Eugenio Bala, Ilocano, was born on February 16, 1908 in Banna, Ilocos Norte, Philippines. He was raised by an aunt in a farming community.

In 1928, he came to Hawaii to join his father, who was a laborer at Waialua Sugar Plantation on Oahu.

A year later, seeking better pay and working conditions, Eugenio came to Kona. His first job was picking coffee for a Japanese farmer. In 1930, he began working as a janitor at Bank of Hawaii. That same year, he began working for Ackerman Ranch, milking cows and pulling weeds. He remained there until 1975.

Since 1960, Eugenio has operated a pool hall in Kainaliu, Kona.
MK: This is an interview with Mr. Eugenio Bala at the Daranciang residence in Keopuka, Kona, Hawaii on December 20, 1980.

So, Mr. Bala, where were you born?

EB: Born Ilocos Norte, Philippine Island.

MK: And what year were you born?

EB: Nineteen eighty [1908], February 16.

MK: And what happened to your parents when you were born?

EB: My mother was pregnant. And when (pause) I come out from the stomach, she pass away about two weeks. And my father, he did not see me when I was born. He bin go to the Philippine. He stay Manila. And he stay there about 15 years. When I was 15 years [old], then he come back to my hometown.

MK: So, you never see your father till you were 15 years old?

EB: Yeah, I did not see my father ever since [i.e., until] I was 15 years old.

MK: And so, who took care of you, then?

EB: My auntie, my father's sister.

MK: How many children she take care of?

EB: They had three children.

MK: And what kind work your auntie was doing?

EB: Oh, she's babysit now. Because she get three children. And the husband is a farmer. Plant rice, corn, whatever.
MK: Was your uncle selling the corn, the other vegetables?

EB: No, he did not sell those because for home use.

MK: How was the family doing, then, in that village?

EB: Well, so far, [at that time] they okay. We can survive [on] whatever he's doing on the farm.

MK: When you were small, what school did you go?

EB: I went elementary school. I was nine years old when I went to school. And when I was fifth grade, then I quit school because I no can make a go. For live.

MK: So, you couldn't afford to go?

EB: Yeah, no can afford to go high school or whatever.

MK: So, how did you feel that you had to leave school?

EB: Well, I am unhappy because I like go school, but I no can go. I help because about our living. That's why I bin quit.

MK: So, you went school only little while, yeah?

EB: Oh, yeah, yeah. Only little while I wen go . . .

MK: And your uncle was farming, yeah?

EB: A farmer, yeah.

MK: What did you do to help your uncle that time?

EB: Well, sometime, I go help in the farm. Help him around.

MK: What kind of work did you do for your uncle?

EB: Well, plant corn, plant little bit vegetable.

MK: And when you not working with your uncle, what did you do?

EB: Well, we stay home, play around. Because I was kinda young yet, that time. Nothing to do.

MK: Those days, how you play around?

EB: Well, someplace, you (pause) running around loose.

(Laughter)

MK: Those days, you play sipa sipa ball?

MK: Those days, what did your family do with the neighbors?

EB: Oh, they just go around, talk story. They no can serve coffee because no more coffee. (Laughs) They no can serve coffee, or tea, or whatever. See? You no can tell them, oh, "Come eat lunch." You know what I mean? We no can do that. Because not like Hawaii now--invite your friends for come dinner, or lunch, or breakfast. Not in the Phili [Philippines]---maybe the big shot can do that, but not us. Yeah.

MK: And then, those days, holidays--how did you folks celebrate your holidays?

EB: Well, Christmas like that, we go cut the pine tree, put 'em inside your house, or whatever, or your parlor. That's how we make our celebration. But no more too much candies. (Laughs) Only maybe, piece of paper or hallelujah or whatever, see? That's all.

MK: What else you folks celebrate?

EB: Oh, New Year's, too. We make candy--the Philippine candy, like that. But no more this kind wrapping on, you know.

MK: How about any other times you folks get together and do something?

EB: Only when, for instance, my auntie get baptized. Or what you call. . . .

