Richard I.C. Caldito was born in 1913 in Bacarra, Ilocos Norte, Philippines. At the age of ten, he immigrated to Hawai'i with his father, mother and one of his sisters. They settled on Maui and he attended Spreckelsville School, Waihe'e School, Wailuku Junior High School, and Lahainaluna High School. He received his diploma in 1955 from Baldwin High School.

When he was nineteen, he lived with the Koichi Yamanaka family and worked in their store for the following eight years. He was a truck driver for Waihe'e Dairy, and a field and cannery worker for Wailuku Sugar Company. In 1949, he became manager of Hawaiian Life Insurance Company.

In 1956, he was elected to the Maui County Board of Supervisors as a Democrat. He served for fifteen years.
Tape No. 17-76-1-91

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Richard Caldito, Sr. (RC)

January 29, 1991

Wailuku, Maui

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN) and Daniel W. Tuttle, Jr. (DT)

Joy Chong: This is an interview with Richard Caldito. It took place on January 29, 1991. The interviewers were Warren Nishimoto and Dan Tuttle. It took place at the Hawaiian Life Insurance [Co.] office in Wailuku, Maui.

WN: This is tape number one with Mr. Richard Caldito and we are at his office in Wailuku, Maui. This is a videotaped life history and it is going to be transcribed and whereupon you’ll be given the opportunity to edit the transcript, and only after you’ve seen it and approved it, will it be made available for public use. The videotape will be held in the video archive and the only parts that can be used by the public will be the parts that have been approved previously by you. Do you find these conditions agreeable to you?

RC: Yes, it is very agreeable to me, Warren.

WN: Okay, Mr. Caldito, why don’t we begin. Can you tell us first of all, where you were born and when you were born?

RC: I was born on February 1, 1913, Bacarra, Ilocos Norte [Philippines]. And my father’s name was Crispin and my mother’s name was Monica [Cadelina]. Then at the age of ten, we came to Hawai‘i as an immigrant. They chose me to come with them because I was the second oldest and I was the only son that probably can travel with them at that time. I had another sister that came. Then we were placed on a boat called, President Lincoln. You know, children, they do not get seasick, you know. So, we run around the deck and run every day here and there, play. But the saddest part was that we saw a lot of people being thrown overboard. You know, they die out in the sea, yeah. And that was sad for me, you know. So, I never did forget that.

So, when we landed in Maui, we went to HC&S [Hawaiian Commercial & Sugar Company], that’s Pu‘unēnē. My dad was placed at Sprecklesville, Camp One. Then, I went to school at Sprecklesville. Then, six months after, a sister was born. So, there were five of us—three children, mother and father. And I can well remember that when my father worked twenty-three days [a month], he had $2.30 bonus. So, $25.20.

WN: So he got a dollar a day.
RC: A dollar a day, yeah. So, $25.30. But if you work twenty-two days [or less], you don't have that ten cents a day bonus. So, you have to work twenty-three days before you can get that. Then, probably, they experienced that we cannot make a living with five in a family—a dollar a day. So, my mother, a brother, and a sister, went back home after eight months, you know—was here eight months. Then, when they went to the pier—those dead from the President Lincoln, came into being again, you know. I remember those things. But, Warren and Dan, I tell you though—every day, every night, I prayed. I prayed to the good God. I'll never forget that.

DT: Had you left sisters or brothers back in the Philippines when you came over . . .

RC: Yes, I had brothers and sisters, too—I had two brothers and two sisters.

DT: Who were left in the Philippines?

RC: Yes.

DT: And, then your mother and brother and sister went back to join them . . .

RC: To join them because we cannot make a go.

DT: They did make their successful trip back?

RC: Yes, yes.

DT: But it was terribly hard to see them go, I know.

RC: Mm hmm, oh, yes.

DT: Particularly since you had all of that . . .

RC: Those experience.

DT: . . . experiences on the ship, yeah. Was that because of some sort of sickness . . .

RC: Seasickness.

DT: Just seasickness?

RC: Yes.

DT: Were they older people that were . . .

RC: Oh, the older people because young boys and girls, they run around the deck. They don't have seasick, you know. And, I experienced that because I was ten years old.

DT: There must have been some other disease . . .

RC: Probably, and . . .
DT: You probably had no doctor, did you?

RC: Of course, those days the ship was not like today. Not clean, like today. You can smell oil and a lot of things that—unhealthy. I think that what causes the death. Because lot of death in that ship when we came over, you know. It probably took about twenty-two days.

DT: Long trip?

RC: Long trip.

DT: Your father had been hired before he came, had he?

RC: What's that?

DT: Your father had been hired in the Philippines to come to Hawai'i?

RC: They know where to go. They knew where to take them. That's why we were sent to, HC&S Company. Pu'unene, yeah?

WN: When you went to the Philippines, how long did you stay? [RC did not accompany his mother, brother and sister back to the Philippines in 1924.]


WN: Oh, I see, you didn't go back [in 1924]?

RC: No, I went back in 1938 to visit my family and I stayed about three weeks. You know, one experience I had with President Lincoln—and this was a Canadian boat, you know. Japan, named Maru, I think, something like that. White boat, you know, four White boats that they owned was Empress of Japan, Empress of Canada, and there were two more other boat. Oh, they were clean, very clean. So, I did not see death at that time.

DT: That was quite a few---how many years were you away from seeing your mother then?

RC: From '24 to '38. That was only about fourteen years.

DT: That's a long time though, for . . .

RC: Yeah, quite some time.

DT: . . . for a fairly young boy . . .

RC: Especially when you young boy, yeah.

WN: You lived in Sprecklesville, Camp One?

