BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY:  SHIRLEY TOKO, 35, Honokaa Hospital paramedic aide and taro farmer

Shirley Puaala Toko, Hawaiian-Japanese-Chinese, was born on November 25, 1943, in Kukuihaele. After graduation from Honokaa High School, she got an office job in Honolulu. During the nine years Shirley lived in Honolulu, she married Andrew Mancao, a carpenter, and had four children.

In 1971, the Mancaos moved to Kukuihaele. Shirley began taro farming with her brother and with Andrew. After their divorce, Shirley continued to raise taro on her own.

At present, in addition to raising taro with her friend, Lanny Taka-hashi, Shirley recently got a job as a paramedic aide in Honokaa Hospital.

Shirley enjoys cooking and baking.
BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY:  LANNY TAKAHASHI, 43, carpenter-foreman and taro farmer

Lanny F. Takahashi was born on March 25, 1935, in Lahaina, Maui, the ninth of 12 children. His mother, a Japanese immigrant, is a Buddhist minister; his father was also from Japan.

After graduation from Lahainaluna High School in 1953, Lanny spent four years in the Army at Ford Ord, California. In 1960 he began learning carpentry in Honolulu. He moved to Hilo 10 years later, still working in construction. Lanny has lived in Kukuihaele since 1973.

Lanny began farming taro part-time in Waipio in 1976. He and Shirley Toko go down to Waipio almost daily to tend their taro patches. When not working in construction and farming taro, Lanny likes to fish and hunt.
This is an interview with Shirley Toko and Lanny Takahashi. Today is June 26, 1978. We're at the church in Kukuihae. For the record, can you tell us where and when you were born, Shirley?

Shirley: Okay. I was born on November 25, 1943. And I was born in Kukuihae, at my parents' home.

VL: Were you raised here?

Shirley: Yeah. Uh huh.

VL: As you were growing up, did you have any experience in the taro patch?

Shirley: Well, I used to watch my mother do taro farming. But I've never seen her harvest it. Because she died before she had a chance to harvest her taro. And during the school year, from 9th to 12th grade, I seen my brother. And we sort of helped weed a little.

VL: How did you like taro patch work then?

Shirley: Well, when you young, you don't want anything to do with taro farming because it's a lot of mud.

VL: What would you rather have been doing then?

Shirley: When I was young?

VL: Yeah.

Shirley: Not in the taro patch. I mean, could think a lot of things to do outside. But we weren't permitted to go out. So that was sort of a recreation for us, just going to the valley.
VL: Did your brother pay you for the work that you did?
Shirley: No. It was sort of my repayment because I lived with him after my mom died.

VL: After you graduated from high school, what did you do?
Shirley: Oh. Three days after I graduated I had a job in Honolulu as a general office clerk.

VL: Can you say how you got that job?
Shirley: Oh, at the time of our graduation, we had a guest speaker, who at that time was James Kealoha, who was the Lieutenant Governor. And he was close friends with my mother. After the graduation ceremonies, he had talk to me and told me if I needed a job, he had a job in Honolulu. All I had to do was contact him within a week. And I would start working. So I just left after three days from the graduation. I went down and started to work.

VL: When you left Kukuihaele, did you think that you would ever come back?
Shirley: Frankly, no. I didn't want to come back.

VL: How come?
Shirley: It was a different kind of life from here. Like over here, my parents were more strict with me. We couldn't go out unless we had somebody who was a chaperone. And in Honolulu we could do what we wanted to. Everything was new. The night life was new too. And you could choose your own friends. Your parents didn't have anything to say about, you know, "that certain girl or boy." It was hard, but we enjoyed it.

VL: How did they, your parents, feel about your leaving and going to the city?
Shirley: It was hard, but they said they couldn't hold me back because I had fulfilled my promise that I would graduate. And after that, I could do what I wanted to.

VL: So how long did you end up staying in Honolulu?
Shirley: Almost nine years.

VL: And while you were there, you met your husband, right?
Shirley: Uh huh.
VL: And how many children did you have in Honolulu?

Shirley: All four.

VL: So why did you decide to come back?

Shirley: My ex-husband had gotten a job in Hilo. They were building the Hilo Lagoon Hotel. And he asked me if I would consider returning back here if he found a place for me to stay. So I said, "Yeah." But I didn't think it was going to be in Kukuihaele.

VL: The place that he found to stay was here?

Shirley: Yeah. Was in Kukuihaele. So when he told me, he told me I didn't say that I didn't want to stay there. I just said it would be all right if he found a house here. So he sort of surprised me and brought me back to Kukuihaele.

VL: How did you feel about that?

