Protestant church. Right across in the front used to have Protestant church.

YY: You remember a Catholic church?
RT: Uh huh, the Catholic church going, now you going toward our way. You know where Matsunami's coffee land? Right across has a Catholic church there.

VL: How was the road back then?

RT: I think the road was much better than now, to me. We didn't have so much bushes. Everything was open, you can see through. That's what I think.

VL: What was it made out of? Just rock?

RT: Just rock.

YY: In those days, the roads were used by people or did animals use it too?

RT: Uh huh. They used to pack taro and poi with the mules to come up Kukuihaele. Never had jeeps in my days, I remember, didn't have jeeps. When I was living down there. All by mules.

YY: And then people to get from one place to another, say from Kunaka to Napoopoo, they would always walk?

RT: Walk, they always walk. Well, if you want to ride, you ride; but they always walk.

VL: Kunaka, where did that extend from?

RT: To my knowledge, Kunaka is, you know that's a taro patch and it's all grasses now, they don't have taro inside, right across Robert Kahele? It's right in a corner on your left hand side? That's Kunaka. From there and, I think, right across us, it's all by the Chinese church, to me, Kunaka. Above there.

YY: Were there a lot of family homes like yours? Family houses, people living in Kunaka?

RT: I don't remember. I remember is that Chinese church and our house and Akioka's house. That's the Chinese man used to raise plenty taros and he used to make a poi factory and takes his poi on mules to Kamuela, to Waimea. That's Akioka.

VL: Do you remember in the valley, other areas with names? Like Napoopoo.

RT: Napoopoo, Kunaka, Kaau.

VL: Where was that?

RT: Kaau is where Robert Kahele lives now, that's Kaau.

VL: What was there before time when you were little, what was in Kaau?

RT: Have houses, Kanekoa's house. You know who's Kanekoa, that Harrison Kanekoa? His parents was there. James Nakanelua, his parents was there.
and Mrs. Akamu was there. And Mrs. Haraguchi was there. All in Kaau. And Mr. Kulii was there. I remember them.

VL: Most of those people did what for a living?

RT: Taro. All taro. They were Hawaiians.

VL: And do you remember other areas in Waipio with names?

RT: Down the beach has name too. I cannot think about the name now.

VL: Did you folks use the names very much when you were, say, when you were....

RT: Oh yeah. When we going to Kaau, we say, "Oh, we going to Kaau." And if we going to Kunaka, we say, "Oh, we going up to Kunaka." That's how. And going too, down the beach, has a name, you know.

VL: You wouldn't say, "I'm going down to the beach."

RT: Well, like we young girls, we use that, "Going down to the beach." But the old folks, like my mother folks, they have another name.

VL: Can you tell us what a school day for you was like, when you were going Waipio School?

RT: When I was a little girl I was going school. I went as far as fourth grade. I think when I was a little girl, when I was going to Waipio School, I mean, not that much children, but we had two teachers. In my days, my teacher was Mr. [Sam] Kaaekuahiwi and my sister-in-law, Mrs. Nakagawa. They taught me, and Mrs. Ragsdale. That's three teachers, I remember, taught me.

VL: When you were going to school, what time would you get up every morning?

RT: Seven o'clock.

VL: Did you have breakfast?

RT: Sometimes we have, sometimes we don't. We used to pack lunch.

VL: What kind of lunch?

RT: In those days, we always take poi. We always take poi and we exchange lunches with the other kids. Maybe they bring rice. When we had money, we go to that Lui Hing store and we buy bread. He makes good bread. And the bread was so cheap in those days. Money was scarce those days.

VL: How would you take the poi, how would you pack it?

RT: Pack it in the lunch can, you know those kind of lunch cans the plantation olden days used to see those lunch cans. They have for rice underneath and they have the top for okazu, they put. That's the kind lunch can.
VL: And you would bring poi from home?

RT: Yeah, we bring poi.

VL: Anything else?

RT: Just poi and we put the okazu inside, whatever fish we had. Fried fish. Those days is most fried fish like that because plenty fish down there.

YY: And the bread that you bought when you had money, can you describe that?

RT: The bread? Oh, the bread is about like this, the loaf.

YY: About 12 inches or so.

RT: And they cut it in half, they open half like this, they put the jelly two side. You just buy 'em for five cents. Half.

YY: What kind jelly?

RT: Guava jelly. They make the guava jelly. They make their own guava jelly. I guess that's why so cheap. Was good.

VL: You enjoyed that?

RT: I enjoyed that.

VL: Where would you get the money from to buy that?

RT: My father. He gives us, whenever he has money, he gives us for lunch. And if we don't have, well, we take home lunch. Poi, sometimes rice.

VL: Why would you exchange with other children?

RT: Oh, sometimes they don't have the poi, they want the poi, you want the rice. "Well, you take my poi, I take your rice."

VL: Which did you prefer?

RT: Well, if I want to eat poi, I don't give my poi. But if I want to eat rice that day, well, we make an exchange. Whoever wants to change.

YY: When you had lunch, did a group of you eat together?

RT: Uh huh. We get together.

YY: Girls and boys?

RT: Girls. Girls here, and boys.

VL: How about at recess time, what did you play?
RT: Oh, when recess time, we run out. Oh, we used to have baseball, you know. Boys and girls, we used to have baseball.

VL: At recess?

RT: Uh huh. Baseball or you know that game, I go and catch you and you catch me. Run.

YY: Master?

RT: Yeah, Master, that's the game. We always running around, catching each other.

VL: Girls and boys play together?

RT: Uh huh. And do you know that game when you make blocks and you throw, you jump?

VL: Oh yeah, hopscotch?

RT: Yeah, we used to play that.

VL: What would you use to throw?

RT: We used to throw something in the blocks and you jump.

VL: What would you throw?

RT: Stone.

VL: Were there any games that only girls played?

RT: I don't remember. Only that....

VL: Hopscotch. Any games that only boys played?

RT: Used to play marbles.

VL: Girls didn't play marbles?

RT: Well, some girls they play, but I don't remember playing marbles because I never cared to play marbles.

VL: Did you like school?

RT: I liked school but the time came that I had to move from that school and come to Kukuihaele. Because the teacher was angry I went to Hilo to see one Chinese show. I didn't ask him so I went. I went with Gilbert's [Chang] grandparents and when I came back, he told me, "Well, you didn't come school yesterday, you got to go pick up 500 weeds, pull 500 weeds."

I was angry. I did it, but I was angry. And I told my parents, "I'm not going to that school. I don't care how small I am, I'm going to
walk up that hill and go to Kukuihaele School." Because they had other children was going, boys and girls, the older ones, that was attending seven and eighth grade. So I went up Kukuihaele.

VL: Going to Hilo to the Chinese show with the Ahanas [aka Changs], did you do things with them often?

RT: Oh, we were good friends. I used to be good friend with the daughter. And but, she's older than me, about two, three years older, I think. And we used to go to school together, although she was older. Used to come up every morning, going down, going back. And I used to go sleep with her. Even eat, wash clothes, do things together.

VL: She was your best friend?

RT: She was one of my good friend.

YY: And so then her parents were taking the family to see this play?

RT: Yeah, taking her too, so I went along. Because we were good friends so I went along with them.

VL: What other kinds of things would they do that they would ask you to come?

RT: Oh, they used to have a store. I used to go in there help them, sweep around in the store. And, those days, we used to wash with hands so I used to go and help the daughter, Sau Lin, to wash clothes. We used to go by the big pond, they used to have a big pond behind. We used to go there and sit down and wash.

VL: How about chores in your own house?

RT: Oh well, as I grew older, as I came seven and eight grade, Monday to Friday, I hardly do anything because I leave early in the morning to come to school. And when I goes back home, dinner is all cooked. I don't have anything to do, just eat. But come Saturday and Sunday, I do all the work.

VL: What kind?

RT: Cook, wash, clean house. My sisters don't have to do 'em. I do all that because Monday to Friday, I don't do anything. They do everything. Come Saturday and Sunday, I do the job. The housework.

YY: Did you learn sewing?

RT: Well, to tell you the truth, I'm not interested in sewing. I can patch, yeah, patch. But sew a dress, no.

YY: So where did you get your clothing for school?

RT: Well, we used to have a friend, she used to sew for us. And we used to have a dressmaker, up here to Kukuihaele. And I used to bring my material
and have the dressmaker sew for us.

YY: How much did it cost?

RT: Those days, was real cheap, you know. I don't remember, it was cheap.

VL: How often would you have a new dress made?

RT: I don't have too much clothes those days. Even shoes, I don't remember, when I was going school. Bare footed.

YY: Would you have a new dress on a special occasion?

RT: Oh, maybe if we having something in school, then my mother gives money to buy material to get a new dress. But otherwise, you going to wear over and over. Wash and wear.

VL: What kind of meals would you cook on weekends?

RT: Like us, we used to have poi and rice, together. We always have poi and rice. We used to have cracker but bread, hardly we have bread. So, when we know when we have to cook, I have to cook, I used to tell my brothers and my sisters, "Well, what we going to have for dinner?"

They say, "Well, let's go down the river and catch some fish." And it's gori, now. We wen go for gori. And we go fishing. Put our nets. And we have lots of gori. Come home and I do the cooking. I always fry the gori.

YY: Did you clean the gori yourself?

RT: Uh huh. Clean the gori, put salt and fry 'em.

VL: So the children would go fishing?

RT: Uh huh. Brothers and sisters, all go fishing.

VL: Would you catch just enough for that day?

RT: Well, when we go, we have luck, we get so much we don't have to go the following day. Sometimes, two, three days we don't have to go.

YY: Where would you put the fish that you caught, say, two, three days....