RC: Yes, then, in 1924, the big [Filipino] strike came along. So, my father choosed to go and strike with the rest of the laborers. And I was in Camp One [Sprecklesville] School at that time. I was fourth grade. Then, I seen one truck stop by the school. Then, I seen one
policeman, you know those days they used to wear leggings, you know. They came up to the school and they said, "Caldito." And I raised my hand. He came and grab me and took me to the truck, you know. Oh, I cried because I didn't know what was happening. But when I seen my father there, I knew that he joined the strikers. They took us to Peahi, where lot of guava trees—pineapple. And, we slept under the guava trees, you know, for two weeks. Then after that they came and they took us to Wailuku.

DT: These were people who were striking?
RC: Yes.

DT: Not the managers?
RC: Ah, no, people that were striking, was placed . . .

DT: Striking, you had to get out, get away from the plantation?
RC: Right, right, right. But those days, as I recall, there was labor commissioners from the Philippines. And that name was Cayetano Ligot. And, the strike leader at that time was Pablo Manlapit, I think was that. So, we went to Waihe'e, after my dad felt that we couldn't win. We presented ourself with Wailuku Sugar [Company] and they ship us to Waihe'e, which is about four miles from that. Then, from there I went to school at Waihe'e School and I graduated there. Then I went to Wailuku Junior High School, which I graduated then. Then I went to Lahainaluna [High School] for two years [1930-31].

But, then my father said, "Shee, I gotta go home to the Philippines."

So, I tell him "All right, Dad, you go and I'll stay back."

So, I did not graduate. I finished up high school at Baldwin High adult education.

WN: When was this?

DT: Much later. It was very much later going back to . . .
RC: Yes, much later, that's right.

DT: But let's stick here with the '30, '31. You had two years at Lahainaluna. It must have been a nice break—it must have been a good life for you?
RC: Oh, yes, that's a boarding school, you know.

DT: Right. Even though you were away from the rest of your family, it was probably pretty pleasant, right?
RC: Mm hmm [yes].
DT: But then, you didn’t go back to the Philippines with your father, did you?
RC: No, no, no.
DT: You stayed here.
RC: I stayed back so that someone can earn money to send back.
DT: So, you grew up in a hurry?
RC: Yeah, that’s right.
DT: Very fast.
RC: (Chuckles) Very fast is right.
WN: Backing up a little bit, you know, in the 1924 strike, I know that your father folks lost that . . .
RC: Yes.
WN: They were actually kicked out of their plantation home, is that what happened? Is that why they had to go to Peahi?
RC: Yes, yes, yes. If you joined the strikers, they take you out from your home and then they ship you out to the pineapple field—under the guava trees, you know. If you will take notice, when I ran for politics, I went under that name, Richard Pablo Caldito. That Pablo was Pablo Manlapit. [Manlapit was the leader of a failed labor strike by Filipinos in 1924.]
WN: Did you ever meet him?
RC: No, I did not meet that man.
WN: Did you meet Mr. Ligot?
RC: Yes, I met Mr. Ligot. He was the [labor] commissioner [sent by the Resident General in Manila in the 1920s]. You know, those days, 3,000 Filipinos go to strike, they bring in 4,000 [new laborers]—so how can you win? Hard, yeah?
DT: Well, that was very—talk about pioneering. That was very pioneering because you didn’t have very many legal labor unions anywhere in the United States.
RC: That’s right.
DT: Certainly, you had no rights as strikers, well in advance of the Labor Act, right?
RC: Mm hmm [yes]. Well that’s what it is in my life, as far as schooling is concerned. Although, I took correspondence course at the LaSalle University.
DT: Oh really?

RC: Yeah, a lot of Filipinos took from LaSalle. Some took law, but I took real estate. That’s the only education I have above high school, Warren.

WN: So 1931 was when you left Lahainaluna boarding school . . .

RC: Yes, yes.

WN: Then what happened after that?

RC: Then, I went to work as a store clerk with a store named Yamanaka—Koichi Yamanaka—at Waihe’e. And, I lived with them because they felt sorry for me, probably then, and said, “Hey, you live with us, and you work with us.” So, I lived with them for about eight years. And funny thing, you know, for eight years Mrs. Yamanaka took me as one of the children. But, later on, I paid her back though. When I was—you know, I had [sixtieth] birthday, I think was it—way back in ’73. I honored her as my Japanese mother, and my goodness she was so happy, you know.

DT: Because you must have been [nineteen] when you went to live with them [in 1932]?

RC: That’s right.

DT: So you stayed for eight, nine years . . .

RC: Yes.

DT: So you were really, really grown up by that time.

WN: How different was living in a Japanese household, compared to what you’re used to?

RC: Well, I’ll tell you, I lived with lot of single Filipinos. My goodness, they go to work, come home, got their chicken, you know. Not much time to do anything. Even—my goodness, I see the wash towel, brown, you know, they don’t even wash until come brown. I experience all those things, but very good experience. It taught me how to live more better environment than how single Filipinos used to live. So, I done lots of those things, at that time.

Now, let’s go back to the forties when the war came about. I was working at Waihe’e Dairy, where Mr. Ansai was the manager, you know—Toshi [Toshio] Ansai. Then, I see Mr. Ansai run for politics [beginning in 1934], and he got in. And every time he run again, he being reelected, but outright. He don’t have to run in the general, you know because he got more votes than required probably—those days, you know, Dan.

DT: He was a very nice gentlemen, wasn’t he, even now?

RC: Who?

DT: Toshi Ansai.
RC: Oh, yes! Very nice man, he went to war too, you know.

DT: He went to volunteer.

RC: Yeah, he volunteered with the 442nd [Regimental Combat Team].

DT: How much were you paid as a store clerk, do you remember?

RC: Oh, store clerk, well I ate with them and I lived with them [Yamanaka family], so about thirty-five dollars a month—oh, big money, big money. But, I also worked, ten–twelve hours, Dan.

DT: So you can save a little bit?

RC: Oh, yes. Big money, thirty-five dollars with free room and board. But as I say, I work every day, ten–twelve hours because the store will close about nine o'clock.