Shirley: At first, I didn't want. Because I knew that back here was slower compared to Honolulu. And not being able to drive, I felt that it would be hard to get around too. Because in Honolulu you have taxis. You got buses. You can go anywhere you want. But in Hawaii it's different. You have to either know how to drive or bother somebody else to do it.

VL: Then, I think, you came back around....

Shirley: 1971.

VL: And you started helping your brother with taro?

Shirley: My younger brother.

VL: Was that your only source of income? Or did he not pay you?

Shirley: No. He didn't pay me. I don't know. We were brought up, like, we all help each other. It's not usually for money, it's more for love. Just trying to see each other get ahead. And being that he was the youngest, we sort of babied him. And we tried to push him to get ahead.

VL: So while you were working for him, how were you folks supporting yourself?

Shirley: My ex-husband was still working on construction. So during the day while I was at home, I'd go with my brother down to Waipio Valley. And get back just before my ex-husband gets home.

VL: Had your feelings about working in the taro patch changed?
Shirley: Yeah. Surprisingly it did. It's not the attitude that I had when I was younger. It's more like it's a way of living. I mean, there wasn't any job in Hawaii at that time. And jobs were scarce for ladies. And it sort of kept my mind occupied. Just going down to the valley. So, after my brother gave up, then I sort of took over. So actually, I didn't really want to take over, but I just didn't want to see a family-operated farm go to somebody else. And I know my father would be happy if somebody else in the family took over. So I felt that that was his wishes. That's the only way I could repay him for bringing us up the way we were brought up. I sort of made it a point to just carry it on. Although, at times, I do get discouraged.

VL: I'll ask you more about that. Okay, Lanny, can you tell us where you were born, and when?

Lanny: Yeah, I was born in Maui on March 25, 1935.

VL: What brought you to the Big Island?

Lanny: Oh, we had a job building, the construction of Hilo Lagoon. And that was in 1970.

VL: How did you first come to Kukuihaele?

Lanny: Oh, I was working Mauna Kea Beach Hotel when I met Ted Angelo [Kukuihaele resident]. And then we kind of got interested with each other because we had a same liking. Hunting, fishing, and everything. So, then one day, he brought me down here. And was peaceful, so I kind of liked it. And at that time, he needed somebody to build his house so I told him I'd stay as long as, you know, if he's going to build the house. So that's how I got to stay here.

VL: And after you built his house, you still decided to stay?

Lanny: Yeah, because I made lot of friends. And we all had the same interest. So, I guess, I kind of took root to here. It's a nice place.

VL: Now, before you had your own taro patches, did you ever work in taro patch?

Lanny: Yeah, just helped around. But I never thought I'd be in the dirt.

VL: Like who would you help?

Lanny: I was helping Meliton [Ngayan]. When I first came down here, he had taro patches. So Ted took me down and just helped
VL: Around with him. Then I met Andrew [Mancao--Shirley's ex-husband]. We was working the same building, eh. Hilo Lagoon. So when I was down, kind of helped them out. Just fooling around.

Lanny: By "just helping out," does that mean that you weren't paid?

VL: No, I just enjoy it. Not for money or anything like that. Doing things with love I guess.

Lanny: How were you supporting yourself?

VL: I was working. I was the foreman up there, so.

Lanny: Mauna Kea Beach?

VL: Yeah, Mauna Kea Beach, Hilo Lagoon.

Lanny: Now, your working for love, did that have any effect on the people that were working for wages? I mean, how did they....

VL: Lanny, can you tell us how you two met?

Lanny: It's a long story. (Laughs)

VL: Can you summarize it?

Lanny: Well, through a little headband.

VL: What?

Lanny: Headband, you know the kind they put on the head?

VL: Yeah.

Lanny: Yeah. I always wore headbands. Then one day, she made a whole bunch of 'em and gave it to me. After that, we got started to talking to each other. Then that's how we met. I mean, that was after they got divorced and....

VL: Shirley and Andrew?

Lanny: Yeah.

VL: Now today, what's your occupation?

Lanny: Still a carpenter foreman. Building houses now.
VL: How's the job market? Is that a full time job?

Lanny: Well, as far as we know, it is. Until something comes up.

VL: It's been pretty steady over the years?

Lanny: Well he just started his business so, I mean, I don't know if it's going to be permanent or, you know, how long it's going to last. But right now, you cannot be choosy, so you got to accept whatever comes, eh. So I cannot be waiting for the union to call me. Otherwise, I'd be starving.

VL: Does that require that you travel away from Kukuihaele a lot?

Lanny: Well, yeah, that depends on where the job is located, eh.

VL: You got to go?

Lanny: Yeah. Wherever the job is, I have to go. If Kona, Hilo, or wherever it is.

VL: Shirley, how about your job now? Can you describe what it is?