RT: Oh, we used to salt 'em. With salt, plenty salt. And then when we want to cook, we soak it in the water to make the salt go away, and then when you cook, doesn't taste salty. Or else, those days we used to dry the gori. You clean the gori, you salt, and then soak it in the water; next day you soak it in the water and you string it up. String it up in a long, what you call that, string. And you hang 'em on a clothes wire, let it dry out in the sun. We didn't have screen, you know, to dry the fish. And those days, don't have that flies. I don't see flies like now. We used to dry all our fish, not in a screen. Nowadays, it's all in screen.
VL: Would you ever sell any of the fish you caught?
RT: No, I don't remember selling. It's all kept at home for family to eat.
VL: So mostly what you folks ate was what?
RT: Mostly we ate, we had meats. Waipio used to have cows. People used to raise and they used to sell meat to the Waipio families. They used to slaughter themself, and the way they used to do, they used to pile all the meat, pile the meat all in piles. Pile, pile, pile, pile. And the people used to come there and say, "I want this, I want that, I want that." They just pick 'em up $1 one pile, put 'em all in the bag. Five dollars, some people buy $5, $6. And lots of meat those days. Wasn't that expensive. They used to salt the meat and they used to dry the meat to preserve it. There's no icebox. That's how we used to preserve, salt and dry.
YY: How did the people know that so and so family had slaughtered a cow?
RT: They let the people know. They come to you and say, "I'm going to slaughter a cow tomorrow. How much do you want?"
Then you say, "I want $5." Or so much. Then you come. When that day of they killing the cow, you come over there, say, "I want this. My order is $5, I want this pile, that pile." You pick up whatever pile you want. Your choice.
YY: One cow makes how many piles?
RT: Gee, I'd say lots of piles they make. I don't remember how many piles. Only the meats now, they pile all up. And the bones they give free to the people.
VL: For what? The bones were used for what?
RT: They make soup. Even the cow feet? They make soup with that. I see some people.
VL: Did you folks?
RT: I see my father and my mother used to get the cow feet, and they put it over the fire to take out all the hairs, burn all the hair. And they get one sharp knife and they just go like that, up and down, to take out all the hair and the whatever skin they have on top. And I see them chop them up, they boil in one big can.
YY: Was this for soup?
RT: For soup. Cow feet soup. That's true.
VL: How about the skin of the cow, the hide?
RT: Oh the hide, they use that for saddle. Some people used to make saddle. They make the saddle.
YY: Did you folks eat Chinese food?

RT: Uh huh, they have lots of Chinese down there. They used to make Chinese food.

YY: How about your dad?

RT: My dad wasn't a good cook. I don't remember him cooking. He eat what we cook.

VL: Which is mostly what kind food?

RT: Well, if you going to boil, make soup with gori or fry the gori. And meat, we fry the meat or we cook with vegetables. My father is very seldom he used, well, that's the only dish that he used to have always, is the Chinese salt fish.

VL: Harm ha?

RT: Not Harm ha, harm gee. The one we used to steam it and it smells the whole house.

(Laughter)

RT: I like it but.

VL: Me too.

RT: I like harm ha, too. I like that. I like that harm gee.

VL: Where would he get that from?

RT: Those days they used to sell in a can. Stores used to carry. Ahana Store, they used to carry that. They had Chinese food, those days. They used to sell that.

VL: What about vegetables?

RT: Well, vegetables, my brother used to go deliver poi to Kona. And when he comes back, he used to stop at the stores to buy vegetables for us. Like cabbage and beans.

YY: Who did he deliver for?

RT: Oh, he used to deliver for Puuwaawaa Ranch and down to Kona. We used to have a poi factory?

VL: You folks?

RT: Uh huh. We used to have a poi factory. My brother used to have and our family used to work.

VL: Where was it?
RT: Down Waipio.

VL: What part?

RT: Well, they call that Up-Rice Mill. You know where is Up-Rice Mill [near Hiilawe Stream]?

YY: Is this Akioka's rice mill?

RT: Yeah, Akioka used to have his poi factory there, too. Ahana used to have.

YY: All in the same area?

RT: Well, Ahana was first, and after that, when Ahana was quit making poi factory [1941], then my brother took over. Akioka's was right around there too.

VL: Do you know much about your brother's business?

RT: I remember some because I was working for him.

VL: I'll ask you later about that. I wanted to ask about what you did for fun, then? You had to work on the weekends at home, so when did you have your fun?

RT: Sundays. After you do your chores you can go up the school. There's a park up behind the school, that's where we go. Play baseball or whatever.

VL: What kind of equipment did you have for baseball?

RT: We had regular ball and bat.

VL: Did you have teams? I mean, formal teams, or was this just get together and....

RT: Just get together. But in my, I used to remember, they used to have baseball teams from Honokaa, they used to come down Waipio and challenge baseball with the boys down there.

VL: Did you go to those games?

RT: Uh huh.

VL: What were they like? Like, where would you sit, did you have bleachers, or....

RT: No, no. We just sit on the grass. We just sit on the grass and watch. But those days, I think was fun. After the games, just like they had luau.

YY: Where would all the food come from?
RT: Everybody donate. Bring the food. We used to have kalua pig. We used to have fun, you know. We used to have fun.

VL: What else would you do for fun?
RT: They used to have concerts.
YY: Can you describe that?
RT: People from outside used to come down Waipio. And open concert, in the night, they come maybe Saturday night, then give program. After that they have dance.
YY: What kind of music did they play?
RT: Guitar, ukulele, violin, saxophone. Used to have all those kind music.
YY: And what kind songs?
RT: Hawaiian music, all Hawaiian music. I don't know if you remember this....
END OF SIDE ONE
SIDE TWO
VL: Yeah, Johnny Almeida.
RT: Johnny Almeida. Even he came down Waipio to open concert.
VL: When these people came, how did they come down the hill?
RT: Horses. People from Waipio used to bring horses for them. And meet them up here and they ride the horses.
YY: And where did they stay?
RT: They used to stay at [John] Thomas'. That's where they used to sleep. Used to have a big house there. Downstairs and upstairs.
VL: So who organized these music events?
RT: Gee, I don't know. Because people down there used to be....I guess, maybe, they get in touch with somebody in Waipio. Like Almeida, maybe he gets in touch with the Thomases that he wants to come down and give concert like that. So they make that arrangement.
VL: Did these open concerts cost money?
RT: Gee, I don't remember paying. I think everybody was going free in there. I don't remember paying.
YY: Where did the concerts take place?
RT: At the school. At the school.
VL: And who would be like the M.C., you know, the moderator for the evening?

RT: Well, I remember John Thomas, he used to be kind of, he was a teacher and kind of a popular man down for Waipio, so he was the one that announcing and what's going on and all that.

VL: How many people would come to watch?

RT: Oh maybe 40, 60. That particular room, two rooms, would be all fill up.

VL: Did any people from Waipio perform?

RT: Well, in different times though. If Almeida is supposed to perform it's only their troupe.

VL: Did they bring dancers too?

RT: Uh huh, they used to bring hula girls, dancers. Used to have fun.

VL: When it was Waipio musicians, it was a different time?

RT: Uh huh.

VL: Who would perform?

RT: We used to give concerts with the Akanas. Mrs. Akana, but she's not living now, she died long time ago. She used to teach the girls, like us, she used to teach us how to dance hula. And then, we go and we give the concert.

VL: How many girls?

RT: Oh, maybe seven, eight girls.

YY: And when you gave a concert, did you have special preparation? Hula skirts and other stuff?

RT: Oh yes. Ti leaves, that's the only hula skirt we used to wear, those days.

YY: Did you make your own?

RT: Uh huh. I used to make my hula skirt.

YY: How about on top?

RT: Oh, on top we wear clothes. We never go like how now.

(Laughter)

VL: When did you practice? Did you have regular lessons?

RT: That particular lady who's giving the concert, that's the one teach us
to dance different numbers, different hulas. You got to go to her every after school and go over there, maybe one hour, two hour, and learn.

VL: She was Hawaiian?

RT: Hawaiian-Chinese.

YY: Did she play the music while you danced?

RT: Uh huh. She play the ukulele and she sings. And when we make mistakes she gets the ruler and....I used to get the ruler on my hands.

VL: Who else would perform from Waipio?

RT: I used to perform and used to have girls, but they're not here now. They all went away. They all went away.

VL: How about other musicians?

RT: Well, in my days I just remember that particular lady, Mrs. Akana.

VL: Would there be refreshments?

RT: No, they don't have refreshments after that. During the night, they don't have any refreshment, they don't give anything for you to drink. You just give a concert. After that you dance.

VL: To what kind music?

RT: Get some boys down there, they know how to play saxophone like that. Guitar and ukulele. And those days, used to have so much Filipino men down there, too, you know. And they like to come and dance with the girls.

VL: Did you like that?

RT: I didn't like that. We used to run, hide. We used to run, hide from them, and they want to fight.

VL: Who?

RT: The Filipino men.

VL: Who did they want to fight?

RT: They want to fight because we girls don't want to dance with them. And then we want to go with the other boys, like the Hawaiian boys or Chinese, half-Chinese boys. And they want to fight with the other boys. Filipinos.

VL: Did you ever see any fights?

RT: I used to.

VL: And what would happen?
RT: Well, everybody gets into that fight and somebody had, well, they used to have policemen down there. They had one policeman down there, they call Tom, Mr. Akana, and he's the Special Police, they call him.

VL: Why?

RT: He goes there, he don't have pay. He just, that's why they call him Special Police, they don't pay him. He just look out for troubles, like that.

VL: And so what would he do?

RT: He go over there and break up. No more fight.

YY: Did he carry a weapon?

RT: He have a gun.

VL: Was there drinking at these dances?

RT: Oh yeah, the Filipinos they come, some they drunk. They used to drink okolehao.

VL: Before they came?

RT: Before they go to the dance, they always drink. They drink okolehao, they drink wine.

VL: Why didn't you want to dance with them?

RT: Well, I don't know. I don't know. So scared, I guess. Just by the name. I guess just because the name Filipino. But nowadays, we don't think about that. Before, only Filipino, you get scared, you know.

VL: Did people tell you that Filipinos were certain way, certain way?

RT: Well, people used to say "Filipino poke knife." You better not put that in. (Laughs)

VL: Were there any other kinds of things people would do for fun or recreation?

RT: They used to have Fourth of July, we used to ride horses. You know, pa'u riders? We used to ride and we represent the islands, Oahu and all that. You know where Joe Kala live? We used to start from down there, ride our horses until up the school park. I remember doing that.

YY: About what age were you?

RT: Uh, 15. I used to remember that, riding horse.

VL: Who would decide that you would represent certain island?

RT: Those days, they have John Thomas them, the Loos, the older people, they
used to decide, "Oh, let's make Fourth of July and let's get all the horses and let each one represent the island." That's what we used to do.

VL: So, would they come to you and ask you if you would be in it?

RT: They would say, "Oh, you want to go Fourth of July and you want to represent the island, what island." It's up to you if you want to.

VL: Did you wear special clothes?

RT: Some used to wear. Now, if Oahu is yellow, you should wear yellow.

VL: Yellow what?

RT: I mean, something they wrap around and come way down to the stirrup of the horse, down to your feet. And they start wearing lei over here, put yellow lei, yellow lei on the neck.