DT: And dairy more better, probably?

RC: Mm hmm [yes], that's right. So, I did not go to join the army because we were needed at home because it was, I think, essential to the community—dairy product. So, they didn't force us to join the army.

Now, in 1948, a friend of mine asked me if I want to be an insurance agent. So, I told him, "Well, how do you feel? You think I can do it?"

He said, "Yes, with all the people that you know—you're friendly and, I think you can make a go." So, I became an agent, I took the examination then and I pass it, you know. But, those days, it was really hard for us, you know. You have to study, day and night, but only for about two weeks. Then you take the examination, you pass, then you can go and sell insurance. Oh, I made good money from that time on.

DT: Now had you taken the correspondence course before that?

RC: Yes, I took the real estate.

DT: Real estate—you took a course in real estate before you took the exam?


DT: Nineteen forty-nine, and that's when it became your lifelong career, didn't it?

RC: Yes.

DT: Well let's get into that after we change tapes. Twenty minutes are up.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)
The following is a continuation of the Richard Caldito interview. This is videotape number two.

Okay, this is tape number two with Richard Caldito. Okay, Mr. Caldito, backing up just a little bit, can you tell us about your experiences at Waihe'e Dairy and what you did?

Yes, while at Waihe'e Dairy, I was a truck driver, delivering milk and meat for Waihe'e Dairy. Waihe'e Dairy is under the Wailuku Sugar Company. Now, I did that for good number of years, though, before coming into the insurance business. However, prior to that, I was with Yamanaka—I used to work there for about eight years. Then, I was offered a job at Wailuku Sugar with Toshi Ansai at Waihe'e Dairy, which gave me about fifty-two dollars a month. But, remember, I was also living with Yamanaka, so I did not lose the room and board. The only thing that I have gained was about seventeen dollars more. So, since the children of Yamanaka was coming up and they able to work at the store, I was free to go out and get this job from Waihe'e Dairy. And that was good for me because you earn more—the more money that you can send home. That's what happened.

You must have been saving up money? Maybe to get married, or something, or not? Later?

Oh well, I got married later.

After you became an insurance agent.

No, prior to that though.

You married . . .

I got married with Dorothy Lovell from Kaua'i. We have four children—three girls and one son. The oldest daughter [Ivy] is a teacher with master’s degree in Washington D.C. My son, [Richard, Jr.] he ran for office too, you know (chuckles)—1976 and he got elected in the [state] house of representatives. But, being a playboy, my god, he did not last as a politician, Dan.

No?

No. Then I have . . .

When did you get married? What year was this?

This was during the war years.

During war, '41 or '42?

About '42, I think that was—December [December 20, 1941].

You better remember, you know. You have to remember your anniversary.

(Laughter)
RC: Yes, mm hmm. Then, my third daughter [Charlene] is with the County of Maui, tax department. The youngest daughter, [Iola] she owns a Polynesian dance studio, where she teach about a hundred students a day. She's making good. She's a good hula dancer. She had a contract with Sheraton [Maui] for five years, but Lahaina being too far, so she had another contract with [Maui Inter-]Continental [Resort], you know. So, keep us moving all the time. “You want to see us perform?” Okay, we all go to Intercon or Sheraton, which, you know, make the family close together and also make the father and mother younger (laughs). Look younger.

DT: Some grandchildren by now, too?

RC: Yes, I have eight grandchildren.

Then back in 1954, that's when Elmer Cravalho, and Dan Inouye, Matsunaga . . .

DT: Big year.

RC: Yes, they ousted Hiram Fong, which those days you felt nobody can beat Hiram Fong and, you know, those big-name Republicans. But, that was the sweep that the Democrats made. But, I did not run as a supervisor at that time. I ran in 1956 election. Then fortunately, there were many Filipinos ran before that, but couldn’t get in. But it so happened that probably, they felt sorry for the laborers so they said, “Okay, let's give one representation for the laborers.” But, those days were good time. You have to go to every precinct and speak, you know—rallies, we call that. Prior to that, I joined the Toastmasters Club and I took it very seriously. And as soon as the first speaker goes up, I can readjust myself to the microphone and how to adjust my voice, you know, or how far the people are. I must have impressed lot of people, that's why I got elected at that time. Because, I beat out [Clarence] Crozier, very popular man. John Bulgo, very popular man—he ran against Eddie Tam before. But, I must also give the credit to the union [International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union]. The union was very strong, those days, supporting Democrats, yeah.

DT: Yes. You must’ve joined—when did you join the union? You were working at the sugar company . . .

RC: Yes . . .

DT: . . . so you must have become a member of the union then.

RC: Back in 1946, I joined the union. That’s when we had the big strike, too. But, being a dairy worker, you cannot go on strike, you know, 'cause the children of people have to drink milk—you have to deliver this milk.

DT: So, you didn’t have to walk picket lines or . . .

RC: No, I did not but I have to work and, well, you have to give part of your salary to the union. But, that’s all right, you helping the union cause and you’re helping the causes of the people in the community, yeah. That’s what it is.

DT: That must have made you think of your father, too?
RC: Oh, yes.

WN: Now, before you ran in '56, you were telling us earlier about a story about what happened in '54.

RC: Yes, in '54, I was approached by the Republican party under the leadership of Arthur Woolaway, at that time—and of course Hannibal Tavares. Hannibal Tavares being a public relations man, I used to go to lunch with them and they try to encourage me to join the Republican party. But, I still remember the strike and the laws that were passed, and I have experienced this out at Waihe'e, you know. Waihe'e, there's a nice beach where, those days, lot of fish and tako and whatnot. Boy, you can go down the beach at night, we used to call that, lamalama with the torch. Oh you see a lot of fish and, you know, eel. You can go down the beach but you cannot use spear or knife, you know. My god, how can you catch them with your hand? But, at times, you catch them with your hand. And all those laws was being passed by who? The Republicans. I think a man like Dan Inouye and [Spark] Matsunaga and [Shunichi] Kimura, they never forget these things and I did not forget it, too. So, I did not choose to go into politics under the bannership of Republicans.