Shirley: I'm a paramedic aide for Honokaa Hospital. And it's sort of a nurse's aide job. Only thing, being a paramedic, you get to go out on ambulance calls, which nurse's aides are not permitted to do. And you get to do all sorts of things and get to see all unexpected things. But it's interesting.

VL: How did you get that job?

Shirley: Through a friend that worked in the state building. He knew that I had nurse's aide training. And we didn't see each other for quite a while. And he asked me why I was doing taro farming. So I told him that there wasn't any jobs available. So he mentioned it to somebody else that was in the Social Services. And they contacted me, and told me that I was hired before I was even interviewed. So, I was supposed to start earlier but I had a surgery done on gums. So I couldn't go at the time they scheduled me for. So I went about two weeks later, and started to work couple days later.

VL: How long have you had that, this job?

Shirley: Since December first of last year.[1977].

VL: Is it full time?

Shirley: Yeah, 40 hours a week.

VL: So now, you work your full time job, and you have your own taro patches?
Shirley: Yeah.
VL: How does that....
Shirley: Affect me?
VL: ...work out, yeah.
Shirley: I can't find the words to describe it. I know it's tiresome.
VL: How many patches are you farming, just yourself?
Shirley: Forgot.
VL: Did you tell me before?
Shirley: Yeah.
VL: Oh yeah. You said 5-1/2 acres open, two patches that you have planted but not harvested yet, three patches that you're going to plant, and seven patches that you hope to clear from cattail.
Shirley: Right.
(Laughter)
VL: That's quite a bit. When do you find the time to go down there?
Shirley: In between. From after work. Sometimes, till about quarter to seven [6:45] in the evening. And then Saturday and Sundays.
VL: Is this every weekend?
Shirley: Nearly every weekend.
VL: Why do you keep it up?
Shirley: Cost of living. And it keeps me busy. I mean, with four children, it's pretty hard. And I want to know that if something happens to me, at least they'll be set, financially. Where they won't have to be thrown from one aunty to the other aunty. At least there's some kind of fund.
VL: Are you getting any State help?
Shirley: A small amount.
VL: So, like taro would provide what percentage of your income?
Shirley: Wow. It depends on the harvest. But normally, like what I make at work, if I'm pulling, I would make out. What I pull
from the taro farm, out of one week, would take me a whole month at my regular job, to get a one week's pay check from the taro farm.

VL: So it's good money.

Shirley: Yeah. And with taro farming, there's no pressure. I mean, it's hard work, physical work. But then there's no one to tell you how to do it, or tell you when to do it. You're your own boss. And, you know, you can sit when you want to. Don't have to worry about listening to buzzers buzz. Or people calling you, or ambulance calls. And, to me, it's an easier life. It's a more relaxing life.

VL: Despite the hard work?

Shirley: Yeah. Like I said, physically, it is hard work.

Lanny: She get to sleep longer too.

Shirley: Yeah. And the time is convenient too. I mean, I can go down after my kids go to school and still be back before they get back to school. And if they were sick, I could just stay home and not go down if I were doing taro farming.

But if I'm at work on the regular job as a paramedic, I cannot just call in and say I'm not coming to work without a good reason. Because it's made very clear before you even accept the job, that it's a different kind of a job. Someone always has to be there. Because you cannot have a replacement just on a short notice. Unless, you know, you're really ill. I mean, even if you have a cold, you still can't stay home because you feel that the rest of the patients will have your germs. Because they provide you with a mask to keep the germs away. So you still have to show up to work.

VL: How do you feel about....would you ever go full time, completely into taro? And leave your other job?

Shirley: As a paramedic?

VL: Yeah.

Shirley: Yeah. I think I'd have to. Because to stay there longer, I have to have additional training, which I feel I'm a little too old to do now. I mean, it's a pretty hard thing to do, being that I have a handicapped son that needs a lot of attention. And between him and the book work, I don't think I could handle that. And there's other parts of the training which I don't think I could handle so.

VL: So are you planning, someday, to expand your acreage?
Shirley: Yeah, I want to do it eventually. Hopefully soon. But it takes a lot of hard work to do it. And if they can come up with some kind of solution to controlling cattails and rots, spoilages, flood control and all that; then I think I'd really like to go back into taro farming.

VL: Would there be any problems with you for getting more land?

Shirley: No, I don't think so. I mean, as far as the land, it's mostly lease land. And we hope it's not going to be sold eventually. Because we did put a lot of hard work on it. And to go full time, perhaps I'd have to. As time goes by things get more expensive, I'd have to have more land. But right now, I'm satisfied. Overly satisfied with the acreage that I have.

VL: What is your arrangement now, for your land?

Shirley: It's on a percentage, it's a crop share deal, 70/30.