VL: What kind of flowers?

RT: When we cannot find flowers we used to use paper lei. You know the kind they sell in the store but you got to string it?

YY: Crepe paper?

RT: Yeah, crepe paper. That's what we used to do.

VL: Was this a parade? Were there other people besides the ladies on horses?

RT: No, just horses with the ladies on it. Then, for the day, you have baseball like that. They have little luau, you know.

VL: Were there games at the Fourth of July?

RT: They had baseball, always baseball.

VL: Anything else?

RT: I don't remember anything else. Was baseball, always had baseball.

VL: Did the girls have a baseball team?

RT: Uh huh. They have girls from Waipio and girls from Kukuihaele. I played too, but I'm a poor player. I cannot strike. We used to play.

VL: How about Chinese celebrations, did you folks celebrate?

RT: Oh yes. We used to go when we have Chinese New Year, we used to go Nelson Chun's house, when he used to live Waipio. He used to live across the river where Joe Kala lives; that's where his house. And we used to go to Akioka's.
VL: What would they have at their houses?

RT: They have Chinese food, man, so good.

VL: What kind?

RT: Oh, they cook all the Chinese kind. They have the watermelon seed and they have, you know Chinese food, the way they cook, I don't know what's what, but all the ono kind. They have ducks and chicken and the way they cook, you know how the Chinese cook?

VL: Who was invited to come?

RT: Oh, not everybody they invite, you know. Only certain friends, I guess they invite. Then you go. Well, like Chinese New Year, get some Hawaiian people, they go to house to house and sing. They go sing, you know, in my days. I used to go. And they give you money in the red paper? They put the money in the paper, one red paper, they roll 'em up.

VL: You used to sing?

RT: Well, we go sing all Hawaiian songs, eh? To the Chinese people.

VL: And how much would they give you in the paper?

RT: Fifty cents, like that, they roll 'em up.

VL: Wow, for each person?

RT: For each person. Sometime, get two or three men go and they pick up two, three girls, go. They play the music, the girls sing or the girls dance, and then, they give the money in the red paper.

VL: You did that?

RT: I used to do that.

YY: And you danced?

RT: Uh huh. Dance.

VL: How about other Chinese celebrations or customs, did your family practice since your father was Chinese?

RT: We only remember Chinese holidays, that's all.

VL: How about like religion?

RT: I don't remember. My father, I don't remember even going to the Chinese church. They have one down Waipio, but I don't remember my father going.

VL: Did he speak Chinese at home?
RT: No, he speaks broken English to us. He don't speak Chinese to us, that's why never learn. Only certain words we, you know. Like "match" and those small, you know. Like "match" we understand when he tell us and all that, but for speak in sentence, no, because he never speak to us in Chinese.

VL: How about more on your Hawaiian side? Did your mother's family have an aumakua?

RT: My mother's aumakua used to be shark. She don't want us to, or my brothers to kill shark because she always said that's her aumakua. Funny, yeah? I think most Hawaiians had aumakua.

VL: How about medicines like that, when you were ill? What happened?

RT: Like, when you catch cold, or you coughing, or what, she always tell us go get that, chew on popolo. You know what's popolo, the one that have that purple berries? She tell us chew that and....that's what you call popolo, now. And have that other one, kukui, you know kukui nut? But the fruit is, not the nut now; you have the fruit, the green fruit. That thing, you pluck from the stem, has water, eh? That's the one you go get, and put on your tongue when you have fever. Even for babies, they tell that's good. And banana--you know the banana, what you call that?

YY: The flower?

RT: Get the balls or what underneath, the flowers....

VL: The red thing?

RT: Yeah, the red thing. That thing they said you cut that and has the juice come out, it's good for put on your tongue, drop on your tongue. Sometimes the baby has fever and they cannot drink milk from the bottle, cannot suck. You put that on and that helps. And what is the other one? My mother calls that kukae-puaa. That's the grass. I hardly see that grass now. Used to have that. You chew that, they say you chew that and, well, you know those Hawaiian people before they never used to put the medicine in a spoon. I used to see them chew and they just, from their mouth they put in a baby's mouth. I used to see that.

VL: So there's kukae-puaa.

RT: Kukae-puaa. That's medicine.

VL: You chew it.

RT: You chew it.

VL: The flower?

RT: No, it's something like the grass. That don't have flower. You chew that, and the juice, that's the one you give the baby.
VL: For what?

RT: My mother used to say that makes the baby, I mean their body, gets, I don't know what you call that in English, but they say make the baby just like open there [chest]. Make them the strength or something like that.

VL: What's the word in Hawaiian?

RT: Gee, I'm not too good in Hawaiian, you know. One word that my mother used to say. Make the baby healthy. But has the Hawaiian word, she used that. And the *popolo*, they used to chew that too and they put 'em right on top here [head], the baby has that soft, soft. They say good to make them, I don't know, just like that medicine is all over there and helps to, just like helps the baby to breathe, or something like that. Put on top here, the soft, soft part, the baby has the soft, soft part, eh? Yeah. I see my mother do that.

VL: How about Chinese medicine? Did you ever use those?

RT: Chinese medicine, my father used to, I don't know, he used to tell us, "When you have boil." He used to go get cockroach, he used to pound a cockroach. Ai, yeah, cockroach. And I used to see grasshopper.

VL: Pound it and then what?

RT: He say it's medicine. But he never use on that, but he used to tell me, "Cockroach is good for boil," or something like that.

VL: You put it on the boil?

RT: Uh huh. And grasshopper, he used to tell, "Good to eat." I don't know.

VL: You never did?

RT: No, I never.

YY: Did he?

RT: My father, he eat. He roast 'em on the fire and he eat 'em. He say it's good. He say it's medicine. Chinese, I see them eat mongoose--my father-in-law. They say it's medicine, good for the body. I never tried.

VL: And what else? Did he have other medicines?

RT: My father used to use medicine, make medicine, but I don't remember. Chinese medicine, he used to make some black kind, I don't know what's what. Not opium, though, something else. My father don't smoke opium, though. His brother smokes.

VL: Did you have much to do with the Chinese working men in the valley? There were Chinese working men at the time?
RT: They used to have, yeah.

VL: Did you folks do anything with them?

RT: No, I don't remember doing anything with them.

VL: Did they used to go to the Chinese New Year's, though?

RT: Well, this particular house, Akioka's house--well, they used to have this business-like, you know. And they used to keep so much of this Chinese people, works for them. Well, we used to go, Mr. and Mrs. Akioka used to be good friend to us, to my father and my mother. We were neighbors, we was neighbor once. So, we used to go visit them, and when they have some kind of dinner, they used to invite us and we used to go see those Chinese mens. They used to build their own, well, nowadays you call apartment, but those days I don't know what they call, but they have rooms for each of them. I used to go see them smoke opium. With a long pipe. I used to see them smoke and making that noise [puffing sound]. I used to watch them.

VL: And what did you think?

RT: I don't know. I think, I don't know what they get out of that. I used to think, it's for fun or, I don't know. I think they crazy. They just lie down on their bed and doing that. Did you see them smoke?

YY: No.

RT: No? I used to.

VL: Did your mother, when you were growing up, tell you that later on you were going to have periods?

RT: Well, I don't remember my mother, my mother never teach me that. But as you grow up and you live with your older sisters, they used to tell you and you used to see. That's how I used to know about that. My mother never used to tell us that.

VL: What did your sisters tell you?

RT: She used to tell us, "When you have that, you not supposed to go with...." You got to know how to use it, eh? You have to make like this, like that, to use because like we were young, those days, we don't know what's what. So they tell, "This is how." And those days, you don't have Modess or Kotex, those days.

YY: What did you use?

RT: Oh, you know the old clothes. You know, your old clothes that you don't use and your old panties that you don't use? That's the thing you use.

VL: How would you make it?
RT: You have to fold it, maybe about like this, that long.

VL: About six inches long.

RT: Yeah, about that long.

YY: And how thick? How many layers?

RT: Oh, maybe two panties. You know, your broken panties? That's the kind we used to use when we were.

VL: Did you have some kind of belt?

RT: Well, later on then we used to have belt. Before, no, we used to just pin to our panty. Front pin and behind pin, that's how we used to do.

YY: And then you would wash it out and use it again?

RT: We had to. For the next time, bumbai we don't have. Yeah, we used to wash it. Go down the river and wash it. But as we grow older, and then we start having Modess and all that.

YY: Did you sisters talk about babies?

RT: How to keep babies?

YY: No.

VL: How to make babies.

RT: Oh, how to make babies.

(Laughter)

RT: They used to say, "Oh, when you have your period and you going with one man or something like that, you going to have baby." They used to tell us in that funny ways, they don't come out and say exact.

VL: So did you understand?

RT: Well, I guess. Those times, you think it was silly when they tell you those kind things, but they don't come right out and tell you. I guess they shame, or what.

VL: Did you used to date?

RT: Well, I used to date. I used to like this boy, and we were going for a while, then happened they moved. They got to go away, you know.

VL: How did you meet him?

RT: Well, we used to live Waipio. They live down Waipio. The Mock Chews and you know. When they have to move to Honolulu, well, they got to go.
YY: What did you do on your dates?

RT: Well, we used to go like concerts and like that. And he play the saxophone and I guess those days, he used to think I'm a good dancer. And I used to think he's a good dancer, too. So, in that, we used to date because he think I'm a good dancer and I think he's a good dancer, and we always going out to dance.

YY: Where?

RT: Down Waipio. Up the school. That's only the time we used to date, that's all, we never go out to Honokaa or different places.

VL: Did your parents have any opinions about him?

RT: No, they used to think he's a good family.

VL: Did they want you to marry?

RT: No, I don't think so because we were young, we was about 17 and 18. So, never think of marry, that time.

VL: Was he Chinese?

RT: Chinese-Hawaiian.

VL: Did your parents say anything about you should marry this kind or this kind?

RT: They never tell me, "Oh, I want you to marry this boy," or what. They never say. They didn't say anything.

VL: And so, how did you meet your first husband?