WN: Were there other Filipino Republican lawmakers or other Republicans at that time in '54?

RC: Oh, there were about three Filipinos. Mr. Polo and Mr. Sevilla ran under the bannership of Republican party, but they couldn't get in.

WN: This is Leodegario Polo?

RC: Yes, Leodegario Polo and . . .


RC: . . . A. B. Sevilla. They ran for political office, mm hmm [yes]. And I was so lucky, but I worked hard, I worked hard. And that man, [Koichi] Yamanaka, I talked to you about, they owned that store still out there. My goodness, he gave me $500 to run for politics, mind you. And, $500 then was plenty, those days, boy. You don't have to give beer and steak and coffee hour, those days. All you do is, you know, make your brochures. And of course, you're supposed to get those big pictures [i.e., posters], where you can put it on the windows of the stores. That's the only expense you have. But after that though, in 1968, '70, '72—my goodness, I have to go and borrow $7,000, mind you, then.

DT: Yeah, people expect to be fed, these days . . .

RC: So, you borrow $7,000, it takes you two years—you cannot pay it back. Why, because, not enough contribution, too. You had some contributions, but ten, twenty dollars. I did not know how to go about having contribution from the engineers and from contractors, I did not know how to go about that, you know.

WN: Back in '56, who approached you to run?

RC: Oh, the late Eddie Tam. He was chairman of Maui County at that time. I don't know, he seems to like me, so he told me, "Richard, I don't think you'll make it as a Republican."
So, I told him, "I don't want to make it as a Republican, I want to make it as a Democrat because I came from the plantation and I want to represent labor."

So he said, "Okay, go ahead join the Democratic party, here's a card. Sign it." I signed it and I went into politics under the bannership of Democrat.

DT: And the union endorsed you?

RC: Yes, yes, fortunately the union endorsed me.

DT: They used to give out ballots, marked ballots telling people how to vote . . .

RC: Yes, yes, right, right. But as I say, I did not know too much about politics, so four years after that. . . . You know two contractors bidded for that Wailuku gym, you know. One contractor belonged to ILWU [International Longshoremen's & Warehousemen's Union]. So, when he went to Honolulu to lobby, Newton Miyagi approach me and a supervisor from Moloka'i to support them in getting this job for the contractor. So, it so happened that, "Goddammit, I punch any union head who tell me what to do. So, don't tell me what to do. You know, Newton, I will pay for this dinner because I don't want nobody to tell me what to do." But, you know, Dan, strong as they were—Jack Hall forgive me for that. That came into the news, they had investigation. Then they question us. "What did you say to Newton Miyagi?" Then, I told 'em I told Newton, "I'll punch any union head that will tell me what to do." That became advertised in *Maui News*, Dan. But son-of-a-gun, Jack Hall really forgive me for that.

DT: So even after that, they endorsed you?

RC: They endorsed me, mind you.

DT: But, your testimony, it was okay. Because you didn't have any communist label to pin on them, right?

RC: Right, right, mm hmm [yes]. And every election the ILWU endorsed me.

DT: Did you keep up that position?

RC: No, no, no.

DT: Or did you finally do what the union wanted you to do?

RC: No, no, but I—I approached them very sensibly and they are human, they listen to you, but you have to account for it, too, Dan. In some cases you just have to say, "All right, I give you the benefit of the doubt." You just have to give and take at times, but not to give your soul and body to people like that, no. And they admired me for that, funny. Tom Yagi used to be a strong union man, but he and I got along very nicely. I'll tell him why I disagree with him, you know.

DT: About that time, more and more Filipinos were registering and voting, right?
RC: Correct. At that time, well, I think when I first ran, probably, we [Maui County] had about 700 or thereabout. But, as you said, at that time in '60, '62, we increase in great number because a lot of Filipinos were seeking citizenship, you see. But they did not make use of their rights because many of them did not become American citizen yet, at that time, Dan.

Yes, I had a pretty good life, as far as politics goes because, I wanted to pave the way for the young people and, goddamn it, I waited quite some time, Warren. One election, I think, on my fifth term—I said, "My goodness, please vote for me because we are still waiting for the graduates to come back." Son-of-a-gun, lot of people voted for me (chuckles). Because, they wanted to probably—"This voice representing labor, let's go out for him" and, shee, this Filipino youth who goes to college, come back, and represent them. And after that, we had quite a bit of graduates coming back but some of them did not take an interest in politics, at that time yet.

DT: Did your parents know about your success in politics?

RC: No, no, because . . .

RC: They passed away before that . . .

RC: Yeah, my mother died. . . . Let's see, about '41. Then my dad died about '46, I think, or '45.

DT: You were saying, he'd have been very proud of his son who was able to get elected supervisor after his '24 strike.

RC: That's (laughs)—'24 strike, oh my goodness, I cannot forget that.

WN: In those early years, especially the first couple of elections, what was your plan in terms of campaigning?

RC: Well, to meet the people and tell them what I have and try to do. Those days, as I said, you go out and make speeches, yeah. But, some politician started house-to-house campaigns. That was the hardest that came about then. Oh, my god, you have to go to Lāna‘i and Moloka‘i, you know, and you have to get lot of help, too. As I said, why I was able to get reelected—because I go to them and say that I have done this, do you notice it? They say, "Oh, yes, we did." Because when Lahaina came into the picture, as a resort area, there was a road that leads to the beach. We gave that to the developers because, as they said, they could not borrow enough money if there was a government road ran across that resort area. So we gave that road to the developers, but in exchange we had eighty-foot right-of-way where the present road is now. My goodness, boy, I couldn't sleep that night, that Friday night—I still remember we used to have our meetings Friday night. They called me a son-of-a-gun Filipino. "You sure sold us down the river."