VL: Lanny, what made you decide to go into the mud?

Lanny: Oh well, to tell you the truth, I just....her father told me if I wanted to open a patch. So, just to keep myself busy, I told him I'll do it. So that's how I started raising taro.

VL: Where did you learn from, how to raise it?

Lanny: Well, I go down and watch everybody, and you know. Plus, I figured that's some kind of income, if I don't have any job or something, so it helped out. Plus, it's relaxing to be out there. That way, I talk to the taro, I don't have to scold the men.

VL: Do you really talk to them? The taro.

Lanny: Huh? Yeah. Nah, just joking. You know, when you run construction job, you get so many people working under you, and your mind is always working. And you trying to get job for everybody. So during the week, just to get a peace of mind, that's why I go down Waipio Valley and just relax. Sort of relaxing down there.

VL: How do you feel about getting dirty and...

Lanny: I don't mind it a bit. That's why when you folks see me, I'm always dirty, eh. I mean, as far as my part, I don't have any prestige or, I don't know what they call that, but I feel I'm just as close to the dirt like anybody else. Just do it. Just have to do it, so.

VL: You wouldn't rather do something else with your weekends?
Lanny: Well, depend. If the weather is good then I go fishing like that. But other than that...if I stay home, I'll be doing job for somebody else. And it's all for love anyway. So I might as well go down there and do something for myself. In all my school years like that, I never did learn how to say "no," that's why. It's always "yes." It's kind of hard for me for do things for somebody. I cannot charge, I think, that's why. It's all for love.

VL: Are there any discouraging things for you?

Lanny: Like what?

VL: About the taro?

Lanny: No. I expect whatever comes up. I mean, if it's going to get rot, it's going to get rot. But you can't fight the problem. And just because the taro get rotten, that don't mean that I'm going to quit. Just keep trying. And try see, you know, what can be done about it. That's about all. I don't get discouraged. You can look at my patch, eh. I never get discouraged.

VL: You have one acre right now in that one big patch?

Lanny: Yeah. One acre plus another patch. I don't know, maybe quarter acre. Her father asked me to open it up because it's been so idle for so long that he wants to see it open. So I'm trying to get it open. The starting part.

VL: Would you like to someday expand even more?

Lanny: Well in my field, I guess I have to, sooner or later. Because construction is not going to be the same like before. It's going to get slower. Houses are coming up but as far as highrise, like that, it's going to slow down. So I guess it's good to have some other open, some other patches. So that way, you know you going to have some income. Otherwise, I'd have to worry where my next meal going to come from.

VL: Do you get advice from the old time farmers? On how to farm.

Shirley: Oh yeah. Lot of advice. Sometimes they can drive you crazy. Everybody has different advice. One tells you to close the water, lower the water. And somebody else tell you raise the water. So if you listen to everybody else, you can just sit down and cry. Because you don't really know who to listen to. I sort of listen to my father. Even if sometimes I think he's wrong. I guess it's the natural instinct that you feel closer to your dad, so I take his advice. Even if my taro gets small. But, he's set in his ways too. I figure, he's gone far in life, just on taro farm. So he must know things to
keep him going. So I sort of take his advice. I mean, I question him at times, which sort of irritates him, but you know, he's such a gentleman. He just answers.

VL: Are you using any different methods from those that he taught you?

Shirley: You mean my father?

VL: Yeah.

Shirley: No. I think I added on something, which he's never done before. That's what he tells me. I mean, Lanny and I sort of let grass grow bigger than the taro. Which he hasn't done before. So, he says we're not real farmers until we can pick up all the grass before it starts to overgrow the taro.

YY: Your dad also raises water chestnuts and lotus, hasu. Would you consider raising those crops if he should retire?

Shirley: I often think about that. On the lotus root, no, I don't think I would personally. If I had somebody who would help me, I probably would carry it on. But to do it on my own, no. For one fact, I'd drown. It's too deep to harvest. And I don't have educated toes like my father folks do. Because they sort of pull it out with their feet. Instead of feeling with their hands, they feel with their toes. I think it takes a lot of experience. I don't mean just one year experience, I mean years of experience to do that. Like he says, it's easy to just break it [the lotus root] in the water. But then the mud gets all in the holes....which the markets don't like. If you can do it without breaking it, then you're all right.

As far as water chestnuts, yeah, I'd like to do it. Only once I did it. Did harvesting of it. With the encouragement of Lanny, which I don't think I'd ever have gone into that patch, if he didn't encourage me to do it. And I found it fun. Like two little children playing with mud, coming up with marbles.

VL: Do you think you'll ever move away from Kukuihaele now?