MD: Wedding?

EB: No.

MD: Baptismal.

EB: Yeah, yeah. And da kine [phrase not clear]. What you call that now?

MD: Birthday.

EB: Birthday, birthday. Yeah. You can make little bit, eh? Birthday, see? With the Philippine kaukau or whatever, you know. (Chuckles) Candy. Yeah. Baduya, whatever. Bibingka. (Laughs)

MK: So, those days, you went school little while; you helped your uncle sometimes; you play around; and when have holidays, you folks celebrate holidays, yeah? Or special times for people.

EB: Yeah, special. Only most da kine Christmas and New Year's, that's all.
MK: When you were small time, did anything unusual happen or anything that you remember real well about your childhood?

EB: When I was young? I can remember when I was young? Oh, yeah. When my father come home from the Philippine.

MD: Manila.

EB: Yeah, from Manila. I don't know what he told me to do. We get horse in the Philippines, so he told me to feed water the horse in the forest, country, anyhow. So, I bin go. And that horse was—he can reach, tied up, that horse. That horse can reach the canal. Okay? I don't understand. More later, understand. So, my father bin go, check up the horse. And happen that horse bin drink water. So, my father was so damn angry. He come home right away. And he whip, whip, whip me. Yeah.

Then, my auntie say, "What's the matter with you?"

"Ah, the kid stay lie."

And I say, "No, I no lie, Auntie, because the horse can reach the ditch. He can reach the ditch. No sense I go show him the ditch because the water is in there."

So, when the father---happen the old man bin go over there and give the water, and then the horse bin drink, I don't know. When he come home, he saw me, oh, he whip, whip, whip. We neighbors. Just like this house, eh? Far apart, see? That's how. That's all the story.

MK: Oh, that's what you remember most?

EB: Yeah. And, you know, those days, when harvesting the rice, you know small kids, eh? My father tell me, "We go cut rice." Magani, eh?

Say, "Okay."

MD: Harvest.

EB: Yeah, harvest the rice. I say, "Okay." In the afternoon, about 3 o'clock. So, I went with him. I harvest little bit. Then, I heard kids playing around there, someplace. (Chuckles) So, I run away from him. (Chuckles) Oh, that's the time he beat me up again. And that evening time, again. So, ready to go home, everybody go home, oh, he so damn wild. He take the—I don't know what he bin take—he beat me again. That's when my auntie bin worry like that. That's all. You know, small kids, when you hear something playing, you gotta sneak, run around, eh? That's how it happened. That's why, most of the time, even my father was come home in our town, most of the time I stay with my auntie.
MK: Oh, most of the time, you stay with your auntie . . .

EB: Yeah.

MK: ... and not with your father?

EB: No, no.

MK: Okay. And when you were small time, that time, what did you want to become when you become a man, adult?

EB: Well, I no can say that I was thinking to come a adult. Because, me, I was thinking about can go high school, but no 'nough money to go high school.

MK: So, you wanted to become a farmer . . .

EB: That's why I come to Hawaii to become a farmer.

MK: ... or you wanted to become a businessman?

EB: Well, businessman, hard. Because when you start businessman, you gotta get plenty money; you gotta get good education. See? You no can go businessman if you no more education. No 'nough money.

MK: So, why did you come to Hawaii, then?

EB: That's what I say. Very hard living in the Philippine. And more worse when my father come to Hawaii, too, you see? He come to Hawaii, nineteen . . . I forget already. They was in Waialua, too. I met him in Waialua. My brother bin come Hawaii, too. My oldest brother, older to us, come Hawaii. So, I did not see my brother. My brother, he was high school in the Philippine, but he was very poor. He was a graduate in the Philippine. So, he follow my father. So, my brother was working in the Waialua Plantation. Stay there about couple of months, I think. That's what my father told me. Then, he said he going continue his school in the Mainland. But too bad, he did not. He got shot down. He make in the Mainland. And my father, after that, he bin go home [to Philippines]. He leave me behind. He told me to go home. I say, "No, you go first."