"Now why?"

"You gave that road away to the developers."

WN: Why don't we wait until we change tapes.
RC: Okay, thank you.

WN: Okay, remember where we were.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

JC: The following is a continuation of the Richard Caldito interview. This is videotape number three.

WN: This is tape number three with Richard Caldito. Okay, why don’t we finish the story . . .

RC: Yes, you know, with regards to the development of Lahaina, lot of people called me up because we gave away that road to the developers. But I told them, “You know, a year from now, you will see people working.”

JC: Excuse me, can we stop for a second? Mr. Caldito, don’t pull the cord.

RC: Okay, all right.

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

WN: Let’s start again, tape number three with Richard Caldito. Okay, let’s continue that story about the right-of-way in Lahaina.

RC: Yes, we gave the right-of-way to the developers and a lot of people called me up. In fact the whole Friday night, they told me, “Why did you give that road away, now we cannot go down to the beach.” But I told them, I sacrificed that because lots of our friends and neighbors went to the Mainland because Baldwin Packers [pineapple company] was shut down. Now, I want to change the future of Lahaina so that we will have people working and you will see people coming from Wailuku, Kula, Makawao because we will not have enough workers in Lahaina. They didn’t believe that for a good eight months, you know, they didn’t believe that. But, after the development came about, my prediction came true. Lot of people from Kula even, Ha’ikū—a year, a year and a half after that—traveled to Lahaina and worked those resort areas. So, the people kind of forgot what I was trying to do. But, the next election, I went back again, “You see what I told you people,” you know, when I go out and have coffee hours, those days. “I told you folks that we will have jobs available for our friends, for our sons, and for our daughters.” Hey, Dan, I tell you, I got a lot votes again on that election.

DT: You know, just to clear up the record, this was at Kā’anapali, the original hotel right . . .

RC: The original hotel [Royal Kā’anapali Resort], yes. That was the first one. All our senators and representatives, they worked on that project too because they wanted to see Kā’anapali being developed. That’s what the progress that was made in Lahaina brought to Maui.
Now regarding the elections that I have participated, we go to every district and make a speech for three minutes. If you pass the three minutes there's a bell. Then you have to cut it off already because probably they didn't want you to overdo it and the other politicians will do likewise. Then we have to end up one o'clock or two o'clock in the morning. So, we cut it just about the time that had been allotted to us. Now when you go to, let's say, Moloka'i, I kind of make a research, what Moloka'i need most. Then, I base my speech on that subject, Dan, so that I can probably interest the people that I care for that community. And, it works.

And one experience is at Makawao, [Maui]. Makawao, those people don't vote for Democrats, especially Japanese, they don't vote for Japanese, you know. All the Japanese get low vote, but Caldito's vote was way up there. Because, probably, I was a Filipino but I always go out and said, "Makawao, you need a swimming pool and you need a baseball ground, and I will work for it." And I did work for it because every year we used to put $3,000, you know. We cannot do it in one year because Lahaina needs a couple thousand, too, for their recreation center. So, I used to be fair to all the people in Makawao especially.

DT: And each of the parties would have these rallies, right?

RC: Yes, yes.

DT: And you would come, do your report, and this ties it to why you were so interested in going to Toastmasters Club . . .

RC: Right, right, right.

DT: Put you in good form, right?

RC: Yeah.

DT: And, describe the crowds, who. . . . Did they bring their kids all dressed for bedtime, running around and have some shave ice and . . .

RC: (The first experience I had in politics was my first political rally in Hāna. Those days people really came out to hear and meet the candidates. When you are called to make your speech, people came to present leis to you. I did not know anyone in Hāna at that time so while waiting to be called to deliver my first political speech I prayed to the good Lord for someone to be kind enough to present me a lei. When my name was called to speak, there were four girls who came up to put leis around my neck and I was very, very happy indeed. I was told after the rally that the Democratic party of Hāna always presented leis to the candidates.

Warren and Dan, I must confess that the first political speech that I made in Hāna gave me inspiration and hope to be elected in my first try in politics. To be sure that there will be someone to present me a lei when we have a rally in other districts, I always called upon my friends in that district to prepare and present me a lei when I was called upon to make my speech.

In the 1950s and 1960s politics was not too expensive because rallies were held in every precinct so you get to meet the voters during political rallies. Then in 1962 some candidates started to give coffee hours and at times chicken hekka and steaks. Politics became more expensive and time-consuming because candidates want to outdo the other candidates. So
some started to visit the voters—house to house. Today, it is costly because radio time, newspaper advertisements, coffee hours and at times television—all of these cost money and time.

In 1956 there were two Fil-American candidates who ran for political office, Mr. Peter [A.] Aduja from Hawai‘i, an attorney, and myself. Mr. Aduja was not elected [in 1956] so I was the only Fil-American who was elected [that year].

After statehood more and more Fil-Americans became interested in running for politics. We had Benjamin Menor, the first [Fil-American] state senator [first elected in 1962]; Eduardo Malapit, first [Fil-American] mayor of Kaua‘i; Benjamin [J.] Cayetano, first Fil-American governor and yours truly, first Fil-American councilman and pioneer in politics for all Fil-Americans in the United States.)

Those days, politics was good because lot of people come out and listen to you and they bring their children, you know. Especially in Moloka‘i, we bused them from way out Kilohana and Kipū, come to Kaunakakai and they get big rallies over there. So, you don’t have to go house to house, yeah. You can talk to the people, and as I said, I do some research and see what the people want and I put it into speech and relay it to them. And it worked, it worked.

DT: You tried to appeal to people, not just Filipinos, but to everybody.