RT: Well, I met my first husband when I was in Honolulu [approximately age 18]. I was working, then, in Honolulu. After I went to school and we had our poi factory then, but after you were staying in Waipio all your life, so I think, well, for a change, I went to Honolulu. And I had a friend in Honolulu so I went to Honolulu. And I was living with my friend and we both were working, and my husband's sister was a good friend to me, when we were down Waipio. So, when she went to Honolulu and we met in Honolulu, we used to see each other. She became ill one time, she was real sick and when she went in Leahi Home, she had TB. And she knew she was going to die, I think. And she told my first husband that she wanted him to don't get married to anybody else, but get married to me because I was one of her best friends. I didn't know that, see. Well, when she died, I went to her funeral and the next day, he came up to look for me. I was surprised, you know. So he start dating me; to go show like that. So we went out. But that time, I didn't have boy friend that time. So, I went out with him couple of times, I went out with him. Didn't think nothing. One time, he told me that before his sister died, the sister told him that she wants him to get married to me, nobody else. And only the father was living down Waipio and his sisters were all in Honolulu. I didn't think about
him, getting married but in the same time, I guess I was rascal then, so I was dating one other fella.

VL: In Honolulu?

RT: In Honolulu. I was dating him, one other fella. I guess I was tired of working, think, "Well, I better go back to Waipio and help my brother folks with the poi factory." So I came back. When I came back, few months after, my husband came back to Waipio and live with his father. That's when we wen start dating. Going together and about couple months after we got married [approximately age 19].

YY: And then your first seven children were born in the valley. Can you tell us about that, about your first born?

RT: My first born. Oh, I didn't have doctor. I had my husband's grandmother, they were living across us.

YY: Your husband's grandmother being your present husband's grandmother?

RT: Yeah, this Charlie's grandmother, came to help me to deliver the baby. She was the one. I didn't have doctor.

YY: Was she a midwife?

RT: Yeah. Well, I guess those days they didn't have doctor, so all those older people, they know how to deliver babies. So she deliver my first baby.

YY: What was it like for you?

RT: Oh, I thought I was going to die because you know, the pains just, ho, horrible.

VL: Had she been telling you what might happen later? I mean, earlier, when you were pregnant, did she teach you what would happen later....

YY: During the birth.

VL: Did anybody teach you what was going to happen, when you gave birth?

RT: Oh yes, they told me the pains coming and you got to know how, how you going to....Like some people, they tell me, some have the pains on the back and some have pains on the stomach. But my pains was all on my back. I didn't feel anything in my stomach, pains in my stomach, it's all my back.

So they told me how to give birth, how to do, what you going to expect and all that.

YY: What did they say?

RT: They said, when the pains comes off and on, see, they tell me don't force until the pain is strong, they come so many minutes. Then, you
try force, because the baby wants to come out. But it took me long time to.

VL: Where did you deliver?

RT: In my home, in my bedroom.

VL: Did your husband help?

RT: Oh no, he was so scared.

YY: What position were you in? Were you squatting or lying down?

RT: Oh no, I was kneeling. I kneel, my two knees down. Somebody got to press my back. I cannot lie down.

YY: Did you take any kind of medicine or herb to help you?

RT: No, no. Only when the baby came out, everything was all pau, my father used to boil the orange leaf, he used to boil just like tea and make you drink. He say, "It's good for the blood."

YY: Then, as soon as the baby was born, who took it?

RT: My present husband's grandmother.

YY: And what did she do?

RT: Oh, I don't know what she did because I don't look. I don't know if she cut that cord, or what. I don't look, you know, when they cut that thing. I don't open my eyes. All my children, even I go doctor, give birth all my others, I never did look in that mirror. I don't look. My eyes is all close up. Till everything all pau, and they tell me you ready to walk, or what, then I do. Otherwise, I don't open my eyes.

YY: Did you hold the baby?

RT: Uh huh, after everything clean up, they bring the baby to me.

VL: How did they clean it?

RT: You know olive oil? That's the kind they rub on the baby. They rub all on the baby.

YY: In the valley, did they put anything in the eyes?

RT: I don't see. In the eye? No, they don't put anything, they never put anything in the eyes.

YY: And if it was boy baby, did they....

RT: No, they didn't. It just came itself, I think. Like, in the hospital they go....
YY: Circumcise.

RT: Yeah. But not.

YY: And the afterbirth, what about that, what did you do with that?

RT: Oh, I had hard time that thing come out, that afterbirth stuff. You know, that, worse than giving birth. That thing, they bury that thing.

VL: Where?

RT: In the ground. And they plant one fruit tree, the Hawaiians. They never throw, you know. Even, what the Hawaiians call the piko, you know when that cord come out from the button? They never throw that away, you know.

YY: What do they do with it?

RT: They put in one bottle, they make alcohol inside, some they keep 'em for so many days, then they take 'em and they bury 'em and they plant fruit trees on top. They say, they don't want a rat ever take that thing and eat because that child might steal. I see, hospital, they just burn 'em or whatever, no? But at home, no. All that afterbirth stuff, they wrap 'em all in a blanket, they get that old rags, they wrap 'em and they bury 'em.

VL: In your yard?

RT: In the yard. And they go plant fruit trees on top.

VL: Any kind of fruit tree?

RT: Uh huh. Orange or coconut.

YY: So, who took it out and buried it in the case of your children?

RT: I think my husband did it. I think my husband. That's how the Hawaiians used to tell.

YY: And now, after you gave birth, what did you do? Soon after you give birth.

RT: They get hot water, you got to wash yourself up and my father, he's always like the orange leaf, they cook 'em for tea. They say it's good for the inside for the blood. They want the bad blood to come out so that you don't have that; they say, if you don't clean, your stomach going come pot-belly, or whatever that is. So that the kind medicine I used to take. I don't drink water. Only take tea. That's the kind tea my father said, I don't know, that's Chinese ways. And he don't want you go out from the house if you not one month old. For one month, you cannot go out to the store or going on the street.

VL: Why did he say that?
RT: He said because he doesn't want when the wind....

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 4-24-1-78; SIDE ONE

VL: Okay, when the wind catches your head....

RT: Yeah, and you easily catch cold. That's why he doesn't want you to go out from the house. He used to tell me, when you give birth, you have your baby, don't go out.

YY: Then, what did you feed the baby?

RT: Well, for couple of days, I give 'em my breast. And after awhile, I don't have any; dry up.

YY: How soon after?

RT: Two, three months. And then dry up, I have to give bottle. Feed Carnation milk.

VL: How would you prepare the bottles?

RT: I sterilize the nipples, the bottles. And I always cook hot water and put in the thermos bottle, to keep it hot. To make his milk or her milk. Because when every child, when I'm pregnant, I used to go to the doctor.

YY: Where?

RT: Honokaa. For check-up. Until time for me to give birth, I always go.

VL: Did you ever ask the doctor, or did you ever not want to have more children? Any kind of birth control?

RT: I never. Until my second marriage, when I had my first son. And then came to my second daughter, the doctor told me I better stop. Don't have any more because I was getting old, 40, 41; it's kind of old. Because the bones is getting narrow, or something like that. And I was scared to operate for not having any child. So, I told the doctor, "Well, I'll see, I'll let you know." When I was pregnant to my daughter, he wanted to operate on me not to have any more because he know I could have another one.

And then, I start having another, my other daughter. So, the day I gave birth; yes, I had a hard time, my last girl. The day I gave birth, and then in there he told me, "Well, do you want me to work on you? I think you better not have any more babies." And I looked at him.

And he said, "Don't get scared. I'm going to do it."

And I said, "Okay."
So he said, "All right. I'll call your husband to come up and sign the paper." So the next morning, he did it.

So I said, "I think I rather have seven operation than giving birth seven times." It wasn't hard.

VL: Back when you were younger, did you hear about any birth control methods? Never heard any?

RT: I never heard about that.

VL: Did you ever hear of girls or women that became pregnant but didn't want to be, and what they did?

RT: No.

VL: As you had your children, more and more, did it become easier to give birth?

RT: No. I think all of them was, some was more hard time. I can say I never had easy time, no. All my babies was so painful, oh.

YY: During your pregnancies, what kind of food did you eat?

RT: Well, I ate my regular food. I didn't go and say, "Oh, I cannot eat this and I ate that." I just ate. That's why, I guess, that's why my babies was about eight pounds and nine pounds. I think the smallest was seven pounds.

VL: All the time, when you were having your babies, did you work at some point?

RT: Oh yes, I worked.

VL: And when would you stop working? At what stage of the pregnancy?

RT: I never stop, I keep on working and working. You know, your daily work at home. Keep on working and working, I never stop.

VL: Until you felt the pain?

RT: Uh huh.

VL: The work that you did at your brother's poi shop, what kind of work did you do?

RT: Peel taro, put the poi in the bag. And those days, didn't have plastic bag, now. They had that rice bags. That's the kind of bags they were using. And to wrap outside of the poi bag, we used to set ti leaves. Now, you put two layers of string, like this, and you put the ti leaves all like this, set all like this. Set, set, set, set. Then the poi bag, you put 'em on top and you roll it and the string you tie. To cover outside the bag. Then you put it in the brown bag. Put it in the bag because the mules, the animals is going to bring the poi up.
VL: The rice bags, what size were they?

RT: Oh, they were that kind size.

VL: How many pounds of rice?

RT: Oh, maybe the 25-pound kind rice; 25 or 50-pound. They use that. And you know those days? Twenty pounds for $1. Fifty cents was half of that $1.

VL: The smaller bags, how did you get the smaller rice bags?

RT: Used to sew the bags.

VL: You did?

RT: No, my sister-in-law used to sew the bags.

VL: Hand sew or machine?

RT: No, machine. The foot kind.

VL: So, when you went to peel taro, did you do this all day?

RT: Not exactly the whole day. Maybe 1 o'clock, 2 o'clock. Everything is all pau, grind and everything; clean up. Then next day morning, that's the day my brother takes the poi to deliver.

VL: What did you peel the taro with?

RT: With coconut shell. You know the coconut? The shell. You take out all the meat and you sharp the coconut, the edge, one side. That's the kind we peel. They call it opihi.

VL: Why do they call it opihi?

RT: I don't know. Maybe that's the name for that. Say, opihi, they don't call coconut shell, they say opihi.

VL: What did the poi shop look like, inside?

RT: They have a place to cook your taro and a place like this, all cement. That's where you have your stool. You get all your taro, you sit down and peel. A section where they all wash the taro clean. They take all the husk and they bring the clean ones and then what you do is take the good ones and peel and throw in the bucket.

VL: How many of you were peeling?

RT: Well, my sister, three, four ladies. All family, eh, we don't hire outsiders.

VL: And then what did you get paid?
RT: Well, I never used to get paid from my brother; I used to go help him and he gives me poi to eat. Whatever, anything I want, he gives me. I never charge him for working.

VL: How much poi would he give you?