MK: So, when you came to Hawaii, your father was already in Hawaii?

EB: When I come to Hawaii, yeah. That's why, I bin follow him, take the address. I follow his address, see? In other words, when I come Hawaii, I did not see the immigration [EB may be referring to the plantation recruiter] in Manila; I did not see the immigration [plantation labor recruiter] in Hawaii. Outside.

MK: So, you just follow your father to Hawaii?

EB: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, the address.
MK: Did you have work already in Hawaii?

EB: Yeah, I was working in--when I reach Hawaii--Waialua. Yeah, yeah. I work right away in the plantation. Because my father and the boss, Mr. Sinclair, he was a good friend with him, so. The boss in the plantation, he recommend me to the office in Kawaiola so I can work in that plantation. Then, the big boss in Waialua, he say okay. So, I bin work couple of months.

MK: So, you came Waialua 1928, yeah? Before you come to Waialua, what did your father tell you about Waialua?

EB: Oh, my father, he say, "Waialua is good." But no, no. My father, he was sick in the hospital. He was sick, then he wen go to the hospital. And stay there about--oh, too many--I don't know how many months he stay. And then, the company bin send him to the Philippine. See? Because about his sickness. So, they send him to the Philippine.

MK: When did the company send him back to the Philippines?

EB: What year, you mean? That was 1934, I think. Yeah, I was in Kona already when they send him to the Philippine.

MK: So, when you went Waialua, your father already Waialua?

EB: Yeah, but he was in the hospital when I left. When I left Waialua.

MK: You were already Kona, yeah? He was in the hospital, and then he went back Philippines, yeah? But before you . . .

EB: Then, he told me, "We better go home." No, he write to me. He said, "Better you and I go home."

"No, you go. I follow you bumbai. When I'm ready to go home, I go home."

MK: So, your father stayed Waialua up till 1934?

EB: Yeah.

MK: Okay. And when you were Waialua, you stayed there 1928, up till 1929, yeah?

EB: Yeah.

MK: In Waialua, what camp you stay?

EB: Camp 2. In the mill.

MK: What did the camp look like back in 1928?
EB: Oh, those house was older than this house. But when I went back over there, all disappear the house already. The new commissioner from the Philippine broke all the old house.

MK: What kind people were working in Camp 2?

EB: Oh, most Filipinos or Japanese.

MK: How many Filipino, how many Japanese?

EB: Oh, you no can count.

MK: Cannot?

EB: Cannot. All camp.

MK: Where did most of the Filipinos come from? Visayan, or Ilocanos, or . . .

EB: Well, I no can tell you that. Because I heard the story, I think, most Ilocano come in, than Visaya, I think.

MK: What kind work you did in Waialua?

EB: Me? From the beginning, I was cleaning around the camp. Cut the grass with the hoe.

MK: Oh, you only clean around the camp?

EB: Yeah.

MK: You never go out in the field kind? Sugarcane kind?

EB: Yeah, yeah, yeah, I went. I went, yeah, I went. So, I went to the field, hanawai. They said "hanawai"--water the sugarcane. Okay. But bumbai, I water the plant, but the field boss--the Japanese--he show me any kind, talk any kind, I don't know how, eh? He don't know how to talk English, too, just like me. Only kapakahi. And I don't know kapakahi English, too, before. He said, "God damn you."

I told him, "What's the matter with you? You scold me for nothing. I don't know what you talking."

It happen the boss bin come over. He wen pass. So, he stop. I was arguing with the Japanese. I know you Japanese, eh? (Laughs)

MK: Uh huh, yeah.

EB: So, I no can understand him. He say, "What's the matter?" I don't know what's the matter, eh? We was arguing. So, it happen that Sinclair bin pass. And he stop. He say, "Oh, you no huhu this
man. This new man, only today, start." So, he took me to the
camp, clean around the house, the yard. I stayed there about two
months, I think. And after that, the same boss in Kawaiola, he
recommend me again in Waialua, now, to work in the warehouse. So,
I bin go down in Waialua--not in Kawaiola, though; Kawaiola is
ma uka. So, I bin go down Waialua. That's just like city over
there. And then, I work to the warehouse. That's where I stay,
because the Sinclair in that Kawaiola, he recommend me over there.
And good things, he got back, and so I bin go to work in the ware­
house.