RC: Everyone, yes, oh yes. Because when I address the people, I said, “My fellow Americans,” not only Filipinos. Because Filipinos is not enough to get you in. But, it helps you if you convince them that they have to go to their neighbors and to the stores that they buy their food and gasoline station, please convince them that we need representation, and they do that, you know. And, funny, I had my share. I served fifteen years in the board of supervisors [1956-71], Dan, and I like it very much.

WN: You said that you were the—‘56 you were the first Democratic Filipino . . .

RC: Candidate, yeah, elected in public office in the United States, because afterwards, I think in the seventies they had some in Alaska and in California. They had some board of supervisors and I think a representative in California but that was late seventies already—the middle part of seventies, [Peter] Aduja and I started in fifties, yeah. Aduja was in ’54, I think, and I was in ’56.

DT: You were in ’56?

RC: Yes. Aduja ran as a Republican [in 1954], he got in [the territorial house of representatives]. But the next year [1956] he turned to run for the [Hawai‘i County] board of supervisors, but he did not make it at that time.

DT: I don’t think Alfred Laureta ever ran, did he . . .

RC: No, no.

DT: He was very prominent in the Democratic party . . .
RC: Oh. You know, when Patsy Mink became a house member, U.S. House, she took the place of Dan [Inouye] because Dan moved up to Senate [in 1962. Actually, Thomas P. Gill was elected to Inouye's vacated House seat in 1962. In 1964, Mink was elected to Gill's vacated seat.] I begged Laureta to run, [against Mink] you know, but Laureta was not interested too much in politics.

DT: Well, he had several appointed jobs, as I recall, . . .

RC: Well, he was administrative assistant for Dan Inouye, then [John A.] Burns brought him back and he became labor director, you know. I think that he really wanted to be a judge, anyway. Because if you run at that time—there were many Democrats running. [William] Heen ran, too, at that time. And, Patsy Mink, and about two more Democrats. Then I asked Alfred, “Please run, Alfred, because you gonna make it.”

“Oh what makes you think so?”

“Well you'll get Dan Inouye's machine and Dan Inouye's machine is very powerful. Then you have the Filipinos, and you have a lot of Haoles, too, because Haoles, they like Filipinos,” you know, I told him. But he said no. That's why he did not run for office. He could have gotten in, the first Filipino to be a House Representative, Dan, if he really followed up because Dan [Inouye] used to send him to the neighboring islands to make speeches for him, you know.

DT: That's right.

RC: Yeah. So, he got all the connections, yeah. The Japanese boys like him, and they know that he was a pretty bright student. That was Laureta's asset.

DT: Then Bernaldo [B.] Bicoy came along . . .

RC: He came and again I went to him and told him, “Please do not run for the [state] senate yet because you have, Patsy Mink and all those big gunners running for the senate.”

“Oh, I want challenge, I want challenge.”

(Laughter)

RC: I told him, “All right.” But I tried to stop him but, as he said, he wanted challenge. He never get in, but. . . . Oh, he was out for quite a while.

DT: And then he backed off.

RC: Yes.

DT: He went into the house for a second . . .

RC: (The experience and honor that was exciting to me as a politician was in 1961 when Douglas MacArthur returned to the Philippines for the first time after World War II. I was one of four Filipino businessmen to be sent to the Philippines to accompany General Douglas MacArthur.)
We landed at Clark Air Force Base and stayed at the same hotel with the general at Manila Hotel. That hotel was his headquarters during the early stage of World War II so when he returned he stayed there.

In 1961 the first Miss Hawai‘i Filipina was crowned and also accompanied the general. The Filipinos were so grateful that MacArthur made good his pledge and promise during the war, “I Shall Return” that a parade was held in his honor. There were many beautiful floats and the float that Miss Hawai‘i Filipina rode stopped in front of the grandstand where all the dignitaries were seated. She came down from the float with four beautiful flower leis from Hawai‘i. She gave one lei to the president of the Philippines then she went to General Douglas MacArthur and placed a lei around his neck and kissed him Hawaiian style.

You know Mr. Tuttle, the photographer who took the picture was asked to give the photo to all the newspapers in Southeast Asia because kissing Hawaiian style was not familiar in the Orient and that even became first-class news in that region or part of the world. Then she placed a lei on the bishop but did not kiss him, instead she knelt down, took his hand and kissed his ring. That was amazing and that’s what you call experience and maturity on her part.

During our stay in the Philippines all the newspapers and magazines carried the photo of the queen from Hawai‘i [i.e., Miss Hawai‘i Filipina] kissing General Douglas MacArthur which made her very famous and popular in all of Southeast Asia. It was a wonderful experience for all of us who accompanied the general on his last visit to the Philippines.

WN: Let’s talk about your fifteen years in the board of supervisors. You served under three mayors, Eddie Tam, Manuel Molina, and Elmer Cravalho.

RC: Elmer Cravalho. Yes, but I was not reelected on my fourth term. So, anyway, on my fourth term, I missed reelection by about twenty-five votes.

WN: This was in 1971?

RC: No, no. Shee, this was in 1968, I think, something like that. I did not make the election but somehow, someone moved up to the house and since I was the next in line, I took the place again. So, I was fortunate because I was the number ninth, I think. I was very fortunate at that time. Then, the fifteen years that I have served, I tried to accomplish what the various districts wanted. As I said, when I make speeches, I make research what they want so I tried to develop parks or probably even swimming pools for that districts. And, of course, when you go to Kihei—Kihei at that time, not very many people, but as soon as WaiLea developed, my goodness, it was just honey bees going towards Kihei. The development brought lot of people out there. We tried to provide the means and playground for Kihei. That’s why we have a lot of parks in Kihei.

DT: Which of these three mayors or chairmen, Tam, Molina or Cravalho, impressed you the most with providing the greatest leadership for Maui?

RC: Well, the greatest leadership that Maui ever had was Cravalho. Because in Cravalho’s time, we have made lot of improvement with the private industry and with government help. However, though, I think Eddie Tam made the most contribution as far as getting tourism to
come to Maui is concerned. What Eddie Tam taught us was to be friendly with the PATA organization, that’s Pacific Area Travel Association, I think. He used to send two councilmen to the conferences and I was one . . .