RT: Any amount I wanted; if I want 50 cents, $1, $2, he just give me the amount I want.

YY: Which brother was this?

RT: You know Sonny Ah Puck? Our older brother Herbert. He died long ago.

YY: When you were working, what did the children do? Your children?

RT: My children? Well, my mother used to take care. And then, when my brother had the poi factory, I had only two then. Before that, when I was single, I used to go help. I never had children then. After I got married, I had two, my mother used to take care. My mother never go to the poi shop. Only us sisters and brothers.

VL: Would you take the two children to her house?

RT: She used to come my house babysit, or else I take to her.

VL: When you had each child, did you celebrate in some way?

RT: Uh huh. We used to make one year, we make birthday party. Big luau. Not every one, though. I know my first son, we made a big luau. The Chinese, they always say the sons is their number one. I used to remember that; my father used to say that.

VL: So was there a different feeling if you had a son or a daughter?


YY: Can you tell us about the baby luau?

RT: Oh, we used to have kalua pig. Used to have plenty wine; they come over there drink and oh, we have all those raw things. You know, opihi, raw fish; we used to have all that.

YY: Raw fish Japanese style?

RT: No, no; poki style. We used to have raw fish.

VL: Where was most of your food from at that time? Did you buy most of it?

RT: Oh yeah. We used to come up on horseback. Up here used to have that store, Kaneshiro Store, where this Rice have his store. Used to be Kaneshiro Store. We used to ride on the horse or the mule to come shopping. Come buy our groceries. We used to have store down there,
Ahana Store, but he doesn't have everything what the Kukuihaele store have.

VL: Did you folks fish?

RT: Go fishing? Oh yeah, we used to go with bamboos. Used to have plenty fish--moi, oio, had plenty fish. We had pigs too, pork, like that. My brother used to go Kona and deliver poi and I have a sister used to live at Puuwaawaa Ranch. Her husband was a foreman of that Puuwaawaa Ranch. We used to have plenty pork. They go sheep hunting, for sheep, like that. For food, we never used to worry about food. We used to have plenty food. We used to keep chicken too, we used to have plenty chicken.

VL: Did you get eggs?

RT: Uh huh. My father-in-law used to raise lots of chicken.

VL: How long did your brother have the poi shop?

RT: I think five years, though. When he came ill, that's when he....About four or five years.

VL: Did he raise taro also?

RT: Uh huh. We raised taro too, to supply the poi factory.

VL: Did you help with that?

RT: In those days, I never go to the taro patch. Only now.

VL: How come you didn't before?

RT: I guess, those days, just like only men was doing. No ladies, I never see ladies those days. I don't remember seeing ladies. Only nowdays I see ladies going. Those days, I don't see ladies.

VL: How about when you were a little girl and your parents had a taro patch?

RT: No, I never go.

VL: Did your mother?

RT: No, I never see my mother go. My father, only my father used to go. Those days, we never go. Only nowdays, I see the ladies going into the taro patch.

VL: Were there certain things that only ladies did and men did not do?

RT: I guess when the mens go out work on the taro farm, the ladies go fishing in the river. I hardly see mens go fishing in the river. Most was ladies. We used to go in the river, like bright sunny day,
used to go see. And you see the *gori* sleeping in the sand. You know, the rivers never used to be deep, you know. From down the beach, you come up in front of Joe [Kala] and you keep on coming. The river, the water is only like this. Now you go up here. Used to see the *gori* sleep in the sand. We just catch, we string 'em up, keep on going, you catch, you string 'em up, you come back, oh, the long string of *goris*. Was really fun and was easy.

END OF INTERVIEW
[This is an interview with Rachel Thomas in her Kukuihale home, on May 29, 1978.]

What I wanted to ask you first was more about your family life down in Waipio, when you were living with your parents. You had brothers and sisters yeah?

RT: Uh huh. Yes.

VL: Can you name them?

RT: The ones were living with my parents were the younger ones. Herbert Ah Puck. Sonny Ah Puck. Eunice Ah Puck. And myself. That's all. The rest were living with their own families.

VL: They were older already?

RT: Yeah, they were older.

VL: And then had your two parents.

RT: My father and my mother.

VL: Did you have any grandparents or aunties and uncles that lived with you?

RT: No.

VL: So there were six of you.

RT: Yes.

VL: Did you folks used to do things together, as a family?

RT: Yes. We used to go fishing together. Before that, before we had
the poi factory, my father used to raise taro. But I don't remember going to work in the taro patch. He was doing that all by himself.

VL: How about your brothers?

RT: Then later on, my brothers started to work in the taro patch. That's when my brother had poi factory. So we started to raise taro for our poi factory. And, the poi factory was worked by our family.

VL: Going back to the fishing, can you like describe the day that you would go fishing together?

RT: Oh yes, when we go fishing, well, we go after lunch like that. We have nothing to do. And then one will say, "Oh, what we'll have for supper?"

And we say, "Well, let's go fishing."

Get the net and we go down the river. And we set the net. We don't go with bamboos. The kind of net that we have, it's so big that almost reach to the other end of the river. Then what we do, we lay those guava leaves, the branches. We cut the guava branches, we lay and we lay both sides. I guess so the fish don't go over. I think that's why we do that. And then we go in the front. The net is like this and we go in the front, and then we chase the fish.

VL: How is the net held in place?

RT: Oh, we have two irons. About like this.

VL: An inch or so thick.

RT: Yes. And it's long, about that. Maybe three, four feet. And we stuck 'em in the sand....well, they have a way of making the net. Poke one iron this side and on the other side. Then you pound 'em in the sand. Then we lay the guava branches on both sides. Then we go chase the fish. In those days, we used to have so much fish. Oh, plenty, plenty fish. Have gori. And the Hawaiians call oopu. And we used to make that, they call that una. They lay with stones on both sides of the river, and that way we catch mullet. I don't know how. We build you know. We go with somebody older that knows. We build. Just like stone walls, on two sides. And in the middle, they build high. They call that una.

VL: In the river?

RT: In the river.

VL: So that, what, the stones are blocking there?
RT: Yeah. Blocking the water so the fish cannot run away. That's how some of us catch mullets. They call it *una*.

YY: And, do you use a net to catch the mullet?

RT: Well, they put net, I think, in the back. Like this. And they build the stone. And the fish come and then come down like that and drop in the net. And they used to use *p*ai, too. In Hawaiian, they call *p*ai. From underneath, come small, round and in front of the mouth it's bigger. Small, and he come wide. And then they have a little small one inside. And they set that in the river too. To catch *opus*, *gori*, and *opae*.

VL: What is that made out of?

RT: Made out of *ieie*. They strip the *ieie* before they weave it. They know how to weave that thing.

VL: It's kind of like a basket?

RT: Yeah, just like a basket. It goes small like that. And then goes like that and then it come up like that and go like that. Round in the front. They call that *p*ai, in Hawaiian, *p*ai. That's another way of catching fish. And they have nets too, made from thread, those days.

VL: And then, would you sometimes eat the fish right there?

RT: Well, sometimes we get some crowds of ladies. We go down to the river. When it's nice and sunny day. We catch the fish, we eat lunch. We roast over the fire, the *gori*. On the charcoal. We bring our poi, we bring our rice, then we have poi and rice with fish. We used to have fun.

VL: Were there other things that your family did, together as a family?

RT: We used to go down to the beach and hook. Hook for *moi* or *oio*. Or eels. We used to go. Our families. And other families too, they go down.

VL: How about coming up out of Waipio? Did you folks come up, as a family, to do things up here?

RT: Well, not the whole family, though. I used to come up together with my father on horseback. To come to the store and go back. But not as a whole.

VL: How did your parents raise you? How....

RT: Well, how my parents raised me...we were poor. We were poor because my father was a...before my father married my mother, he was a rice planter. He worked in the rice field. Waipio used to
have rice field. Then, after that, when he got married to my
mother, his job is plant taro. And he used to work for people down
there. I remember that we used to live on poi, have plenty poi.
And, we have store down there too. Well, we never starve. We had
plenty to eat. But I don't remember having vegetables like cabbage
and lettuce and carrots, like now. But before, we used to have
that luau, you know luau leaves. And taro stem. And, what you
call, the fern that they call hoio? Well, that's what we used to
live on for vegetables.

VL: In the way that your parents raised you, were they strict with you?

RT: They wasn't that strict. I mean, my father and my mother was real
nice parents. They wasn't that strict. And I know those days
wasn't like nowdays. Nowadays is modern, more fast, everything is
fast. But in those days, to me, everything was slow. You know
what I mean? Never have so many things to do. Only once in a
while, when we have baseball and concerts like that, well, that's
when everybody in Waipio gets together. But most of the time, we
don't have anywhere to go. We used to go out fishing with the
light, with the gas light or the torch. Well, those days, never
had gas light. I don't remember. But torch. They used to make
the torch out of bamboo. Get the bamboo about like this big, but
maybe about like this long. We put kerosene inside. And we put the
bag, you know the grass bag, they roll it and they push in the bamboo.
Get the kerosene inside.

VL: Like in the joints?

RT: Yeah. Then they light the bag. That's how we have the torch (light)
to go fishing in the night. And catch frogs.

VL: What would you do with the frogs?

RT: We used to sell the frog (to the Chinese). Some people want the
frog, we sell the frog. Or else we eat the frog.

YY: Did you enjoy that?

RT: Well, I don't care for frog. (I enjoy catching them.) But, like
my father and my brothers, they eat the frogs. My mother doesn't
eat. I eat, but I don't care for frog. My mother don't eat frog.
My father loves frog. My brothers, they like frog.

VL: So, when you'd go out at night, would your parents worry about you?

RT: Oh yes. They used to say, "Be good." Well, I don't remember going
out alone. I do with my friends. When we used to have concerts,
the whole family goes.

VL: Even, how about catching frogs?
RT: Oh, we used to go with our brothers. Because we so scared to go in the night. Kind of spooky, eh. Well, those days, they used to say that Waipio get some devils, or something like that. Ghost. So us, we used to get scared, eh, when we were young. We don't want to go out, we so scared. In the night, when we used to walk, sometime us family used to walk, my mother, my father and my sister. I always want to go in the front or in the middle. I don't want to go be in the back.

VL: Did you ever see any ghosts?

RT: I did. I saw once. But I didn't see the whole thing.

VL: Where was this?