Shirley: I hope not. I mean, I think I'm stable here. The kids enjoy it. I mean, for my part, if I didn't have children, perhaps I'd move. But this is a nice place to raise the children on. And I just couldn't take them and sort of expose them to something else new. Because it's harder for children to adjust than adults. Especially this time. I mean, kids are a little more brutal in saying things when other children are.... And they don't have to really worry. Because everybody is so friendly here. You know your neighbors and all that. It's not like the big city, where you don't really know your neighbor.
VL: Do they go down into the taro patch with you?

Shirley: To work? No, I don't push them to work. Not in the taro farm. They sort of play. They help when you ask them to do it. For a short while. But other than that, I don't think they really want to do it. And I don't really want to discourage them. I want them to sort of feel like it's a game. So they'll do more for me. Instead of, you know, pushing them.

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

Shirley: Like, it could be something great. If the younger people could keep up with it. But like I said before, there's a lot of discouragement. The taros are starting to rot. It's part of being a farmer, but I can't see that. Like my father says, that you have to expect some rot. But the rot is tremendous. Like some in the past, we've harvested, maybe the patch had to have about 150 bags. We'd end up with eight bags. And sometimes I really wanted to quit, at that point. But then I think about all the hard work. And then my father and the older people sort of encourage me, and say they cannot do nothing about it. It's nature's way. And they keep saying that someday you'll get your blessings in larger amounts. So if the younger people could be encouraged to do it, I think it'll keep on going.

VL: What could be done to encourage young people like yourselves to go down and farm?

Shirley: For one thing, giving them some land to do it. And most of the land are held by older people now. And, in time I guess, they'll give up. Slowly. And there's lots of land that's idle, that's owned by older people. But, I guess, they're so used to having it within the family line, they just don't want to see it go out to the next generation.

VL: So it's hard for young people to find land?

Shirley: Yeah, it really is. It's usually not the local people that starts off with the land. It's usually the outsiders that wants the land. The local people are usually too busy with outside curricula. But it's strangers that usually want the land, to start off. If we could get the local boys to do it, then perhaps they would.

VL: Do you think that young people, the local boys, are interested in farming as a business?

Shirley: I think they would be, if they could have a financial start to start them off. Like most of 'em that you talk to, you hear them say there's no start, no beginning. They cannot get the
financial help to start them off. So they usually go outside to look for a job. And they find it. It keeps them going so they just hang on to their job.

Lanny: Because most of the boys, if they want to do taro farming, they don't have a truck to go down. They have to depend on the parents. So I guess, maybe, kind of discourage them, eh. That's part of the reason, I guess. But most of the young kids over here now days, they have the opportunity to do it, but I don't know, they don't have the gumption to go down and try to open patches like that. Maybe they too young.

VL: Lanny, what do you think is the future of taro in the valley?

Lanny: Well, should be, could be better. But because of the rot now, the prices are going up. If it wasn't for the rot, then the prices would stay about, maybe might go up a little. But since they have so much rottage down there now, they don't have any taro so the price is going up. But eventually, if everybody started to get good taro, I guess the price is going down. Like anything else. Fishing, the same thing. If you don't have enough fish, then the price is higher. So, I guess, now the taro is about the same way now. Because the prices not going be up all the time. Someday, after everybody getting good taro, then the price is going down.

VL: Is there anything that you would not like to see happen to the valley?

Shirley: Oh yeah. I don't think I want to see the valley be changed completely. Like taro was there before everybody else. So it should stay there. I mean, I'm not saying this because I'm a farmer. But I feel, like they should give the older people some kind of remembrance. And I think the older people really look up to taro. Like mainland people look up to apples and oranges. And here in Hawaii you have oranges and apples, but they don't really look up to it as much as taro.

Like my grandfather used to say, it's a food that can carry you a long ways. Just taro alone. Because, then he says, you can eat everything from it. From the leaves to the stem. And then get fruit on the bottom.

Maybe if jobs get slower, then the younger people would go back to taro farming. Because even now, we have problems just to hire local people to do the pulling or the packing. Or weeding. It's usually the outsiders, the newcomers, that we hire to do it. The wages are small, but like I said, there's no one there to push you to do it. And you can sit when you want to.

VL: Would you rather hire local people to help you pull?
Shirley: I don't know. I've never had anybody local to pull. I mean, I've had an older Filipino man to do it. But he's worked before for my father, so we know exactly what to expect from him. There's no back talk. Because they say, sometimes, if you hire local people, they know a lot more than the outsiders so they tend to question you. As to why things are, like wages are so low.

Lanny: But if you hire anybody, you have to pay 'em the same wages, more or less what the other farmers are paying them. So you cannot pay more that what the other farmers are paying. Otherwise, they going to get mad, eh. So, kind of got to work it out with other farmers.