Any kind from Honolulu, the freight or whatever--lumber, or lime,
or nail, or what--that's what we unload from the train. The train
come in before, not the car. They deliver the things before. The
one they needs in the plantation. You go unload those things.

MK: So, you worked field just little while, then you clean around the
camp, and then later on, you worked warehouse?

EB: Yeah, to warehouse, yeah.

MK: And those days, from what time to what time you work?

EB: Oh, we work about 6 o'clock [a.m.] to 4 o'clock [p.m.]. And only
one dollar a day. Yeah, no bullshit.

MK: How did that pay compare with the kind of money you could have
gotten in the Philippines that time?

EB: Well, it's better for me over here. Because at least you can see
silver money or paper money. In the Philippine, you no can see.
That's why, us, in the Philippine, I no brag. If you get good
teeth, you no eat candy. The candy make your teeth spoil when you
were young. See? Try look. That's why, we no can afford. Maybe
you get candy, but I don't know what is candy. In other words,
sometime. Only da kine, you know, what you call that. That's why,
I come Hawaii. Maybe Hawaii better because I can see the silver
dollar, the silver money, and I get good time over here. You can
go show if you get money. You can kaukau very good if you work.

MK: So, when you look at the work, though--da kine work you did in the
plantation and da kine work you did in the Philippines--what did
you think about the work?

EB: Hundred percent, over here [was better].

MK: Why?

EB: I told you. So long you work, you can see the silver money; you
can see the paper money. And you get money in your pocket when you
go out. You can buy something what you like if you get money in
your pocket. When I was in the Philippine, I don't know what's the
looks of a paper money. Maybe I look, but I don't know, see? Maybe over there, oh, the one cent is big one, eh, at our place.

MD: Centavo.

EB: Yeah, centavo.

MK: And then, you said that you get money by working in the plantation; you can have good time.

EB: Yeah, only Hawaii. You can go show.

MK: What did you do when you not working? Pau hana time?

EB: Oh, yeah. Now I tell you the story. You know, when Saturday night, get the dancing. (Laughs) Yeah, you buy the ticket--ten cents, one ticket. One dance. That's what I'm telling you. When weekend, no more work Saturday, Sunday, that's what they wen see, you see. Out in Haleiwa. That's a city. That's just a town, that, before. That's where the dancing is (laughs). See? Then, I have car, too, before.

MK: You had car?

EB: Yeah. I bought one car.

MK: How did you get the car?

EB: My father bin give me little bit money. That's why, it happen I get the car. Chevrolet 1929 or '28. (Chuckles) Yeah.

MK: So, you had car. You went to Haleiwa and you went dancing?

EB: Yeah. That's how my story is when first I come Hawaii. When I stay begin of Hawaii.

MK: So, you stay Waialua 'till 1929, yeah? Why did you leave Waialua?

EB: Well, because of one of my 1010 friend. (Laughs)

MK: What happened? You tell us the story.

EB: "Bala."

"What?"

"Mo' betta we go Kona."

"What you going do Kona? Oh, you mean to say, you going go away from plantation?"

"Yeah, Kona good."
"What's good in Kona?"

"Go pick coffee."

"Oh, yeah? But hard. I don't know how to pick coffee."

"Oh, easy."

So, we come. That was June, I think, was. No more ripe, the coffee, yet. It's still green, yet. Then, we come. We ride the Humuula. I don't know if you remember the Humuula. No more Humuula. The steamer, the Humuula. The old one. The old Humuula. From Honolulu to Kona. Yeah. [To] Kailua. So, boy, that time. Funny thing is, when I come from the Philippine, come to Honolulu, I no feel dizzy. But from Honolulu to Kona, oh, just like the house spinning around. Two days, boy. Yeah, funny thing. Hoo, the house just like the propeller of the airplane. (Laughs) Yeah, when I see 'em, look. Oh, I close my eye when I lay down.