RT: At my sister's house. I just saw the hand. I don't know if was ghost or a human being. But the arm was all hairy. Long kind hair. But I don't know if was human being, because I was fast asleep. And I don't know how come, just like somebody was shaking my bed. And my bed was near the window. So I got up, and I face the window. I saw the hand, only the hand now. And hairy, you know. I yell for my sister. I call for her. And my brother-in-law came in my room. He said, "What's the matter?"

I said, "Oh, I saw something! Just a hand!" Just like they were shaking my bed, that's why I got up and I sat down and look. Oh, I saw the hand. Oh, hairy. Oh, I was so scared. That's the first time I ever seen. But maybe I was imagining or what, but cannot be a living thing that come around like that.

VL: Was that your sister's place in Waipio?

RT: Yeah. They used to live down the beach. Mr. and Mrs. Thomas.

VL: How about lights at night? Did you ever see any flying lights?

RT: Oh, the flying lights? No, I never see such things, though. I didn't see that kind. My brothers used to see, my older sisters used to see. But I never see that kind. I ask them how that thing look like. They always tell me, "Oh, that thing flies like fireballs and then it falls and disappears." But I never see.

VL: And your grandparents, did you get to see them very often?

RT: No, I think I didn't see my grandparents. My mother's parents, I didn't even see them. Even my father's parents. I guess they were all in China, my father's parents.

YY: Did your parents move to Waipio from Waimanu?

RT: Well, my mother used to live in Waimanu. With her grandparents. Before. She used to tell us the story. But when she gave birth
we grew up, we were in Waipio. She said she used to live in Waimanu. They used to come on the canoe to Waipio.

VL: How about your Waimanu grandparents, did you ever see them?

RT: My mother's parents, I didn't see them. I think they died long ago, before I was born.

VL: How about funerals in Waipio? Did you ever see a funeral? Can you describe one for us?

RT: Oh, you know in those days, really give you the creeps when somebody died. When you have the funeral in your home. Or, can be somebody else's house. When you go there, they just cry and cry so loud. When people come in to the funeral, and when they see somebody coming, the people who's in the house, they start in crying. And whoever coming, they start in crying. They cry so loud and yelled loud. But nowadays, they don't do that. Some, they have the fits. I used to see those things.

VL: Would this be at Chinese funerals also?

RT: No, not Chinese funeral. Hawaiian funeral.

YY: Did they ever tell you why they did that?

RT: No. I didn't ask them why. But, to me, I feel, it's just funny. I don't know why they do that. When they see somebody coming, they starting crying, from inside the house. Whoever is in the house, they start in crying, too. The family who has that, whoever died, that's the one start crying first. And then, the one who coming in to see, they start crying from outside. They cry until inside. Funny, I don't know why they do that.

VL: How long do they cry?

RT: Oh, they cry about 10 minutes. They yelling and screaming. They come inside, they hugging and kissing and screaming. Really. And nowadays, they don't have that.

YY: Did men and women cry like this?

RT: Well, not all the men. The older men, they'd cry. But the most is the women. The Hawaiian women, they cry.

VL: What kind of clothes did they wear?

RT: They used to wear all black or white before.

VL: The women, would they wear muumuus?

RT: Well, they have dress, those days. Those days, they don't have
those muumuus like what we have now. Those fancy muumuus what we have. They just have dress. The kind below your knees.

VL: And, the body, is it laid out for people to see?
RT: Uh huh. In the kind black coffin. The kind they make.
VL: How does it get black? Is it painted?
RT: No. They had buy the black material. And the white material is inside and the black material is outside. They make the coffin with board. You know these, the kind big boards like that. That's the kind they make.
VL: Was there somebody in Waipio that made coffins?
RT: Uh huh. There's a man.
VL: Oh, who's that?
RT: Joe's father.
VL: Joe Kala's father?
RT: Uh huh. I remember him. He make the coffin.
VL: And then, would he get paid for that?
RT: No. He just make free.
VL: And where were people buried?
RT: Some was buried in their own yard. Some, they take way over the other side. What place they call that? Ai, I getting old, I forget all the names of the places.
VL: Kaau?
RT: Kaau, and way down. They had some people in Kaau too.
YY: To a special place where they bury?
RT: No, they just take 'em all different places.
YY: Just along the pali?
RT: Uh huh. Even, they have some up by the Ti House, below.
YY: That's Chinese?
RT: They have Chinese, some Hawaiians there too.
VL: And after they were buried, what would happen?
RT: They have luau and drinking.

VL: Did they still cry?

RT: They all drink okolehao and get drunk. No, they happy after. That's why I say, "Some funny." Funny, you know, some people. They sorry in the beginning, and then afterwards they get drunk. They drink okolehao, get drunk and they sing. I used to see all those thing and I used to think in me, "That's crazy."

VL: Did you ever cry like that too?

RT: No. I used to get scared. I never want to go funeral. I don't want to go, I'm so scared. I cannot sleep. And I don't want to see the face. I used to get scared when I was a little girl. I don't want to go to somebody's funeral.

VL: Do they fix up the body?

RT: Well, some, they don't fix. When he die, they just put you in the coffin. Don't have doctor or what. In those days, I used to stay down there, I used to see them like that. They don't have doctor.

VL: Would someone give a service?

RT: Yes. If you were a Mormon, the Mormon priest will preside over the body. They'll sing and pray. That's how. Or the priest have something to say.

VL: What if they never went to church then?

RT: They will have someone.

When you Mormon, they baptized you when you eight years. So, most time, they know what religion you are. If you're a Mormon or Catholic. But if Catholic, they'll have somebody who's Catholic. If you're Protestant, they have somebody Protestant.

VL: You mean that everyone, just about, by the time they were eight years old, was baptized?

RT: Yes, well that's Mormon. Mormon religion is eight years, you baptized.

YY: Were you baptized a Mormon at that age?

RT: Yes.

YY: Can you describe your baptism?

RT: In the river.

VL: Which one?
RT: They call Waimih, above Joe's [Kala] place. Up side [Kukuihaele]. That's where. You go in there, they dress you in white. Any white dress you have. Then the priest will put their hands on your head and then they say prayer. And then, after they say their prayer, they hold you and lay your body whole in the water. The whole thing got to go in the water now. Your toe mustn't come up.

YY: So it's like you're floating?

RT: Yeah, just put you in the back and your whole body goes in the water. You see, you standing like this now. Then you have the priest. Then they just grab you and got to lay you down. Your whole body goes in the water like that. So you mustn't put your toe up like that. Everything got to go in the water.

VL: Who was the priest?

RT: Oh, I forgot. It's one Hawaiian name. One Hawaiian man. I mean, I had my baptism paper but it's somewheres. Because after you baptize everything, you have the paper. They give you a blessing paper and baptism.

VL: Were all your brothers and sisters baptized Mormon too?

RT: No.

VL: And both your parents, were they Mormon?

RT: My mother was. Not my father. But after couple years, I remember that my mother went and joined another church. You know, the Hawaiian church where you folks living [Ka Hale Hoano O Ierusalema Hou].

VL: So, when you were young, after you were eight years old and baptized, did you go to Mormon church every Sunday?

RT: Yeah.

VL: What did it look like? The church.

RT: It's right by my home in Waipio. And there's an empty lot this side. Still there, that empty lot. That belongs to the Mormon church. We had a small little church. Maybe holds 100 people. Just a big room. And in the front, they have the pulpit for the priest.

VL: What was it made out of?

RT: Made out of lumber.

VL: Was it off the ground?
RT: Yes. Off the ground. So many feet, I don't know how many feet. But it's off the ground.

YY: Did the priest reside there all the time?

RT: He doesn't live over there but he lives in Waipio though. Well, my time, used to have the priest who lives Kaau. Kelly's grandfather, Kelly Loo's grandfather, Nakanelua. He was the priest. And then, Kawashima, Japanese man, he was another priest at my time. And, they used to have Mormon elders too, you know, haoles come from the Mainland. They used to come to Waipio once in a while.

VL: What would they do there?

RT: They come to go to the families who is Mormon. They go to visit them in their homes. I can't remember their names. So long. They used to have, husband and wife used to come.

VL: Would they stay in Waipio for a while?

RT: They come. And they used to come up to Honokaa. They have a place where they have these Mormon elders live. They still have the house in Honokaa.

VL: So they would not spend the night in Waipio?

RT: No.

VL: When you went on Sundays, about how many people were there?

RT: Sometimes 30, 25.

VL: Did most of those people go regularly?

RT: Well, that's the same one that go regularly to church. And have some more but they hardly come out.

VL: Then would the church support the ministers?

RT: I don't remember that. I don't think so. I don't think so the members support them.

VL: Did you have offering every week?

RT: Well, they used to do that. They had offering, and pay tithing like that. I remember, in those days, tithing and fast offering was not too strict that you have to pay. But, like now, I know that they asking you to pay your tithings and your fast offering.

VL: At that time, did the church have fund raisers in Waipio?
RT: They used to. They used to have concerts like that. And they raise money.

YY: Do you feel that you learned a lot from going to church?

RT: I think it makes me to be a better mother and a housewife. By going to church. That's how I feel.

YY: How is that?

RT: I don't drink, I don't smoke. And I try to take care of my children in the way that I should, a mother should do. And I try to take care of my home as a mother should do. I feel, if by not going to church, maybe I'll go astray. Do things that I'm not supposed to do. By smoking, by drinking and doing things that a wife should not do.

YY: Do you feel that you learned this from an early age, from when you were baptized?

RT: I feel from the early age and until now. I don't say that I go to church every Sunday. But I have the strong feeling that since I'm a Mormon, that it makes me to be a good wife and a mother.

YY: Do you feel that this was taught to you by, say, Mr. Nakanelua or Mr. Kawashima?

RT: Yes. He taught us and our primary teacher. Used to have primary teacher too.

VL: What is that?

RT: In our church Sunday School. We have Primary classes when you are 5, 6 years, 7 years, 8 years old. You have a class where you have a primary teacher teach you all that Bible stories. Then, and the Ten Commandments and all the scriptures in the Bible, they read to you. Guess that's what I learned from small and until I grew up. And those stays with me.

VL: Would this be at the Mormon church that you had the primary school?

RT: Yes.

VL: Did they have separate rooms or something in the church?

RT: Yeah, they have a little room outside. As you go enter in the church, then you have a little room there. That's where the little children stayed in there with their primary teacher or Sunday School teacher.

VL: Also, at the time you were a young girl in the valley, before you went to Honolulu, was there anybody in Waipio that was like a leader or spokesman for the valley people?
RT: Well, I think that everybody was for themself I guess. I don't remember having seen or heard of somebody that, you know, leading the group in Waipio or....