Plus, you know, hard to find somebody that you can depend on. Like, we work five days a week and the taro has to go out Saturday. Now, you expect the taro to be pulled. And when you get down there and nothing's pulled, so you have to do the pulling.

VL: That's happened to you?

Lanny: Oh yeah.

VL: You mean you hire someone and they didn't do it?

Shirley: Yeah. So we ended up pulling it and had to go real early in the morning, had to deliver the taro directly to the poi factory because we couldn't meet the schedule of the transportation. And that happened on Mother's Day. We were pulling taro, we took the taro about 6:30, I think, in the evening, to Hilo. Which is very far.

Usually, we hire people only to do the pulling. And sometimes the weeding, when we cannot catch up. Sometimes we act a little dumb. And we don't hire nobody to pull. And we end up we get lot of grass. But packing like that, we usually do it by ourselves, with the mules. So we do some things sometimes. Like with two mules, we end up with 20 bags of taro to pack.

Lanny: One mule and 40-something bags to pack.

Shirley: Yeah...44 bags in one weekend. With one mule, when somebody else takes the other mule hunting without we knowing. It happened quite often.

VL: So that means 22 trips, right?

Shirley: Uh huh. Yeah. And taro farming is funny. It's not when you have the time, you go. You have to make the time to do it. Today is sunshine and tomorrow is rain. So what you can do today, you have to do today.
VL: You've mentioned some of them, but what are the rewards for you in taro?

Shirley: It's the self-satisfaction. Because I know, like I say, when I see my father walking around, I know he sort of pictures things like when he was young. Because he talks about it a lot. And it's just seeing his face light up, I guess. He likes to see the taro keep going, and things growing.

And it's knowing that you're stable, financially. Or you can become financially stable. Maybe not in a year or two, but maybe in 5 or 10 years. It sort of keeps you going. And you know if you have some sort of emergencies. I mean, with four kids, you know that sometimes you will have emergencies that you don't expect. And you know at least you've got money to keep you going.

To me, the reward is more for my father. Just knowing that he knows we care. Like, he doesn't want us to pay him back in any way. Say he doesn't expect us. To me, I feel like that's the only way I could repay him. For bringing us up and....I mean, he could have just not bring us up, but he did. All the way. He sort of stands for authority so we look at him.

And without the other encouragement from the older people, from Lanny like that, sometimes I feel I would give up.

VL: Lanny, what are the rewards for you?

Lanny: You mean raising taro?

VL: Yeah.

Lanny: Well, you get to buy what you want.

VL: Is that how you bought your truck?

Lanny: Yeah. Well, that's one reason. Plus, if I didn't have a truck, then I would have to borrow Ted's or somebody's else truck. And I feel kind of bad. So I figure, you get your own, you don't have to ask anybody. And when you want to go down, you go down. You come home when you feel like. Not asking somebody at all. You want to borrow truck. And if they going to use it, well, you going to be stuck. So I like to do things that I don't have to ask anybody. If I want to do it, I just go and do it.

Shirley: I asked Lanny that question before. Why somebody with his educational background would do taro farming? I mean, for me, I started off because there wasn't any job around, you know, for ladies. And he told me it was sort of a....
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Shirley: His job deals with a lot of mental work, as far as hammering and sawing. So he sort of pushes the boys, I guess. You know, boss. So he told me that he felt relaxed. He enjoys it. To him, it's play. To me, it's very hard work.

VL: Now, you folks each have your own patches. And, you help one another too?

Shirley: Yeah.

Lanny: Yeah. Help each other.

Shirley: He helps me more because he can do more things than I can. He operates the tractor for me, which I cannot do. My sister does it sometimes. And I sort of help him a little. When he makes me angry...

Lanny: And she makes my lunch.

(Laughter)

Shirley: But poisoning like that, he helps too. I do some but I cannot go over the limit. I tried. I wouldn't want to do it again.

VL: Oh, who do you folks market to?

Shirley: It differs. We usually go with steady.... Our shippers would be Puueo Poi and Kona Poi Factory and Waipio Poi Factory once in a while. We sort of help him out when he doesn't have any taro. And my father's go to Honolulu Poi Factory.

VL: Now there's a difference. You don't market to the same place your father markets to.

Shirley: No, I don't. If I have to, then I would. But my father usually ships his. That's because the price difference. My father sends to Honolulu Poi because he's sort of obligated to them. They helped him out when they really didn't need the taro. They were over stocked with taro couple years back. And Honolulu Poi sort of took his taro, even if they didn't really need it. Whereby, the other poi shops couldn't take because they couldn't handle any taro. And they were small too. So if my father asked me, then I'd ship. But other than that, I usually send it to Puueo Poi because he's higher in price too. He's steady but he's also bigger in price.
Can I ask you a question?