MK: So, you come Kona on the Amauulu? (MK mishears Humuula in previous response.)

EB: Humuula, yeah. Then, we come up. They get that moemoe house in Honalo. Moemoe house--two-story house. Anybody can go there, rent, [if] you get money. So, we went over there. We sleep over there one night, okay? Then, I went with my friend again. We go the other side for go find job. No more job. We go fishing. We caught some [fish], enough for eat. But no more ice, huh? (Laughs) Yeah, okay. And after that, coffee season already again. So, I pick about two weeks, I think. "Ah, this one, hard living."

MK: How did you get this coffee job?

EB: Oh, before, Japanese, they own the farms, eh? So, they like pickers. Before, you [coffee farmer] stop the man--because plenty Filipino, before--you stop them to come your place and harvest your coffee. But not today, see? No more the Filipino [who] can handle the coffee. So, I went. "The hell with this job."

MK: Oh, oh, before we change to the other job story, I want to ask you more about the coffee-picking job, yeah? Who wen hire you? You remember?

EB: Oh, make already. Okihiro.

MK: What part Kona, his farm?

EB: You know where the Seventh-Day Adventists? Way down, to the end. To the end of the coffee land.

MD: Kainaliu?
EB: Yeah, Kainaliu.

MK: And then, that time had plenty Filipinos, yeah?

EB: Oh, plenty. Yeah.

MK: And the farmers looking for pickers, yeah? So, hard to get the job?

EB: Not hard. Because if coffee season, not hard. Because that's what I say. Before plenty Filipinos and all these Japanese, all the farmers. They like men to pick the coffee.

MK: So, had enough job to go around?

EB: Oh, yeah. To go around, yeah. Not today, though. No more pickers. The Filipino, no more.

MK: And that time, from what time in the morning to what time you pick coffee?

EB: Oh, well, up to you. Because this not contract, eh?

MK: Oh, so how you do, then?

EB: Anytime what you like, what time you go [and leave]. Six o'clock [a.m.] to 7 o'clock [p.m. you can work]. Up to you.

MK: Up to you?

EB: Yeah. Because this not contract. You can fill up one bag, two bag. If you like go home, you can go home. The owner of the coffee [no] say, "You no can go home." Up to you. Not like the plantation, eh? After that, I think, "About this coffee, no good." [EB considered coffee picking to be a hard life.] No can do. I was thinking to go back Honolulu.

So, one morning, I didn't come up. I walk, walk, walk, walk, myself. By the Bank of Hawaii, you get post office, before, over there. Bank of Hawaii, now. Now, new one [Bank of Hawaii] over there [where post office used to be located.] So, about 8:30 [a.m.], I think. I was sitting on the railing [of] the post office. And it happen that haole wen come in. I was sitting when he said, "Good morning."

"Good morning, sir."

He say good morning, and he go get his mail, eh? As soon as he pick up all his mail, come back again. He say, "Boy!" Boy--only 18 years old or whatever (laughs).

"Yes, sir."
"You like job?" That's broken English, already, that. "Hey?"

"Oh, yes, boss. I like."

"Where you stay?"

"They said Honalo, over there someplace."

"Oh, if you like job, you come tomorrow. My house is behind this building."

"Oh, yeah, yeah. I come tomorrow." So, that's the time I start the job.

MK: What was this job?


MK: What was his name?

EB: Walter Ackerman. And he make already. Walter Ackerman, his name.

MK: Yeah, I heard about him.

EB: He was real close to this kinda post office, eh? Behind is his house and beside is the Bank of Hawaii. Small Hawaii [Bank of Hawaii] building. That's how I get the job.

MK: Same place like now?

EB: Yeah, yeah, same. But new one, this one. And this side, post office--small post office, before. And this side is Bank of Hawaii. So, they bin broke all those things.

MK: So, Bank of Hawaii stay on one side of the street?

EB: Yeah, by the side. And the post office was this side.