VL: Was there some person or persons that people looked up to and respected a lot?

RT: I don't remember.

YY: Or church leaders?

RT: Well, I guess church leaders. It's the only church, they look up to the priest, whoever it is. But otherwise, I guess everybody to themself. In my days, I don't remember.

VL: Do you remember the Waipio Community Club?

RT: Uh huh.

VL: What kind of club was that?

RT: Well, that club is something like, we want all the Waipios to get together. But I think that club didn't last long, though. It breaked off.

VL: Were you a member?

RT: I don't remember if I was a member.

VL: Do you know some of the things that they did?

RT: Oh, that I forgot. I don't remember.

VL: Then also, I was wondering if, like, the housing in Waipio, if Hawaiians lived together in one area and Chinese lived together in another area, Filipinos in another area.

RT: I don't think they had that. They were all mixed. I mean, Chinese and Hawaiians and they were all, no difference.

YY: Did everyone get along well, just the different ethnic groups?

RT: Well, some. I guess, like now days. Some all right. They get along together. But not everyone.

VL: Were you able to understand everyone's language?


VL: So how would you talk to Filipinos and Chinese?
RT: Well, if my father says something to me, I'm going to talk broken English to him. And he understands. I would tell, well, if I talk to my father, I say, "Oh, Pa, you want to eat candy?" Or, "You want to go someplace?" I just ask him. He'll understand.

VL: How about other Chinese people?

RT: Same thing. You got to talk broken English to them. You know, the broken way. They'll understand you.

VL: Did you folks have a radio?

RT: When I was young, very young, I don't remember having a radio. As I went to school, came to Kukuihaele, I think when I was around 15 years and 16, I think. That's when we had radio. In Waipio.

VL: How was it....

RT: Run by electric. Because we had an electric power down there. A motor that runs. It's electric.

YY: At your house?

RT: At my house. When we grew up, my brother bought the generator.

VL: Were there many other people in Waipio that had generators?

RT: No. I remember only our family and my husband's family.

VL: The Thomas family.

RT: Uh huh. That, I remember. That's the first time when that thing came out. A radio.

VL: And then, off the generator, what other things were run by the generator?

RT: We just have radio. And, I guess, it's for the radio and the lights. That's all. I don't remember having ice box.

VL: How did you refrigerate things? Or did you?

RT: Everything was, you have to dry the fish and the pork or the meat. Or you have to salt.

VL: No ice box.

RT: No ice box. But later on, when I got married [approx. 1937], then we had ice box. Kerosene ice box. Run by kerosene.

VL: Oh really?
RT: Yes. Just like ice box. Exactly like that, but was run by kerosene. Yeah.

YY: It got cold?

RT: Yes. Makes ice. I used to make, what you call that...not ice cream. You make with cream and sugar, with water mix up, and you put 'em in the ice cubes? What you call that?

YY: Ice cake?

RT: Yeah, ice cake, eh. I used to make that.

VL: This was when you were first married with Mr. Lau Kong?

RT: Yes. We had an ice box. Run by kerosene. You got to go burn, eh. Fill up with kerosene every time and burn.

VL: Going back to the radio, what programs did you listen to?

RT: Oh please, I don't remember.

VL: Did you listen often?

RT: Oh yeah. Because that's the only thing that we could enjoy, eh. And not everybody has radio so they come to our house. Our friends or our relatives. They come to our house and listen to the radio.

VL: Is this in the evenings?

RT: In the evenings, uh huh.

YY: About what year was this, when you had a generator?

RT: Gee, maybe I was around 13, 14, 15 years, I think [approx. 1932]. I'm not sure but I think around there.

VL: And how about newspapers? Did you folks get newspaper?

RT: I don't remember. My family never had newspaper so I don't know. I don't think so.

VL: How did you find out about things happening in Hilo or Honolulu or Mainland?

RT: Well, so-and-so will tell you, "Oh, something had happen."

END OF SIDE ONE
SIDE TWO

VL: Oh, can you tell us a little bit about the different jobs that you had? Say, at Honokaa Poi? This was after you came back from the Mainland.

RT: I didn't go to the Mainland.

VL: I mean, I mean Honolulu.

RT: I used to work in our poi factory. We used to have a poi factory in Waipio. Our family used to work.

VL: So then, how did you start working for Honokaa Poi Factory?

RT: I used to work Honokaa Poi Factory before my husband died [approx. 1952]. Lau Kong. Yeah, before he died.

VL: How did you find that job? Was it easy?

RT: Was easy. They ask me.

VL: How come they asked you?

RT: I guess they felt that I'm half-Hawaiian and I know how to work with taro.

VL: So about how long did you work there?

RT: I think I worked for two years. And then I went to work for the laundry, Harris Laundry.

VL: How come you stopped working for Honokaa Poi?

RT: The hours was kind of...I didn't like the hours. Because you have to go work late in the night.

YY: By this time, did you have your family?

RT: Yeah, I had my children.

YY: And so, you had already moved out of Waipio?

RT: Yes. When we moved from Waipio, we stayed Kukuihaele. And my husband died. Then I went work for the poi factory. Then after that, I worked for Harris Laundry.

VL: So when you were working at the poi factory, and it required that you work at night, what about your children?

RT: Well, my daughter Daisy, she was in high school already. And my
youngest was in kindergarten. I meant, my children, they were big enough to take care of one another. So I used to work. Sometimes, I come back 2, 3 o'clock in the morning. And it's kind of too late. And, I guess, my health wasn't too good. I was getting skinny. So I quit.

VL: How did you get to Honokaa?

RT: They come and pick me up. The one that owns the poi factory. Fred Olepau's father used to own the poi factory.

VL: So they always made poi at night?

RT: Well, you start in the afternoon. Depends. Sometimes in the afternoon until in the night. And they deliver the next day like that.

VL: And at the laundry, what was your job there?

RT: I used to wash. And iron.

VL: Wash by hand?

RT: No. We have a washer. And I used to press, too. You know, we have that machine to press.

VL: About how long did you work there?

RT: I worked about three years. And then, my father was staying with me then. He was about 90 years old. So he was living with me and he was getting weaker and weaker. So I asked my boss. I had to stay home and look for my father because he was getting weaker. And, when my father died, I didn't go back. I felt I better stay home. So I stayed home and I didn't go work.

VL: How did you earn money then?

RT: Well, that's why I went to work, because I lost my husband. And so I went to work for Harris Laundry. But my husband left us some money. We didn't have Social Security then. Because my husband was working for Board of Health, and that time didn't have Social Security. You see. So, what he left us was his insurance money. He left for me. That's how kept us going.

And then, when Daisy got out from high school, she didn't go [to more] school. She graduated from Honokaa School. And my oldest son, he joined the Marines. He didn't finish school, he wen join the Marines. Had seven of them home with me. But the rest, they continued, then they graduate. I didn't have no outside help. I didn't have no welfare, no nothing. Just whatever my husband left for us, his insurance. That was what kept us going until I got married to my next husband, my second husband [Charlie Thomas].
VL: How did you meet Mr. Thomas?

RT: Well, I guess, he used to tell me he used to see me going to work every day, Harris Laundry and the poi factory. I guess he felt pity for me because I had my seven children to take care of. That's what he told me, after that. But my [present] husband and my first husband, they're cousins.

VL: How are they cousins?

RT: His [Charlie Thomas'] mother and my first husband is cousins, first cousins.

VL: Mr. Thomas' mother and Mr. Lau Kong's mother?

RT: No. Mr. Lau Kong and Mr. Thomas' mother are first cousins. Because Mr. Lau Kong's mother and my husband now, his mother's father [are brother and sister]. . . . you understand?

YY: I have to clarify one thing. Was Mr. Lau Kong Chinese?

RT: His father is Chinese, pure Chinese. His mother is Hawaiian and English.

So Mr. Lau Kong's mother and my husband's grandfather is brother and sister. That's why Mr. Lau Kong and my husband now is second cousins.

VL: Uh huh. That's right.

RT: So that's how we met. I guess, we were living kind of near. His house and our house.

YY: In Kukuihaele?

RT: In Kukuihaele. We were kind of close. So I guess, he seen me with my seven children. And then, he seen me goes to work every day, every morning and comes back. You know, when you have so much Army clothes to work at the laundry, you comes back late. Because they want the clothes, you got to stay up till 2, 3 o'clock in the morning, sometimes, to work in the laundry. I guess he seen me going to work late. I guess he felt pity. We didn't go together. He just came and asked me.

So I told him, well, at that time, he used to drink. He drink a lot; he used to drink. But I told him, "I don't want to get married to another husband that drinks." Because Mr. Lau Kong was a drinker too. So when he said he was going to leave his liquor and don't drink and don't smoke, that's how I got married to him. And my youngest son was only five years old when I got married to him.

VL: And then, when did you start farming taro?
RT: Well, with my first husband, Lau Kong, we used to have taro farm. But we never used to work. We used to have a Filipino man who works for us.

VL: It was your folks' property?

RT: Yes. He used to work for us. He used to raise the taro.

VL: It was that sharecrop?

RT: Uh huh. And then, when I got married to my husband, Charlie, then we started going work little by little, until now.

VL: Now, the land that you first started, how did you get that land?

RT: It's from my former husband, Mr. Lau Kong.

VL: Did he own it?

RT: Yes. From his parents, his father and his mother.

VL: So you and Mr. Thomas started farming that area [approx. 1957]?

RT: Yes.

VL: Do you remember how many acres that was?

RT: I think it's only one acre, little over.

VL: And where was that place?

RT: That's the one where we have our shack.

VL: Same place as now?

RT: Yes.

VL: And, had it been in taro before you folks started it?

RT: Yes. Had taro from the Filipino man.

VL: So the patches were already set up, when you and Mr. Thomas started?

RT: Uh huh.

VL: And then, where did you folks get your huli from? To plant your first batch?

RT: Oh, we used to ask our neighbors, the other farmers who have. Like Kelly. And like Duldulao. When they don't use, they give us. And we used to go around, finding in the guava bushes for those wild taros growing. And get the huli. The first time, my husband and I started to work.
VL: Oh. What kind was growing wild?

RT: They used to have that apii taro.

VL: Growing wild?

RT: Yeah. The kind taro that people don't take care, my husband and I, we cut and use the huli. That's the kind we take and plant. They get 'em on the bank sometimes. And then we get when we go over there. Get the huli. That's how the first time we used to have huli. Our huli is go around in the bushes and find.