VL: Sure.

Shirley: What made you folks get interested in Waipio Valley, and the farmers? I mean, there's lot of other farmers in different parts of the islands.

VL: Taro farming because, in Waipio, it's been going on for hundreds of years. And it seemed to be an important place. Not only because it's grown taro for hundreds of years, but because thousands of people lived there before. And taro as an industry, seems to be declining. And Waipio, as a community, seems to be declining. So all of these things made us interested in what it was before. And what is now, and what it might be in the future.

Shirley: I mean, after all these interviews, what do you think the future of Waipio will be?

VL: Would you like to become an interviewer?

(Laughter)

VL: Well, I know what I'd like to see. I'd like to see taro growing there. More than it is now even. And I'm encouraged by young people like you that are farming. Because people have told us that young people don't want to farm, because it's too dirty and it's too much work. But there's a lot of people around, like you folks, that are interested in keeping up taro farming. And partly because the money's good, and partly because their parents and grandparents did it. And they feel it's traditional for Waipio. I don't know which is stronger. Because there are lots of people like you, and there's also lots of people that aren't interested at all.

Shirley: Can I say something to the younger farmers? I mean, a lot of people say that it's a dirty job. Yeah, it's true. It's dirty in a sense. But when you think about it, I think wet land farming, like taro, it's much cleaner than dry land. Because dry land, the dust is always there. You always breathing in the dust. It gets into the lungs. On wet land, the dust is in the mud. You get dirty but then you can always wash it off. And dry land, you inhale it. You can't take it away. It's in there already.

It all depends. Like other jobs, it's still dirty. Construction jobs. Even hospital. There's more chances of you getting more disease working in the hospital than it is working down at the taro farm. I mean, you might have some kind of infection like that, at the taro farm. But in the hospital, you exposed
to all different sickness that you can carry home with you. I mean, you try not to, but then you wear shoes, you have to come home with it too. Your clothes is there. It's the same thing.

So if they're thinking about not farming because it's really dirty, because it's muddy, it's way cleaner than being a construction worker or even a dry land farm worker. So I think they shouldn't think about the dirt.

Lanny: But Waipio will never be the same like before. Because community-wise, the people around here, they don't work with each other. They all work by themselves. So I don't think it'll be the same like before.

VL: Is there anything that could be done to make people work together?

Lanny: I don't think so. Not here, anyway.

VL: Why?

Lanny: I don't know. They just seems to be, you know, they rather do it themselves. That's how they are, I guess.

Shirley: They sort of set in their ways already. Even you can tell if you're a newcomer too. Like, being away from home, for that nine years. And you come back, you still see the people the same way. The way they dress, the way they talk, the way they do things. And you can't change that. They say if you can adjust yourself, from an oldtimer to a newcomer, or from a newcomer to an old timer, you're way ahead of the game. But then, most people can't. It's sort of backwards. I hate to say it but, it is sort of backwards. People feel like if you dress better than them, especially in Kukuihaele, they feel like you're snooty. But you're trying to keep up with the fads, fashions like that. But they're set in their ways too. Like my father is too.

Like today, if a lady goes into a bar, it's something normal. They go to have relaxation, to drink, make conversation. But before, it was like taboo. Where you'd be degraded. Well, that's exactly how my father still feels. He's well educated but then his beliefs are still in the backward part. I mean, if he would see me or my sister walk into a bar, he'd probably have a heart attack. That's like he is.

Because, I don't know, it's really different. Maybe other people around here don't have that kind of thoughts about their kids. But there's a lot that do. Especially in the older bracket. And I think the younger people sort of respect the older people's ways. So they sort of carry through so they become backwards too. Just to respect.
VL: Have there been changes brought about in this backwardness, because of the young haoles moving in?

Shirley: Yeah, in a way. But then, there's sort of resentment, even, till now. Towards the younger haoles. Like, I don't know why, but they have this terrible idea that every haole boy or girl that comes from a different place are considered as hippies. Which, most people don't want to be considered that. And most of those people are well educated kids, but they just want to live off the land. Just trip around.

VL: How do you feel about the young haoles?

Shirley: I like them. Most of them are nice. They're respectable. And some of them, they work for me. And I get to know them and talk to them. And they don't make any trouble. I guess, like any other person, if somebody would make trouble with them, then perhaps they would make trouble. But other than that, they're nice people. I sort of respect them.

Lanny: Yeah, they mind their own business. It's the local people that's the one making the trouble. No, that's the truth. It's the local people.

Shirley: When you listen to them, if you really sit down with them, they're really nice kids. They know a lot more than we do, about Waipio Valley or even Kawaihae or things like that. They take the initiative to know about it. Which we, sort of...

