Irene I'i Brown, daughter of George I'i Brown, Jr. and Julia Jones Brown, was born in Honolulu on October 11, 1946. She grew up along with her siblings George, Julia, and Deborah, on a thirteen-acre piece of property on Waipi'o Peninsula. She is the great-great-granddaughter of John Papa I'i and the great-granddaughter of Irene I'i Brown Holloway.

She was educated at Punahou School, Westover School in Middlebury, Connecticut, and Bennett College in New York. After two years at Bennett, she returned to Hawai'i and worked for a short time in the Castle & Cooke mail room. She then began working for Island Holidays Travel Service. In 1969 she was transferred to San Francisco and worked as a group tour coordinator for three years. After taking a year off to travel, she moved back to Hawai'i and lived in Kailua while working as a sales representative for East-West Travel Service. She then lived on Kaua'i for a few years before relocating to Maui in 1988.

She currently lives in Kula on Maui, where she runs the Mililani Bed and Breakfast. She has three children, Padraic, Julia, and Seamus.
HY: This is an interview with Irene Brown. We’re at her home in Kula. It’s October 17, 1998, and the interviewer is Holly Yamada.

Let’s start with what’s your birth date?

IB: My birthday: October 11, 1946.

HY: And where were you born?

IB: I was born at Queen’s Hospital in Honolulu.

HY: And where did you grow up?

IB: I grew up in Waipahu on O‘ahu.

HY: Maybe you could describe your home where you lived a little bit.

IB: The home was part of the [John] I‘i Estate, which stretched from Pearl Harbor to the hills of Wahiawā behind. And when the I‘i Estate was sold, Dad [George I‘i Brown II] kept about thirteen acres for his house. Now the house was built in 1940, I believe. [Nineteen] forty or ‘41. Well, it was before the Pearl Harbor attack [on December 7, 1941], the house was complete. And it was designed by a local architect. I think it was [Vladimir] Ossipoff, and it was sort of a long ranch house type with large lānais and views of Pearl Harbor a little bit, through the trees. And we had a swimming pool and a tennis court and lots of play areas and we had the sugarcane fields of O‘ahu Sugar Company. We were right next door and we used to go out and play in the cane fields.

HY: Now what was—your father worked for the John I‘i Estate.

IB: I believe he was the treasurer for the John I‘i Estate until it was sold [in 1950].

HY: And your mom [Julia “Judy” Jones Brown]? I think she was a schoolteacher, is that right?

IB: Mother was a schoolteacher when she first came out here, which was during the war [World
War II]. Well, she was a schoolteacher when Dad first met her in Annapolis, [Maryland] when Dad was doing a post-graduate year right after the war started. And she was a schoolteacher—I believe she was an elementary school teacher.

HY: Maybe you can talk about your grandparents, what you remember about your—let’s start with your paternal grandparents.

IB: Actually, my paternal grandfather [George I'i Brown] died in March before I was born. He did, at the time—well, I guess he knew he was dying and asked Dad and Mother that if the baby happened to be a girl, to name me after his mother, Irene I'i [Brown Holloway]. So they promised him that they would do that.

And my grandmother, my paternal grandmother [Julia White Brown], was very close to all three of her sons [George I'i Brown II, Zadoc White Brown, Kenneth Francis Brown] and spent a lot of time with us as children. She lived on Diamond Head in this cool house that was right on the beach and we used to love to go in there and go to the beach and swim. And she was a very strong woman, a very definite woman. She was very independent. She was very small, too. She was about five feet tall. And just a dynamo. She had lots and lots of energy and did spend a lot of time with the oldest of us grandchildren including Zadoc [Brown, Jr.] and Alan [Brown], my cousins, and George [I'i Brown III, IB’s brother] and myself. And she would take us on trips to [the island of] Hawai‘i to her place in Waimea. And she spent a lot of time with us. She would take care of us when Dad and Mother would go on trips.

HY: What type of stuff did you do there with your grandmother. I guess either at Waimea or at her [Diamond Head] house?

IB: Well, at her home in Diamond Head, usually, we were going to school. She would take care of us when Dad and Mother went on trips and we would be going to school. So she would make sure that we did all our school stuff. We would also go to the beach a lot since it was right in front of her house. She liked to do a lot of walking, which we didn’t like at all. But in Waimea, we would—her (relative) was married to the head of the Parker Ranch at the time, [A.] Hartwell Carter. Hartwell and Becky [Rebecca White] Carter. And we would go up there and they would set it up where we would be able to go riding every day with one of the paniolos. And so we learned to ride when we were pretty young. And we’d go to the brandings and rodeos and then she’s make us walk all around Waimea. And it was funny because we thought she was really nuts. She’d wave at everybody, even if she didn’t know ‘em. She was just very friendly. And she’d make us walk and walk and walk. And she’d take us down to the beach.

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

HY: Okay, we’re talking about . . .

IB: My grandmother, my paternal grandmother.

HY: . . . your grandmother and hanging out in Waimea.

IB: Yeah, hanging out at Waimea. And we’d go up there—usually for vacations, we’d go up there for Christmas and for spring [break]. And she was also a good friend of the owner of the
Parker Ranch, Richard Smart. So we’d go over the Richard’s house at Pu‘u‘ōpelu and go to parties there and the whole ranch would have New Year’s lil‘aus. And she’d drag us out there at five o’clock in the morning when they were opening the imu to make sure we saw the opening of the imu.

Also, when we were very small—I was probably four or five years old—she would take us to Kona and we would stay at a little place in Kona and she’d take us down to watch the cows being rowed out to the [interisland ship] Humu‘ula. And they’d drag the cows out and lash ‘em to the boats, the small boats, and row ‘em out and then lift ‘em on board. And we’d go down there and she’d get us up at the crack of dawn and we’d go and see that, which was really exciting actually. And she would take us down to the beach a lot. She didn’t swim very well, but she took us to the beach. She’d always get the car stuck in the sand. And we knew that. (Chuckles) We would expect it.

And then we would have to fly into Kona and then drive to Waimea at that point in time. And we’d fly into Kona and invariably she’d get a flat tire driving to Waimea. So we always had to change her tire. I remember that. But she was just really a dynamic woman and shared a lot of experiences with us that I guess we wouldn’t have had if we hadn’t had her as our grandmother.

HY: And she would usually just take the kids when your folks were out of town or something, or would it be the whole family?