VL: And then, the kind that you got from other people, what variety was that?

RT: The apii and lehua.

VL: Then, did you need any financing to start?

RT: Oh, no.

VL: Did it require...like, how much money did you need to start off with?

RT: No.

YY: If you were living up here, in Kukuihaele, how did you used to get down to your taro patch?

RT: We always had a jeep and a truck. We always have truck. If go broke, we buy a new one.

VL: Did you ever hire any help, to help you in the patches?

RT: Uh uh. My husband and I, my girls sometimes, and my boys, when we need them. When we really need help, we ask them. They come and help us. But otherwise, we just do ourselves.

VL: The water, where's your water from?

RT: Water for drink, or for the taro?

VL: For the taro.

RT: From the main river.

VL: You have your own water head?

RT: Yes.

VL: Did you build that yourself?
RT: Yes.
VL: Can you tell us how you build a water head?
RT: You set with stones.
VL: How do you set it?
RT: Just pile the stones as you go, and set. Like how you want and cut branches of tree to help protect the water leaking. Or else, we have those plastics that we don't use, we take down and help block the water from leaking.
VL: Do you make a little dam first? I don't know, I can't, what does your water head look like?
RT: Well, that's what we call it, a dam, when we block the water.
VL: I don't know.
RT: I think it's a dam the way we build it with stones.
YY: The main river flows by your property. And so, then you have to get the water from the river to bring it.
RT: We block it and when it fills with water and flows in the ditch, and goes in the patches. [See photo section]
YY: And how do you block it?
RT: With stones.
YY: Did you have to dig?
RT: No. Just find for stones. You have to go and find stones in the river. And lay straight across [the stream]. To block, so that you have some water to go in your ditch. And if the stone doesn't help, you have to put plastic, or cut guava branches, or something to help to block. So that you have enough water to go in your ditch.
VL: Did that dam ever wash away?
RT: Oh, it does when it rains plenty.
VL: And then what do you do?
RT: You have to back and fix. Every time when big water, it wash away.
VL: Did you ever not get enough water?
RT: Uh huh. That's problem.
VL: And then, what can you do?

RT: Every time you have to go block the river to make enough water to go in your ditch. You have to find a way to block it to make the water come more high so that get and let more water to flow in your ditch.

VL: Why do you think there isn't enough water?

RT: Because you can tell when it goes to your patches. Not enough water in the patch.

VL: How come not enough if [enough is] coming down the river?

RT: Sometimes too much water running away. Sometimes your dam need fixing. The stones roll down and so much water going out. Then, not enough water coming in your ditch. So every time when the stone roll down and there are space that plenty water going out, you have to go over there and block 'em again.

VL: Upstream, is always enough water coming from upstream?

RT: I guess, they have enough water.

YY: So, the reason why you don't have enough in the patch sometimes, is because your stones broke?

RT: Yeah. But sometimes, when it doesn't rain much and you have this hot weather, that's when the water is low down the river. That cause us problems. That cause that not enough water go in the taro patch. Because the water is too low in the river.

YY: Have you seen change over the 20 years that you've been farming? When you first started farming, was there more water or less water than, say, now?

RT: I think now, to me, it's just like less water. Many changes, the rivers.

VL: Do you still grow apii now? All apii?

RT: Yes. I have apii and I have some lehua.

VL: Did you ever try other varieties?

RT: No, I don't think so. I think it's only apii and lehua. That's the kind most people down there raise. Apii and lehua.

VL: When you first started to market, who did you sell your taro to?

RT: You mean long ago? Or with my husband now?

VL: With your husband.
RT: Now?

VL: Yeah.

RT: Honolulu Poi.

VL: Have you been with them for the whole time?

RT: Uh huh. Honolulu Poi. And now, since we keeping for Mr. Kaneshiro. We have a certain portion of property that we raising taro, well, that goes to Kaneshiro, Seiko Kaneshiro. Because that's his property and what we are doing, we just raising the taro so we just go according to share.

VL: Do you sharecrop with anyone else?

RT: No. Just Seiko Kaneshiro.

VL: The rot problem, has that been affecting you?

RT: Yes.

VL: What kind of losses have you had?

RT: Oh, big loss. I mean, it's really a loss.

VL: With the soft rot?

RT: Uh huh.

VL: What do you think is causing that?

RT: To me, I think the weather.

VL: How does that affect it?

RT: Well, I think it's the weather; sometimes too hot. That's what I think.

VL: And what does that do?

RT: I think when it's hot the taro mature fast.

YY: You mean the plant?

RT: Yeah, the plant. Comes turn yellow so fast. From the weather, that's what I think. Some people say from the pupu, but I don't say, I don't think so. Some say maybe poison, but I don't know. Or the soil. Not enough fertilizer, or.... But I always say maybe the weather.

But, to me, I feel that when you take care things like that, it's
nature got to take care. Of course, you work. But you have to have....gee, I don't know how to explain that....to me, I think it's coming to the end of the world. That people is going to suffer and not going to have enough food. That's what I think. Coming to the end of the world. I don't know if you believe that, but I believe.

YY: That's an interesting idea. And so you mean...

RT: I mean, it's coming to an end. You don't know when but you just see what's coming.

VL: So that this rot problem is just part of that?

RT: Yeah, it's part of that. That's why I feel you have earthquakes. And all this, you know. Pretty soon, I don't know when going to have war again, but all these things. That's what I think.

VL: Is there something that can be done about that?

RT: I don't think so.

YY: Do you think it'll get better at some point?

RT: I don't know. To me, I don't think so.

VL: Do you and your husband try to do something about the rot?

RT: We bought something to fertilize the ground. In two patches we tried. This the first time we tried, so I don't know. And if it's going to be the same thing, I think nobody can....it still going be rotten, the taros going keep on. Because today, I went and pull one on my patch, a little small one. It's all rotten, underneath. The plant is so nice and healthy but underneath is half gone.

YY: This is the soft rot?

RT: Yeah. All that brown stuff underneath, all.

VL: Was that one that you had tried the fertilizer...

RT: No. No, I didn't try that.

VL: What kind of fertilizer did you try?

RT: Gee, I forget the name already. Something to fertilize the dirt. Not the taro, now. It's for the dirt. Something like....gee, I forgot the name. Cannot tell you the name.

VL: Did it have the numbers, the three numbers?

RT: No, no. My husband know.
VL: Before this, did you fertilize?

RT: Well, I used to fertilize, we used to fertilize our taro.

VL: You and Mr. Thomas?

RT: Uh huh. But still rotten.

VL: So this fertilizer now, is it a different kind?

RT: That's a different kind. It's for the dirt. Something like powder. White. That's the kind.

VL: Is there anything else, do you think, that can be done about the rot?

RT: I don't think so. If it's going to be rot, it's going to be rot. If comes out good, good. I don't think so.

VL: Did you ever think that you would give up the taro patch?

RT: I won't give up until the day I cannot work.

VL: Even if it's all diseased?

RT: Yeah. Because you going get some good ones.

VL: Why won't you give it up until the day you can't work?

RT: Oh, I like to have something that I can do everyday. To move around...

(Telephone rings, taping stops, then resumes.)

YY: You had just said that you will work taro patch until...

RT: Yeah. Until I cannot get the strength and cannot move around. Well, that's when I going give up. Because, it's good for us to exercise. I mean, if you tired, you can just sit down and rest and keep moving. And then, another thing is that because that piece of land is my place. I hate to see grass growing. I like see the taro growing instead of grass growing. Because, nowadays, these young generations, they don't like work taro patch.

VL: How about your children?

RT: Them too, they have. They have taro patch. Byron has one. He hardly go down and touch the taro patch. The taro is growing with the grass growing. He's the only one.

VL: Would you like your children to continue growing taro?
RT: I like. I like see them. I tell them, "That's extra money." You know? Help them going. Nowadays, they know they have a job, they don't care to do an extra job.

VL: Do you go down everyday now?

RT: Most time everyday. Except Sundays. Except, if I'm going someplace. So Hilo shopping, then I take one day off. Or, go into Honokaa pay bills. My husband goes to pay bills or he goes to see the doctor. That's when we take maybe one day off. A week.

VL: And your income now, how much of it is from taro? What percentage?

RT: We make about, maybe $6,000, $8,000. Not like before. Before, we used to make kind of plenty. But since the taro get spoiled, we cannot make that much.

VL: Is this where most of your income is from nowadays?

RT: Well, that's why we work too, because it's from the taro, most our income.

VL: More than Social Security?

RT: Yeah. And retirement and....

VL: What do you think will happen in Waipio in the future?

RT: I think, I always tell my husband so-and-so is getting old, who is working down. I guess when everybody ever go away or dies, I think this new generations wouldn't care to plant taro and everything going to waste.

VL: How come they don't care to?

RT: That, I don't know. I guess....I think, to them it's a hard job. And it's a hard job. It is. It is hard job. Because it's in the water, eh. Everything you do is in the water. They figure, even when the grass grows, it's hard time to clean and everything else. So, I don't think these young generations would....plenty, you don't see them going down there.

VL: So you think taro might, someday, not be grown in Waipio?

RT: I think so. If I'm not wrong.

VL: What would you think, what do you think about that? Or, how do you feel about that, if it's not grown?

RT: I feeling so shame that, you know, people who living around here and don't keep on planting taro. You know what I mean? It's food for us. For the people, the Hawaiian people. And even different
nationalities, they eat poi. And if don't have, that's one of our food. Well, I guess I'm going to die that time so it's the new generation to....to look and see.

VL: What does Waipio mean to you?

RT: You know something? Waipio meant, something, it's really a place that I love. Because, my husband left me properties in Honokaa, in Kapulena. I traded with the Waipio land you know. Because I love Waipio. And I trade with the property in Honokaa and Kapulena for Waipio. With the Honokaa Sugar.

VL: Would you like to live down in Waipio again?

RT: I like to. I always say, I wish my last daughter is all pau with her school so that if she goes to college, she wouldn't be at home so my husband and I can go down Waipio and stay down there. And once in a while, comes back up here.

VL: What do you like about it down there?

RT: I mean it's so quiet. And it recalls when you were a little girl. You were living with your parents. And then I got married, then I raised my children. You know, that all comes in you. That you cannot forget.

END OF INTERVIEW
WAIPÍ'O: MĀNO WAI

AN ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

Volume II

ETHNIC STUDIES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

ETHNIC STUDIES PROGRAM
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I, MANOA

December 1978