Lanny: Take it for granted.

Shirley: ...take it for granted that you'll always be here so you'll always have these things around us. And it takes somebody from the outside to pinpoint to you about certain things. Like how lucky you are that you have these things. And to us, it's just like ordinary things.

Somebody once asked me why I don't resent people that they call hippies. I cannot. Because I always used to think about, what if was my younger brother in the service, in another part of the country. So I always used to think, if I do good for that person, maybe if my brother was someplace else, God would be nice and do good for him too. Because they're also human beings. You cannot label somebody because they don't work. I can see if they stole or to do things like that for a living. But they really don't. They sort of find their own way. They work their way. Every once in a while, they'll take a papaya from your yard. But when you look at it, you're not going to eat the papaya anyway. Usually, the birds get to it before you do. So if somebody else has it, then it's good.
VL: Some of the older folks resent it that the so-called hippies get food stamps and stuff like that, while they have to work hard for their living.

Shirley: Well, that's their fault. I mean, that's the older people's fault. The younger people has the knowledge of going to find out about those things, to go and get it. Which we local people don't take the initiative of doing it. Of finding out ways of how to get it. But they're smart. They're doing it for their benefit. They're just looking for a normal way of living. Getting a better way to get things. To me it's great. Because then they won't be stealing off of one another. Because if they didn't have such thing as food stamps, they probably do get to a point where if they didn't have money, they'd have to steal, or take from somebody else's yard. So I feel if they cannot get food stamps, then they'll take from somebody else. I'd rather see them take from the government than take from me. My own pocket directly. Yeah, but I still say it's the older people's fault that they don't go and see how they can attain that.

Lanny: Most of these local people, they got too much pride. So they feel kind of embarassed if they try to get help from the welfare or the government. So, I would say that the benefit is for the people that knows about it and try to get it for them. Because sometime, when you get sick, you cannot go to work. So you have to go.

Shirley: And a lot of times, too, is they don't realize, but. The welfare itself, the people that work there don't really set up the rules themselves. It's the community themselves. They make the laws, they elect the people that put the laws into effect. So if they don't want it, that way, they can write to Congress or something. Or show up to vote. But usually they don't. They just sit back and sort of grumble after it happens. Which is too late. When the welfare people are there just to follow out the laws. If they qualified, they just have to give them. They're not there really to make decisions as to whether they not supposed to because they're not here.

VL: Anything else?

Shirley: You didn't answer my question. What you thought the future was. After all these interviews with the different farmers. Would you say that it was going to be better? Or would you say that it's going to drop?

VL: I don't think that taro will ever not be grown. Because the less that is grown, the better money it'll be, and more people will go into it. Even if it is muddy, dirty work. So I think it will be there.
Lanny: But you know something, if the old timers start to fade away, and the young kids don't pick up the trail afterwards, then the outsiders going to start coming in and going to raise that taro, that local people won't do it. Either that or Waipio is going to go back to it's grass and all the trees growing again. Because if the parents do it and the kids don't follow up after them, somebody going to give up. Nobody going to continue.

Shirley: So if the old timers feel that the haoles, or whatever they consider hippies, would come in and take away their land, then they supposed to encourage their kids to follow up and go do it.

Lanny: Yeah. Because some of the hippies, they buy property down here. They always look at the newspaper, looking for property Waipio Valley. But the local people, the kids, they don't have the gumption to go down and raise taro. After the older generation goes by, then that's it. I guess that's about all.

VL: Yeah, I really can't answer your question. I don't know. I think one crucial thing might be land. And getting land. Because I think there will be people that will want to farm. Whether they're local or haole, there will be people that would want to farm taro. But, as you say, there's things. The land is tied up. And that will be a crucial factor.

Lanny: Yeah, right now it's mostly tied up because the local people have all the lease.

Shirley: But then, too, eventually I think, as you know, Bishop Estate is the biggest holder of land in Waipio Valley. And, I sort of confirm the rumor that they were planning to sell. So the lease part couldn't be in black and white anymore. Where you'd go by year to year. It was just on a month to month basis. And I think it would become a problem. Because most local people don't have that kind of money to buy land. Even if they really wanted to buy it. And then farm loans are even stricter now, so it's harder. As the price goes up, it's even harder.

Lanny: That's why, the people from Japan, they buying property down here. And so now, the people in Hawaii, they start to grumble. How come they sell? They have the backing, eh. So they sell the property to them. So that's why now they get all the tourist trade coming in from Japan. Because they know that they come down and they build hotels like that. They know it's going to be full because they sending them down here. That's one of the biggest spenders, people from Japan. So they buy lot of property. I guess, if the price is right, they going sell.

END OF INTERVIEW