Pedro E. Racelis, Jr. was born January 15, 1920 in Manila, Philippines. When he was still a baby, his father, Rev. Pedro P.E. Racelis, Sr., moved the family to Hawai‘i to minister among the Filipino immigrants. Racelis was educated at Andrew Cox School, Kalaniana‘ole Elementary and Intermediate School, Mid-Pacific Institute, and Union College and Union Theological Seminary in Manila.

While Racelis was still in seminary school, the war broke out and he joined the Filipino army. He was captured and imprisoned at Camp O'Donnell in Capas, Tarlac.

After World War II, he worked as a recreation officer on board a passenger ship carrying Filipino laborers to Hawai‘i. When he returned to Hawai‘i in 1946, he first worked as a field foreman for Onomea Sugar Company, then as a recreation specialist with Matson Navigation Company Hawaiian Hotel Division, and as a clerk interpreter for Hutchinson Sugar Company. He was a recreation specialist at Hawai‘i Youth Correctional Facility, 1952 to 1954, and at Hale Ho'omalu juvenile detention home until he retired in 1981.

When Racelis moved to Hālawa in 1964, he became involved in local politics worked as a precinct clerk, precinct inspector, ballot delivery chairman, vice president of precinct, and president of precinct. He was active in the Democrat central committee from 1978 to 1986.
Tape Nos. 17-63-1-90 and 17-64-1-90

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Pedro E. “Pete” Racelis, Jr. (PR)

June 14, 1990

Hālawa, O‘ahu

BY: Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto (MK) and Warren Nishimoto (WN)

MK: Okay. This is videotape number one with Mr. Pedro “Pete” Racelis, Jr., on June 14, 1990. The interviewers are Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto and Warren Nishimoto.

Mr. Racelis, I was wondering, can you start off with when and where you were born?

PR: Yeah, I was born in Manila [Philippines]. But before I was born, my mother was carrying me, and we were in the island of Corregidor. My dad was a [army and navy] YMCA [Young Men’s Christian Association] secretary there at that time. But my mother didn’t want the army doctor to touch her, so my father brought her to Manila. And there I was born in Mary Johnson Hospital in Tondo, Manila, in 1920. And some time. (Chuckles)

MK: And tell me about your father and mother. Who were they and their background.

PR: My dad [Rev. Pedro P. E. Racelis, Sr.] was a minister for the [Holy Trinity] Congregational Church in [Pāpa‘ikou,] Hawai‘i. Before that he was ministering in the Philippines. He was sent here by (the Hawaiian Board of Missions in Honolulu, through the Congregational church) to minister among the Filipino immigrants. They sent him here in 1921. I came with them at that time. I was eleven months old when I left. I came here, I was one year old. The ship travel was long, so it took me about almost (a) month to come. My mother [Vevencia Villaverde Racelis] is a housewife and been that for a long time. She [was] ninety-(four) years old (when she died in 1992) in the island of Hawai‘i. My sister (was) taking care of her in Kea‘au. Before it was [known as] ‘Ōla‘a. It’s Kea‘au now. That’s where she stayed.

MK: And, you know, you mentioned a sister. How many brothers and sisters are in your family?

PR: I have two brothers, two sisters, one adopted sister and one adopted brother. We (are) seven in all children from my parents. Five regular children and two adopted.

MK: And you’re number . . .

PR: I’m the first child from the family. The number one. (Chuckles)

MK: And when your father and your family first came to Hawai‘i, where did he go first?
PR: When he first came to Hawai‘i he was assigned at Waialua Congregational Church. Right in (front of) the [sugar] mill they had a church there. We (first) lived in the (camp), a place called Spanish Camp in Waialua. And while there, (my dad) wanted a church. So he asked the plantation [i.e., Waialua Sugar Company] and the people to build a church for him. In 1924, he built a church in Waialua, [Filipino] Congregational Church. And that church was in front the mill. It’s not there anymore. They moved it out. Termite (chuckles) got the church.

MK: I know that you were in Waialua from about 1921 to . . .

PR: To 1927, when my dad was again transferred to Pāpa‘ikou in the Big Island. So he was transferred to Pāpa‘ikou [i.e., Onomea Sugar Company]. And a friend of ours, Reverend (Jose) Alba died, so my father took his place. And then we stayed there until 1935. I left there to go to Mid-Pacific [Institute, on O‘ahu].

MK: You know, before we move on, I’m going to have you think about the times when you were in Spanish Camp, Waialua [1921-27]. What do you remember about Spanish Camp?

PR: Spanish Camp. I don’t remember much, but I know it’s a plantation camp. Spanish Camp at that time is now where Andrew Cox School is. In front of Andrew Cox School was where the former Spanish Camp (was). I remember, because when we visited there lately, I saw the place, near the house—behind there is Andrew Cox School. So that’s where Spanish Camp was located.

MK: And I know you were a small boy when you lived there. But do you remember anything about the people in Spanish Camp?

PR: No, I don’t remember. I don’t think I can. (Chuckles) Kid only, that time. I left there, I was seven years old, I think.

MK: Did you start your schooling in Waialua?

PR: I was at Andrew Cox for first grade. When I went to the Big Island, they put me kindergarten. I went back one grade. I was surprised I started kindergarten in Big Island. Then that’s why I graduated high school, I was nineteen. (Chuckles)

MK: Oh. And then what school did you go to in Big Island?

PR: In the Big Island I was at Kalaniana‘ole (Elementary and Intermediate) School. (Virginio Augusto) Carvalho was our principal. And he was a wonderful man and strict at that time. That’s good, so we stayed at Kalaniana‘ole School until 1935. Then I moved out from there to go to Mid-Pacific (Institute in Honolulu).

MK: And, you know, when you folks were living in Pāpa‘ikou, what part of Pāpa‘ikou did you live in?

PR: They called the town Moir town. It’s a camp called Moir Camp. It’s right in front the plantation gym. The gym was across, the playground was above, and our home is right behind the church in Moir town.
MK: And what was the name of the church?

PR: It's the [Holy Trinity] Congregational Church in Pāpaʻikou. Filipino Congregational church.

WN: The place that you lived in, was it mostly Filipinos living there?

PR: Filipinos, Japanese, Portuguese. Moir town have different sections. In our area, where they build the church, and behind the church and my father's house is the Filipino Camp. Next to that is Japanese Camp. And this side, on the roadside, is the Portuguese. It's divided by who were living there: Portuguese, Japanese, Filipino. The Haoles was living on (the) top there, living in homes above the town.

WN: But the church was mostly Filipino?

PR: It's mixed now. Japanese and Filipinos go to that church. But there's no minister now, so the board of director is trying to sell the church. So, they don't have a minister in that church. They go to different churches. Some go to Honomū, some go to Hilo.

MK: And when it was your father's time, the church was mostly Filipino or that time, too, it was mixed? Japanese and Filipino?

PR: No. That time it was only Filipino. His time. After he passed away—after he left the church, a Haole minister came, they have mixed congregation.

MK: And then, you know, the Filipinos that lived in Pāpaʻikou, were they mostly Tagalog, or Ilocano, or Visayan?

PR: Oh, mostly Ilocano and Visayan. Half and half. Visayan and Ilocano are there together. Tagalog were very few. Only our family and, I don't know, I can hardly count the rest. (Chuckles)

MK: And how did your father communicate then with . . .

PR: Well, he talked English and he sometimes talked in the dialect, because this congregation is young people, and they all understand English. So he preached in the English language. And sometimes he go in the camp and he talked Ilocano and Visayan.

MK: You know, a lot of times we hear about Visayans don't get along with Ilocanos. And Ilocanos don't get along with Visayans. How were they in Pāpaʻikou?

PR: No, during the early days, you didn't have that feeling. There was no difference between Ilocano, Tagalog, or Visayan. They mixed well before. Only lately they've been having differences. Only when I came to Honolulu I felt the difference. But when we were young, we mixed well. All the different dialect people, they get along well. They talk English, pidgin English, and they get along well before. It's surprising now that they have differences. I don't want to tell the difference how the difference came, but it has a difference now.

WN: So you folks spoke English among each other.
PR: Our time, yeah, because we go to English school. We don't talk dialect. Our language was pidgin most of the time. So we talked to understand each other.

WN: What about at home?

PR: Well, my parents told—my father told my mother, "Talk English to the kids, so they'll learn English." My parents don't talk in the dialect to us. And we don't know the dialect. My brothers and sisters cannot talk the dialect well. Then they learn as they go through (among the people in the camp).

MK: And then, you know, in those days, were most of the Filipinos bachelors or they had families already?

PR: No, when they came they were bachelors. And some already—in the early [19]30s, or before the [19]30s, they were able to bring their families. But the '46 [immigrants] also were able to bring. But in the early part, mostly bachelors were in the camp. Some have families already, but they came earlier.

WN: Were there very many Filipino kids your age at the camps?

PR: That time we were only two Filipino boys in our class. Three girls, Filipino girls. I went to Mid-Pacific, only two Filipinos. Myself and another girl. We were very few students. At that time, the family was not big. They just started, so. I'm surprised now some families have a lot of children. (Chuckles)

WN: So small boy time, your friends were mostly, what, Japanese or . . .

PR: I beg your pardon.

WN: You know when you were a small boy?

PR: Yeah.

WN: Your friends were mostly, what, Japanese then?

PR: Most of them were Japanese. They're so good that we exchange lunch. I bring my bread they bring ume and rice. (Chuckles) We change lunch, see. They were very friendly and we eat, mix.

MK: How about with the other ethnic groups, like the Hawaiians and the . . .

PR: Well, we have a few Hawaiians in our class, too, at that time. I know William Kama and several others. I forgot the name. Not too many Hawaiians in the class. Our time was mostly Japanese at that time.

MK: And, you know, in those days, your father was a minister in the community. So I was wondering, did he get involved in politics in Pāpa'ikou?

PR: Politics was out of his mind that time. He wasn't too involved while in the church. But in the
community work, he does a lot of community work. But during the early days, politics wasn't his line. So, later on, when he saw me getting involved in the Democratic party, trying to get around.

MK: Then he got involved?

PR: Well, he didn't get himself involved yet. (Chuckles) He just happy that we got involved.

MK: And then when you were small, I think, yesterday you were telling us that sometimes election time you used to . . .

PR: Election time they had a lot of entertainment, when we used to see them in the island. They come to Pāpa'ikou. They have a certain area, there they entertain and they talk about election. That was interesting. We were young that time. (Chuckles)

MK: What did you think about all this kind of politicking when you were a small boy?

PR: Well, it was something to draw the crowd in that time. That's good that people go and listen what was coming up and knowing who the people were running for office at that time. That's the reason they get that type of election. Entertaining. Entertainment and speech making, and campaigning. Was good.

MK: And then you were going to school at Kalanianaʻole School, what kinds of activities did you participate in?

PR: Well, at that time, we were just kids, so not much in the early grades, activities. I didn't play in sports. I only played after I went out. I was an amateur fighter after. And I was track man for Mid-Pacific. Miler and cross country when I was at high school.

MK: And you started at Mid-Pac in 1935, yeah?

PR: To '39. Four years, and we were four years in the dormitory life. Four years. That's good life, though. They taught me how to be a man. To iron my own clothes, wash my own clothes. Now I learn all those things. I help my wife, too, now. (Chuckles)

WN: How did you feel going from a plantation area, you know, maybe isolated area, going to the big city?

PR: Well, I used to come here [Honolulu] to work in the [pineapple] cannery. So, it's nice to see the big city. You know, it's no difference. People are the same, that time. So, no problem meeting people. Plantation people and the city people, they're the same thing. At that time, big city wasn't much to talk about. We want to know what we can get from the city. That's the thing we saw at that time. And we were young.

MK: I was wondering, how come you came to Mid-Pacific instead of going for more schooling on the Big Island?

PR: Well, I didn't think of Mid-Pacific, but my dad knew about that school, because he comes to Congregational church. He told us, he'll send us to Mid-Pacific. I didn't know what school it
was until I know it's a boarding school. And it's good that I came. I didn't know what kind of school it was first. But when I knew it was a boarding school, I learned how to live with my group. And so it was nice.

MK: When your dad told you, "I'm going to send you to Mid-Pac," what was your first reaction?

PR: I said, "I'd like to go. I'd like to go to see what it is up there." It's in the city, better than the country. So, my reaction was, "I'll go. I'd like to see what they have for me up there." So, I thought, good. I learned to be a man myself. (Chuckles)

MK: And then how did they family manage to, you know, pay for the school?

PR: Send us through?

MK: Yeah.

PR: Now when I was at Mid-Pac and talking to some Pāpa'ikou people and—"Eh, your father was rich, eh?," they ask me.

I say, "How you come you say rich?"

“He can send you to Mid-Pacific. It's not easy to go there.”

I said, “Well, we had scholarship to go to school.” I used to work on the grounds, to clean the area. And my father was able to pay less. So we had scholarship. My sisters too. They had to work in the pantry and the kitchen. My two sisters and myself were at Mid-Pac. Three of us. And they said, “Gee, they really sent a lot to send you people there.” It's nice that we went there. And my father tried hard to send us. My dad used to help make doughnut and sell around. My brothers and sisters, younger ones, have to sell. And whatever he make, he send us money. (Chuckles)

WN: You mean, house to house, you mean?

PR: Yeah, at the plantation camp. And (my dad) had a chicken farm. He sell his eggs at Morigaki Store.

MK: Okay, we're going to stop this tape, then continue.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

MK: Okay. Tape number two with Mr. Racelis.

We were just talking about Mid-Pacific, yeah? How were your studies over there at Mid-Pacific?

PR: How was?

MK: Your studying. Your studies.
PR: My studies? Well, I was an average student. I was not the top, but I was active in—little bit in sports. I didn’t play baseball, but I took track and cross-country. And also, took oratorical contest. I tried to be an orator, but I didn’t take any place. (Chuckles) That time we had better speaker. Like Masato Doi was the winner that time. I was competing against people like him in the oratorical contest. He was my classmate. So he won the oratorical contest.

MK: Who were some of the other classmates that you had, who became active in the [Democratic] party later?

PR: Active in politics? Only know Masato Doi was active in my class. I know the Kometani family was also active [in the Republican party]. They’re from that school. And several others I know, I forgot their names.

WN: Did you have any idea of what you wanted to be at that time?

PR: That time? Well, I wanted to be a minister like my dad at that time. So, when he told me—he sent me there, I think I learned. Then he said if I was ready to go, I said, “Yeah, send me New York.” He said, “You have a wrong place to think of.”

I said, “Why?”

He said, “Why don’t you go to the Philippines, learn the culture and the language. Then you come back.”

I said, “That’s a good idea.” I went. (Chuckles) And I went there, I took up—I went to Union College (and Union) Theological Seminary [in Manila]. Then while up there, the war came and changed my career.

MK: Tell us what happened World War II time.

PR: World War II time? We were going to school in Manila when the war started. They bombed Manila. But before the bombing of Manila, I went to a town called Pasig (on the morning of December 8, 1941). And there, in that town, I visited my godmother. My godmother said, “You better go back to (Manila). They have a commotion now going on in the marketplace (of Pasig, Rizal province).”

I said, “What’s happening?”

“You better go back to (Manila).” So I took the streetcar back.

The people were looting the town in Pasig and also in the (U.S. Army) camp, Fort McKinley. They were going in. The Americans let them get in, take everything out. And going to Manila, all the Japanese stores, they were ransacking the place. I said, “Gee, something must happen.”

He said, “There’s a war. They bombed Pearl Harbor. It’s bombed,” he said.
So (I) went to our barracks (in Union College). We were ROTC [Reserve Officers’ Training Corps] that time. We were training. Then after training for a while, they disbanded the ROTC. We said, “How come?”

“You cannot fight without ammunition,” they told us. “So, we have to disband the ROTC.” So while we got disbanded, the commander said, “Stay in the barracks until you have a way to go home.”

I said, “Where we going home?” I’m from Hawai’i and the others from outside islands.

So one of the boys went out to town and came back and said, “Eh, let’s volunteer.”

“Volunteer what army?”

“The Philippine army recruiting. The Philippine army was at that time under USAFFE, United [States] Armed Forces in the Far East. So, we volunteered in the Philippine army. And we were brought to Tagaytay Ridge, way up on Batangas, until MacArthur ordered all forces, “Proceed to Bataan. Japanese on three point attack.” So, we left Tagaytay Ridge, going through Manila, to Bataan. In Bataan we stopped at the town, Limay, where we were bombed. And lots were killed during the bombing. And surprising, I didn’t get hurt that time.

MK: And then after?

PR: And after the bombing, they moved us further in[land]. From that forces I was in, (at) Tagaytay Ridge, (I) was (with the Philippine army, USAFFE), 51st Brigade. When we went to Limay, further in, they transferred myself and several of the boys to (the) headquarters (of) General (Guillermo B.) Francisco’s headquarters. That was beach defense (of Manila Bay). And so we were in the constabulary forces. From 51st Brigade to the constabulary forces under General Francisco. Then while there, we saw the bombing of Corregidor from our side, from the mountainside. And we saw a lot of bombing where we were. Later on, we were told that we have to surrender. We were wondering how come. They said the lines were broken. Enemies came in. So, we had to surrender. So we walked down. And walking down, they told us, follow the rest of the soldiers. But we thought we were going home. Instead we were corralled in a rice field. In Orani rice field. There, oh, thousands of soldiers were in the rice field.

Then, in the morning as you look around, we saw the Japanese soldiers taking fifty soldiers each, in a line, and make us walk [from Bataan]. So they call that, I know, the Death March at that time. Well, we walk three days [April 9-13, 1942] slowly, until we (came) to San Fernando, Pampanga [under Japanese guard]. We ate twice on the way up. And while in San Fernando we waited again for the next day. They put us on a train (cart) where they keep cows in. No window. We were put in there and closed (the door), and traveled to another town called Capas, Tarlac. There they released us and we walked again to prison [i.e., concentration camp], Camp O’Donnell. At Camp O’Donnell, I stayed there until—I was (reassigned to work in) the morgue. The chaplain (Matias Cuadra) was in charge. My job was to count the dead as they come in. Some job. And as they came in, we count the number of people, the dead people. We have to get the names of the dead. Before they come to us, the doctors put a tag on the dead people. It’s either known or unknown. When it’s unknown, you
have to put “unknown.” If known, you have to get the name, whatever information we can. We get the information, we put ‘em in a tablet, and put ‘em in our (morgue) headquarters, and help the (soldier) record it. When we left prison camp, my record, we had 22,000 known dead, excluding, unknown. I don’t know where the record went now. I had them with me. We brought it down. Now I don’t know where the record went to. I know it was 22,000, because I was listing all the (names when) I was in the morgue, in charge. And Castro was in the grave side (supervising the) digging, and I was in the morgue counting. A lot of people died in prison camp. They came (into Camp O’Donnell), but (they were) sick already. Malaria and all kinds of sickness. So, hard.

MK: So that was at Capas, Tarlac.

PR: Capas, Tarlac. Camp O'Donnell is the (prison) camp. It’s about six miles from Capas to Camp O’donnell.

MK: And how long were you there in that prison camp?

PR: I went in April. I get released August 4 [1942]. I was released, sick prisoner of war. So, they told me, “You got to go.”

I said, “I cannot stay.” So I went with the sick (soldiers). When I was at Camp (O'Donnell) I had beriberi, malaria, dysentery. I used to urinate blood and my stomach was bloated. I was big when I was in camp. I don’t know what happened. I had to tie my belt. The belt don’t touch anymore. I was [normally a size] twenty-eight waist. And I came so big I had to tie the string on my (pants). So, I was really a sick prisoner of war. So, as I came out from camp, where they put us on a train, somebody called me (by) the train meeting place. And as I looked around who was calling me, my friend from the church called, “Pete!” I looked. “Pete, look at that sign.” When I came out, I had eighty-one, my number. And I looked at this sign, eighty-one. “Eh, thanks for taking me out.” Yeah, he met some people in Manila that nobody can come out. So he came and volunteer to take me out. Alfredo Gomez was his name. And it was so nice of him to take me to his home. I stayed with him until I was free in Manila.

So, I used to go to Philippine General Hospital, have treatment for malaria injection. After having several treatments of malaria, I cannot take it, the injection. I got hurt climbing the horse drawn cart. I cannot lift my leg up, so I didn’t go back to the hospital, Philippine General. I went to another hospital (San Lazaro Hospital). And there they put in the contagious disease ward. And that made (things) worse yet, so I said, “I scared the hospital.” (I escaped from San Lazaro Hospital.)

I went back home to my aunty’s house. She said, “What are you doing here?”

“I cannot stay up there. I cannot take that ward.” So I was looking around for where I can get treatment. And I heard of the Red Cross, Philippine Red Cross. And I know a doctor there. He was able to help me get quinine. I took the medicine and saved some. Well, I didn’t take all. I was saving my medicine, because I was thinking of going underground again. [PR joined a guerrilla unit in his father’s home town, Tayabas province.] I wasn’t free in Manila. I have to report every week to the Philippine forces that time. So, if we are healthy, I was told I’d go back to the constabulary (army). I don’t want to go back in that army, so I was
trying to find a way I can find a force I can join. I reported in Manila that I’ll go to Lopez
town (in Tayabas province). Instead of going to Lopez, I went to my parents’ town (of
Lucban, Tayabas province). [PR roamed the barrios, towns and countryside with a guerrilla
unit. PR held the rank of captain.] And in that town my parents’ relatives were wondering
why I’m always in the forest, walking in the forest. “What are you looking up there?”

I said, “Maybe we can find some organized group.”

They told me, “Don’t join, because there are bandits in the countryside. They’re only
molesting people and burglarizing the place.”

I said, “No, they have organized group, if you find right one.”

Then my other relative said, “Oh, come, Pete. I take you out someplace.” So he brought me
to another town. He knew what was going on at that time, what I had in mind.

So my other uncle brought me to a town called Santa Cruz (in Laguna province). But these
people said, “We will send you back to the town (where) you came from, and give (them) all
the information, who have arms.” They’re going to raid them and get the arms.

I told my uncle, “I’m going back with you.”

He said, “No, no, you not coming back with me.”

I said, “Why? I got a job. You tell me to get a job. My job is to go back and find out from
our people that who have arms. They’re going to take ’em.”

“No, you not coming.”

On the way back, we stopped at a town called Pagsanjan (in Laguna province). There he met
another (guerrilla combat group). (My uncle was) a liquor inspector. So he know his contact.
So in the town he met the Phil-American irregular troop forces, and told them (about me).
But before he went there to talk to them, he told me to stay in the bus station and wait for
him there. I said, “Why wait for you here? I thought I was going with you.”

He said, “No. You wait there.” So I waited at the bus station for over half an hour for him.
And then when I looked around I saw a bunch of soldiers coming in. Armed men. And one of
them pointed at me. I look around, but was me. So he told me to stand up, in the dialect. I
stood up, he dropped me (to) the ground. They hit me, they kick me, and they did so much
things to me. In other words, I was thinking to myself, “They going kidnap me now.” The
people there in the bus station know that I’m kidnapped. That’s a good way to go, I was
thinking to myself, but . . . So then they molested me in the bus station. Now, these people
going back to the town I came. They going tell the relative (I) was captured by guerrilla
forces. So, anyway, I left the station. We went to another area where they ask more
questions. They said, “Do you have any identification?” I had my prison paper with me.
“You don’t need this.” They ripped my prison paper. Japanese prison camp (paper), be all in
the Japanese character. They said, “You don’t need this.”

“Oh, I need that to identify myself.”
"No, you don't."

So they brought me up to another camp. Oh, there I saw all the arms. All the rifles, all the pistols. German lugers, Spanish pistols, (etc.). I was happy I seen arms. But they said, "You cannot touch them until the colonel meet you. He's going to ask you more questions." So when the colonel (Justiniano Estrella) came, he was happy what he found out—he heard that I was a ROTC student and a Bataan veteran. And they need men up there to train the boys, so I was a training officer in the camp, helping them train his men how to shoot rifles, because they were young boys from the country. We train them and they became guerrilla. And then from there, we went to another town. He was asked to visit another unit called the Markings' Guerrillas. We were the Fil-American Irregulars. And while going to the other town, several miles away, (Estrella) told me to stay on the hills and wait for him when he comes back. [PR fought in undercover action at Laguna, Rizal and Tayabas. Later, the unit joined with Markings' (Fil-American) Guerrillas to plague Japanese troops until the arrival of American troops.]

I said, "Where I going stay?"

"You see that hill up there? Make camp up there."

I said, "Gee, I look at the men. How we going make camp up that mountain?"

So we did our best. We went up the hill, stayed up there, cleared up the place. Call the (barrio) lieutenant to bring food if he can. Rice like that. So we were able to camp several days up there waiting for our colonel to come back. He didn't come back. Instead, my man said, "Look down there. A bunch of people coming down with arms."

So he didn't, that person, that leader there, didn't come up. He sent a runner up to me. And that runner said, in a note saying that I had to surrender my arms and join his force.

I said, "If you want my arms, you have to have it out with me. I won't leave my arms and my men unarmed." I said, "You want my arms? You have to fight it out with me."

I was surprised he didn't come up. I had only twelve men. (Chuckles) He had fifty. He didn't come up. He didn't know how many I had, because he know that when the colonel leave, he get a big gang. But this time when we went, we brought only trigger squad. All pistol men. So, this Colonel Bautista, who had the fifty men, went back to camp.

A few days afterward, our colonel was released. (He) came back and he saw me in the camp. He was happy that I kept the men [together] and I kept the arms, and I didn't give it to them. So he said, "You're wonderful to keep the people together. In fact, now we're going back to the camp."

I said, "What camp?"

"Markings' Guerrilla camp."

"I thought you just came from there."
“Yeah. And I’m going to promote you to another rank.” So I went back with him.

MK: Maybe we can stop here.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

MK: Tape number three with Mr. Racelis.

You were just talking about your World War II time when you didn’t give up your guns and—you can continue.

PR: Yeah, we went to the Markings’ camp, and I got promoted (to captain). I came back with him to our camp, to Laguna, where we were staying, another province. And there we raided the train which had Japanese (soldiers) on the train. And we raided (two) convoy (trucks) that come into the town (of Nagcarlan, Laguna). We were active in the guerrilla forces at that time. Our Fil-American (Irregulars) group was active in Laguna area. And we did a lot of work. We did a lot of harassing and they did, too, the enemies. If the enemies know we were there, they burn the whole camp. So we tried to (travel by foot) nights when they don’t know if we (were) around.

Then we went to another town. (There) we were told to pick up three Americans whose bomber fell in Laguna Lake. We took them up with us and brought ’em to our camp. And then we were ordered to make a runway on the mountain, Cristobal Mountain (near San Pablo City). We ordered men from San Pablo, 200 men, to come up the camp, and clear up the place for the plane to land. So, when the field was ready, they radioed the plane can come. So when the plane came, they picked the three Americans and some civilians that was able to go with the Americans. We stayed back. And then later on we joined the first cavalry, 86th [Infantry] Division in the mopping-up operation in the mountains. Some time in mopping up. Get lot of dead guys underneath where they—in the tunnel. And the smell is terrible. Wow, hard to take it, but we had to do our job, trying to find more live ones, but they all dead when we went. So our mopping-up was enough to get the work done.

The American forces was with us. And I brought my group and the American had his group. We were together going up the mountain. They (Japanese soldiers) were coming down to the well to get water. So the other American officer said, “You take your men there and I take my men here.” We were this way, wedge type.

They were coming down from the hills, the enemies. So as they came down, he signaled. I said, “Okay, I signal my men.” We see only eight came down. Eight soldiers. We were all surprised. Of the eight, one escaped. You know, he was smart. As the shooting gone, he had disappeared fast. So he went back to camp there. Then after that we had to go back to our camp. And I was reprocessed in Lucban, Tayabas, given my serial number, because the Americans wanted the group to be recognized. So I got my army serial number with the first army when they came back. And then as we were reprocessed, we were all happy that we became part of the regular [U.S.] Army. Then we get our serial number. I still have my
number. I can use it. (Chuckles) My number is 028826. Officer’s rank.

MK: And you ended up as a captain?

PR: I started as an appointed lieutenant, training officer in the guerrilla [army]. But in Bataan, I was a private to sergeant. I was promoted to sergeant in (General Francisco’s) headquarters. Then when I came out, since I had experience, the colonel appointed me first lieutenant training officer. Then when I kept his men together, he promoted me to captain [in May 1944]. And I kept that rank until I got discharged.

MK: And I think the other day you told us the story about how the Americans tested you to see if you really came from Hawai‘i.

PR: Oh, that was the (Hunter’s ROTC) guerrilla group. Officer asked me, he wanted to know if I was really from the Islands. So the question he asked me, “Do you know any person by the name of Duke?”

“I only know Duke, is Duke [P.] Kahanamoku you talking about. He’s the world famous swimmer in Hawai‘i.” And he knew what I know. He know that person, so he know that I came from the Islands. So then he know that I am a Hawai‘i boy. So he got me in. As he got me in, he gave me a number to call. Not my name. I said, “Why?”

“We don’t use name in our rank.”

So I was (assigned) S21. My number was—my name was S21. So when I communicate with them, I got to be S21. But I didn’t join them, because my uncle didn’t want me to go back with (him). That’s why instead I went to the Fil-American Irregular troop forces. That was a combat group. Field combat group. So, anyhow, I was in the combat group and we moved from town to town. We traveled evenings, nights. We don’t want the people know that the bunch of people traveling in the night with arms. So, we traveled during the nights. Our time was night traveling. It’s hard, you know, hard to see. So, what they said, “The only way you can identify the next person in front you is (to put) the moss behind your back.” They find certain kind of moss, they put ‘em in the back. I didn’t know until I did that. They use a certain moss, they put ‘em behind your hat or back. And as you walk, you can see the glow. So you follow that glow. Dark, you know. And the forest there is real heavy. Big forest in the Philippines. When we were in Bataan, I went to (Little) Baguio. That’s really (a big) forest (area). After the war when I went back there, no forest. All cut down. The people cut the trees. No forest anymore. No big trees. I’m surprised that the trees were cut down.

MK: You know, you were a Filipino from America that was caught in the Philippines during World War II. Were there other Filipinos like you who were from Hawai‘i or the Mainland caught like you?

PR: Well, in our group I was the only one from Hawai‘i. I don’t know of any others who were there. But when I came back here, they told me there’s a lot of Philippine veterans are here now that was in the service with me. But I don’t know who they were at that time. So, when I came here, I joined the prisoner of war group. And they have some Filipinos there that we met here.
MK: You know, since you were a Filipino from Hawai‘i, were you more fearful of the Japanese than, say, the other Filipinos?

PR: No, when I was there, I know they were all my friends. So, I cannot say I was fearful of the Japanese. They are good friends. But even in camp, in prison camp, they treat us nice in prison camp. They didn’t molest us. So, they were only guarding the area. They didn’t come down and did anything. Among our own people get troubles, because when I was going from camp to camp, they tell me, “Beat it.”

I said, “Why beat it? I just come to look at your place.”

“No, you want food. Go get your own food.” (Chuckles) You know, they told me, I was watching, looking them cook food, eh. They tell me, “Get out.” They talk English. They talk all kind of things. Our own group was not as friendly as some other people.

MK: So, you have World War II, the Americans came in. You helped them to mop-up operation. And then 1946 you came back to Hawai‘i. How did you come back to Hawai‘i?

PR: Now, there was no way to come home to Hawai‘i. So my father found a way for me to come by the plantation way. So he spoke to [Chauncey B.] Wightman, HSPA [Hawaiian Sugar Planters’ Association]. And Wightman wrote to [Slator M.] Miller [HSPA executive] in Manila to accept Racelis son is coming there. So when I went to Mr. Miller in Manila, he said, “I heard about you from your father, who wrote to him. They want you home.”

So I said, “May I go home or can I go home? No boat.”

He said, “No, I’m taking you the plantation way. You go with the laborers coming to Hawai‘i.”

Oh, one way I can go home. Instead of sending me with the laborers, he made me work on the S.S. Marine Falcon with the families [of Filipino laborers coming to Hawai‘i], and I took charge of recreation on the boat. So I worked with Walter Varnum, I think. Somebody there was in charge and I was his assistant entertaining the families on the ship with phonograph records, cards, and stage play. We had the nurses and the doctors help us make a play for the passengers.

WN: This is the same ship that laborers were on?

PR: This is the S.S. Marine Falcon that brought the families [of laborers] here.

WN: Oh, just the families.

PR: The Maunawili brought the laborers. Two ships. I was on the (S.S. Marine Falcon), (Slator M.) Miller made me work to bring the families back. I was supposed to go back on the second trip, but an immigration officer said, “You’ll be sorry if you go back.”

I said, “What’s wrong?” I might get caught when the independence come in. When the Philippine independence come, nobody can come back. So while you’re here, they advise me stay back. I came in June. I’m supposed to take another trip in June and come back by July.
But I might get stalled, they said, up there. So instead of going, I didn't go back. The second trip was taken by somebody else. That's when.

MK: So, you know, when you were on the (S.S.) Marine Falcon as the assistant recreation officer, when you got together with the workers' families, how did they feel about coming to Hawai'i?

PR: Well, they all think it's nice to come to Hawai'i, because they can make a living over here. That's why they're thinking of making a living in Hawai'i. And it's nice that they can come out and they feel happy they can come out. Many wanted to come, but they cannot leave. They don't have the families. Some wanted to go through different ways by getting somebody match them.

WN: You know, were conditions on the [S.S.] Marine Falcon, was it better than conditions on the . . .

PR: Maunawili?

WN: . . . Maunawili?

PR: (S.S.) Marine Falcon is a big (troop) passenger ship. If you know (S.S.) Marine Falcon, that's used as a army transport (ship). But the Maunawili is a freight ship and it's not as good as the—I was happy boarding on the S.S. Marine Falcon, a bigger ship than Maunawili. I'm thankful for Mr. Miller making me go on that ship. (Chuckles)

WN: So the one with the laborers was more crowded and the one that had—the Maunawili was more crowded.

PR: Yeah, more crowded and all men. Well, they had men working, helping in the kitchen. And the passengers were all women and children on our ship [S.S. Marine Falcon]. We had about 800 that time. We brought 800 families. Second trip another 800, but I didn't take the second trip.

MK: And then on the Maunawili, did they have a recreation officer, too, for the . . .

PR: I was the only one.

MK: So only (S.S.) Marine Falcon had a recreation officer. Not the Maunawili.

PR: I don't remember they have any on the Maunawili, because they said to entertain the children. They have a lot of children and mothers that need something to go on. On the Maunawili I don't remember having. They only put one on the (S.S.) Marine Falcon, and I was the one. The second trip, I don't know who they put in. And another thing, people told me—any problem you had on the ship? Well, somebody died, but before she died she was sick boarding the ship already. That's why she died.

WN: Were you particularly good with children or. . . . Do you know why you were selected to be the recreation officer?

PR: Well, Mr. [Slator M.] Miller know who I was. He said when he saw me in Manila, he knew
I was a boxer. (Chuckles) He said, “You walk like a boxer.”

“How do you know?”

“I know the people who box,” he said. So he assigned me (as) recreation (staff) on the ship. And from there, I got assigned to Royal Hawaiian Hotel as a recreation specialist—recreation supervisor, because of Miller who got me involved again.

MK: You know, I know that yesterday you were telling us when you came back to Hawai‘i, you were a field foreman for the children at Onomea Sugar [Company]. Was that before or after you became a recreation person for . . .

PR: The ship.

MK: . . . Matson Navigation?

PR: I came back from the Philippines [in 1946], I went home to my parents in Pāpa‘ikou. Then my parents said, “What do you going to do now, son?”

“I got to look for work.” So we saw the manager [of Onomea Sugar Company], the manager said they’ll make me a [field] foreman for the school children [working in the cane fields during summer vacations], since I can handle people. I was a [field] foreman for all the school children. We had about sixty kids. Thirty-five or sixty, between that number. And good time working with the kids. They enjoy my company. (Chuckles) I don’t talk much story, but I just had all kind things to tell them. I work with the boys and they told me, “You know what we can do?”

I said, “What? What can you do? Work in the fields?”

“No. Can we hukipau?”

I said, “What’s hukipau?”

Well, they told us, “You know, this field is this big, you know. Let us finish it to the end.”

I tell, “Can you do that?”

“Yeah,” they said. With all the girls and boys, they hukipau, they finish the field. So they said, “We can go home, eh?”

“Oh, since you did your job, you can go.” I got scolding by the timekeeper.

He said, “Where are the children?”

“Oh, I sent them home because they did a big job. They were able to work.”

He scolded me, so I didn’t get the good name for him. (Chuckles) The kids were smart. They told me they want to go home. But they really worked, you know. I allowed them to do that, but from that time I didn’t do that again. (Chuckles)
MK: And then later on you became a foreman for older people.

PR: Yeah, after the kids went [back] to school, the manager told me to take care the old people. I handled about eight, nine, ten old men and old women. They worked in the fields. Japanese people. They were all good workers. Cannot find that kind now, that they want to go in the fields.

MK: And then about that time they had the 1946 strike, yeah?

PR: Yeah.

MK: What did you do in the striking?

PR: During the strike, all the foremen were called together. They said, "We got to man the fields now." Hō hana, and all that kind job. All the foremen from all the area in Pāpa'ikou. We grouped together and we worked on the fields. We were disappointed because we had no men, ourselves. We were the workers. Who passed by? All the laborers. "Hey, you scab, get out the field," they told us. But we kept on working. It's our job. So they [laborers] were mad, because we took their job.

WN: How did you feel about doing that?

PR: Doing that? Well, it's my job, the boss told me to do it, so I got to go. I'm loyal so I do my job.

MK: I think we have to end the tape here, and we're going to change, yeah?

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

MK: Videotape number four with Mr. Racelis.

You know, we were just talking about the 1946 strike, yeah?

PR: Right.

MK: And you were working in the fields, and the workers called you scab, yeah?

PR: Yeah.

MK: So, when the strike was pau, how were your relations with the workers?

PR: It was all right. They didn't bother us. They were good and friendly yet, because we didn't cause trouble. We just wanted to clear the field. But there's certain guys that came around, that did the yelling at us. But the majority of the workers were okay. They were friendly to us. We had no problem with them. We went back to our job to work with the people.

MK: What did you think about the union back then?

PR: Then, I think the union, at that time, was good. It helped the laborers get what they want.
And if it wasn’t for them, our [standard] of living won’t go this high again. I belong the HGEA [Hawai‘i Government Employees Association], Unit 13. I was a steward and it was good knowing that I can help, too.

WN: I was wondering, most of the rank and file, a lot of the rank and file were, you know, had a lot of Filipinos, yeah, in ’46.

PR: Right, right.

WN: And the supervisory, like you folks, hardly had any, yeah, Filipino?

PR: Myself, Terry (Alicuben). We were four Filipino luna, that time, in the plantation.

WN: Did the Filipino rank and file treat you differently at all?

PR: No. They treat us same like the other foremen [non-Filipino]. No different. We were treated well, because it’s same kind so they don’t bother.

MK: And, you know, when you were at Pāpa‘ikou in ’46, were you involved in politics in any way?

PR: No, at that time I wasn’t active in politics. I just got along with the people there that time. At that time we had amateur boxing, so we were organizing the boxing team. I organized the Pāpa‘ikou amateurs and we would box in Hilo. We boxed in Hilo Armory. So we brought some boys to fight the Waiākea boys. We were picked, five of us, Pāpa‘ikou amateurs to come to Honolulu to fight, amateur boxing. So from Hilo and Pāpa‘ikou, we joined together. We came to Honolulu and fought (at Civic Auditorium). I didn’t make good because I went nightclubbing the night before that.

(Laughter)

I had no wind to take the fight, so I lost the fight. But anyway, had an experience coming here that time.

MK: And that was at the old Civic Auditorium [in Honolulu]?

PR: Civic Auditorium. My sister watched me fall down. My friends saw me down. And I cannot see myself. (Laughs) I thought I’ll make good, but that’s all right. That’s a nice experience.

WN: Who promoted your fights, those days?

PR: That time, (Richard) Chinen.

WN: Oh, they named the [Afook-Chinen] Civic Auditorium [in Hilo] after him?

PR: Yeah, that time Chinen was amateur fighting, not the professional. He was in charge of amateur fighting. Chinen. He brought boys to Hilo and fought our boys. And we came to Honolulu. I don’t know who organized the one in Honolulu. But I know Chinen was involved with us. You know, Richard Chinen, eh? A husky fellow. He used to bring boxers to Hilo. I
fought one of his boys, Higa. That’s the one [photograph] you saw me on the floor.

(Laughter)

I dropped him first, you know. He fell down. It so happened I came back, he dropped me second time. The second time he dropped me, the picture was taken.

(Laughter)

I told my second, “Why you throw the towel in?”

He said, “No, forget this fight. We go to Honolulu and fight.” (Laughs)

WN: Where did you folks fight in Hilo?

PR: (Hilo) Civic auditorium.

WN: Oh, the Hilo civic.

PR: The gym. The armory. They had one armory, eh, near the river. That’s where we fought. Way back.

WN: Did you know Mr. Jamito?

PR: Jamito?

WN: Sabas Jamito.

PR: He was fighting then?

WN: Yeah.

PR: I don’t remember his name. After my time, maybe.

WN: He’s about your age.

PR: Yeah? Is he still around?

WN: Yeah, yeah.

PR: Where he from? From the island?

WN: I think he’s from Hilo. I forget.

MK: Yeah, he was a Hilo longshoreman.

WN: Hilo longshoreman.

PR: I know one small fellow from Pa‘auilo. Not Pa‘auilo. From Pāhala. I used to fight, too. I
forget his name though.

WN: Anyway (laughs).

MK: So you had this boxing background, yeah?

PR: Yeah.

MK: And you were recreation officer on the [S.S.] Marine Falcon. So you got to be a recreation specialist with the Matson Navigation [Company] Hawaiian Hotel Division, yeah?

PR: Yeah.

MK: How did you get that job from Onomea [Sugar Company] to . . .

PR: How did I get that job? Well, coming to Hawai‘i, Mr. (Slator M.) Miller knew me. And knowing my background and knowing me, and they wanted a recreation staff to staff the hotel’s employees, he recommend me to Warren Penney, (general manager of) the hotel division. So, I went to see him. He tell me, “Go to Matson Navigation Company [Hawaiian] Hotel Division and see Warren Penney. He have something for you down there.” So when I went there, I got hired to work as recreation supervisor for the staff and also work in the personnel office for other jobs. So that’s how I got a job from the hotel, from Slator Miller, who knows me on the ship [S.S. Marine Falcon], and knows my background before that. So I got the recreation job and I did a good job for the hotel. We had volleyball, bowling. That’s for the employees at that time. And I was able to get the hotel softball team into [the] businessmen’s league. We attended the businessmen’s league in (Honolulu). And we got them involved. We go to different (playgrounds) to play softball.

MK: And this was a full-time job to just work on the recreation for the staff?

PR: Yeah, full-time job. And during the daytime, when I’m not doing that, I work for the personnel office—record. In the evening I go out with the boys. I got through working late sometimes. (Chuckles)

MK: So this was more . . .

PR: The management was happy that I don’t complain, he said, on the job. I always work. At that time no complaining. More work done.

MK: So this was like intramural sports with the staff?

PR: No, interdepartment staff. The bellboy staff, the bellboys, room service, the waiters and waitresses, they had their own team in the hotel. And some others organized themselves different way.

MK: So when you folks had field sports like softball, baseball, where did you folks play?

PR: We played at a park behind—in front of Moana Hotel there was a park inside [around] where the employees lived. They leveled up the place. They made a field there for us to play
volleyball and softball. That's where we practiced there and play. But we go to different parks to play with other teams. We had a good softball team. I'll show you the picture. Bumbai I'll show you that.

MK: And then when you worked for the Matson [Navigation] Company, what other jobs did you have with the hotel?

PR: Well, I got to be involved in different types of jobs, because management changed. And one personnel director didn't like me in the office. So he assigned me to different—like time keeper's job, maître d's office. And the last one was engineering department. I work in three places in the hotel division. It was wonderful, because I gained experience in those work.

MK: And then in '49, though, you stopped working for the hotels and you ended up going to Hutchinson Sugar [Company] in Nā'ālehu. How did that happen?

PR: How did that happen? While I was with the hotel, working for the hotel, Hutchinson Sugar was looking for a young person to go there to work as a clerk interpreter. Mr. Slator [M.] Miller, HSPA secretary, knows me, he called [Al] Maisel, my boss at Matson, to send me to him. So Mr. Maisel said, “You go to see Miller at the HSPA office. He wants to see you.”

So when I went there he said, “Well, I got a job for you.”

I said, “Where at?”

“Nā'ālehu.”

I said, “That’s on the Big Island someplace there, yeah. Where is it?”

“I’ll send you there and you look it over. And if you like the place, you come back and tell me.”

So I went. He sent me to the Big Island. It’s different from Pāpa‘ikou. It’s far. So I went there and I said, “Oh, it’s a nice country community.” So I told him, “I’ll accept the job.”

So I was on the job as clerk interpreter to Nā'ālehu [i.e., Hutchinson] Sugar Company. But I didn’t get along with the manager there, because he thought I had union meetings in the house. But that time we had Filipino activities. And the Filipinos come to the house to talk about the Rizal Day program. But the person I was living with told the management I was having union meeting. So he was real mad at me, the manager, [James S.] Beatty. And that time Beatty didn’t like union. So, well, I can’t help, but I still want to get along with the people, because I work with them. So, that’s what happened.

Then the last long day I came back to Honolulu [in 1950]. And I asked Mr. Miller, “I’ll be looking for a job here again.”

He said, “Come, let’s see what we can find.”

And then I took the exam for recreation supervisor. I was out of work for two years before I got that job [as recreation specialist at Hawai‘i Youth Correctional Facility in 1952]. That
time my wife was working at the University of Hawai‘i as a school nurse. So we were able to live. So, I wait for two years until I took the civil service exam. And I got number five on the list. I was happy I was selected. And while at the job at the boys’ school for recreation, I took the exam again. And I told Mr. Among, “I want to go to the other place to work.” No, he want me to stay there. He didn’t want me to leave the boys’ school, because—I don’t know, maybe he like what I do, but . . . When he went on vacation, I saw another friend, Mr. K. O. Chun, who was (Mr. Among’s) assistant that time. I told him, “I still get this job coming, you know.”

He said, “Go, it’s promotion to you.

“So thank you, if I can go.”

He said, “You go.” He let me go.

So I left the boys’ school [Hawai‘i Youth Correctional Facility] and moved to juvenile detention home (called Hale Ho‘omalu, on Alder Street). It brought me a better job and closer to home. That’s why I stayed at detention home and met new people, people who know politics. (Laughs)

MK: And then you started getting into . . .

PR: And then I start get involved [in politics].

MK: Before we get into that, I think you said before you got your government job, you were appointed to a job by Oren [E.] Long, yeah, when he was governor.

PR: That was before I got the state job in ’52. My friend told me—Jimmy [James J. M.] Misajon, a good friend of mine said, “Go and see Governor Long.”

I said, “Why?”

“He has a job for you.”

Instead I went to the department where they were hiring, highway planning and survey, under Kwon You Chang. And then he hired me as a [survey] interviewer for their highway planning. So I worked there until I took the test for the (state) civil service (for recreation supervisors).

MK: Did you know Governor Long?

PR: I know he was the governor at that time [1951-53]. He was before [John A.] Burns. He was the governor then. Not personally, but we know him as our governor at that time. And knowing that he’s going to hire for some people, I went to the chief, “I can get that job,” and I was selected.

MK: And then when you got to be recreation specialist, you did that from 1952 to 1981?

PR: Yeah, I worked for the department twenty-nine years. Twenty-seven years at detention home
[Hale Ho'omalu, 1954-81], two years at the boys’ school [Hawai'i Youth Correctional Facility, 1952-54]. And when I left the job, they gave me thirty-one years service with the state, including my sick leave time. That’s good, because I didn’t get sick. And instead, they gave me more time for my retirement.

MK: So it’s when you started working there you got involved in politics?

PR: Well, because I know people who know people. And people were involved, friends. Starting with Vincent [H.] Yano, that time, who was running for senator in the Kapahulu district, I think, or Kaimuki district. So we went house to house for him, and all around. And when Sparky [Spark M. Matsunaga] ran for U.S. Congress, yes, we helped him there, too. Sparky’s time, we went to Wai’alae-Kāhala. Oh, that was a terrible place to go, because people (were) different in there. I asked a lady, “May I introduce myself? We’re here to help Sparky get to Congress.” She slammed the door at me. I went back to see Andrew (Matsunaga, Spark’s brother), “Andrew.”

“What’s the matter?”

“That lady slammed the door at me.”

“Forget her. Go the next door.” So I went the next door. (Chuckles) I don’t know why. Those people, they have feelings, you know. They didn’t like the idea we helping. So I moved around to the next house to pass Matsunaga’s brochure. At that time, we all were doing house to house many times, but not too much like before.

MK: You know, I was wondering how come you got involved, though? You know you got . . .

PR: How come?

MK: Yeah, how come you said, “Yeah, I’m going to go help you guys.”

PR: Well, I had good friends, and those good friends told me, “Let’s help each other,” so I help them. So, if without friends we cannot move, you know. Friends make friends. So it’s wonderful that I met friends like Roland Watson and the Watson gang. Now here and there, I met Clarence Kusumoto. Built (me) as a precinct worker all the way up to central committee.

MK: Did you ever consider becoming a Republican instead of a Democrat?

PR: No, I never did. Since I became a Democrat, I never did.

MK: What do you like about the Democratic party. What is it that attracts you?

PR: The Democratic party really is the people’s party. And I like that, because we get along as grassroots people, to work together for our people who run for office. And keeping ourselves with them, make us feel good working for the people you want to help.

MK: Okay, I think we have to change tape and we’ll continue.

END OF SIDE TWO
This is tape number five with Mr. Racelis.

Mr. Racelis, we were just talking about the time you got involved in politics. You said that your friends got you involved. You became a Democrat. What did they tell you to get you involved?

What did they tell me?

Yeah.

"Eh, Pete, let's go campaign for somebody."

I said, "For who?"

First we started with Vincent Yano way down that [East Honolulu] side. Then for Spark Matsunaga on that side. I helped a lot over there. Then some people over here [Leeward O'ahu] know I was helping there. They told me get into the precinct, work in the precinct. So Clarence Kusumoto made me work in the precinct. I started from clerk, all the way from clerk inspector, delivery chairman, vice-president, president, district chairman to central committee in the Democratic party in this area.

Oh. So from the time you moved here [Halawa] in '65, you got involved in the party politics, precinct politics.

Yeah. Because we had people here who knows what they need here. And they asked us to join them. And Clarence Kusumoto know what I can do. Made me work hard. He knows I can work so I did, trying the best I can.

And, you know, like, you're Filipino and there are a lot of Filipino voters out there. Did members of the Democratic party say, "Oh, Mr. Racelis, Pete, can you help us get the Filipino voters to support the Democratic candidates?"

They have, but they're not that active calling people out, because there are two factions. The Republican—there are two kinds of Filipinos to working. So the Democrat, they try to put together a group. I used to go with [Hideo] "Major" Okada, who have Waipahu group. And he had some Filipino gang, he told me bring some friends there. So I used to go there and meet these people over there. Major Okada was active that time. And then, I don't know much about getting—how a Filipino can get involved, because they different. It takes individual interest to come out. Like, I came out myself, you know. There are some of them that are interested by themselves, for their own. But not to help out as—I don't know how.

Did you help any candidates living in your area? I know you lived on Houghtailing in Kalihi. Did you help any of those candidates?

Peter [S.] Iha was there at that time. But one time they asked us to help another Republican
Hawaiian guy from Big Island. [James K.] Kealoha [lieutenant governor of Hawai‘i, 1959-62]. We helped him that side. Then my brother-in-law asked me to help house [i.e., canvass] for Kealoha, so I started helping only helping him, Republican, that time. I was Democrat yet that time. (Chuckles)

MK: So you helped Jimmie Kealoha then?

PR: Yeah, he was a Republican. But my brother-in-law from Big Island asked me to help him. So that’s why I helped him that time. But he didn’t win, because he fought his own boss. (Chuckles) It’s hard that way.

MK: So that was when [William F.] Quinn and Kealoha were running [against each other in the Republican primary for governor in 1962].

PR: Yeah, right. Right.

MK: What did your Democratic friends think when you went around supporting a Republican?

PR: I wasn’t too active yet at that time, so they didn’t say much. Now I have to be careful.

WN: So this was when Quinn was running against Burns for governor?

PR: Not yet. That was between themselves first for—[Republican] primary that was.

WN: Oh, primary. Oh, okay.

PR: That was primary. The general, I went to the Burns’ side [against Quinn].

MK: Yesterday you were telling us you’ve always been a Burns man. How come you supported Burns?

PR: Well, Burns was the man we know well, who is a people’s governor. Not himself, but he worked for our own people. So that’s how I thought of him as a governor for our kind. So, he is a man that can stand on his own foot without being told what to do. And he also is a man that we can trust. That’s why I looked at him that way.

MK: How did you come to look at him that way? Did someone come and talk to you and tell you about Governor Burns or. . . . How did you come to that kind of feeling for him?

PR: Well, the reason how we helped was from the [Roland] Watson gang to the [Daniel T.] Aoki gang, we all, they were together that time. So we all worked for him from that time. That’s how I became involved with the Burns gang. [Daniel T.] Aoki used to tell Watson and our gang, “Eh, let’s push Burns in.” So we got involved with Burns way back. That’s long time ago, that.

WN: How did the structure work? Okay, you have a precinct.

PR: Here?
WN: You have a precinct, yeah. How did it work in terms of the hierarchy? Like, who was the— you have the precinct chairman, right, all the way down to—what would you call the bottom?

PR: The clerk. They started with the clerk, (then) inspector. Then vice-president, secretary, treasurer and the president in the precinct. They called us the precinct club. And from there, as you want to go higher, you get to the district, senatorial district. After you get into the senatorial district, you can go up if you want to, get involved in central committee group. And then you get elected to the central committee at the convention, Democratic convention. They pick the people who want to get—they select. I was chosen from here to go to the five districts. And that five districts select that man to get into the central committee. Out of four district and myself, we became the solid central committee group from this area. Kalihi, myself, and the three other groups on the other side. So, I was elected to the central committee.

MK: And then what is the central committee responsible for?

PR: It's the policy body group of the Democratic party. They make the rules for the party. And whatever the party goes, the chairman of the central committee takes care of us.

MK: And then on the precinct level—like you said, there's the precinct clerk, what does he do?

PR: During election time, he just registers all of those voters that come in (the precinct). Her or his job is to register the name of the people coming in, get their identification number and then register them as they vote.

MK: And then the precinct inspector . . .

PR: And then it goes to the inspector. The inspector checks that they okay. It goes to the ballot boys. They put it into the box. And from there it goes to wherever the counting place is.

MK: And then when you get to be like vice-president or president of the precinct, what's your responsibility?

PR: Well, the president handles all the men in charge, takes care that they do their job. The vice-president assists the president. And the president sees that the election's working in order. Is it all right, going or good. No problem. If there's any problem, you have to call in the area where we have to report the problem to.

WN: For example, like the door-to-door people, where would they be in all this whole thing? Those that had to go door to door to campaign for somebody.

PR: Going to door to door, they are organized by a group. Like Sparky had Andrew and the staff organize the group. They meet at a certain school. They are given brochures, their bag with brochures. Then we go to our cars or whose car they have, and sent to the district. Like here we have Alice Takehara (our district chairman), handles our party here, door to door. Then we go all the way up to 'Aiea heights, Hālawa Heights, part of—by the [Aloha] Stadium (Hālawa Valley). We go door to door, house to house. Four people go this area, the next four go another area, another four go different area. About several groups that go out. And when
we have house-to-house brochure passing, we get about sixty, seventy people meet at the ‘Aiea High School. But Vincent Yano at Kaimuki, we had that many, too. Sparky had that many, too. That time, good, you know. We had a lot of people come out. Now it’s hard to get people coming out.

MK: So the grassroots people that passed out the brochures and go house to house, are they connected with the candidate? Like they’re the Friends of Tom Okamura kind of organization member or they’re just Democratic party precinct people?

PR: No, they’re all friends of certain people. Like Tom get his own group. Tom got his group from Halawa, all different area, he got his group. And Tom is very active over here. He has a big group of supporters.

MK: And then when there’s like a statewide campaign for governor, does the Democratic party use the precinct structure to campaign?

PR: No. You have another group that come for the governor. And that group is selected by another group that heads the campaign for governor. Not from the precinct. The precinct is only a club by itself that handles the voting system. And from the precinct, you go to the central [committee] that makes the policy body for the Democratic party. Now from there, we go out to help the campaign. You don’t get the guys involved in there.

MK: And then when it comes to the state conventions, the people are elected from the precinct clubs to go to the conventions . . .

PR: No. The convention depends on how many delegates each precinct can send to the convention. Some precincts send four delegates. Our precinct, we had seven delegates. So seven will attend the convention from our precinct here, district three. We have a number of people, more. That’s why we were able to get seven delegates. And then we are elected to get into the convention. At the precinct meeting, when they elect the officers, they also elect the delegates to the convention.

MK: And you’re still active in politics? You’re still active in precinct work?

PR: Oh, me?

MK: Yeah.

PR: Well, I’m still active. They call every now and then. Sometimes a central committee member who took my place can’t make it, she told me to take her place. So I attend the central committee meeting. They still know me there. (Chuckles)

MK: So still active then.

PR: Yeah, I’ve been active in the central committee from [19]78 to [19]86. Central committee, I was a central committee member that time, until I make Alice take my place. Because Alice is a hustler, so I was able to get her in there.

MK: You know, I’ve been wondering, like, you’re an old Burns man, yeah? And then nowadays
they have the [John D.] Waihee group. How’s the relationship between the people who came in with Burns and now the Waihee group?

PR: I think they still have that same close relationship. They still feel that the Burns group is also with the Waihee group. So I’d like to get in that same group, because no other group better than what we have now. (Chuckles)

WN: How has campaigning changed from the time you started back in the [1960s] to now? Has it changed at all?

PR: Well, not so much, but only harder to get people out now. A lot of people say, “Enough already. It’s enough already of getting involved.” They want to stay out. But I don’t know why I’m still there with the people who helping. There are people, they don’t want to involve themselves because they say that’s enough time to giving. Maybe because of their work, they cannot go out. But since I’m retired, I can put time now. That’s why I still.

WN: What about nowadays, they have, you know, there’s a lot more money involved in campaigning. There’s TV and radio and things. Has that changed things?

PR: Now it’s harder because it’s more expensive to run and it’s more expensive to campaign. And people don’t want to get involved, because they don’t want to give, you know what I mean? And I’m still helping some candidates. They ask for funds. If I can give, I give. One reason why I see some don’t come out, because they don’t want to contribute. It’s not good to tell this way, but it’s one way they don’t come out. And campaigning is hard. You have to get a lot of funds to run.

MK: Also, I notice, you know, when I was a kid, I remember people walking the district, you know. And they would come hand out brochures. But nowadays, like last election, nobody came to my house, but I saw them carrying signs, you know, on the street.

PR: Yeah, we do that. We’re doing that. We’re on the streets, always holding signs for—since the last campaign.

WN: You hold for who?


MK: With people holding signs nowadays, do you folks do less canvassing? You folks go to house less than before?

PR: The same people go out, too.

MK: Still do?

PR: Yeah. But the holding signs, not too many people come out, because they work. And we hold signs in the morning and the afternoon, and no more time to come out. So only we have a small group that hold signs all the time. They’re mostly retirees. (Chuckles)

WN: How effective, you think, holding signs is?
PR: Well, it shows what kind of people we have. When they make the [shaka] signs with their hands, well, all right. When the put their thumb down it shows that they're different. When they happy, they blow the horn and it's nice that they can get that.

WN: So you think people do pay attention to you folks holding signs.

PR: Well, they like the people out there showing interest. Without interest in the people, they don't come out.

MK: We're coming towards the end of our tape. I think I'll ask the last question. What do you think is the future of politics in Hawai'i? How do you think . . .

PR: Future politics of Hawai'i? I'd like to see more young people get more involved. The younger guys are the one we want to look for now. And they're coming out, but not as much as they should. Well, it's because they are working, one reason they don't come out. But if they can come out and get involved, we'd like to see that. For the future. We want to have more young people come in and help campaign for whatever we can. (Sighs)

(Laughter)

MK: Okay, I think this is . . .

WN: I think it's a good place to end.

MK: Good time to end.

WN: Thank you.

MK: Mr. Racelis, you did it. We're pau.

PR: (During the 1986 Democratic party convention, I was honored for my long service to the Democratic party as a central committee member. I was the second recipient of the party's meritorious achievement award.)

END OF INTERVIEW
HAWAIʻI
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