WN: Stop right here?

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

JC: The following is a continuation of the Richard Caldito interview. This is videotape number four and the last of the series.

WN: Tape four with Richard Caldito. We were talking about Mayor Eddie Tam and his relationship with PATA.

RC: PATA conferences. Yes, we used to attend the PATA conferences. I went to Bangkok and also to Kuala Lumpur, to the Philippines, and Taipei for those conferences. The house members, house of representatives, they used to send two. But there were only four of us that really represented Hawai‘i. All right, then when Mayor Eddie Tam died, Elmer Cravalho followed up. So, we went to Japan. Elmer Cravalho invited seventy-five, you know, the biggest travel agencies in Japan and around Japan. We got together. Of course, we took our brochures with us and we gave them the interesting places where Maui has to offer. But Hilo, Honolulu, and Kaua’i never did send board members to those conferences. But, it paid off, why? Because after that, we passed Kaua’i as far as tourists is concerned from the East, yeah. And Kaua’i, my goodness, they was crying for more tourists to visit that place, but Maui was enjoying a lot of tourists that came to Lahaina—even today to WaiLea. But, what started all this? Because of the work of Eddie Tam plus the follow-up of Elmer Cravalho. That’s what brought the Japanese tourists more to Maui. Before, the Japanese tourists, they take instruction from Honolulu, they go to Hilo, then go to Kona. They stopped in Maui for lunch and go right back. Maui never did benefit much because they only stopped by to have lunch. But when the tourists started to come to Maui, oh, we even outdo Hilo, Kaua’i, and at times we had just as much as Honolulu, Warren. So, all those things paid off for the economy of Maui, Dan, that’s the way I feel.

WN: It actually started way back to Mayor Tam’s . . .

RC: Way back, yeah from Mayor Tam’s time.

DT: He would convince quite a few Canadians to come, too.

RC: Oh yes, Eddie Tam, he. . . . When he traveled he make friends with the mayors, you know, and public officials. And when he go stay, he call them up and tell them, “Hey don’t forget to bring your people to Maui.” Those words and kindness and aloha paid off. They come to Maui and we are very happy, but I don’t know whether we overbuild or not, but time will tell.

DT: You know Eddie Tam was a mayor before he was called a mayor, if you know what I mean?

RC: Oh, yes. I know. He called himself Mayor Eddie Tam, yeah, and you can’t blame him because I think mayor to him was more appealing to people of the Mainland. [The title
changed from chairman to mayor in 1969.] But in California they used to call supervisor and
chairman, yes.

WN: How was the relationship between the board and the chairman?

RC: Well, I tell you, with Eddie Tam, the relationship is just like brothers. He don’t have no ill
feelings (chuckles) with no one, that man. You can tell him, “Darn it, I tell you, Eddie, I will
oppose you in everything that you do.” Then when he see you and the wife, he go over there
and kiss your wife and say, “Hello!” He change you, that man.

But Elmer is a strict man. He means business but sometime too strict is not too good, too.
Elmer is a hard worker. The best workers that I have ever witnessed representing Maui is
[Mamoru] Yamasaki, David Trask, and Elmer Cravalho. They mean business. When they in
Honolulu, they don’t fool around. They don’t go out playing golf or this and that, no. They
really do their work for the people of Maui. And that’s what Elmer is all about. Elmer is a
good speaker, his words are well chosen, but the delivery is not like Dan Inouye, them. The
best speaker that I can think of is Shun [Shunichi] Kimura—number one for me. Then, I take
Dan Inouye, then of course, Patsy Mink. As a speaker, [Spark M.] Matsunaga never did
attract too many people on his speaking ability, but his choice of words and delivery is such
that he kind of pulls you to his side. But when Shun, Dan and Patsy Mink speak, my
goodness, the hair of your arms and your chest come out because the delivery is such that—I
think that’s what made them great.

DT: Certainly more appealing, probably. No ho‘omalimali about Elmer Cravalho, though. Really
isn’t. But what happened in his most recent election? Now we come right back to . . .

RC: All right . . .

DT: Last year [1990 mayoral election] when he was trying to come back and didn’t work . . .

RC: Well, Elmer, he played a group of people more than the other group. What I mean, we have,
let’s say, Filipinos, Japanese and Haoles, Hawaiians, Portuguese. He played the Filipinos too
much. So, when this other group want to get in, they cannot get in. They don’t know where
and how to get in. So, when time to vote in the general—I’m speaking of the general—lot of
people probably did not like this ways so they went on the other side, and some did not vote
maybe. But, during the primary election, there were four qualified Democrats, Dan. But,
Elmer, being an old politician, he went to the old-timers that backed him up. “Please help.”
He had enough to put him over the top. But during the general election, he did not have
enough because, as I said, he was playing the Filipinos too much.

DT: You think he let down? Was he lazy in campaigning . . .

RC: No, no . . .

DT: . . . or, it was just that they had other favorites and they decided that for one reason or
another, Elmer couldn’t deliver the goods, is that it?

RC: Yes, mm hmm. Right, and he come out and back up Patsy Mink, in the general, which he
feels probably that he can get the Japanese vote. But, as far as my experience is concerned,
Elmer have hurt lot of people, too. Hurt in a way that he did not favor your ways and the
most striking is, I don’t want to use the word “hate,” but the thing that people do not like
[about] Elmer is that if you do not favor him or work for him, he will never appoint you to
anything or never do you any more favors after that. There are lot of politicians that they
forget about things like that after the election, but not Elmer. But it came out that before the
general that Elmer is mellowing because—he used to go to church every morning. So, he
came out also and said that, “I am maturing and mellowing, not like before.”

DT: Do you think there was any of the developers sort of turned against him, too?