MK: Across the street?

EB: No, not across. Just... .

MK: Same side? Next door?

EB: Same side. Next door, yeah. And the house [of the] boss, that's behind the bank. And they get one cottage, so that's where I stay.

MK: You stay in cottage, then, when you get the job?

EB: And I ate with them. I go wash dishes. I clean the yard, I go wash dishes.
MK: What else do you do, that job?

EB: When they get visitors, I go waiter. I go serve the people. One time, the actors—Claudette Colbert, I think—they come spend the night over there, and I served them. Yeah, no shit.

MK: So, you work in their house and you work in the bank, too?

EB: Yeah, janitor. Not in the office, though. Yeah, janitor. Once, before, I work inside the bank, clean around. The best thing, they tell me go clean the safe. So, I go. They watch me, they watch me. But from that on, they trust me. They no watch me when I go clean inside there. In the safe, where the money is.

MK: Since you work inside the house and you work inside the bank, from what time to what time you work, then?

EB: In the bank? Well, not every day, though. Because maybe two times a week only. Yeah, two times a week. Then, I go to the pasture.

MK: So, you work Ackerman Ranch, too, then?

EB: Yeah, yeah. That's his ranch. I work in the pasture, and I work milk cow, too, in the morning. After that, if no more job in the bank, I go pull weeds down the pasture. You see? It's a hard living, before.

MK: Oh, so you did all kinds work...

EB: The dirty works.

MK: ... for Ackerman, yeah?

EB: Yeah. But when the war [World War II] started, you get the machine now. The milking machine. So, my boss told me, "Mo' betta you stay there, work in the dairy." So, I work in the dairy, [at] 2 o'clock in the morning, [and at] 2 o'clock in the afternoon, twice a day. And I milk—forget how many gallons a day now. Maybe about 300 gallons, 400 a day. That's how the story is.

MK: Those days, when you work for Ackerman, how was the pay?

EB: Of course, I told you, that's what I say. I ate with them, not too much. Because I stay in the house, I eat over there. Maybe $30 only.

MK: So, you get $30 one month for pay?

EB: Yeah, yeah.

MK: And sometimes you eat with them?
EB: Not only "sometimes," I eat every time.

MD: Three times.

EB: Yeah, three times a day.

MK: Three times a day. And the housing . . .

EB: But no more $30. Maybe $28, $27.

MK: And the housing, you pay or . . .


MK: When you work for Ackerman, you have somebody watch you work? When you janitor, when you work pasture, when you work dairy?

EB: No, no, no, no. Nobody watch me. So long my boss, he say, "Go do this," I go do it. Not da kine people, they watch your ass every time, no. When my boss wen go Honolulu, I take care everything. Only myself in the house and only myself in the ranch. He told me, "I will go Honolulu with my wife. So, you take care everything." See? That's how it goes.

MK: So, no more other workers?


MK: So, no more other permanent workers?

EB: Before?

MK: Yeah.

EB: Only after the war [World War II], now. Because the old man wen make, the boy take over. So, they get Joe and---two Filipinos. Three with us working, before, now. But I only control the dairy---I only work in the dairy. The rest, the two guys, they pull weeds outside in the ranch.

MK: So, you do mostly dairy side?

EB: Yeah. Since that time the war pau.

MK: Those days, how many days you have off, one week?

EB: Two days.
MK: What you do, those days?


MK: When you retire from Bank of Hawaii job?

EB: They no give me nothing. No more.

MK: What year you quit Bank of Hawaii job?

EB: When was. . . . Forty-five, I think.

MD: You work for 45 years, you said.

EB: Yeah, yeah. Oh, yeah, 45 years.

MK: Oh. So, you worked . . .

EB: Yeah, yeah. I worked for Ackerman for 45 years, including the bank.

MK: Oh, so you worked up till 1975, then?

(Visitors arrive. Taping stops.)

END OF INTERVIEW
A SOCIAL HISTORY OF KONA

Volume I

ETHNIC STUDIES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Ethnic Studies Program
University of Hawaii, Manoa

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