IB: Oh, well, no, Dad and Mother wouldn’t come along. It would just be basically Zadoc and Alan and George and myself. Or a lot of times, just me and George. And we’d go up and stay at her house and sometimes I’d have friends up. She liked men a lot better than women, and boys better than girls, and if I had my girlfriends up there and we’d giggle and laugh, she thought we were sort of frivolous.

And she had a motorcycle—I think George may have told you—until she was eighty, when we finally took it away from her. But she would ride her motorcycle around Kāhala or maybe around the island, I don’t know. And after that, she did have a bicycle that she would ride down Kāhala. And George may have told you the story about a young rookie policeman taking her bicycle away from her because she didn’t have a bike license on the bicycle and apparently she was riding in Kāhala and the rookie policeman took the bicycle away because he was confiscating it. And she walked home and called Dan Liu, who was chief of police at the time, and said, “I want my bike back.” And so the policeman had to come out. The young policeman had to come out and apologize for taking her bike away. (Chuckles) But she was old at that point in time.

Dad would go visit her, when she was older, just about every day and spend time with her. He was real dedicated to her. There are stories of her taking her children, her three sons, back east to school when they were in high school, I guess, or just before—middle school, high school. And apparently, she would tell my grandfather to go down into the front yard of their house on Diamond Head and wave a big white flag as the boat sailed past. And he would see them off at the boat—now this is just hearsay, too—and then he would go down to the Waipi‘o [Peninsula] property that we were brought up on, because there was a house down there. Before Dad built a house, there was another house that he [IB’s grandfather] would go down there and have huge parties. And then he would send the gardener down to the front of the
house in Diamond Head with a big white flag, waving it. She was thinking that he was there waving the flag when he was already partying down at Waipi'o.

But I knew her—she is probably my mentor. I mean, she, because of her independence and her stamina, her enthusiasm, has helped me a lot in my life going through the different trials and tribulations that I go through.

I didn't know my mother's parents very well at all. Her father died when I was young, and I had visited them once when I was young and I don't remember him at all really. My mother's mother was the typical grandmother, you know. She baked and cooked and was just a very kind, elderly lady as opposed to my father's mother, who was very sort of dynamic and exciting. My mother's mother's existence was just what you would think of a typical grandmother who was just a very nice, kind person. I didn't know her very well, either.

HY: Did you spend time with her on the Mainland then?

IB: I spent a little bit of time, but not a whole bunch. I went down there on a vacation when I was a freshman in high school when I was back east in school. And we would go over to her house for fried chicken. But I didn't spend a whole bunch of time with her. And then I was down in Maryland again, I guess my junior year, because George got me in trouble. (Chuckles) George had been caught speeding or something at Christmas time and had his license taken away from him. And I didn't tell my parents because I didn't think it was right to tattletale. And they found out about it and decided to discipline both of us and sent us down to our aunt's in Maryland for spring break. Well George took off to Florida with friends and didn't go [to Maryland], and I went. But I didn't spend that much time with my grandmother at the time. I was with my aunt and uncle.

HY: Maybe you could talk about your daily life at home, what kinds of things that you would do there. You had this big piece of property to play.

IB: Yeah, well, we played a lot. We swam a lot. There was a huge fence around the swimming pool when we were young so that we wouldn't drown ourselves. But we were good swimmers from an early age so when Mother wasn't paying attention to us or watching us, we would climb over the fence and go swimming. And she discovered that, and then decided that they might as well take down the fence because we knew how to swim.

We did have ladies taking care of us. We had—when I was small, there were people there, but I don't remember them.

HY: That lived on the . . .

IB: That lived on the property. We did have a cook and we had a lady who cleaned, and we had a lady who did the laundry. They did have some au pairs that I remember when Julia was born [in 1950], that came from Switzerland, Jeannette. And she took care of us, I think, for a couple of years. I'm not really sure. But I remember that Julia, when she first started speaking, was speaking in French because this lady, Jeannette, took care of her all the time. And so Julia was definitely bilingual when she was very young.

But we weren't allowed in the kitchen. In other words, there was always somebody there that
would prepare the food and serve us. So we had—I don’t remember early childhood, but as we got older and went off to school, we would be woken up in the morning and breakfast would be served to us. And we’d sit on one side of this big, huge, old koa table that was my great-grandmother’s, for breakfast. And then at dinner time, we would sit on the other side. And we would be served dinner, too.

HY: And were you served separately from your parents?

IB: I don’t remember when that occurred. It probably did because I know Julia was in the kitchen and—actually I don’t remember Julia, I remember Debbie was in the kitchen when she was younger, eating in the kitchen, throwing her food. (Chuckles) But we ate at the same time. We’d all sit down at the table and eat.

HY: What kinds of foods were prepared for you?

IB: What kinds of foods? Well, I just remember—the ones that I liked, we had beef stew and I don’t remember a lot of the kind of food. I know that we had—for breakfast we had fruit, and we had cereal and we had eggs, and a lot of times, bacon and milk. For dinner, at that point in time, there was a lot of canned vegetables and stuff. And I remember canned beans and canned corn and peas. I don’t remember salads, per se.

HY: Were there different kinds of ethnic foods?

IB: Not really. No. It was—what Mother would do is she would—she had a dozen, a gazillion cookbooks. I mean, we have boxes and boxes and boxes of cookbooks. She would go through the cookbooks and she would do the marketing, and then the cook would do the cooking. And so she would choose dishes that she wanted to be cooked. I don’t remember a lot of them. I remember zucchini and hating that. And I remember beef stew because I always wanted to learn how to make beef stew, and so the lady, the cook, did show me how at one point in time.

But we were not allowed in the kitchen. I mean, when I left home, I had no clue how to cook at all. Mother didn’t like fish, so we didn’t have fish a lot even though Dad would go out fishing and sometimes bring—well, a lot of times—bring in some really good fresh fish. But she didn’t like preparing it, or having it. She didn’t like eating it. So we didn’t eat a lot of fish. Steaks, probably.

HY: Were the foods primarily from—since she’s from New England . . .

IB: Right, well, the East Coast.

HY: From that area.

IB: Yeah, it was American food. Roast beef, chicken—fried chicken, roast chicken, pork, pork chops. No, not very much ethnic food at all.

HY: And you had a lot of people helping with the household, domestic help and whatnot. Were you expected to do any chores or any of that kind of thing?
IB: Not at all. No.

HY: Okay. George had mentioned a caretaker that lived—the Watanabe family?

IB: Watanabe was the gardener. But he also took care of us when—actually, when we were little babies. We would crawl around behind him and he would—maybe he took care of George more than me. But he and his family lived in a caretaking house on part of the property. He used to have a furo. We used to go over there and want to check it out. But it was his house, you know. We weren’t really allowed to go around his house at all. I don’t---George probably remembers more of Watanabe than I do.

HY: Were there other people that you remember that lived on property or spent a lot of time there?

IB: Oh, well, there was—one person who wasn’t on property was—I can’t remember her name now—the lady who did the ironing, Masue. Masue did the ironing and the laundry. And Shirley [Oda] lived on property and took care of us and took care of, basically, the housekeeping. And Mrs. [Elizabeth] Neal was the cook. Mrs. Neal had a huge—two sets of false teeth and had terrible sinus problems, and was a lady from the Mainland. Shirley was Japanese and had been brought up in the islands. And then one of the gardeners, [Shohei] Oda, who used also drive us into school when Dad and Mother weren’t around. We thought it would be great if Shirley and Oda got together, so we were trying to be matchmakers. And they did get together. And they actually had two kids.

HY: And did they raise their kids on . . .

IB: No. I think one of the kids was born—as soon as they got married, they moved out. And I don’t know if she kept working for us at that point in time or if she was finished, because that was when I was away in high school. I think she kept working but I don’t know. Anyway, she was great. She taught me how to sew and she taught me how to cook, and Masue taught me how to iron. (Chuckles) I thought it was great. (Chuckles) All these wonderful domestic things, which I hate to do now. But they were all just real kind people. Mrs. Neal was a pretty independent woman and actually, I haven’t heard from her recently, but she was on the Mainland. She got married again at age eighty and was in a care home. And I did see them—I saw Shirley and Oda and Masue and Mrs. Neal in about 1983. We all had lunch together, and that was really nice. But Shirley was wonderful with all of us. Mrs. Neal was very demanding. She was very religious and would go to church every Sunday. And when I started getting boyfriends, she was very upset. You know, couldn’t hold hands, definitely couldn’t kiss—you’d get pregnant if you did. (Laughs)

But we would go to Kona in the summertime as a family. Dad would take his fishing boat up to Kona and we’d rent a house up there and Mrs. Neal would go along—I think Shirley would go along, too. But I can’t remember if Shirley did or not. But then, actually, when we got to be older, too—I think after high school, during college, I don’t think that they were with us any longer. And then we were supposed to do chores. Well, we did have to do some things because Shirley and Mrs. Neal would have days off, they’d have Sunday off, so we were supposed to help with the dishes on Sunday. And not cook but help clean the kitchen and do
the dishes, and that was about the extent of our chores.

HY: What kinds of things did you do to play . . .

IB: To play?

HY: I know there weren’t neighborhood kids around.

IB: Right, we just played—we played by ourselves. We’d do a lot of swimming, you know, and then as we got older, we’d play tennis. And we’d—George liked to hunt, and actually I did, too. We used to take the BB guns and go off into the cane fields and try hunt, shoot doves. And we would occasionally shoot doves, I would occasionally shoot doves, and we would take them in to Mother and ask her to cook them for dinner. She wasn’t thrilled about that. But we’d do that. Dad would take us down to Wai‘anae and Mākaha and over to Waimea Bay to go surfing or body surfing, go swimming. And then they would also take us up to—it was called the mountain house, behind Wahiawa. And we’d go up there and hike around the forest and stuff. But we’d have people out and just basically hang out and swim and climb trees, and the yard was big enough so that—oh, we built a tree house. We built tree houses and stuff. It was very outdoors.

Mother was a gardener. She really, really enjoyed gardening, and when I was probably in elementary school, there was sort of a greenhouse behind the cottage. And the cottage was where the kids lived, where we lived. We each had our rooms in the cottage. She helped me grow carnations and I really enjoyed that and wanted to learn more about growing plants.

HY: Was the cottage a separate unit from the main house or attached?

IB: Well, it was attached by a walkway, a covered walkway. And it was—the covered walkway came off where my parents’ bedroom was. And it was probably twenty feet, maybe twenty-five feet from the main house. And it had basically three bedrooms, a sitting room, and two bathrooms. The bathrooms connected the bedrooms. And we switched rooms at different points in time. The room that George ended up in was—I remember living in that room for a while. And George was in one of the middle rooms, and then Julia and Debbie always shared a room and George and I always had separate rooms.

HY: Where did you go to school?

IB: I went to Punahou [School] from kindergarten through eighth grade. And Dad would—we’d wake up early in the morning and have our breakfast and then Dad would drive us into school. And when we got older, there were some kids that were the plantation manager’s kids who would drive into school with us. By that time, George went off to Hawai‘i Preparatory Academy] when he was, I think, in the sixth grade. Sixth grade. And I think that the Burnses who were with O‘ahu Sugar didn’t start driving with us till about then. And then George went back east for the seventh and eighth grade. But Dad would drive us in every morning and pick us up at school every afternoon at 2:30 and bring us home. And then we’d have snacks and do our homework and stuff. We didn’t have TV for a long time. They just didn’t have TV.
And I remember going to the Mainland when I was, I think, nine or ten, and just so surprised they had these boxes that you could watch. And so we got a TV shortly after that. So it was like '56, '57, that we got a TV. And then we were only allowed to watch certain programs. I don’t think we could watch it a lot during the week. It was on weekends.

HY: Where did you go after eighth grade?

IB: I went back east to a school called Westover [School] in Middlebury, Connecticut. And George, at the time, was at Taft [School], which was in Watertown, which is about eight miles away. And Dad had gone back to school when he was in middle school to a place called Fessenden [School], and then he went on to high school to a place called Hotchkiss [School] that was in Lakeville, Connecticut. And his brothers went away to school, too. So that was sort of a tradition in all of our families—and my cousin’s family also—to go back east to school and get an eastern education.

Westover was a school that my aunt Joan went to, Kenny’s [Kenneth Brown’s] wife. I believe. And I don’t think the teachers had changed since she was there because they’re all about eighty years old. And it was basically—they were all spinsters and hadn’t been out of the walls of the school since they were graduated from college themselves. So I would have gotten a better education staying at Punahou. But it was interesting going back to school there. It was very different.

HY: What was your adjustment like?

IB: Well, you had to adjust to a different way of living. You know, people were, I think, more class conscious back on the Mainland than—at least back east at the time—than here. A lot of the people I was going to school with were Vanderbils and du Ponts and people with lots and lots of money. And they had debutante parties and our lifestyle in Hawai‘i is very casual, laid back, outdoorsy. And I had to adjust to the winter, which, the first snow storm was great. Actually the first year was fine, but then it got tiring. I would always hope when I went to sleep at night that I'd wake up in the morning and be back home. That didn’t work. But it was very interesting, too, because it was a way of meeting different people and seeing how different people lived, so that when I did get older, I could make an informed decision as to where I really wanted to live and what I wanted to do. And I really missed the islands. You know, it was hard leaving your friends when you were—I was thirteen when I went back there. And they were all starting ninth grade at Punahou. I guess it was easier in that Zadoc and Alan and George were all back there and some other friends, but not a whole bunch of people.

HY: You were expected to go to boarding school?

IB: Oh, there was no choice.

HY: No question, mm hmm. And was the reasoning an academic reason? Your parents felt it was . . .

IB: They felt that I would get a better education there. I think it was that and also just
tradition because Dad went back there. And it was very, very difficult for Mother to have us leave when we were still young. I think it was very hard on her even though Debbie and Julia were still home. Now, Julia didn’t go away to school because she had epilepsy and they just didn’t feel that it would be a good idea to send her away. So she stayed home and she died [in 1969] when Debbie was in the eighth grade. So in ninth grade, Debbie went away, too.

HY: So was education something that was really stressed at home?

IB: Well, Mother, being a schoolteacher, stressed it. And yeah, they wanted—I think all parents are like that anyway. You want to educate your kids so you can send them out and they can take care of themselves. And their contemporaries stressed education in their children, too. It was—I think it’s just universally important to parents that their kids get educated.

HY: Now, who was the disciplinarian in your family?

IB: I believe it was Mother. Dad was more easygoing, sort of happy-go-lucky and was more inclined to play and have fun. And mother was more inclined to keep us in order, although they both stressed manners, too. Manners were important. We learned what utensils to use at the table and put our napkins in our laps and all those kind of things. Yeah, but Mother was the disciplinarian.

HY: Were you aware of your own family history while you were growing up, that that had been your great-grandmother’s [property]?

IB: Yeah. We were. The lower part of the yard, although I don’t think it belonged to us anymore because during the war, properties were condemned around Pearl Harbor. And so part of the bottom of the property was condemned, which included this old swimming pool that used to be Irene I’i’s, which was a cement sort of swimming pool. And we’d go down there to check it out. We did a lot of exploring. And we’d go down there to check it out even though it wasn’t ours. And then—so we knew that this property was part of the I’i Estate and they’d tell us that all the time because when it was sold, nobody else retained any part of it, and Dad felt very proud to have a piece of his inheritance as a piece of property, and neither Uncle Kenny, nor Uncle Zed [Zadoc] had that. Of course, we would have liked it much more if Dad had gotten a place at Diamond Head, where we could have been with our friends instead of being out in the middle of a cane field. And so we wanted to be in town all the time. We thought it was a real drag to be that far away. And there weren’t that many people around. You know, we had cane fields all around us, and there was also a butchery? Is that the word? A butcher shop? Not a butcher shop, though. But it’s where they butchered animals.

HY: A slaughterhouse?

IB: A slaughterhouse (chuckles), that’s the word. My education hasn’t done me very well, can’t remember words. (Chuckles) Yeah, there was a slaughterhouse that was close, and we used to go down there. And they also had chicken farms, you could smell the burning of chicken feathers when we were young. But we were really in the country
and we were isolated from a lot of our friends. And also, I think, Mother was very isolated, too, and that’s probably why she really got into gardening. But we were, in 1950, it was pretty far away from downtown, and most of our friends lived in, say, Nu‘uanu or Kāhala or someplace else. So it was difficult for Mother. We were just in the middle of this cane field.

We used to like outings. At Christmastime, we used to have all the presents wrapped and then go and visit all the relatives and drop presents off and then we would drive over the Pali. And there was the Old Pali Road, and usually it was just windy and rainy and we’d love that. We’d drive over the Pali and go see some cousins on the other side and drop off presents. But I always felt that we were really isolated and wanted to be in town closer to everything that was happening.

HY: Were your friends other kids that you had met through Punahou?

IB: Mm hmm, right. And they all lived in town, I mean very few of them lived out as far as we did.

HY: Did you ever have friends come out to visit you?

IB: Oh yeah, the friends, they did come out. It was—sometimes it was hard, though, because you had to—I mean, there was driving involved. And you know, it was hard, too, to do after school activities because Dad would pick us up to drive us home. And I was on the swim team in the third grade and had weekend meets. And that was always hard for Dad and Mother to—for me to attend them unless I stayed in town with somebody else. So it was difficult living in the country and being so far away, although it was just a wonderful place to grow up. And there were a lot of adventures right on the property. It was difficult being that far away, I think.

HY: You have this sense of isolation.

IB: Yeah.

HY: Maybe we should talk about school a little bit. Were there people that were influential in terms of subjects you liked or whatnot when you were in school?

IB: In school? Well, my kindergarten—no, it was probably my first grade teacher—was awful. (Chuckles) Mrs. Ford. She was a real witch. And actually, because of that I wasn’t really encouraged academically in school. It sort of turned me off. And then Punahou was also set up on this curve, which, as I got older, really was upsetting because you were always compared to your fellow students. And somebody always had to be at the bottom of the curve. I felt that my academic—my brain, wasn’t as good as everybody else’s. Because then Punahou would also put you in the dumb class. And so they had the bright class and it went all the way to the dumb class. And there was a bunch of us that knew that we were in the dumb class. The problem is, anybody that goes to Punahou is bright, but we didn’t realize that as kids. And I got back east to school and they did it on the percentage. You know, if you got two wrong, you got eighty percent, and I started getting good grades back there and it was shocking. (Chuckles) And I decided that I had a brain. But I didn’t start off my school
career real well, and I basically needed a lot of attention in school. My youngest son is hyperactive and has attention deficit [disorder] and I wouldn’t be surprised if I had that myself and nobody knew it at the time. And so I didn’t really excel in school. I did have a wonderful, wonderful teacher in the seventh grade, who was basically a social studies teacher, Mr. [Peter] Powlison. And he was just very supportive. And I excelled in his class. And then I also excelled in the math class and I can’t remember who the teacher was. But she set it up where you would go at your own pace and basically go through the year on your own schedule. And because of that, a lot of us excelled because we wanted to do well. We were sort of competing to get to the end of the book or do all the exercises, and she was a very encouraging teacher. But I wouldn’t be surprised, too, if George had attention deficit as we were growing up, because we did have problems with our—I don’t know if George shared that, but I think he had problems with his academics like I did. And my son was diagnosed with attention deficit so I looked back on my school career and think that maybe I would have done better in other circumstances, yeah.

HY: What about other activities at Punahou that—you were on the swim team . . .

IB: Well, we didn’t do a lot of those because we had to go home. And by that time, when I was on the swim team, Julia was starting school, and George was in school. And so it was—Dad wasn’t real flexible about me staying and doing activities. If we had lived in town—I also took ballet when I was—oh yeah, Mrs. [Josephine] Flanders, she taught ballet at Punahou for years and years and years. And she was wonderful. And I took ballet, but again, it didn’t work out because of the schedule and staying after school for the activities, which was a little discouraging.

HY: So then when you went to boarding school, then, you sort of discovered academic[s].

IB: Right, and I enjoyed it but I’m not really—I’m more of an outdoors-type, hands-on, art person.

HY: Where did that come from?

IB: I don’t know, probably Mother. We took Japanese flower arranging together and she had a real artistic eye decorating the house, although she had interior designers do it a lot of the time. She had to make some of the decisions as to what went with what and the house was real pleasant. So I think that her artistic abilities came out in her gardening and in the house. She did take oil painting lessons, and actually, I think I have a couple of her oils there some place, or George has them. And they were good. They didn’t encourage art.

HY: Your folks?

IB: Right. But we’re all artists. Debbie’s definitely an artist and George is an artist, too. I don’t think it’s from Dad’s side of the family. I think it’s from Mother.

HY: What kind of art did you get interested in doing?

IB: Well, I just took a lot of different art. Photography has always been one of my
 favorites. I did some drawing and painting. I didn’t do any ceramics until recently, and
now I’m doing ceramics and I’m drawing and doing photography, too.

HY: Was this something you pursued in school?

IB: We didn’t have photography in school and actually, Westover didn’t have a real good
art department. But my last year, Mrs. Barnes was hired as the art teacher and she
really actually developed the art department. And Debbie went to Westover after I did
and she had the benefit of Mrs. Barnes much more than I did. I didn’t really pursue
my art.

HY: And how long were you at Westover?

IB: Four years.

HY: Did you go to school beyond that?

IB: I went to a junior college in New York called Bennett [College], and it’s no longer in
existence. And I took liberal arts and I took Japanese. Actually, I really enjoyed
Japanese until I had to start learning the kanji. (Chuckles) And then I decided that that
was really difficult. But I sort of went into Japanese because Kimura-san, the teacher,
would have us over for tempura once a month. So we got Japanese food back there,
and I really liked that. But he was a wonderful teacher, too. He was a very strong
individual that lived very simply and was very kind. He was a good mentor, too.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

HY: You were talking about being in college in New York. When did you decide to stay,
continue going to school?

IB: On the East Coast?

HY: Yeah.

IB: I don’t think I even applied to any place on the West Coast. A lot of my friends were
going to junior colleges.

HY: Your friends from . . .

IB: From back east. Because I had been there for four years and developed friendships
with the girls I was in school with. Many of them were going to junior colleges—I
mean, at that point in time, too, a lot of the emphasis was on going to school and then
getting that wedding ring and getting married and having kids. If you weren’t engaged
by the time you were twenty-one, you were almost a spinster.
HY: You felt that, too?

IB: Yeah. And so education, at least at that point in time, for me, wasn't something that was going to get me anywhere. I mean you're going to be a mother and a housemother type of thing. I didn't have any goal as far as my education was concerned. And that's probably why I'm not promoting my kids to just go on to school and get their degree. I want them to be interested in what they're studying so that they have a goal in the end and that it's to do a certain job or a certain—be it volunteer or whatever. I just went because that was what everybody else was doing. I didn't have any real goal. I only spent two years there and then I came back here. I just didn't enjoy school that much. I wanted to get hands-on experience so I got a job at a travel agency. And that was fun. I liked—I'm a people person; I like people.

HY: What was the travel agency you worked with?

IB: I worked with—it was called Island Holidays [Travel Service], and actually, Uncle Kenny [Kenneth F. Brown] was on the board of directors, which I didn't realize. I went into an employment agency and said I want a job. And they said, well there's one at Island Holidays, why don't you go and interview. (HY chuckles.) So I got a job with Island Holidays and I was one of their sales representatives. And then when I got married, I transferred to the Mainland and became the group tour coordinator. I enjoyed that.

HY: Is this on O'ahu?

IB: On O'ahu. So I went to interview, and there was a picture of Uncle Kenny having dinner with the president of Island Holidays or shaking hands with him or something, I don't know. And when I went in for my interview, I sort of said, "Well, what is that picture?" They went, "Oh, your uncle is on the board of directors here." And I went, darn, I have to pay this employment agency for sending me in here? (HY chuckles.) So I got a job with Island Holidays and I was one of their sales representatives. And then when I got married, I transferred to the Mainland and became the group tour coordinator. I enjoyed that.

HY: And what is time frame here? You worked for Island Holidays here for . . .

IB: I worked here for maybe a year and a half. I got the job in '67, late in '67. And we got married in August of '69 and transferred to the Mainland.

HY: Where were you on the Mainland?

IB: I was—we were living in Berkeley and I was working in San Francisco on the corner of Grant and Post [streets] above [F.A.O.] Schwartz toy store. And the ex was going to law school at the time. But I spent a lot of time actually—when I came back after Bennett, I lived at the house for a year and basically played. I didn't—well, I graduated from Bennett and was here for the summer—was on O'ahu for the summer and worked as a mail girl at Castle & Cooke [Inc.] in the mail department just as a part-timer. And actually my boss there was great. Her name was Irene Inman, and she had this platinum blonde hair and long, red fingernails, and she was just a really, really neat person. I enjoyed working there tremendously. And it was a summer job that Dad got me because he knew Malcolm MacNaughton, who was president of Castle & Cooke at the time. And my cousin, Alan, was the mail boy at A&B
[Alexander & Baldwin] at the time, and his father had gotten him the job. Actually, there's a great story about Uncle Francis. And I believe it was A&B. Uncle Francis, after he finished school, got a job with A&B I think. And the president called him in one day and said, "Francis, this isn't working. You can't be driving to work in a car that's better than mine." (HY chuckles.)

So Uncle Francis said, "Well, I guess I can't work for you guys anymore."

(Laughter)

IB: I think that was Uncle Francis’ only job, paying job. So Alan and I used to meet down at the post office and he’d pick up the A&B mail and I’d pick up the Castle & Cooke mail and we’d deliver it. It was really funny, actually. When I got there in the morning, I would have to go around to all the executives’ desks and make sure that they had a red pencil, a blue pencil, and a number two pencil all sharpened. And those were fun jobs. But after I graduated from Bennett, I did the summer job and then Dad and Mother paid for a trip to Europe with a friend from California. And she and I got a Euro-rail pass and we travelled around Europe for three months, and she stayed there and I came back home. And then I just sort of hung out trying to figure out what I was going to do. And this was when Mother and I took Japanese flower arranging. And then by the time summer was over—well, winter, spring, summer, I needed to get a job. So I got my Island Holidays job.

HY: Just to backtrack a little bit, when you were going to school on the Mainland I assume you would come back [during] the summers.

IB: Yeah. The first year I was back at Westover as a freshman in high school, I spent the whole year back there. My grandmother met us in Boston. We stayed at the Ritz Hotel there. My grandmother and I shared a room and George had his room, and at that point in time, Uncle Zed was going to a business class at Harvard [University] for the year. So he had moved up there with the younger kids in his family to spend a year in Boston. So that Christmas, we spent a lot of time out and visiting him.

HY: Your Uncle Zed is . . .

IB: Uncle Zadoc.

HY: The oldest?

IB: Yeah, Zadoc and “Ginna” [Helen Virginia Brown], Zadoc Brown Jr.’s parents. And at that point in time, Zadoc Brown Jr. and Alan were at Choate [School] high school, a school in Wallingford, Connecticut. So that Christmas, we spent a bunch of time with them. And then that spring, George and I went down to our mother’s sister’s in Maryland and stayed with her. So that first year that I was away, I was away the whole year and then we came back in the summertime. Then, subsequent years, we would come back home for Christmas, spring, and then the summertime.

HY: Now how did that area change? I know there was a subdivision and there was more development in the surrounding area.
IB: Right. I can't remember when the subdivision was put in next door. But the subdivision was for the cane workers that needed housing, and so they put in housing there and it was on a lottery basis, I think. You put your name in and if your name came up, you got one of the houses there. And after that went in was after Shirley and Mrs. Neal had left. And so this lady, Nancy [Kimura], who happened to get one of the houses right next door to ours, became the housekeeper at the house. And Dad and Mother put up this huge wall—it's got to be an eight-foot wall—so that people from the subdivision couldn't see into our house. But the kids from the subdivision would climb up and always peer over and see what was going on. But Nancy was right up against the wall and what she would do was climb over the wall, and she is this little lady—she's like four [feet] five [inches] or something like that. She'd climb over the wall every morning and she basically took care of Dad and Mother for years and still lives down there and took care of the house even after Dad was in a care home. She'd come over and take care of the house, and then Keoki [Brown, George Brown III's son] was living at the Waipi'o house before Queens [Queen Emma Foundation] took it over. And he calls Nancy "Grandma." And she took care of him and took care of his cooking and his laundry and everything else. So we still see her. She came up for George's wedding in March and of course helped out. She couldn't just be a guest. She had to be in the kitchen helping and she and Mother were the same age. Born in 1921. She was wonderful to Dad and Mother and really took good care of them. So she moved into the subdivision and there are just lots of houses there now.

There are houses on both sides of the property now. And then below the property was developed into the Ted Makalena Golf Course. I think it's called something else now, I can't remember. But it changed. Waipahu got bigger and bigger and there was just more going on. But it still was out of the way. I mean, we didn't really have friends that lived in the Waipahu area. Then Waipahu, too, and 'Ewa, are very military, too. You know, there's the local people and the plantation people and then there's the military. And the mix doesn't always work. I mean, when you read about Waipahu nowadays, there's a lot of bad stuff going on in that area, you know. But there's good stuff, too.

HY: So when all this—when there were more of the subdivisions in that surrounding area, did you feel less isolated?

IB: No, I mean, I didn't really know anybody. The isolation wasn't necessarily because people weren't living around, it was because of our friends and contemporaries living elsewhere.

HY: Did it change the kinds of activities that you did there?

IB: Well, the subdivision didn't come in till I was away at high school so it really didn't at all. Maybe that time, I wasn't shooting doves anymore. (HY chuckles.) Well, George would go out there when we were younger, before the subdivision. I guess he would divert the water. Or we would both do that, you know. They [the plantation] would set up the fields so that they were being irrigated a certain way. We were sort of bad and we'd go out there and change the water direction.

(Laughter)
IB: And the plantation manager would have to call Mother, "Keep your children away. They're diverting our water." And we'd love it when they had the cane fires. We'd just sit there and watch the cane fire right there, and then Mother would get another call because it was dangerous for us to be sitting right there at the cane fire. But it was right on the other side of our hedge, so. But by the time that they built the subdivisions, we were driving, so it really didn't impact us that much, I don't think.

HY: So after Bennett, you went back home and lived there for about a year and a half, you said?

IB: About a year. And then I got my own apartment, moved in town. Well, I got a job and then moved in town. Because I was working in Waikiki. It was just easier. And I wanted to be independent, too.

HY: Your folks stayed there. And you mentioned Nancy Kimura, she lived on the other side of the wall. But were there other—some of these other caretakers that were still living on the property during that time?

IB: There were other people. There was a couple, Mike and Kyra. Mike was with the ag[ricultural] department [at the plantation]—I guess both of them were with the ag department. And they lived there and sort of were caretakers of the house.

HY: Do you remember their last name?

IB: No, but Debbie or George might. Debbie might. They lived there quite a while and—Dad and Mother had different people coming and going in what they called the maids' quarters. I think, though, that Mike and Kyra were the people who lived there the longest. I think there was a Samoan couple but that didn't work our very well because they kept having friends come by all the time and Dad and Mother didn't like that. But Dad and Mother, after Debbie started school in Connecticut, got a town house in Connecticut that they would spend time at while Debbie was in school there. So they would need somebody to take care of the house, and I think that's when Mike and Kyra were living there and sort of maintained the house. They did have gardeners the whole time taking care of the grounds. But they travelled back to Connecticut several times a year and stayed a couple months. And then Dad—they would also go to Waimea and stay at what had been my grandmother's house there for weeks at a time. So they were travelling a lot after I left home and got married, while Debbie was in high school. They travelled quite a bit between Connecticut and Waimea. They didn't go any place exotic. (Chuckles)

Well, it was fun for them. You know, it was different. They'd go in the fall before winter. And I did go and visit them once. And it was sort of fun because we'd drive around to the little Connecticut towns—we went to the town that Norman Rockwell lived in and went to the Norman Rockwell Museum. It was really pretty in the fall with all the fall colors and antique stores and stuff like that. Mother enjoyed that.

HY: Okay, so you went---you were living in Berkeley and still working as a travel agent?

IB: Yeah, I was working with Island Holidays as their group tour coordinator.
HY: And how long were you there?

IB: Three years.

HY: And then you came back?

IB: Well, we took a year off and travelled in Europe. Got a VW [Volkswagen] bus and travelled in Europe, and then I came back. Dad and Mother wanted me to build a house down at Waipi'o because they had plenty of property, but we lived in Kailua.

HY: Was that a consideration? Was it—you mean to live on that same [Waipi'o] property?

IB: No I really didn’t consider it. (Chuckles) Well, it’s back to the I want to be near my friends or I want to be in a community of people that I know and so Kailua was perfect. You know, it was a good place to bring up my kids. And we’d go out to Waipi’o all the time. And the kids learned how to swim in the pool there and they’d get their big wheels and ride all around the yard and down the hills. They enjoyed all that but I didn’t want to live out there at all. I still didn’t have any community friends out in that area.

HY: And then, so how is it that you ended up on Maui, then?

IB: On Maui? (Chuckles)

HY: Yeah.

IB: Well, after Kailua, we moved to Kaua’i for a couple of years, where my ex had a job with Princeville [Airways]. And Patty, my oldest, was going to—let’s see. When he was in seventh grade, he went away to Hawai’i Prep. There were fifteen in each class and each class was two grades, so it was very small. And I—“Patty” [Padraic] was away for seventh and eighth grade and at that point in time, the ex had quit his job with Princeville and we had the opportunity to move anywhere we wanted. And I wanted my kids to be home. I mean, I really didn’t appreciate going away to school myself. I really did miss my family and miss Hawai’i. And not that I would have sent the kids back to the Mainland, but I wanted them to be around. So we moved to Maui and the kids went to Seabury [Hall].

HY: And what year is this about when you moved here?

IB: We moved here in ’88.

HY: And did you continue working, then, when you moved to Kailua?

IB: I worked at a travel agency in Kailua called East-West Travel [Service] as their outside sales representative. But then I was a mom. I was doing a lot of volunteer work for the schools that the kids were in. I had joined a woman’s organization that did volunteer work, and helped to establish the mother’s milk bank on O‘ahu for premature children. And basically took care of the kids, home mother for various soccer and baseball teams and stuff like that.
HY: Let me ask you something about your ethnic identity. Did you have a feeling about your—I know I asked you a little bit about family history.

IB: Right.

HY: So did you have a sense that you’re Hawaiian with this legacy?

IB: Well, we knew about John I'i and his being a [Hawai‘i] supreme court justice and a very well-respected man. Irene I'i, his daughter, and her role in the community. But when Dad was growing up, it wasn’t cool to be Hawaiian at all. And even with this history and knowledge that he was part-Hawaiian, he didn’t necessarily learn the Hawaiian ways. And when we were growing up, we did not at all. You know, we had various words that came into our vocabulary—pau and kapu and those things. But we weren’t taught any of our Hawaiian heritage, really.

HY: How did you think of yourself? Did you think of yourself as a local kid?

IB: Oh, basically Haole. And I just remember asking for a Hawaiian bracelet when I was eighteen. And Dad said, “You don’t want that. You don’t want people to know you’re Hawaiian.” I was like, why not? I’m proud of it. And that’s why I’m really happy that [my daughter] is pursuing Hawaiian studies. I want her to know about her heritage and I think it’s very important, and she should be proud of it. I have a couple books that actually George gave me—and I got some for my birthday—on learning to speak Hawaiian. And I’d like to do that. My aunt Ginna, Zadoc Sr.’s wife, speaks Hawaiian, and I think that’s wonderful. We weren’t really taught anything and Mother knew nothing about Hawaiian history or customs or any of that. And Dad really didn’t either. I mean, he knew a lot of place names and he knew some words, but not a whole bunch. It just wasn’t cool when they were growing up.

George spent a lot of time with Uncle Francis when we were kids. And we used to go visit him, I remember, on occasion, when he was up at Keawaiki. And he was an interesting man. Very, very outgoing. Very generous. But George spent much more time with him.

HY: And so after you moved to Kailua and then you came here [to Maui], did you go back home [to Waipi‘o]? Did you spend much time there?

IB: Did I spend time? Not very much time. I mean, by that time—Mother died in ’87, so she was gone and . . .

HY: So that by the time you were here . . .

IB: By the time I was here—when I was on Kaua‘i, I would go back and forth much more frequently because my ex worked for Princeville and we could go on Princeville Airways and it was easy. But by the time I moved here, Dad was in a care home. And I would go down a couple times a month to visit him. George would go much more. But I didn’t go to the house very frequently because Mother had an accident at the house and that’s how she died. And it just—there was no reason to really go out there at all. But when I was living in Kailua, as I said, I took the kids over there all the
time. And I would go during the week, too. You know, when the other kids were in school, when Seamus was a baby, I’d drive over there and we’d go swimming and I’d spend time with Dad and Mother.

HY: Had the property itself changed at all?

IB: Well, when we were in high school, Dad and Mother built a pool house next to the pool.

HY: So the pool had already been there.

IB: The pool had been there since I was born. And then they built the pool house, which was great fun. It was just a big room with a kitchen and two dressing rooms. And when we were down there, we would spend most of our time at the pool house while we were in high school and college. That’s where we would entertain our friends. And then when I had kids, we’d spend most of our time down there. We would have the living room—well, actually, when we were growing up, we had a huge living room and we’d have Christmases there. But then towards—when the kids were real small, we had Christmases there and then Dad and Mother moved Christmases down to the pool house. So basically, everything took place in the pool house. They didn’t do a lot in the big house. The kitchen in the pool house was a good size. Mother liked cooking down there, and by that time, she didn’t have anybody cooking for her so she was doing her own cooking. And it was easier. It was a full kitchen and it had a dishwasher and all that. But it wasn’t big like the rest of the house. They were simplifying. (Laughs) They had the big house and they lived in the small house basically, except for sleeping in the big house.

The rest of the house didn’t change that much at all. I mean, obviously, the trees grew bigger and bigger and bigger. There are some wonderful old trees on the property. The tennis court—Dad and Mother really didn’t play tennis, so they didn’t keep that up very well. Oh, we had dogs when we were growing up. Dad and Mother brought the first rottweilers into the state when we were kids. And I remember being very small and these big black dogs coming to play but they’d knock me over because they were so big. But they bred those dogs and unfortunately, the female, after she had her puppies, wouldn’t be able to nurse them for some reason. She wasn’t a very good mother, and so I remember Mother staying up all night nursing these little puppies, and then I would help her do that, too.

HY: Do you know why they brought in rottweilers? What was the reason?

IB: I think it was actually Doctor [William] Parker, who was a veterinarian, brought them in with him. I don’t know why they were rottweilers, per se. But they bred those.

HY: Did you have, like, a kennel?

IB: Yeah, we had a kennel that—it was like a house, and the dogs had their dog runs and they had their place inside and we’d go out there every afternoon with Dad and feed them their dog food. I think the dogs were left inside a lot of the time. But it was a great place for the dogs, too, because there were no other families around where the kids would be scared. But, yeah, we had the dogs. Well, the house originally was the
main house and then when the kids were born, they added the cottage. And then, later on, they added a whole—they had like a laundry room and a hobby room and the maids’ quarters were added and then a big garage. So that part of the house was added on. They sort of expanded from the first part of the house that had the kitchen and the living room/dining room and a den and Dad and Mother’s room. And then, I think, the cottage was built, either while I was incubating (HY chuckles) or after I was born. But in that time frame.

HY: What about the grounds? Did that change, too?

IB: Well, Mother worked on the grounds all the time. You know, she was replanting and planting, and she worked with a guy named Horace Clay, who was a pretty famous horticulturalist on O’ahu, and would plant samples at the house of different plants that he had brought in. She also had wood roses that she grew and would sell to a local craft store, I guess, that made things with the wood roses. And they also sold coconuts. We had the whole coconut grove. And so they would sell coconuts to a place that did roasted coconut chips or something like that.

HY: Was this in Waipahu?

IB: No. I don’t think so. I think those people would just come with a truck and buy a truckload of coconuts. But I remember taking the wood roses somewhere. I can’t—It seemed to me, it was near the airport or towards town. Mother would collect a bunch of wood roses and we’d go in and sell the wood roses. And it seems that they used them like if they made lau hala purses as some sort of decoration, I can’t remember. But Mother worked on the yard a lot and would get new samples of new plants and Horace Clay would come out to see how the plants were doing. I think it was like a sample plant farm for Horace Clay. She was very active in the garden club. But they would also, while we were growing up, they would also always have our class picnics up there. So each year, it was always, “Are we going to have the class picnic at your house?” And the kids would love coming out there, and Mother was very giving of her time as far as kids were concerned. Even friends on the Mainland whose kids were around our age would send their kids out for a month in the summertime and Mother would take us for surfing lessons, sightseeing, and just do a lot of activities with us during the summertime, and at the house. And kids would love coming out there. Between our class picnics and . . .

HY: This was when you were younger and before you went to the Mainland?

IB: When we were younger, right. She would always have a lot of activities with kids and they would also—the firemen would have a lu’a’au there once a year and they’d put up these giant tents or a giant tent and have a lu’a’au. I remember that.

HY: So your facilities, they were sometimes used for other purposes than just for family?

IB: Well, it was a donation, though. I mean, it wasn’t like people rented the property. But Dad, I guess he knew the fire chief or something or went fishing with him or—Dad went to the YMCA, every day, too, and played squash. And I think he played with a lot of the firemen, and so they needed a place to have their annual firemen’s lu’a’au,
and he would donate the property. They’d come out and put the tent up one day and
do the whole ilū’au. There was plenty of parking, certainly. They would have different
events.

HY: Do you remember any other things like that?

IB: No. I just remember that one. Because we weren’t really invited to participate. You
know, we may have even left for the evening. I just remember playing on the tent the
next day. George and I would climb to the top of the tent and slid down it and got in
big trouble. But he would have it annually. And then Dad was a trustee at the Lunaliilo
Home in Hawai‘i Kai, and his father was a trustee, too, so it was sort of a position that
was handed down, and Dad would go out to the Lunaliilo Home every Wednesday and
the home would also have—he was a trustee [of the Lunaliilo Estate] with Napua
Stevens [Poire] and [John] Cline Mann. And they would have a ilū’au once a year and
he would drag us kids along to the home and then tell stories about all the old folks in
there and how someday he was going to be at the home. (Laughs) Oh, and another
thing that was sort of cute. When Castle & Cooke developed Mililani Town,
originally—now, Malcolm MacNaughton [President of Castle & Cooke Inc.] was a real
good friend of Dad’s and the Waipi‘o home’s name is Mililani, and so Uncle
Malcolm [Malcolm MacNaughton] called Dad up and the first thing they were going to develop
in Mililani Town was the cemetery. And Uncle Mal called Dad up, first of all, to get
permission to use the name Mililani for Mililani Town and to tell him that the first
thing that was going to be there was the cemetery. And Dad said that would be great
because then he wouldn’t have to change his address when he died.

(Laughter)

IB: I always thought that was funny. But . . .

HY: Anything else?

IB: I don’t think so. Sounds pretty good.

HY: Okay. Thank you so much.

END OF INTERVIEW
I‘i/Brown Family: Oral Histories

Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

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