RC: Oh, yes. The developers, that’s right . . .

DT: . . . developers, foreign money and . . .

RC: Yeah, for instance [Herbert] Horita. Horita poured in lot of money for [Linda] Lingle. But,
they was afraid at the end, though. They say, “Hey, my god, Elmer going get in.” They start
contributing to Elmer, too. But at the beginning all the money was for Lingle from Horita.
You know, Herbert Horita?

DT: Oh, yes. He’s a good comment on O’ahu, shall we say?

RC: Yeah, yeah. Well even in O’ahu, he does that but you cannot blame him because he get
results, too. But I think all in all, Linda will show good although she’s a Republican. But, my
god, I voted for [Richard] Nixon, too, (chuckles) you know, before, Dan.

DT: That gives me pause for thought. But go right on.

(Laughter)

RC: I voted once for [Ronald] Reagan but after that, no. But if everybody sticks to the party that
you are affiliated, the Republicans cannot get in. There are more Democrats than
Republicans, but no such thing as Democrat or Republican, you vote for the man, too.

DT: In other words, you’re really emphasizing that things maybe haven’t changed all that much
since you first got into politics. It’s the person—-or I guess you’ll have to say today, you
wouldn’t want to say “man,” you’d have to say “person,” right?

RC: Yeah, the person, yeah. You take, for instance, Hiram Fong. Why did he get in? Well,
because he did lot of things for Hawai’i and he continued doing things for Hawai’i so why
shouldn’t you vote for him.

WN: Plus he continued to get ILWU’s support.

RC: Yeah, yeah.

WN: Now, were you ever approached to run for any office higher than supervisor?

RC: Well, I was approached to be a [state] representative, Warren. But, I did not choose to go to
Honolulu and spend six months or five months there because the money was not enough.
While being a supervisor, you’re staying in Maui, you can service your clients, as far as insurance or real estate is concerned, then that’s where you bring home money for the family. Because the money that we earn in politics, you just have to pay the loans that you made when you run again. That’s what it is, Dan.

WN: Who was it that approached you?

RC: Well, the late Tom Tagawa was supposed to take somebody’s place.

DT: Yeah, I think Burns had mentioned it to you, too, right?

RC: Yeah, Burns wanted to appoint me to take somebody’s place at that time.

DT: But, you always came to the Democratic conventions . . .

RC: Yes, . . .

DT: . . . you didn’t even mention that along the way. You were . . .

RC: I always tried to attend the Democratic convention because you learn a great deal and you meet lot of people that you serve with on different islands. Those days, we had a pretty good number of Filipinos already at that time. We had Elias Yadao, from the Big Island, and we had George Pascua from Kaua‘i, and we had [Rudy] Pacarro from Honolulu. So, we had quite a number of Filipino elected officials on the board of supervisors at that time. Because, funny, Dan and Warren, being elected to the board is harder then to get elected in the house. More Filipinos were in the house at times than the board. I don’t know why but because, probably, the income also come into the picture. Lot of house members come from Honolulu, though, because they in Honolulu, they can work on their business and at the same time attend the session. And, that’s the difference, you know. Like, once upon a time, we had two Filipinos in the board of supervisors and that was Lorraine [Rodeo Inouye] and Domingo [Takashii], in Hilo. And now we have two in Maui, [Rick] Medina and [Vincente] Bagoyo. And, I think if we have more Filipino youth qualified, run for office, probably could even have three or four, Warren. I think the voting public is different, really different now than before. Before, see, if you are a Japanese candidate, and you qualified, you get all the chance to be elected. But now it seems as though that we get lot of Haole voters, we got lot of Filipinos. And Japanese, we have lot of Japanese, too, but it seems as though the other groups is catching up. So, I think qualifications is one of the key now—the way I look at it, I don’t know how you folks look at it.

WN: Do Filipinos vote as a bloc?

RC: Well, we can see where in Pu‘unēnē [Maui], lot of Filipinos, and in Lāna‘i and Maunaloa [Moloka‘i]. Lot of Filipinos. Filipino candidates get lot of votes from there.

DT: They get more but not necessarily all, right?

RC: Right, right, right, right.

DT: Because they have had some . . .
RC: Correct.

DT: ... competition, particularly on O'ahu, I don't know about here. But on O'ahu you had various factions that sort of work against that.

RC: Yeah, there are some factions that do not like you and they work against you. Where can we find that last election? In Kaua'i, [Eduardo] Malapit. Everybody thought that he was going to make it [for mayor], but lot of Filipinos was against him. So, you're right, there are some factions that do not like your ways and they work against you, so he did not make it at that time.

WN: What about in the recent election where we had a Filipino run for [U.S.] Congress, Ron Menor? Were you involved in that campaign at all?

RC: Oh, yes, I went house to house and also hold sign. That's another thing that, well, I base it just like Elmer. I think the format on that was a little bit too much on one ethnic group. Where a Japanese cannot get in and the Haoles cannot get in, being blocked by some different nationality and most Filipinos, then Filipinos cannot get you in. Although there were four good candidates. I think Menor should have gotten all the other ethnic groups to work for him. You know, not only Japanese and Filipinos.

DT: He may learn that, he's young. So, he ...

RC: Oh, yes, yes.

DT: ... broke some new ground and that's what you were doing back in '56 ...

RC: Very young. Too bad, though, that his four-year [state senate] term was right in that election. That's what happened.

DT: I think I'm about exhausted. We ... 

WN: I just wanted ...

DT: ... thank you so much. Okay.

WN: Will you see a Filipino governor?

RC: Filipino governor, I think, if Ben [Benjamin J. Cayetano] do not defeat himself, I think he will have a good chance. But, only Ben can defeat himself, the way I look at it.

WN: Okay, well, thank you very much for you time.

RC: Oh, I thank you so much. The boys work so hard, and we have a lady here directing everything, thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW