BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Abigail Burgess, 64, lei seller and retired state worker

"So they thought, well, that was an honest way to make a living by using your own hands and try to go get your own flowers, or make your own paper and seed leis."

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Lillian Cameron, 59, lei seller

"You know, sometimes I'm at the lei stand and maybe it's getting late. I think nobody's going to buy this lei. So I see somebody going past, some people just walking. I cut the leis and I just give."

Abigail Burgess and Lillian Cameron, Hawaiian-Chinese-Spanish, are sisters born of Mary Ann Opulauoho and Robert Hew Len. Burgess was born in 1922 in Kohala, the fifth child. Cameron, the seventh, was born in Honolulu in 1926. They lived in Kaka'ako through much of their early childhood, then moved to Damon Tract. In 1941, they moved to Hawaiian homestead land at Papakōlea.

Burgess began school at Pohukaina Elementary and went on to Washington Intermediate. Cameron attended Kalaoa Elementary at Damon Tract, Kalākaua Intermediate and graduated from Farrington High School.

As a young girl, Burgess sold newspapers with her brothers. At age eleven, she helped her aunt, and later her mother, sell leis on the waterfront. Being the oldest girl, she was left in charge of the house while her parents were working. Her chores included gathering and stringing flowers with her brothers and sisters.

As a teenager, Cameron worked at the Waikīkī Bowling Alley, Princess Theater, and the Downtown USO victory club. She also sold leis with her mother in Downtown nightclubs, on the waterfront, and in Waikīkī at the Triangle Park.

The family took their business, Hew Len's Lei Stand, to the airport in the late 1940s. As Burgess and Cameron were starting their families, their brother Arthur helped extensively at the lei stand. When their mother retired, he became the new owner of Arthur's Lei Stand. Arthur Hew Len was a prominent figure at the airport, entertaining tourists and organizing social events for the lei sellers. When he passed away, Cameron took ownership.

Today Cameron is operating her business, still Arthur's Lei Stand, assisted by her sister. Burgess' daughters also help during peak periods.
IH: This is an interview with Gail Burgess [and Lillian Cameron] in Mā'ili, O'ahu on November 22, 1985. Interviewer is 'Iwalani Hodges.

Okay. Can we start out by asking where you were born?

GB: Oh, Kohala.

IH: And how long did you stay there?

GB: A baby.

IH: Oh, okay. So then, you moved to Honolulu after that?

GB: Uh huh. Well, that's when my mother brought me. You know, we been moved. We all came here then to live.

IH: What year were you born?

GB: Nineteen twenty-two.

IH: Do you know why your mother moved over to Honolulu?

GB: Well, she moved down here to live thereafter. Prior to that, they were living in Kohala.

IH: But did she come for work or she just wanted to move here? Do you know why?

GB: No. She brought all the family. Her family came here. My father and all them. And eventually, he worked over here, right? But they moved the whole family down here. And they stayed here, you know, stayed in the Islands.

IH: What was your father doing at the time?

GB: What was he doing?
IH: Mm hmm [yes], as far as work.

GB: He was always---those days they called them vulcanizing. You know, had to do with tubes, tires, like that. You know, automotive tires. And that was his trade.

IH: How many children were in your family?

GB: Well, at that time, I cannot really say, but there's four brothers older than me, right? And then, when I was born over there we came, so there would have been four brothers and myself, would be five.

IH: Then where did you live when you folks came here? Do you know?

GB: No. I don't remember where we lived because I was a baby, anyway. I mean, you know, growing older, then I would have. I mean, we lived mostly Kaka'ako, though.

IH: And what part of Kaka'ako?

GB: Oh, different places. See, it was way before then when they hardly had anything that they have today down there. See, the whole thing was—you know, like Ala Moana was just a beach without nobody around. They just had those coconut trees around here and there. Maybe had a couple of few houses. But then they had these—they don't call 'em subdivision then, they just call it a block. Block with so many houses, like that. But we moved down. That was one place we moved. And then, we were another place, Hausten. Different places. Mostly was in around Kaka'ako area.

IH: Was that area that you lived in in Kaka'ako, that was the one down by Ala Moana?

GB: That was one of them. See, in the Ala Moana, that's where the shopping is now, that Ala Moana Shopping Center.

IH: That's where your house was?

GB: That was one of the places we lived when there wasn't anything there. There was just this ocean weed that was growing around there. That whole block, that whole area, was all of it. That was one of the places we lived down there. And then, we moved not too far away from there.

IH: Was that swamp area that time?

GB: Mm hmm [yes], it was. All swamp. Well, that's what I'm saying. It was all swamp that whenever the ocean came up, the water (chuckles) came right all the way up to it. You know, underneath the houses and stuff like that. And then, when the tide went down, then it went right back out, and then it became dry again. Then you could walk around. Or go in boats. You know, they'd paddle around when the ocean came up.
IH: Oh, yeah?

GB: Which was really interesting.

IH: So when the water was up high, then you stay in the house or you just go around in boats?

GB: We'd get on the boats and just paddle around. And then when the tide went down, there it is, we couldn't; so you had to walk around. But it would be all mud. But for so many days, then it'll dry up like that. See, only when the high tide, really high tide, came in, then the water came way up.

IH: Oh. So, it's not like every day it came up.

GB: No. Not everyday thing. It was mostly when there's really extra high tide came up, then it would come way up to those homes then. But not before that. But it was really interesting because we used to do a lot of crazy things then. You know, like going in the boat. Even the fishes would be swimming around right (laughs) underneath the steps of the house. We would try to catch 'em with nets or anything, but they were pretty speedy (laughs). But one thing, that was the first time where I ever saw hail.

IH: Hail?

GB: Hail. And all those homes, they used to have tin roofs. So whenever, that was the first time they did. I think I was only maybe about four or five years old then. And the hail just, you know, it was just rocks. Somebody throwing rocks on the tin roof. But when we went out to look, it was ice. Ice falling. But it just stayed in the water so long and then it melted. But we caught them then. If they was big enough, we would catch 'em. But then you couldn't be out there too much because that thing would be hitting you on the head.

(Laughter)

IH: Did you folks used to fish when you lived down that area?

GB: We used to do lot of fishing with nets. These scoop nets. Well, not these round scoop nets they talk about today. We had to make our own nets. We get two sticks and try to get anything that look like a net or material and nail it on both sides, right? And then, go ahead and hunt them in the bushes and scoop it up like that. They used to have lot of nehu things. You know those little fish? And they had all different kind of fish then, but we didn't eat a lot of 'em because there was too many of 'em around. We didn't think they were good to eat (chuckles) that time because it was so plentiful. Limu, and fishing like that, or would be crabbing or squidding. You know, there was lot of things to catch. But today you don't see it.

IH: Yeah. Not like before.
GB: Yeah, well, that would be in the 1920s. Yeah. So that would be when I was about five, six years old, seven. Yeah, would be in 1927, '28, and '29, like that. That was the good old days then.

IH: Where else did you live in Kaka'ako?

GB: Well, we lived different places, you know, like Queen Street and close to the fire station. And we lived by the Advertiser where it is today. They had homes there. You know, on the side, where there's those repairing and those restaurants they have now. There were only homes there. Few homes here and there. That's all it was. But that's where we would live. You know, different places around Kaka'ako. Because we liked Kaka'ako. That was our favorite place. It was close to town. If we wanted to go to town, we could easily walk from there. But no, one time, as we grew older, then we moved to Kaimuki, up Pālolo. And that, we didn't stay there too long, though. We didn't care for it because it was too far out of everything. You know, it didn't have the beaches.

IH: So, when you were living in Kaka'ako, did the people living there consider it as part of being in town, in Downtown? Or did you consider it as a neighborhood?

GB: Just on the outskirts of town, it would be. See, town would be--well, it would be maybe not even a couple of miles, you know.

IH: Uh huh [yes], it's close.

GB: And we could easily walk to it.

IH: Was there a lot of business in the area at the time? In Kaka'ako?

GB: No. No, no. There weren't. Hardly any business. Most of the business was right. . . . Well, there was Kaka'ako, the town, it is today. They had few stores. You know, couple of stores maybe. Oh, they had the theater then, you know, that they used to call it Aloha Theater. And that's about it. Just a few stores here and there and a church. So, there was mostly neighborhood, where they had Pordagee camp, Japanese camp, Kanaka camp. (laughs) We were called the Kanaka camp.

(Laughter)

GB: And then they had all those places where they all stayed. Sometimes we got along. But then, like kids, we all used to fight with one another, with the different groups. The Pordagee camp, we would fight with their kids. But even though we did fight with them and all, as we grew older it was really a lot of fun when you think back on it, you know. But then, you figure, you crazy doing lot of things. But everybody did, back and forth, things like that. Get smart like calling them names. And then you don't like it. (Chuckles) Then you want to fight with them after (chuckles) school's over. That was really good then. 'Cause you could walk all over the place
and nobody bothered you. You could go to stores even late in the afternoon, evenings like that. No one bothered. They didn't even bother you, you know, trying to get crazy the way they are today. Things never did happen like they have today. You know, you can't even trust anybody today like they did way back then. People, lot of 'em really got along. People got along with themselves fine. Even though the kids didn't, fought like anybody else. But there was really nice places then.

And that was, I think, the best place, Kaka'ako. Because we could go down the beach and anything, you know, fish for our own food. Pick up limu, was so plentiful. Fishing and all. People didn't do things greedy like they do today. You just picked up and caught what you wanted. If you got too much, you just gave it to the neighbors. You didn't just buy it and just waste it all, go pick anything and just waste it. So those days was really nice, everybody sharing. But you can't find any of those stuff today. You have to buy them. You know, all the fish, all the squid, all the 'opaes you wanted, limu--oh, there were tons of limu. All kinds of limu they had in the ocean. And people always shared with each other. Because lot of times you'd forget yourself when you're picking limu. And then you said, "This is good. This is good." And pretty soon, you got it. It's too much. But when you going home, you figure, oh, well, maybe somebody else want it, so you gave it and gave it away till you only had enough for yourself. But I don't find that today like that. Very few. Unless maybe you go on the other island. They may be, yet. I don't know. That's about it for that.

IH: Did you say you lived one time in the Fort Armstrong area?

GB: Yeah. We lived close to Fort Armstrong, where it is today, but they don't call them that. They don't call that place that. There used to be a fishing boat--where they used to build boats, right on that corner there across from the fort. They used to build these sampans, they called 'em. I don't know if that was the only place where they built those sampans there. But we lived right next door to it. So every time when they had one just about the frame of the boat fixed or built, we would climb up and play on it. That was really good but dangerous when you think of it today because those boats were thirty, forty feet high. They used to have christening afterwards. Anyway, when the boats were finished, the Japanese would have the blessing, they call it. See, whoever owned the boat that they were building the boat for or sold it to the person. So they would have a big. . . . They would have something like food and stuff like that. These Japanese, all this fishcake things, those sashimi, you know. And all the builders participate in it. But like us kids, we were nosy, too, so we were just around there. We'd go over there. They say, "Come on, come on, come on and help yourself."

They used to have the Japanese dough thing. I don't know what they call it. Black sugar and all that thing. Some of 'em even put money in it. They used to wrap this little thing with dough inside and they put money in it. Maybe ten cents, nickel. Those who had
the quarters in it, well, they were lucky. And then, before the boat, they took 'em out on the road, on the trailer, and they took the boat out, then they would take and throw it. Throw it to all the crowd of people who was around. And whoever found the ones with the money were lucky in it. Just like they had a blessing, they called it, for these Japanese boats so that the boat would have a good journey as long as they was out on the ocean. They did that as long as they were building those boats. So we always knew when they was going to have one of those. We're right there waiting for them. And all that foodstuff, and they just said, "Go help yourself. Everybody eat." But they all had their Japanese things. Then we used to wait for 'em, you know, for the money part with the dough (chuckles). They had this thing, but the money was separate in little thin paper. They wrapped it and put it with this dough, candy thing they had. Then they threw it over and gave it to whoever finds it. That was nice then.

That was close to that, where they have the immigration. It was called immigration then not too long ago because all those foreign people who came in, that's where the immigration was. Just on the same block across from where we lived.

IH: So you lived on the ma uka side of Ala Moana [Boulevard]?

GB: Yeah, mm hmm. And immigration was up that road. I can't remember exactly what the road is. Anyway, it was right on the corner there. That's where they had all foreign people who didn't have—you know, wasn't citizens and stuff like that. They had to go over there and get their papers in order to stay in America like that. But those who overstayed, they became aliens, right. They would hold them over there. So we used to wonder when we was kids, oh, if that was a prison (chuckles) for them 'cause it was all high fence, iron fence around the place. And we would see them all in there. So we thought at that time that they were prisoners. So we was really afraid because we didn't know what prisoners meant then during those days. What kind of prisoners they were, whether they were killers, you know, murderers, or some kind of really fierce thing. So we didn't really hang around that place too much.

(Laughter)

GB: We stayed away and walked across the street to go to school.

IH: What school were you attending?

GB: Up the road was that Pohukaina School. That's where we went to school during those years. That was the elementary school then. It was a nice school and I liked that. Even though we got into a lot of trouble and things like that, I still (chuckles) liked that school.

IH: Was Kaka'ako—well, you said there were a lot of different nationalities living in there. Was there any one dominant group?
GB: No. As a matter of fact, lot of them was mixed. I mean, they were mixed, but not one more than the other. Because Hawaiians, they had a lot of Hawaiians then but they were mixing with different nationalities then. So we didn't have any trouble with who was who in the race thing like that. Only the kids, they had those camps then. You know, like I said, the Japanese, Filipinos and Hawaiians camps. That meant that people who were Hawaiians usually would go and try to live in that area. Japanese were famous, though. When Japanese had their camp or areas, Japanese would always go in that area and live only. They would not mix with the other nationalities. See, Portuguese, Hawaiians would mix. Filipinos would mix. But not the Japanese. The Japanese stayed in their own area. So, as long as more people went in it, the bigger the camp area would be. We would know, that's—we used to call them then the Japanese buta head area. And we did get along as long as they didn't call names. But everybody called names then whenever you wanted to get the person mad. So you call 'em whatever you want. And they did the same too. You know, calling Pordagees "Codfish," and all that.

(Laughter)

GB: So it got them mad. The Hawaiians, they would call "You kanakas," (chuckles) and all that. That was funny then when you think of it today. But at that time when you're kids, you know kanaka is not a good word. (Chuckles) Or you know, codfish or bacalao thing like that. That's not (chuckles) too nice of a word. So we called the Japanese then, "You buta heads." We thought that was good too, you know. That was a name they didn't like. And then, till we got older, then found out that "buta head" was "pig head." (Laughs) I didn't even... We thought it was something nicer than that. But "pig head" wasn't that bad (laughs) of a name. When you called them a buta.

But Chinese they had, but not too many. Not down that area. They had a few around here and there, but they didn't have their own camp. Because the Chinese then, I think a lot of them at that time then, the Chinese were moving more in the middle of town, you know, where Maunakea [Street] is and where all those business areas. They lived there, lot of 'em. See, they used to have Chun Hoon, but they was in town. And Ah Leong like that, they were all in the town around by the fish market area. See, they were living in anything. Tenements area, but then that's where most of the Chinese lived.

IH: Okay. And I think you mentioned when we talked the last time about during the depression how you did a lot of fishing because money was so scarce.

GB: Well, that's—yeah, during the depression. I think, somewhere in the 1930s like that. That's when it was during the depression. I don't really know exactly, but I mean, the living then was really rough then because of no money and no jobs. So the only money... And there wasn't all this help that they have today. You know, this
welfare thing, there was no such thing. The only one that would help would be mostly the churches, whatever church would help, what little they had. That's the one would help only during the Christmas when they had those Christmas bags or something. Then they would make so many, whatever people donated to them. They would make Christmas bags to give the families who really needed it. I remember going once, but I didn't like it too much. Because I was a kid then, but then there was no choice. Either you go, you know. We thought then it was something like begging and we didn't figure too much that we could accept that. But then, we figured, well, if we didn't, then we wouldn't have anything for the holidays, right? So we did, which was only once, I can only remember in my life when we lived in that home that time. I may have been maybe about nine years old going to that place. But it wasn't too bad because there was everybody else there who was being given these Christmas bags, they called it then. So I was really happy then when I went home and my mother was, too, because that would help for all the family and the kids, whoever was living there, her brother, sisters, like that, too, see. So I didn't feel too bad afterwards.

IH: Did you folks have more than just your immediate family living in the house?

GB: We always had more than our own family. You know, immediate one, which is my brothers and sisters, and my mother and my father. We always had my mother's father, my mother's sisters and brothers. During those times, during the depression time, they would stay with her, right?

IH: So, was pretty crowded, then, the place.

GB: Well, we only had about two bedrooms, like that. So, lot of us slept on the floor. She had her sisters. She had about two or three sisters, like that. And her brother. So it'd be about four. Four to five people.

IH: How many children were in your family?

GB: By that time, I think we had nine. Nine in the family then. Well, nine children, but my father and my mother made eleven. Well, then few years after that, there eleven brothers and sisters. But with my mother and father, would be thirteen of us. So, like us, we always had so many people in.

IH: Well, was the house big?

GB: No, no. We only had a two-bedroom house. Well, whatever we could afford is what it was. So everybody slept on the floor. Just throw some mats, throw some blankets down, and everybody slept on the floor, whoever. There was always room for anybody who came over that time. I mean, during those years, we sort of managed living different places. The most we ever had was a three-bedroom house, but our parlor was a bedroom, too.
IH: Yeah, right.

GB: Always a bedroom. Yeah. That would be the fourth bedroom or how many, how big it was, how many it'd hold. We hardly had any furnitures in it. See, so everybody slept on the floor. You know, to fit them in. So, that was all right. I mean, we really managed to get along all during those years. Like my mother was working at the cannery. When she first started, we were really young then. She had to help out because there was no money, anything, then. And my father, well, he was making very little money. So she went to work at the cannery, Libby cannery. So that helped little bit. During those times, they didn't need the core. They didn't use the core then. The core of the pineapple. They threw it away. See, so whoever wanted it, they could take it. So she used to bring it home when she could. And when she brought it home, that was a treat. It was a treat for us because that is something we don't buy. (Laughs) We don't buy it at all. Because we ain't got no money for any luxuries. And that was a luxury when she brought that. So she brought it in a plastic bag and, boy, we thought that was the greatest thing we have. You know, she thought of us and she's bringing us home a treat. We really appreciate the thing. The little we got then during those years, we really thought it was a treat. And it was a treat because there wasn't any money for any luxuries at all. So those things that wasn't exactly food was called luxuries.

If she brought home a package of cookies, that had to feed or each one had to have one and that's it. So that was a luxury because she thought of (chuckles) us and she did. Because we could hardly afford a package of cookies then. If there were fifteen, twenty kids or people, each one had one only and that's it. But then, it wasn't too much of the point that, you know, what it was. It was the point of what she thought all the time. 'Cause she wanted to do things, and that's the only way she could (chuckles) appreciate us by saying, "This is for you folks." So we really liked that. That came maybe about once or twice a month. And we liked that because that was on a Saturday or on a payday. We'd had just a little extra money, (chuckles) then you could.

We used to even go to sell papers then. That was during the time, too, when we was about five, six, seven years old when we went to sell newspapers. All my brothers. My older brother started selling papers, then my second brother. See, my older brother Robert, then George. They went to sell papers. And to balance the money, balance whatever money they could help out with the house like that. So, they went. My other brother Philip, the third one, he went to help sell papers. Then my brother William, he went to help when he was old enough, which is about seven, eight years old. He went to go sell papers. So that was four brothers. Then when I got little older, I wanted to go to sell papers, too. 'Cause maybe I was about eight years old that time. So I begged my mother to let me go because she says, "No, you cannot go because you're a girl."

But I said, "That's all right because I can. I know I can. And
Sonny and George could help watch me, see."

Then she says, "No."

I kept begging her during the months went by till at last she says, "Oh, okay. But as long as your brothers watch you."

I said, "Sonny, tell Mama you're going to watch me."

He said, "Okay, let her go."

So I made myself look like a boy. I had a sailor cap. Put my hair, put the sailor cap on below my ears like that. And I had a boy shirt, boy pants. And then, we all went to go sell papers. So we had to buy papers, and then, you know, those days the papers was two for five cents. That was the wholesale price for papers when you buy from the Star-Bulletin. So if you sold the two papers, you made a nickel. So we really used to try like hard to sell every one. Then we made that extra nickel on every paper, whatever paper we bought during the day, to sell it. So even if we didn't, we tried to stay as late as possible selling it. And then, if we sold all of it, then we came home smiling. All of us came home smiling. But we always gave her the money. Gave my mother the money. And she would decide the next day how much we would need to buy again. You know, every day went on like that.

IH: So you have to buy the papers first before you sell them?

GB: Yeah.

IH: So what if you have leftover papers?

GB: Well, if we did, that was a loss. See? It was a loss, which you didn't make any money. And then, when that time went on, so that's why you try to hustle. You know, you just yell your heads ...

IH: Where did you sell?

GB: We used to sell at the old post office in town and all around Fort Street. But we didn't travel too much crossing streets because my mother said, you know, be careful and don't go crossing the streets. Because they didn't have too many cars then, but still you could get hurt and stuff like that. Try to stay close, all of us, to stay close in a certain area. So we'd go into buildings, whatever buildings there was, workers like that. Even them, they hardly bought. So we would be yelling, "Paper! Paper! Mister, paper, paper! How about buying my last paper!" That did it, which was not true. He would buy it. (Chuckles) Then we'd go and get another one that we had put on the side and go down again. "Paper! Paper! How about buying my last paper." Oh, today, I think of it. Oh, that's not nice.

(Laughter)
GB: But either you do or you die. People then didn't steal the way they do today. If they didn't have or whatever, we didn't hear of stealing. You left your house open and everything. No one came in your house. And so, my mother used to have her whole heart open. Even if she didn't have anything in the house to feed anybody, she would call them, "Come in and eat. Come in. Hele mai 'ai (Come eat)."

And I used to tell, "Ma, what are we going to feed them?"

"Oh, whatever we have."

But that was nice, those days. During that time, you don't really think it is because you're not really concerned then of anything. But as you grow older, then you do realize the back. And then you realize what it is today and what you had then. Even though you hardly had anything, you still were happier then. Here, the more you're given, the more you don't appreciate it, the more you want. That's the problem with people. That's why--well, we didn't realize that either. But today I say, I'm glad, I'm thankful then because I know how it is to live without hardly anything. So if it comes to pass again, I would still know how to. 'Cause I don't have to have it. I don't have to have a lot of things. So the most important thing, I think, is food, too, or how you feel. Making this dough, eating dough. Today they call it "dough," but those days we used to call it--you know, palaoa that we make. Just drop it in hot water and that's your food. We used to, kids, "Oh, is that all we gonna have?"

"Yeah. That's it."

So if comes worse to pass, we'll get used to--I will. I'd get used to eating that way again without anything. 'Cause it's something to eat without going to try and steal it off of somebody else, you know. That's why, there's a lot of times that people really wanted to live and without anything, they can. There is no way that they cannot. Just make an effort. Plant their own food. They can. Instead of always being given, given. But today, they expect to be given, anyhow.

IH: Do you remember that place called Squattersville?

GB: Squattersville that used to be down Hickam [Air Force Base]?

IH: Oh, that was down Hickam? There wasn't one down by Kaka'ako side?

GB: I don't really know. You see, anytime a person or people would go into an area where it wasn't theirs, and then start building little shacks and stuff like that, they eventually would call them squatters. And then they give them a name. Unless that was the one by Ala Moana where it sits today. You know that Ala Moana Shopping Center? There used to be duck ponds around there or taro patches all the way up on Kapi'olani [Boulevard]. You know, above Kapi'olani, all the area where Holiday Mart is, all those places were farms. Then they wasn't big farms. They had duck ponds and taro patches and little
places like that. And little over by Ala Moana, they had a village there. But I don't know really what they called them, you know the squatters there. But they had a housing area of all old homes like that. That was just above of that coconut grove area of Ala Moana.

See, we did go down there quite a bit because of my auntie that used to live down there. But that whole place was all coconut grove. That was across from Ala Moana Park. They didn't have a park then anyway. There was just swamp. That was, you know, trees and bushes. Those trees that grows in water like that and right straight over, and then the ocean would start. But there wasn't any way you could get in the back there unless you go plowing through it. That was all private area. But then, nobody bothered people if they went down there. At one time, I'm not too sure who owned it, whether it was the Ward sisters. So that whole place was all swampy. And all beach area. Then it started Ala Moana Park, where you could go down in the ocean, you could go fishing, crabbing, and all that stuff. No one even bother to send you away or anything. You just figure, well, go ahead and help yourself. And people did. Very few people. Because there were so many places you could go. And they don't go in other people's property if they can. So, they would go further over. They had the incinerator. Eventually, later in the years, they opened that incinerator close to that Ala Moana Park. And they used to have a dog pound down that end. And that's where they had the school, too, that Opportunity School.

IH: Oh, now you're talking about down by Kewalo Basin side?

GB: No.

IH: By Fishermen's Wharf, over there?

GB: Yeah. See, that whole area. That was the incinerator, and then the Ala Moana, the dog pound, and that Opportunity School was right there. That's all there was, I think. And just few houses, people that lived there, and then the ocean. That's where everybody went to get their fish and went fishing, crabbing, and limu like that.

IH: Oh, over there was good for that?

GB: It was shallow. It was really shallow and went way out in the ocean. It went, oh, I don't know, maybe about 50, 100, 200 feet all the way in the ocean. So, they . . .

IH: But it's not like that now, huh?

GB: No, it's not. Eventually, they did away with the dog pound. They moved that. By the time we had moved away, too, though. And then, the last one, then one time I heard they had filled up that whole area. And even the incinerator, the garbage, the city and county incinerator closed up or they moved away. And then, they filled up that whole area, the whole back area. Then I had heard it was a firing range, the police firing range back there. But today, I
don't really know what they have back there, but I know there's a lot of big business back at that end.

IH: What was the Opportunity School now?

GB: It was those kids, students then, who couldn't pass or who wasn't too interested in schooling or they were a little slow then. So, if you didn't pass sixth grade then, they would hold you back another year. And if you didn't pass, then they figured that it would be best if you went down to that school. That was to a school mostly for trade. Learning or teaching them of different trades, what they were interested in. That's what they had called it then, the Opportunity--those who went there was really happy about it. They liked it. They taught them sewing, and cooking, and how--you know, making things. Things that they did with their hands. And the boys who was interested in mechanical or in painting, they taught them those things down there. They were happy because they have certain times, too, they had their free time. They could go down in the beach and go swimming. It was right there, the ocean. So, some of those who were sent there were our friends. So, sometimes we would kid, chee, maybe we should pretend, too, that we kind of dummies and we could get sent down there like them and enjoy the beach. We really thought it was good then. All of our friends who were sent there, they really liked it. They said, "This is it." But now, the way they have it, it's different. They try to teach them something.

The girls had made things of their own. They would have certain times of the year they would have a graduation class like that that they can invite all their parents, friends, like that, relatives, to come and they would have a show of whatever they had made. Some who was interested in cooking, they made cakes and showed off their style of cooking, what they had learned. And even in their dresses, in making things, sewing like that, they would show them all what they--they would model what they had made like that. And even the boys would show what they had made in mechanical things. You know, all different kind of mechanical things that they was interested in, they did that. Well, of course, they couldn't show them the cars that they had repaired. Some of them, you know, they took these old junk cars and put it together like that. Or whatever they had there that they did. See, but those, some of them, were interested in things that they wasn't taught in school. They would try to teach them down there. So, that's what they meant mostly by that opportunity. To give them opportunity when they graduate or was interested in mechanical mind or their mind themselves. Lot of them said they wasn't interested who or whatever is going on in the world. They wasn't interested in studying that kind of thing. But they were really good on their hands. So that's what they meant by opportunity.

IH: Okay. And then, you said there was an airport where the farmer's market is today?
GB: Yeah, they did have. They were starting. When we lived there, they had this airport. We lived at one place that it was close to the airport. In fact, it was right next down at, yeah, where that Ala Moana Farmer's Market is. That whole area was nothing but a mud flat. It was all barren. No business, no homes, no nothing. But on the side of it or the end towards where we lived, that's where we could see this airport that they started. They had brought in some planes, so they would come in from the . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

GB: Yeah, it was fine then when it didn't rain because it was nice, dry, hard and clay, you know, the ground. But whenever it rained and they tried to land the plane, then the plane would just skid all over the place. They could hardly keep the plane without cracking in the bushes, in these kiawe bush trees they had around the place. But we used to go up on the top of the house on the roof and watch the planes when they landed because it was funny watching them (chuckles) 'cause the plane would skid all over in the mud whenever it rained. But when it was dry, oh, well, it was nice. You know, they landed (chuckles) fine. But I don't really know how long they had it until they figured it wasn't worthwhile to keep it. So they just eventually didn't have any airplanes over there.

IH: Do you know about what time that was? Or how old you were at the time?

GB: Not really. If I was, I would say, maybe if I was about eight, nine, ten years old, then that airport would have been there about '30.

IH: Nineteen thirties.

GB: [Nineteen] thirty, '31, around the early '30s. That's when they would have had it then or started then.

IH: Okay. How old were you when you started going out with your auntie?

GB: My Auntie Lizzie selling leis?

IH: Yeah. Selling leis.

GB: I was, could be, about eleven. Ten, eleven. Just about twelve, around there.

IH: What was her name again? Your auntie?

GB: My Auntie Lizzie? Lizzie Silva. But we always called her Lizzie. (Chuckles) That's a nickname or however, but that, too, and we
always called her Lizzie. She started going to sell leis. Then that was during the depression then anyway, so that's when we used to make paper leis. Paper leis, seed leis, bead leis. Once in awhile, if we had flowers that we could pick around here and there like plumerias or crown flowers, whatever we could find, and make into leis, that's what she took or what I used to take. Mostly I used to have paper leis. This crepe that they use, crepes, then and made into different styles of leis. And they had all different names then. You know, like the 'ilima, the mamos. Then some were called snowballs or some were called •••• O~hat twist. Well, I cannot really remember all of them. I know what it is and how it's done, but they had names to all of them. And then, we sewed the middle by hand. You know, sewed them in the middle and then made different leis like that. Oh, the mamo, those snowball leis, some of them, well, you had to cut the ends and twist it. There's certain way to twist it to look like a different style of paper leis.

Oh, different ways of different colors, to match the different colors. The 'ilima was always the orange ones. The mamo is another lei that you cut the ends of the crepe paper and string it, sew it in the middle. Then when you twist it into a lei, it look like a mamo lei. (laughs) The colors is according to the way you want to put it together. They came in certain length. So if you wanted an orange mixed with a yellow, yellow with red, or whatever color, red, white. You know, the colors came out real pretty. So it depended on how you wanted to make it. And there's other leis that you twist. You cut there and then twist it to make it look little different. It looks . . . Oh, that name, I can't remember what it is. Or there was another style that you cut the ends to look like a point. Then you take a bamboo and curl it. Twist it or pull it, it'll give it a curl. And they were pretty then during the days. That's the thing that was made mostly for these boats that came and the ships that came. These President ships or the Dollar Line, like that. They were all made for those people like that because they used it as souvenirs. See, when they bought it, they took it back with them to whatever country they were going to.

And then, the seed leis or seed or beads that we made in different colors and ways, those could be kept. They didn't have to throw it away like the flower leis. So those things, that's what we made then. But the seeds had to be made holes in it so that you could string it on either this cord or wires, thin wire that don't break so easy.

IH: Where did you pick up the seeds from?

GB: Well, there was a store, a place that had all these different seeds. See, there was so different names, all of 'em. You know, quite a bit of different names of the seeds.

IH: So you folks bought the seeds then?

GB: We either bought them or tried to pick 'em up here and there from
different trees. If we had the time to pick 'em up on the trees, we pick 'em up from the trees. And then try to drill holes in them, so we could string 'em on this wire or this cord and make into leis. They were good sellers then.

IH: The seed leis?

GB: The seeds and these paper leis, the crepe paper leis. Because they always wanted to keep them and take 'em back as souvenirs. That, we did quite a bit, although the work that was involved in it was quite a bit of work. But then, those days, money had a lot of value then. So even if the leis were supposed to be sold as twenty-five cents, if you couldn't sell it at twenty-five cents, you went down to two for twenty-five cents just so you made some money. You see, but your labor didn't count. It's only what your cost. Labor then, they didn't count your labor at all. So whatever few money, if you made a quarter, if you even made a dollar, oh, that could feed your whole family for almost a week.

(Laughter)

GB: That was a lot of money if we made a dollar. But you see, as time started move up more, then there was a little bit more plentiful things. But still, the cost was still going up then during that time. But it still was in the depression then. So if we made fifty cents, oh, that was a bad day. If we made a dollar or more than a dollar, that was little better.

(Laughter)

IH: When you were talking about the mamo style paper lei, is that similar to the mamo feather lei that you were talking about?

GB: Yeah. It look like a mamo, the feather of the mamo lei. That's why it was named, I guess. I'm not too sure if that's why the name was called mamo on the paper. But they were cut on the ends of the crepe paper [perpendicular to the edge] and sewed in the middle. See, and then they gave it that fuzzy look. Although it wasn't quite as close to the real, you know, the mamo feather lei, but it's close enough. (Laughs) But then they had. So each one of 'em had a different name which was similar to what it looked like. The snowball, you know what the snowball is? The flower?

IH: That's that mums? Isn't it chrysanthemum?

GB: Well, no. In the Mainland, it's quite a bit. They have chrysan. . . . Not chrysanthemum. It's this blue flowers that looks. . . . It comes in a bunch and it's like a big ball.

IH: Oh. Isn't that hydrangeas or something?

GB: Yeah. Yeah, that's what they call it. Something like the hydrangeas. It's blue.
LC: That's what it is. Hydrangeas.

IH: Hydrangeas, huh?

LC: Right.

GB: But it's called "snowball." We called them "snowball." So, this paper lei is made almost similar to it. So if you cut the ends and you twist it, it would look like that snowball.

IH: So, do you know why your Auntie Liz started selling leis?

GB: Well, that was all during, like I said, during those days when they were really hard to get along. There was no jobs, no way of earning any money at all. So that was the only way if you could get involved and do things like that, you know, stringing leis or hustling to make your leis. Well, she was interested in that, too. But prior to that, I think there was another lady who was going selling leis. So she told her if she wanted to go with her--my auntie, you know. So my auntie went one time. Then after that, she started going more. And then she liked it, so she took me and said if I wanted to go with her. If I make my own leis, then we could sell it and I could earn my own money. So that's how I got involved in that. So I think most of these people went like that. They went maybe one time and then they got involved in it. So they thought, well, that was an honest way to make a living by using your own hands and try to go get your own flowers, whatever, or make your own papers and seed leis. Those seed and bead leis, some of those seeds came from the mountain. You know, different trees. And they got washed down towards closer to the ocean areas by the rain. Then all of the lei sellers eventually got into it like that. To me, that was the most thing that it was the only honest thing that they could earn any money at all to live during those days.

IH: Where was your Auntie Liz living?

GB: She was living in Kaka'ako, too, the same place where we lived but little further. . . . Well, maybe just about a couple of blocks away.

IH: Were there other lei sellers in the neighborhood?

GB: I'm pretty sure this other lady, too, was living in that area. Not too far away, maybe about another couple of blocks away from each other. So most of. . . . Well, my auntie and this lady lived not too far away. And we didn't live too far away from my auntie. So eventually, we could all go at the same time to the boats. They would leave their home and they'd come up to where I lived. We would--all three of us--would walk down to Pier 8, Pier 9, wherever the boat was during that times.

IH: So, that's where you started, on the waterfront?

GB: Yeah.
IH: And you were only eleven years old at the time?

GB: Yeah, I could have been about ten, eleven, around there.

IH: Were you allowed to sell, actually sell, on the waterfront at that young age?

GB: There wasn't any restrictions then. Actually, there was no restrictions that I can remember that they had pertaining to age of any kind. You know, there wasn't anything. It was just your way of selling, your way of earning your own living. As long as you didn't get into fights a lot. They did, they did. The older people. But there wasn't anything against selling as long as you kind of stayed in your side. You know, if I had asked a customer first, it should be that I asked them first. But if maybe that customer didn't like what I had, you know, whatever flowers or papers, then somebody else is there who have what they want, they were free to buy from anybody. So that's how they sold then, but of course, some of them, certain boat areas was terrible, was worse. They used to really rough each other.

IH: Yeah, that's what I've heard, that the old-timers were really competitive in their selling.

GB: When they started selling leis, when the boat came in and the customers started coming in, there was no such thing as courtesy. It was sell or take it home and eat it.

(Laughter)

GB: It's what it is. So it was rough and tumble. It means whoever could rough the person or whoever could rough the customers. But lot of people didn't like that. The customers didn't care. Lot of them didn't care for that being shoved in their faces. So, lot of times, I would stay on the outskirts. Because I couldn't get near them because I was small and these people, lot of 'em was so big. And their leis were all on their arms. And when they lift their arms up, nobody else could see anybody else. They were just there. And here, I'm here, underneath all those flowers. I just eventually gave up. I would just stay on the outside, figuring, well, maybe there's another customer coming around. But eventually, I would, at least if the customer didn't like being shoved and pushed like that, they would tell them, "No, no, no, no. I don't want to. I'm going to buy it from her. Would you mind all moving?" Oh, I felt good when they said that.

IH: And they would line up the leis on both arms?

GB: That's how they sold then.

IH: Wow, then the arms get tired.

GB: Oh, it was. It was tiresome because they had all their leis, I
don't know how many of 'em. It was just all crowded. So by the time they would have their rest, but then carrying it all on their arm, a lot of 'em would get ruined because they didn't sell it then for the boat, that would all have to be thrown away. Because it's all smashed and ruined already. So that's why they sold it cheap. They would yell their head off. "Quarter. Here's fifty cents. Two for quarter. Three for quarter. Here, ten for dollar." Just imagine, "Here, ten for dollar." And they did. Ten for dollar. Ten cents a lei. You might just as well throw it away. But they was only interested in the dollar. So that means they picked their own flowers, they strung their own. They didn't care about--their time was nothing. It didn't matter anything. It's only as long as they got a dollar, they figured they made money. That's why, lot of them then were selling that way. You know, a lot of them was their own yards, picked up from people's different yards, whoever gave them the flowers. So that's how they didn't care how they sold it.

IH: And how much were you selling your paper leis and seed leis and things?

GB: Well, those leis usually were worth... They were selling about twenty-five cents a lei. See, certain types, the ones that you took more time, would cost more. So those that didn't take as much time like the 'ilima would be twenty-five cents. If you can't sell it, two for twenty-five, and wouldn't lose any money. And those mamos, you could sell it for twenty-five or two for fifty or three for fifty, you still wouldn't lose any money. But the other one, which is the snowball, well, that took little bit more time because you had to twist every cut that you cut of those papers. So that means it took quite a bit of time to do those. Those were fifty cents or if you could get it, two for fifty or dollar if you can't. But you could sell it two for dollar, you still would have made money. But those who had plenty and they didn't care how they made money, they practically sold it so cheap. As long as they made any money.

But my idea was what it was worth. I would go down little bit and don't figure on my time. You know, figure, well, my time is not, only mostly on the cost. But you had to figure on cost and little of your labor. Because it took time to make those leis, to drill the hole in the seeds, and string. Well, once you drill the hole, it's not so bad. Then you use your own initiative on how you wanted the style of the looks of it by putting different seeds or different beads in between to bring out the beads. See, you put glass beads so that it gives it a different look or brings out the seed, they don't look so dull.

And then, the papers, you do that same way. You do on your papers and changing your colors. If one color don't match the other, you put another color to--one brings the other out. You could make it all the same color, but then people have different tastes. So, some like it bright, some like it dull. So you had to--not what you like, it's what the customer want. That was the way I made it.
I figured I liked it certain way, but I want to know how the customer liked it. If it was certain type of people which was Filipinos, if it was a Filipino ship coming in, Filipinos like the nice, bright and wild. That's what they got. If it was the Japenese boat coming in, then, well, it's toned down to give their style or tastes. And that's how we made it for them. That's how we had to think business-wise and what people liked that. And the different nationalities. Well, Haoles will not take, go for wild colors. They wanted nice colors but not wild ones. (Chuckles) So we made it for them. Whatever. So, we had to figure how, using your own head in figuring what each kind of people liked and make those leis according to them. So in the papers, seeds, and leis, that's how we had to do, the colors.

IH: Were you also selling flowers? Flower leis?

GB: You mean, flower leis? Oh, yeah. We mixed them up. Whatever we could get, like I said. Flowers from the yard without buying them.

IH: Oh, I see.

GB: You see, everything had to be bought. If you didn't have anything growing in your yard, then you have to buy everything or go to whatever families or friends. But you see, it takes time to pick up flowers. And then, if you do and string it all yourself, you have to figure on the time to string 'em and also go to whatever boat you're going to go and sell leis from. So you only going to have a time limit. If you can do it the day before, all the better. I mean, like tomorrow is the boat. You pick whatever or you string whatever, you're going to do it today. And if you don't finish all today, you stay as late in the night as you can and try to finish whatever you can. Early in the morning, you leave to go to the boat. See, and flowers, if you didn't... Well, you see they had graves. You know, Kawaiaha'o grave? They always had a lot of plumerias in there. You could go and buy them over there for twenty-five cents during that time. Twenty-five or thirty-five cents, and they give you a big bucket of plumerias. So you decide how you want to string it.

If you have whatever—loose flowers, leaves, coleus leaves around in your yard or anything, you could mix it with that. If you had baldheads, you know, bozus [globe amaranth], you can add in, too, those and stretch your leis, make more leis. The more leis you make, the cheaper you can sell it. But if you don't stretch 'em as much with what you have, then you cannot sell it too cheap. Because you're only going to make so many leis out of one bucket, which is all plain plumerias. So, you're going to have to try hold your prices in order to get it. But being that was only twenty-five or thirty-five up to fifty cents a bucket and you make seven or eight leis, lucky if you can make ten leis. So if you sold it quarter, which was very seldom that you can sell one lei for quarter, you would have to sell two for quarter and make sure that you get your money back. We say if you made eight leis, two for quarter. Two, four, six, eight. That's four dollars. Now, you paid fifty
cents, you made money. Right? No. Two, four, six, eight. No, you didn't. You hardly made anything. 'Cause it cost you fifty cents for the flowers and you made eight to nine, we say nine leis. So you sold two for quarter. You would have to sell four leis to make your money back, which is your fifty cents back. So you would sell the other four and get fifty cents. So you only made fifty cents. You lucky if you made that extra fifty cents or quarter, which those days was lots of money they made. And if they couldn't sell it at two for quarter, they sold it at three for quarter. Whatever it is. Some of these lei sellers, lucky if they made a quarter on top of what they had spent. They figured they sold all their leis. "Oh, we sold all our leis, we made lots of money." They may have only made a quarter of what they actually. They didn't count their time. They didn't think their time was important. They made money. Well, I would think that they survived. I think, today, they're still doing the same thing. You see, the cost and everything, that they hardly making that much money in the lei-selling business at all. Because of what the cost is to them.

And then, people are not really spending, don't want to spend too much, so. And the rent and everything else is still going up and yet, the leis and flowers, whatever they buying, they cannot raise it too much. So they're not really making too much money at all. Maybe they just even surviving or breaking even or not at all, some of them. Because people don't want to spend more than what they want to. And it's just that they can't raise it too much on the lei. That's common sense. But you can only do that with leis. Mostly because it's not a necessity. So that's lot of where this lei business stands today.

IH: So, how long were you folks down at the boat?

GB: Well, I was there maybe only about a couple of years, two, three years. And then, my mother got involved. And then, she wanted to go and sell leis and stuff like that. So, I had to stay home. Stay home and take care the house, take care the kids. I had to be the mother. She took over. So once in a while I used to go with her and help her on weekend like that, on a Friday or Saturday like that, if there was somebody to help with the kids home.

IH: Can you describe the scene at Irwin Park? What it was like with all the lei sellers there?

GB: Oh, that was nice during the boat days for the big boats. That was really nice. Oh, even for the President boats. That was nice, too, because the President boats, they used to have people come down with wagons pushing their carts of fruits, vegetables. They'd sell vegetables, too, whatever they could get. You wouldn't think that anybody (chuckles) would be buying vegetables or fruits. Well, fruits, you can see it because they can go on the boat and eat it, right, when they leaving whatever. They didn't have too much restrictions on that. But they would come with these long carts and push it there. And it had two wheels. One end had two sticks on
both end that keeps it from flopping. One side, see. And on the other end, they would put the other. Then it'll stay. You know, stay level like that. But it would be maybe about ten or twelve inches high on the sides all around. And all their fruits and all their goodies, that was all in there. They sold anything they had in there. They had fruits, vegetables, candies, whatever goodies that they were allowed to put in that thing. They had it all in there. And they just put it, went down to the road right--where they could park. Just where the cars were parked here and there. So they would just set their stand up and leave it there. And people would buy.

We even bought off of them, too. Whatever was cheap enough or we wanted oranges or apples, they had it. They had papayas, pineapples, and things like that. They had it in that little carts. But they would have two, three of 'em. Different people. The tourists or the people who was going away on the boat on the President Line, if it was the Japan Line or whatever, they would all buy things and they would put it in a package and take it right on board. So all these people with their paper leis or their bead (laughs) leis, just walking all around and eating whatever. They had wagon in there that come and sell different foodstuff and all. And across by the park would have--that Irwin Park--would have different people selling food things, too, among the lei sellers. The lei sellers would be all in the Irwin Park across somewhere on the road, wherever it was a crosswalk area that people crossed over or across from the other.

Across from Irwin Park, they had this corner there. That was this dark man that used to... He was really good. I think he was one of the oldest one [lei seller], too, this man that used to be there before, that Akoni. He used to sell on the opposite corner of Irwin Park. He always was dressed in a white shirt and black pants, always. You didn't see him with any other color clothes. But I don't know if he was... But he wasn't Colored. I don't think he was Colored. He was some Hindu, some foreign country like that. But he must have come here when he was really young. But he was a lei seller. He sold for years and years on, as long as they had the boat. They had those ships coming in, he used to sell right across from that Irwin Park on that corner across from that building. What is that? Well, anyway, that's where he used to be with his family. We would be across of it.

All the people, each one had their areas where they would go and whoever figured that where the cars would park, nobody around, so you want to be there first when the car parks 'cause you would have more chance, right? So, they would be running all over the park from one end to the other. If you figure, well, the person coming from the other end, that's going to be a good corner, you go over there. But if a person coming across from the other side, you run across like a nut. (Laughs) You running all over that park. From one end to the other end you're running around. You should see them with their leis hanging over their arms hanging down and yelling
from one end to another. If they see a customer, even if somebody else is helping this customer, these other lei sellers would be coming from one end and yelling their head off, "Flower leis!" (laughs) at the top of their lungs. Lot of times, the customers thought lot of these lei sellers were crazy. Just imagine at a (chuckles) hundred yards yelling your guts out. And they could hear them because it's all open space.

IH: How many lei sellers would be down there in one day?

GB: How many?

IH: Yeah. Like when the boat came in. Was it like twenty, or thirty, or fifty?

GB: Well, you see, it all depends who could get enough flowers and leis and seeds. And lot of them had their husbands, their kids, and the brothers and sisters. So, actually, it depends on what kind of boat and where it was coming from. If it was the Matsonia, you know those big ships that come in from the Mainland. See, this Dollar Line didn't come in from the Mainland too much. They would be going to foreign countries, you know, whatever foreign country, the Dollar Line. They may be coming in from the Mainland and going to a foreign country or from the. . . . I don't know if the route was the same thing, too, coming from the foreign country to over here, and then go to the Mainland. So it depended on where that ship was coming in from and where it was going to. That would be amount of lei sellers. Because how it was, they figured if was coming in from the Mainland, that means most of those people were tourists. So there wouldn't be too many people greet 'em from here, right? You would have to have friends or someone here greeting them. But if it was going, we say, then a lot of 'em would be friends and family here seeing them off.

IH: So there would be more lei sellers when the boats were departing than when they were arriving?

GB: No. Depends on where, how it's coming in. If a lot of tourists were coming in, there's nobody to greet them. There's hardly anybody greeting them. So you take your own chances. So there wouldn't be that much lei sellers. Most time would be people who going away. Then they have lot of friends, families, whatever it is, seeing them off. They'd be buying them leis to see 'em off. So it'd be more lei sellers then. The same thing like the Japanese boats. Whatever boat came in, if it came in from Japan, you just take your chances that maybe they're going to buy when they leave. And most times, it's when they leave, not when they come in. They'll buy a few. Maybe some few friends or whatever that knows who's coming in. Then they would buy, but not that much.

IH: Did a lot of the lei sellers bring their families with them, their children?

GB: Well, a lot of those who had children, they did. But you see, they
would sell, but then like I said, the big Hawaiian and you're small. They drown you with their leis. So if the little kids came, you know, try to sell, they just had to--flower leis and just hope (chuckles) somebody came up to them to buy leis. But these big ones. They couldn't go in between and sell them because if the customers didn't buy fast, these big people would come over and just drown the poor little things. Some of 'em were, what, about five [feet] eight [inches], ten [inches], and six feet tall, some of 'em. And they're so big and some are heavyset. So with all their leis on their arms, you can imagine how they look. (Laughs) And then they came around with flower leis, you drown. One, two people couldn't even get close to the person already. So, that's why, lot of times, they didn't care too much for that. They didn't like that. If you stayed back and waited and let them give the customers chance to choose, then wasn't so bad. They can see what you have. But when you have it all like that and just go smacking it up in their faces, lot of them didn't like that at all. They just wouldn't buy. Lot of times, they just wouldn't buy at all. They just said they not buying any and leave. But they [the lei sellers] didn't care. There's always another customer (laughs) they say. And so on down the line.

IH: So, after the boat went out and everybody sold all their leis and everything, did everybody go back to the park?

GB: Well, they go by the park afterwards. That's where they had their cars anyway, so they go by the park and sit there and wait. And just talk about, you know, they say how was everybody, did they make out all right, and all that. You know, kind of rest like that before they collect all their stuff and junk to get ready to leave like that.

IH: Were they pretty friendly to each other? The lei sellers?

GB: Yeah, that's one thing. After the boat leaves, they all friendly, they all happy, they all... Well, those who made a little good, you know what I mean, they were happy. But those who didn't smile, (laughs) you know they didn't make out too well. That means it wasn't that good for them. (Laughs) But they all got along for some reason. These lei sellers, one thing I gave them credit, they may get mad at each other while they selling leis and they all want to (laughs) punch each other's face, but I'll be darned. After the boat leaves and they all resting around sitting on their mats on the grass like that, they're all friendly, happy and laughing. (Laughs)

I used to tell my auntie, "Auntie, I thought you was mad at that (laughs) lady."

She says, "Yeah. I was because she cut in front of me and she shove her leis right in my face and the customer's face. And I wanted to punch her mouth."
(laughs) I said, "Yeah."

But she said, "And that's why I wanted to give 'em one punch when that sassy old thing put her leis in my face. So I pulled her (chuckles) leis and I ripped her leis."

IH: Oh, no. (chuckles)

GB: Yeah. Each one do that. You know, they get so mad, so they just grab your leis and push it away. But like I said, afterwards, they're friends. They were all laughing and talking, and then telling them, "We going to go up Kekaulike [Street] and eat. Meet us guys up there. We go eat Chinese food," or "We go eat (chuckles) Hawaiian food."

I would tell her, "Auntie, I thought you was mad at that lady. I thought you wanted to punch her face."

She says, "Yeah. But that's all right. You folks go and eat. I'll meet you (chuckles) up there."

(laughter)

GB: And that went on all the time, so I figured, oh, it don't make (chuckles) any difference these Hawaiians. They mad only that time, but then afterwards they all friends or they all laughing. I mean, so they really didn't . . . . They got along pretty well, I would say. Even though they wanted to fight. And then, maybe a few days or a week later, they were all friends again. But they were nice. I mean, I liked it, the idea of it. You know, the whole idea of the selling. It taught lot of those people how to get along or even to survive. But then, while they're selling, lot of the greed came up. And it shows that in anybody. I guess it does. You know, business is business. But surprising, with the Hawaiians, they didn't hold, you know, getting mad for long time. After a while, they know we're friends (chuckles) again. Even though they hated the person then.

Even they hated the policeman. And that's poor Phillip [Officer Phillips]. He really had it from the lei sellers for years and years. But when they know that he was sick, wasn't feeling too well, oh, they were all concerned. And they were all his friend. Yet, they would say all kind of things. They'd swear at him and all. But he was really good to them, though. That, I think, well, that's the most famous policeman that the (chuckles) lei sellers liked.

IH: That was a Hawaiian guy, huh? Phillip?

GB: Yeah. He was Hawaiian something else, I'm not sure. But we always known him as Phillip.

IH: He must have been down there for long time, huh? Because everybody talks about him.
GB: Down the waterfront, yeah. Well, he was there for a long time, as long I could remember. They tried to shift him out, but they all wanted him back again so they put him back down there.

IH: There used to be an icehouse right in that area?

GB: Yeah, right. It was right across from Irwin Park. Across towards the Waikiki end of the park. There was that icehouse there where they have that road going around it now. It was there for long time. I remember that even when I was a kid you could buy ice there. You could even put your... They used to put people's frozen food stuff in there. You know, if you wanted to put anything in there, you just had to pay so much. And you can keep it in the ice. And you buy all your ice and all from there. Lot of these lei sellers did that. You know, whatever leis that they didn't sell, fresh flower leis like that, if they didn't sell it at the park, at the boat like that, they put it in baskets and boxes. Put in box and then covered up with their cloth. And they took it across to this icehouse by the park, that old icehouse, and had them keep it in there. They kept it in there, then the next day if there's going to be a boat again, you go over there, and pick it out, and come across to the park. 'Cause they didn't have anywhere to keep their flowers from spoiling like that. So that icehouse was always there that I remember. But I don't know if they have it today.

IH: Now, where else did you sell leis besides the waterfront?

GB: Oh, we went to sell during the war. We sold flowers up along Hotel Street. We went to the different bars, you know, outside. Pass by and if there was people who wanted. Going into the places like that, we asked them if they wanted leis. We didn't have too many leis. It was mostly flowers, like little rose for their coats or buttonhole like that, or...
survived during those years. We made few dollars like that. We didn't really make a real killing then. But we just made few. If we bought five dollars worth, we made ten dollars—ten or fifteen dollars, which was ten dollars over of what our expenses was. So, it really helped during those times like that.

IH: So, that time, you were buying your flowers? During the war?

GB: Yeah. Well, those were roses, carnations, you know, those other kind of flowers. Then people got more in the money during the war because the people then wanted better things. They wasn't too interested in plumerias or crown. They wanted carnations, and orchids, and those expensive flowers or gingers and pikakes and those. And those were things, lot of 'em, you had to buy if you didn't have. Carnations, you had to buy them. Pikakes, you had to buy them. 'Ilima, you had to buy. All those kind of flowers had to be bought. So then, they cost more. Because, well, you see, the people then was getting more money. They were getting more money then, so everything then, they were willing to pay. But in the meantime, when we had to buy all that, then we had to really rush and hustle like that to make your cost. Although you didn't really sell it too much, but you made a little bit money. To me, you made a little bit money just to survive.

IH: When you were selling on Hotel Street, was that mostly the military that you were selling to?

GB: Well, they were mostly military people then, yeah, because the civilians and military didn't quite get along together.

IH: Oh, yeah?

GB: Yeah, every time, I guess, well, it was something that's hard to understand. The civilians couldn't get to mingle with the military too much, so there was always fights against them. Or if there was other, you know, two branches of military would be in some kind of fight. Maybe the sailors didn't care for the marines; the marines didn't care for them, either. So there was this fighting. Or back and forth like that. Or the Coloreds. If the Coloreds were drinking, them, and then the Whites didn't figure, you know, and then started calling names. Pretty soon, there would be fights. Eventually we quit going to, you know, 'cause it was getting too wild. They couldn't get along, those people. Different type of people, different branches. They weren't only fighting with the war on the outside, they were fighting among themselves.

IH: So you were out of school at this time now?

GB: Yeah. Well, actually, I didn't really go to school. After elementary—I mean during the years after that, I had to go into business school. Right around that time, during the war, just about getting married, then I went into business, to business college, to bring up. But then, we used to play around, you know. Play around in school, not
staying in school. Thinking of it now, it was just a waste of money. But it's too late to think of it, right down the drain.

IH: What about LeRoy's Cafe? You folks used to sell over there?

GB: LeRoy's Cafe?

IH: That's the one that was near the quarantine station. Was a nightclub or something?

GB: LeRoy's Cafe, that one would be out Ala Moana [Boulevard]?

IH: Mm hmm [yes], mm hmm.

GB: Yeah. Well, we used to go over there and sell flowers and leis. It was a nightclub where lot of local people went. It was a nice place because they had a good bunch of people. And then, we went over there selling flowers or leis, whatever the people wanted, like that. And they did buy a little bit. And then, we just stayed there certain time during the night, and then after that we left. Because if you stayed there too late, they became drunk. (Laughs) You know, and lot of these nightclubs, you didn't stay there too late. You just stayed for the early part of the evening and stuff like that. So after certain time, you just leave because the more people drank, they get little wild. Some people couldn't hold their liquor and stuff like that. So you figure that's the best time always to leave. So we would leave and then go in town like that to have something to eat little bit. Then we would all go home. 'Cause we went with another lady and her daughter. See, my mother, myself, and then this other lady. And she had two daughters. So, there would always be four, five of us, which wasn't too bad. 'Cause we could get to talk and wasn't so boring. Like her two daughters and myself, we were all kids then. So we could all go off, go on ahead of them—my mother and their mother. So, the two, we always said, oh, let the two old buckies stay in the back. We would all go walk way ahead of them, and then let them catch us up, and meet them on another corner, and go on to another corner. There used to be a lot of people selling leis then. They had a lot of Chinese people.

IH: Oh, yeah? Selling leis?

GB: In around the town. And some of 'em that used to be that Chinese stores on Maunakea Street today. I don't know if they were families or what, but this Chinese lady used to sell in and around town.

IH: Did they also go to the boat?

GB: Some of 'em did. Maybe a few of 'em did go. They didn't have that many of 'em, you know. But they did have some of the boat. I mean, they would go over there, and then they would go down the boat here and there and selling, then that's it. But during the years, we haven't seen them. They either died or either moved away. But there haven't been too many Chinese people after the war. And for
long time afterwards, they haven't been too many of 'em selling leis. Then, those are other times with the boat people. Then, they opened the airport. And then, the airport was different from the boat people--the boat lei sellers or even down the Maunakea areas, you know, those flower shops that they have over there. They're all three different bunches of people. The boats were one. The town people was another bunch. And then, the airport was another bunch of people. So there were three different type of bunch of people who were selling. And this airport didn't mingle, didn't interfere with the town area. They didn't interfere with the boat too much, but they can. They could allow. Before, they had all their rules. You know, the rules, and made associations. Then they separated the two. Different from the airport and the . . .

IH: Do you know when they formed those associations?

GB: No, that I don't really know. Lillian comes in on that one from the airport, then.

IH: What about the waterfront one? I'm pretty sure that was formed a lot earlier.

GB: Yeah. The waterfront opened just about the time of the airport. Then they wanted to separate the different. See, no interference. They couldn't come there and interfere with the airport. The airport couldn't interfere with them. Then they formed their association, too. So actually, I don't really know 'cause I wasn't too involved then.

IH: But I was under the impression that the town gang and the boat gang was pretty much the same people. Is that not true?

GB: Well, the town is buying, renting. You know, renting stalls.

IH: Oh, well, I was talking about the ones that used to go on the sidewalks.

GB: In the town?

IH: Uh huh [yes]. You know, they had their stands on the sidewalks.

GB: Oh, no. Not the town. The town, well, they did start it in the beginning like that but then they stopped that because then that's under the city and county rule, right? And then, those that's all further up around Maunakea [Street] and all those areas, and Kekaulike [Street] like that, that is all rented areas that you had to--under the owners or whoever owns the areas, right?

IH: Right.

GB: So, they couldn't interfere. The airport people could just as easy go down there and rent a place. See, and no one had any say-so. Same as the boat people. They could go over there and rent stalls there, too, from whatever business. So, they didn't have any problem.
But the only thing that the two couldn't mix was the airport and the boat people. They couldn't come there. And they wanted the airport people to stay out of their area, too, which they could have if they wanted to go down there. But they figured that they shouldn't mix together too much because if the airport people came down to the boat area to sell, then whatever they didn't sell, they could take it and go back. You know, go take it back to the airport and they had a place to sell it. Whereas, the boat people didn't have. So they separated them.

IH: What other nightclubs did you sell at? I think Lillian mentioned La Hula Rhumba? You folks go over there?

GB: La Hula Rhumba? Yeah. Well, we went to different clubs then. But all those clubs that were there during the time, they don't have them anymore 'cause they're all gone. You know, that's decades ago. There was the Lewis Restaurant. Yeah, that was on Kalākaua [Avenue] on a corner over there, around there. And the La Hula Rhumba was in town, if I'm not mistaken. I'm not real sure.

IH: Mm hmm.

GB: Yeah. We went there, too, and sell flowers, leis like that. And then, we did go in town, Waikīkī areas--Waikīkī areas to go ahead and... By the park, Lewers [Street], that park that was right there.

IH: Beachwalk Park?

GB: Yeah, the Beachwalk. But that one was a nice place there. And we went there way before the--just about after the war [World War II], I think. I'm not sure then. Yeah, after the war. My mother used to go over there on the station wagon and that was really nice. That's when, well, Lillian used to be in there, too. She used to help her. They would play music, then sell leis there with their lanterns. They had all these station wagons here and there parked along Kalākaua [Avenue]. They would hang their leis and their flowers, whatever they had. That's when they didn't have that much tourists, but the tourist people that they really met was really nice people. 'Cause they thought it was Hawaiian, you know, with all these people at night.

Well, my mother them would always be playing music, my brother them. So being it was the park right next, right there, so they would all end up on the park with the tourists and all, laughing and even dancing, trying to dance hula like that. So, they really was friendly then, and it wasn't so much of this tall buildings they have today. So all the places that used to be way before, is not there anymore. But I don't know about... The park is there, but it's a little park now. It's not the way it had a big park then. And the big park was nice because some of the people lived in the back in those apartment homes like that. And they would come out and even enjoy. They sitting out in the evening like that, listening to the music,
dancing, singing, and laughing. And they would even have amateur
hours like that, take turn, who want to do what. These Haoles were
really nice because some of 'em says, "Well, I don't know how to do
it, but if you show me how, I'll get up and do it." You know, dance
hula like that. But that's when Lillian was there, too.

IH: Yeah. That's when she started going out selling?

GB: Yeah. Well, that's when she used to help my mother. Then she got
more involved.

IH: Maybe I'll ask her more about that. I know she remembers that.
You know, stands out in her mind, that stand down there. She must
have had a lot of fun down there.

GB: Yeah, she was just about that time, too, you know. Around that
time, at the park, Waikiki, all around there. And the other stands,
you'd run along. You could walk around there with no trouble, no
problem, all the way up around, so. It was so friendly. They were
more friendlier and they just got along with things. They laughing,
joking, or eating. Somebody would bring some kind of stuff, whatever,
and they would all put it together. It was just like a big party.
So all the Haole people who lived around different areas around
would all figure that if Saturday, they make it that they going to
be there. They all come down there early and have a big, nice time.
That's when Lillian started to go more often. During that time,
when she got involved, and eventually, I went out. I went out of
it. Then we opened our own business. So that's just about the time
that I went out of that and didn't go down too much and help.

IH: You folks also lived in Damon Tract.

GB: Yeah, uh huh. We moved down in Damon Tract, I'm not too sure, but
it could have been around when I was about thirteen, fourteen years
old then. We moved down there and there wasn't anything then. But
they had just a few houses here and there. The lots were pretty
big. They were quarter acre, half an acre, or one acre if you wanted
them. And most of the people who had moved there eventually got
into selling leis. So you could always tell a lei seller by the
flowers that was growing in their yards. And they almost all of them
had crown flowers, plumeria flowers, and baldhead [i.e., globe
amaranth or locally also known as bozus] flowers, and 'ilima, stuff
like that. And they would sell it. It took time, so they had all
the kids pick up whatever to string. It took lots of time to pick,
lots of time to string them. So you had to give the kids all so
many to string. The small ones would have to string so many leis
and so on like that. The older they got, you know, the more
they would string so that it would kind of help toward stringing
all, because you couldn't hire people then to string them.

In our case, that's what we did. I had my brothers string so many.
If he was about six, seven years old, he had five leis to string.
Five crown leis. And if the other one was eight years old or nine
years old, you had five. If you was nine, ten, then you have ten leis. And you don't go sleep until you finish it.

IH: And when did you pick the flowers?

GB: [GB mishears question.] Around in the yard because that's when we planted all those.

IH: And did you pick them in the afternoon right before you string them?

GB: Well, no. If it was going to be used the next day, all of it had to be picked up and strung during that day and night before my mother left in the morning to go to the pier, wherever she went to sell leis. So, we had crown flowers, we had plumerias, we had 'ilima, pikakes, and baldheads, and candle flowers [also known as huapala or trumpet vine] that we use all for making leis. So those crowns usually are picked by the tubful, not by (chuckles) buckets—tubs. Well, 'ilima, it took time to pick it up, so the most you can ever make is two, three leis for 'ilima. And then, the baldheads was to mix with the crown or plumerias. Or you could make it plain leis, but then you use it to mix it in with your plumerias or your crown flowers so it gave it color to it. And then, the candle, well, that was something else. That's hard to describe, candle flowers. But my brother and I would pick it up. So, both him and I did all the picking.

IH: When did you pick up the flowers?

GB: Early morning. 'Ilima was picked up when it was dark. When it was still dark, that's when I picked it up. And the candle was early morning, too. Right after the 'ilima, I would pick up the candle. But crown, you could pick it up anytime. But anytime you pick it up, all the flowers early in the morning, the flowers are crisp, see, during the night. And before the sun, so it's not soft. See, and crown flowers took so much time to pick and you had to have an art to picking up crown. And plumerias, well, not too bad. Only the taller the tree, the harder to pick. Then you pick with a bamboo hook. But if it was low, then you can go right around the tree and pick up the flowers, which was saving a lot of time.

But most of those leis, I stayed up day and night and morning, stringing, so that my mother would have most of the flowers strung before she left. I was only young. I was only, what? Eleven, twelve. I would stay up all night, fall asleep on the table, stringing. And then, get up. You know, just fall asleep, stringing like that. And then get up again. Have to string it or else if I don't string, if she don't string, the leis is not going to get done by itself. So I would string, string, string, string, fall asleep. And then, wake them up, I throw it down. String, string, and fall asleep until all around the clock. As long as my mother don't go sleep, I won't go sleep either. I'll just stay up with her all night, stringing. She tell me, "You go sleep."
I say, "No. That's okay."

And then, towards morning, well, even when it start getting light already, it's almost time for her to get ready, and then go with my father, take her down like that. So I would tell her, well, if she can, if somebody's coming this way, then I string whatever I can and if it's done, then I could send it with them in to give it to her. So, if my brother was coming home like that for any reason, then I would give it to them and have them take it down to wherever she would be, at the boat, the pier, or down the airport. Because I knew how hard it was to survive. And if we didn't really work to help, there wasn't any way anybody going to do it for you. And yet, I still had to do all of that. All that, take care children, and the house. But today, I don't really regret it. I don't regret it at all. Only one thing I regret is not being able to be more happy and freer. I mean, it's imbedded in me in one way, how it used to be, living flowers and all that. Trying to make a living, being a kid, like that. So I can't change already. I can't change to be anything else. I am what I am. And that's the way I'm going to die, that way.

IH: And do you have children now?

GB: Oh, I got four. Four children and four grandchildren. No, I got five.

IH: Have your children been involved in lei selling?

GB: Involved in lei selling? Oh, only my two oldest girls, yeah. When the new airport, you know, when the new stands opened up, the second stand opened up, I used to take my daughters down there to show them when I was helping my auntie. You know, helping them. 'Cause I wanted to really show them how it is to get out. Because the one thing I told them that, "If you folks ever went to ask for a job, you would be kind of shame or kind of afraid to speak up because you figure the person is the owner, the manager, the boss, or the president. And you would feel little backwards." I said, "This way, you're going to sell leis here at the stand. And you don't care and you don't know who that person is. You're just going to smile if they want to come to you to buy. You're going to talk to them. You don't know what that person is. You just going to show 'em and tell them what you have and what they're interested in or ask who's coming in, if it's a lady or man or whatever. And you ask them what they need. And if he doesn't know, then you can suggest." And I said, "See, when you go out and ask for job, you wouldn't know if it's a president. You're kind of backward. But when it comes to lei stand, you don't know who he is. He could be president of any company, but you're going to speak up." And that is what I said that, "When you get older and you get out there in the open, you're going to learn how to speak up."

That's the two oldest girls, Moana and Lani. That's the two I took. Actually, after a while, they didn't really care for it because they couldn't be vicious like some of the other stand people
there. But that's another thing. But they learned how to speak up. And they said it really helped them, although they wouldn't want to be lei sellers the rest of their lives. But they know how it is to speak up to anyone. It has helped them, talking to people, no matter what. Like now, Moana works at the hospital. She says she can sell things. She wants to sell her things, lot of her stuff. She said she has so much things that she want to sell 'em. And it has helped her. She takes it to the swap meet and she sells it.

She says, "I'm not ashamed." She has nothing to be ashamed of. It's her things and she owns it. It's just that she doesn't need it and she wants to get rid of it, so. And she says the lei stand has helped her quite a bit. And both of them. So those two was mostly the one went. We tried my younger daughter, but she didn't care for it too much.

IH: Do you remember when the lei sellers moved to the Lagoon Drive in the trucks? Was your mom one of those?

GB: Yeah. Well, my mother was one of them that had moved there. Because there was only few trucks out there then. They didn't have all fifteen of 'em. It was decided then to move them from the truck into the other area because they were going to build the huts, the lei huts. They told them then that they were going to move them in there. They wouldn't mind or they didn't care too much because this way, they don't have no worries being out there. But afterwards, when they had a meeting, they wanted to know how they were going to move 'em in there and what would it cost them and all. During that time, I was pretty sure they had told them—I was there, but I wasn't really one of those. My mother was. She had the stand, so it was hers. But I was listening to them talking with some of those state [territory] officials. And they were told that it wasn't to be rent. They wanted to know if was going to be rent, they was going to charge them rent for moving in there. And they told them it was not rent. It was to maintain those stands, that place. That's what my mother understood, too, at that time. Then they figured, well, then if they didn't have to pay rent and it was an asset to the state [territory] to move 'em in there, because the people as a whole, tourists and all, was interested and liked the lei stands. That was the thing that was there then about moving them into the stands, that it was to be maintenance cost, not rent. 'Cause none of them would have moved then if they was going to charge them rent. That's why they agreed to move in there and gave up being in the front in those station wagons.

IH: What was the name of your mother's stand?

GB: Oh, during that time, her stand was number eight.

IH: What was the name?

GB: She was Mary Ann. But then, I don't remember whether she had her name up as Mary Ann because there was another stand or lady who had
that name. (So she used her last name, Hew Len's Lei Stand.) But then, eventually, my brother is the one took the stand. My mother had him 'cause he was interested in selling leis and all. It was put under his name and his name was Arthur's Lei Stand. And then, he ran it from then thereafter. He was there until he died.

IH: So when your brother took over, was it already in the grass shacks?

GB: Yeah. It was. They was in the first grass shack on Lagoon Drive. They were. That's when . . .

IH: That's when he took over?

GB: Yeah. From then. He was there at the first one up to the time that they moved. You know, they had the second and the third. But third one, he wasn't there.

IH: So, the times that they've been at the airport, have you gone down there to work, also?

GB: Yeah. I've been at the second. You know, from the grass shack to the second lei stands, I've helped my sister, my auntie, Auntie Sophie (of Sophia's Lei Stand). And Patt's Lei Stand, I been helping. I was helping them, too. And then, all up to this third, this last stand, the way it is now. You know, up there and helping my sister. Mostly it's helping her around the lei stand. And then, I been helping her, oh, for quite a few years up until maybe about a year or so.

IH: Did you say you worked for other lei stands, also, besides your sister?

GB: I've helped, yeah, Auntie Sophie during the . . .

IH: I know other ladies who have done that, worked for different stands. There's no bad feeling between the different lei stands if one worker goes to different ones?

GB: No. Well, Auntie Sophie. Well, I went to help Patt's Lei Stand at one time at the old grass shack. When she needed help one time, she asked. So I went to over there and helped her for few months. And then, too, she had somebody else. Till she got someone else to help her, then I gradually went back to help my brother with his stand. When they moved to the second lei stand, then I went over there and helped Auntie Sophie at one time. And then, when she had her daughter, her family came to help her, then I went back to help my brother. Then I stayed there helping ever since.

IH: So it's no problem, then for you as a--you're not actually an owner but as another lei seller, to work different stands?

GB: Yeah, there's no problems. Because sometimes, they don't have their children helping them and maybe they need help in, you know, like they have orders where they cannot have enough people to string, so
they ask to help. Being that Auntie Sophie, I would go and help her. And then, Patt (Harriet Patterson) needed help, too. And Patt, at that time, she had her stand. She had the stand at the second move from the grass shack to those. And I used to help her, too. Well, they're nice. You know, they were nice people. So if they asked for help, I would go help them. But I don't know about anybody here. They did work or help around here and there.

IH: Okay. Maybe I should talk to . . .

GB: Lillian.

IH: . . . Lillian and ask her about some things about the airport. Give you a break.

GB: All right. I'll call . . .

(Interview stops, then resumes.)

IH: Okay, now we're talking with Lillian Cameron who is the younger sister of Gail Burgess.

Lillian, when did you start going out with your mother to sell leis?

LC: Never really know or remember what year that was.

IH: About how old were you, though?

LC: That was during about . . . During the war.

IH: And where were you folks selling at the time? Is that when you were down in Hotel Street?

LC: Down in Hotel Street and the bars. That was when, was about 1942?

IH: Uh huh. Were you also going down to the waterfront, too?

LC: Hardly, because I was little. You know, I was small then.

IH: Still small.

LC: You know, younger than her [GB]. We were going to school. But during the wartime, that I remember going to sell at all these different bars Downtown and Waikiki. Nineteen forty-two . . .

IH: Yeah, you said you had a stand right down by . . .

LC: Yeah, we had a station wagon on the corner of Kalakaua and Beachwalk [Avenues]. It was right where the Triangle Park is today. That's the same park, only thing it's changed. But we had, I mean, this little station wagon right by the corner. That station wagon would be there practically all day. My mother would be there in the daytime. And then, towards evening time, then myself, my brother,
then we'd all go down there with my auntie and my sister, whoever, the family. We go down there after school and all to string flowers, string leis over there and sell leis. And in the evening time, my brother plays music, Arthur. You know, he have his group come over there in the evening time to play music. And they sang and everybody danced. People gave us money. They threw money.

(Laughter)

LC: So that was fun. That was lot of fun. That was during the war.

IH: So, were there a lot of service people around?

LC: Oh, yes. It was lot of service--all kinds, army, navy, marines. You know, everybody was down there. That was around '42, '43, '44. I think the war ended about '45, I think, something like that, I forget. But all those years, we were down there. And I could sell in the bar. We used to be, I think, the old Ted Lewis.

IH: What is the name?

LC: Right across the corner of, I think that's Coco's [Restaurant]. Coco's on the corner of what? That's Kalakaua [Avenue] and Atkinson [Drive]? Where Coco's is now, today.

IH: [Kapi'olani Boulevard.]

LC: Oh, is it [Kapi'olani]? I thought was Atkinson.

IH: Mm hmm [yes]. [Kapi'olani] and Kalakaua.

LC: Yeah, right by the corner is today, that's Coco's. Well, across the street where they get this service station, and they have these different buildings today. But they have this little old Ted Lewis nightclub. Through the years they've changed name. They've had different name. I've forgot what it was. But when we were little, we'd go to sell leis over there. You know, we stay out by the door on this little table. We sell flowers, little flowers. Chee, I was real young. School age, I think. (Chuckles) I forget. That was one of the places that we went to sell besides going Downtown to Hotel Street. And this is all evening time, nighttime.

IH: So it's after school.

LC: Yeah evening time. Well, they didn't stop all the young kids from going down there to sell 'cause, I guess, it's during the war, huh? And there was no trouble or anything like that. And everybody took care of us. You know, all these military people, they wasn't fresh or anything like that. Yeah, they bought us things to eat, sandwich, ice cream, or hot dog. Yeah. (Laughs) They really. And they treated us just like their little sisters. They wasn't fresh. They were really good. When they did buy, you know, flowers for corsages or flowers for their girlfriends or somebody, they always gave us an
extra tip, an extra dollar or so. (Laughs)

IH: Oh, yeah? Oh, how nice.

LC: It made us feel real good, you know.

IH: Did they stick around when you folks were playing music, too?

LC: Yeah. Oh, yeah. They come around. Pretty soon, we get a whole pile of people. Like maybe over 50, 100 people in the whole park. And you knew, the cops used to come around and they thought it was a fight at first. But then, they got used to it, seeing us there all the time selling leis. And they heard the music. People there sat on the grass. One by one, everybody got up to dance. And my brother Arthur and Joe Kahaulelio and them, he teach all the tourists to dance the hula. Well, of course, then we tell, "Oh, but you gotta wear a lei. You have to dance. All the dancers have to wear a lei." So, they go to our little corner wagon we had there.

IH: They buy. (Laughs)

LC: And they buy the (chuckles) plumeria lei, put on the lei just so they could dance over there in the park. That's how we sold, too, you know. We sold to the people that was there. 'Cause they heard the music. And Joe Kahaulelio was a real good hula instructor. He was the one that taught all his dancers and the tourists there. For a long time . . .

IH: I thought he was a lei seller.

LC: Yeah, he was a lei seller, too. But his mother was. But he was also an entertainer with my brother Arthur and my cousin Peter (Mendiola). We all grew up together. Being lei sellers over there, selling leis. And the evening time, they go out to play music here and there. You know, the different places that hired them. You know, luaus or things like that. See, that's how we came to be at that park over there. (Laughs) I love that park. In fact, I don't know if I still have pictures of there. Maybe my auntie and them might have. Because I know military people used to take pictures all the time. And they take it home with them. But very few I know ever gave the pictures back. You know, gave it to us over there. So, I don't know if we still have some. I might have, I'm not sure. That was good fun. That was all through those war years over there.

IH: Do you remember if from there, did your mother go to the airport?

LC: Chee, I don't remember if she went from there to the airport. I think it might have been during that war years. That's when they started to go to that. You know, all those junk cars over there. I don't know exactly what year. But we didn't go.

IH: Oh, you folks weren't on the trucks?
LC: No. My sister was the one. And of course, my mother. They was the one that was there, you know, on all those trucks over there. They have, what, about six or seven of them or something?

IH: The banana wagons, you call them?

LC: The old banana wagons. I don't quite remember how many of them were there at that time because I was still going to school, and my brother. But because she [GB] was older, so she was the one that went there with my mother. You know, after the war years. She was the one that started going. Go down there, and then she stopped going. I don't know what year that was she stopped going down there. Then my brother Arthur started to go with my mother over there where the old banana wagons just before we moved into the old grass shacks we had over there.

IH: Do you remember what it looked like, those banana wagons with the lei stands?

LC: Like an old banana wagon, those. You know, like old wooden boxes, square, open, and the old Model-A cars. You know, the old (chuckles). I don't know if we have pictures of those, too. But you remember those days, those old banana wagon wasn't made like the kind of parts they get today out of metal and stuff. It was half wooden on each side. That's the kind. They're real solid.

IH: And where did they hang their leis?

LC: In the back. We'd open the back. You know, this station wagon, you open the back down and you flip the top. And then, of course, we put a board across. We bang a board up, tie rope each side, and put nails in 'em. That's to hang the leis in the back. It looked kind of nice at that time. I mean, they displayed the leis real nice. And we could sleep in the car. You know, small kids, we go sleep (chuckles) in the wagon with blankets, pillow in it, all kinds, all inside. Oh, my gosh. But that was really nice, though, over there.

Only thing, the kiawe. You know, those kiawe trees. 'Cause there was all kiawe trees. You got to watch out where you step. Because you step on those thorns all over the place. As small as we were, we had to sweep that thing, clean 'em every time. In fact, I had to bring a rake, and a broom, and everything to clean 'em out every day 'cause they fall all over the place. And everybody did that. Well, you had to 'cause those kiawes was awful.

And of course, those banana wagons did look terrible.

(Laughter)

LC: Because you see clothes hanging, towels hanging outside the windows, or draped over. You know, these towels that you use to wash your hand in the morning. Sometimes we don't go home. We sleep there to
get up early in the morning before we go to school like that. And then, here's this big tub of water, practically to take a bath in it, you know. And that did look kind of funny kind. (Laughs) But that was good fun, though. But actually, my sister was the one. She remember 'cause she was there most of the time with my mother. Then afterwards, came my brother Arthur. He was the one that was there. He was the one that took over the lei stand after my mother.

IH: So, was your brother there on the trucks or when she moved into the grass shack?

LC: No, into the shacks. He was the one that was there. Because I went to work. You know, from school, I used to go work. And then, when I worked through those years, through those war years, working outside, going to school, then I'd come down to the shacks [i.e., lei stands] . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

IH: So where were you working after school?

LC: During all those war years, I worked, chee, as an usherette at the old Princess Theater. I worked at the Waikīkī Bowling Alley.

IH: Oh, yeah, that's right.

LC: At the Waikīkī Bowling Alley, I worked there, besides going in all the bars and selling flowers. And going to school and working there. Chee, I must have had about three, four, five different jobs all at once during those years. 'Cause I also worked Downtown right on King and Bethel Street. Well, they had this USO [United Service Organizations] victory club, they called it, during the war years that they put up during the war. As soon as the war started, they opened up this. That whole building on King and Bethel Street, that whole--they had about four floors, I think. Four or five floors. That was all for the military people only. I worked in there way up on the last floor. Young, you know, real young kid, still going school, with all the military. Young teenagers, you know. I'd work upstairs. I'd work at the desk and do all these paperwork to call up all these young girls from the different schools if they could come down on a weekend or something like that to dance with all the military people.

IH: High school kids?

LC: Yeah. You know, young people out of school or those that was around. You know, wahines that was around during the war. We'd go out and call 'em up and tell 'em that wherever they lived, we'd send the
buses, military bus, to pick them up and then bring them to the
dance. They having the certain dance. They have a military dance,
was real nice. And got food, all kinds of food, and free drinks for
them.

IH: So you used to coordinate those dances?

LC: Yeah. I used to help this lady. I forgot what her name. I used to
be over there 'cause, you know, I know a lot of local people. I
knew plenty of them because my brother and them entertained like
that. So I used to see young people. I see these wahines and I
tell 'em, "Hey, you want to come to the dance? You know, we're
having a dance this weekend. We'll pick you folks up." It was
always, we picked the girls at a certain place. They all meet. And
bring 'em to the dance, like maybe about six, seven o'clock in
the evening. When the dance was over, about eleven, they pile up all on
bus and the driver takes them all home. Takes them straight home
where they picked them up. So what they wanted to do after that,
that's their business. I mean, if they met certain of these army
or navy or sailors or something, well, it's up to them where they
go, but it was like that.

And I worked there, chee, for couple of years, I worked there. So
I met lot of military people. A lot of these young guys, they're
far away from home. Then I'd go school in the daytime, then I'd
come over there after school, early, to sit. They had a big lounge
over there. And you talk to all these--you know, they writing
letters--you talk to them. It got so I met plenty of them. And
they kind of lonesome come around Thanksgiving, Christmas time. So
I used to (chuckles) invite 'em all home, you know. During those
days, the old army command car, I'd bring about five, six, seven of
'em. Sometime, ten or twelve. They'd follow me up the hill to
Papakōlea 'cause we just moved up there about two months before the
war. About two, three months before the war, '41, we moved to
Papakōlea.

IH: That was after you lived in Damon Tract, you were in Papakōlea?

LC: Yeah. After we moved from Damon Tract. That was just before the
war. Then we moved to Papakōlea up there. About two or three
months, then the war started in December. So, after that, we were
still going school and all of that kind of stuff. My mother, when
she go sell leis--you know, she go down the boat, sell leis, she
comes home. And you know, my brother, everybody else would be
picking flowers and stringing. And she'd [i.e., GB] be cooking for
the whole family and all da kine. And in I come with about twelve,
fifteen of (chuckles) military. You know, marines or sailors that
I meet down the club. And I bring 'em all home. And she used to
get mad at me. "Well, who the heck is all that?" Well, you know,
I mean, because the guys didn't have no place to go, I said, well,
come up here and we'd feed 'em. Feed 'em 'cause they're far. I
felt so sorry for them. She used to get mad. My mother, my mother
didn't care. Oh, she said, "Oh, yes. Come on, come." She call
'em all inside and we sit down. Whatever we had, we fed all of them. And they ate, they enjoyed. My brother them took them here and there. Took them fishing.

IH: How nice.

LC: Stuff like that. They took 'em all over the place. When time for them to go home, they'd all leave to go back home. But they always wrote to my mother. All these guys that I brought over. They sent pictures, they send her gifts and presents for all of us 'cause we were so nice to them to treat them real good during Christmas holiday, you know, like that. I was doing that all the time. During the war, I'd always do that. I'd go to Waikiki to work in the bowling alley. I bring couple of them home. And the whole Papakōlea used to talk about me. They'd say, "Oh, how come?" You know, I'm with all these service guys I bring home. They treat me just like their sister. And I treat 'em real nice, and we were good friends through the years, you know. And everybody used to give me that, "How come she don't hang around with all the locals. She's always with all the Haoles."

I told 'em, "No. Ey, they treat me. They buy me things."

I'd go with them here and there. I'd go with them to go shopping for things that they want to take back home. Everybody look at me. Everybody used to look at me, "Oh, wow. How come you always with the Haoles all the time?"

The whole Papakōlea was like that. They couldn't see it. Why I was with them. And then, I'd give 'em leis. My mother used to get mad, too. My sister was the one got mad. When they go, I'd give 'em free leis. The leis we picked the flowers, I'd give 'em, "Here."

(Laughs) I gave 'em the leis. She get mad at me.

"Well, here we trying to fix all these leis for Mama to go down the boat and you giving 'em all away to these guys."

I say, "Well, they going home." And they never smelled flowers. So I'd give 'em, you know. And when they met some girlfriend or something, they give the girl the lei. They say, "You see, you gave 'em the lei. No, he gave it to the girl." (Chuckles)

Well, that's all right. Never mind. I was always one to give, give, give. I was always like that. I always gave no matter what. Even when I started to go to the lei stands. My mother had died, so she turned it over to my brother Arthur. He was the one that was there.

IH: That was when you folks were still on the grass shacks?

LC: When we moved. Yeah, yeah. Oh, at the grass shack. He was there first. I mean, I don't know what year that was. But he was going down there with my cousins. And my sister would go down there once
in a while. Well, she'd go down because she'd got married, see. And she'd come down and help him down there, too. 'Cause I was still working and going to the lei stand and helping whenever I can. My cousin Peter Mendiola and Joe Kahaulelio, all my brother's friends that he played music, I mean, you know, when he went to entertain, they all came over to help him at the lei stand. All those years. He had so many friends of entertainers that came to help him through all the years.

Until when my mother died, then I was going nighttime. You know, I was working in the daytime. And I was working down there nighttime seven nights a week and working in the daytime. That was too much. That was too hard for me. Then, he and I got so close because when he'd be there in the daytime, at night he has to go out and play music, travel here and there. So, he couldn't stay there. So I was going there. I started to go one day, two days. Pretty soon, I was there five, six, seven nights. I work and then I go over there seven nights a week. I'd go over there five o'clock. From work in town, I'd go straight over there and then leave there like twelve o'clock at night, every night. I did that for years until I couldn't take it. And then, I told him, "For me to stay and help you, I think I better quit working daytime and come help you over here." And that's how I did. That was--oh, I forget what year that was. In the '50s, I guess. So I'd help him over there, and pretty soon, he has to depend on me over there. He was traveling to entertain more often, going all over the place to the Mainland, here and there. When he comes back here, then we got all my family, relatives and friends. Everybody at the lei stand. You know where all the shack was over there. So we had a kind of big gang over there.

IH: So was always family that came and helped?

LC: Yeah, my family, my cousins, and we had friends. Everybody came. 'Cause then, my brother and them would play music. They started to play in the back. You know, because when they have the rehearsal, when they have to do a show or something, so they go in the back and practice with all the instruments. Joe Kahaulelio and all of them. So, that'll get all the tourists. You know, they hear the music. From in the front, when the buses used to stop, take pictures, they all go in the back. Everybody goes in the back. Pretty soon, everybody's dancing. (Laughs) We had big crowd over there. Oh, my goodness. That was really nice over there. In fact, I like those shacks better. Better than the ones that we have today or across the street. It was so nice. We had a beautiful village. I think Mr. Onaga was the one that have a picture of that. But he said he couldn't find it. You know, so I don't know...

IH: Oh. Well, Auntie Sophie has a few pictures.

LC: We have...

IH: In fact, she showed me one with the kids swimming in the river. Did
you folks used to do that?

LC: Oh, yeah. Not me. I never swam in the river. My sister and them did. My brother and them did and all the kids in the family. Not me. I never went swimming in that river. I used to walk on the edge where you get all the crabs and catch the crabs, but I never went in that river. They went. It was a horrible smell. (Chuckles) Not in that river. That was awful. (Chuckles) But it was good fun. And I know the lei sellers have taken pictures. I think maybe we did, too, but I don't know where they are of that time. So, I don't know what happened to those. And we've been there quite a long time, too, at those shacks. What did my sister say? How long was that we were there at that grass shacks?

IH: I think it was around ten years in the grass shack.

LC: Should be. Almost ten years, yeah. Then they built the new airport. They started to build a new airport. That's how they told us we had to move from where we're at because that's not going to be the entrance to go into the new airport. So that's how we had to move. Go move again. So that was one, two, three moves [i.e., lei stands] already.

IH: So how was it when you made that move?

LC: Well, that one—yeah, that wooden building. That was nice, but we all liked the grass shacks better. Because it looked like a flower village with all the greenery and the shack. And the area was so nice, like a typical village like you see now in the Polynesian Cultural Center. You know, those kind of villages. And everything was upkept so nice. The grounds was. The state [and territory before 1959] upkept the grounds really nice. Maybe that's what my sister meant about maintenance. You know, that first time. I don't know how long after, that's when they charged rent. But I mean, it was much nicer than when we moved to those wooden buildings. Then, you know . . .

IH: Did you also notice a change in business when you moved?

LC: Oh, yeah. I guess through the years, where everybody moved. You know, the family and things like that. We didn't have space where we could plant as much like we did before and where you could go out and get your own flowers. Then we had to buy them commercially, you know. So when we had to buy, oh, all through the years the flower prices have gone up. Hardly ever goes down, except maybe during the summertime when there's not that kind of business and good weather where flowers are plentiful, then they're cheaper. But during the rainy season, flowers are scarce, not that many, and that's when they're really expensive. So being as when we moved to this wooden building the rent went up from the shack, we had to pay more, then the state wanted percentage. So when they wanted this percentage . . .
IH: So a lot of money going out then, huh?

LC: Yes, a lot of money going out. More going out than coming in.

IH: Yeah, so since you moved from the grass shack into that wooden building, did you notice a change in the amount of customers you had?

LC: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. When we had the grass shack, we had more people. Well, to me, we used to have more. I think we had more people used to come by, I think. Well, we had always depended on the local trade more so than the tourists. Because the local people bought throughout the year for all kind occasions, whereas the tourists only if they going or coming, like that. I think we did better business at those shacks than we moved to the wooden building. Because the way the flow of traffic was coming in, people would pass us by and miss us sometimes because of the turn in to come into the lei stand. When they had to go around, they got disgusted. They just kept on going. So, to me, I don't think we had that much people like we had the other side...

IH: Do you think the atmosphere had something to do with it, too? Because like you said, the grass shacks were like a village.

LC: Oh, yes. I think so. Because those who remembered the grass shack, they really liked it. Even some of the tourists that used to come there, they remembered the difference in the years that they built the new ones with the old shacks. And everybody used to say, oh, they liked those grass shacks better. Now that they built this new, I guess you got to keep up with progress. They said it don't seem that nice and you don't have that spirit, that kind of aloha spirit like they had the other side. So, we used to tell them, well, I guess this is what the state mean by progress 'cause they're building a better airport. But they said they should build it like the way it was, like the other side with the shacks on. It'll look nicer, and put in instead of all these rocks and curbs that they have, put more planters and things like that around. But the state said no, they needed the space. You know, they needed the space for this and that, and increase the airport parking, and all that kind of stuff.

So the business, to me, is not like how it used to be out on the other side of the grass shacks. To me, business went down. Well, maybe some years we made. Like some months we made and some months, we didn't. Then the flower cost would go higher. Each time, it would go higher and higher, so we...

IH: But doesn't the lei price also go higher?

LC: And the [lei] prices hardly ever go up. This, to me, is real strange. I mean, when the cost of flowers goes up higher...

IH: The lei price should go up higher.
LC: They're supposed to go up higher. But at least, I try. You know, we try to sell it for more. But then, our goods are perishable. And we have twelve competition, twelve people. So, it's hard when you got twelve people to compete against. Because our flowers don't--I mean, they're not dry goods. And if you don't try to sell it for whatever you paid for it, and if you think you can get more money. Because maybe the next one, maybe they might sell it cheaper. So, you're not going to--if you sell it higher, I mean--they're not going to come to you. They're going to the next stand. So you had to sell 'em a little cheaper. So I don't see the money--I mean, that we made that kind of money. And yet, we all practically buy our flowers all from the same people. You know, today, we buy all our flowers practically from the same people for about the same thing. For one to sell cheaper, that, I cannot see. I can see you sell a little bit high to make some money, but we still have that today. So, it's kind of hard, so we don't make that kind of money. Everything's going out, not too much coming in. So it's really hard with the competition like it is, with the rental high and everything, percentage. So it's kind of hard now...

IH: So the lei prices are competitive then, you feel?

LC: So the lei prices are, oh, yes. Oh, yes. Being so close as we are, oh, yeah. Even if we have a--you know, to advertise or anything like that, it makes no difference. Like once before, one of the lei stands suggested, oh, we go on KCCW like during May Day, things like Aloha Week, and advertise the lei stands, a certain special for that week or something like that. That was fine, but when we did have people come down there, it was the same thing. Competition. I mean, if you didn't give it for what they want, three dollars a lei or something or $2.50, they say, "Oh, we'll come back." So they walk past you, they going someplace else. And when they come back past you, and when you see, this, they go past, you know they got it cheaper. Because I was selling mine three dollars, and here these people get two, three leis from the next stand or so. And they bought it cheaper. To me, I think they gave it to them cheaper, that's how they bought it. Now, how can we make any money like that? So, it's hard. Competition, too, is really hard. It's gotten worse through the years. The prices go up higher. That's why, the flower people goes up higher, the growers go up higher and higher, and the lei sellers are still the same. So, where the money we making? We not making that kind of money.

IH: Do you still have a lot of family working with you?

LC: My sister is the one. She's been down there to help me since my brother died. She's the one been helping me when I need help. When we busy, then she comes. Her and her daughters come, my nieces. My daughter can't come because she's got three kids now. She used to. It's hard now. It's mostly kids. I mean, my family. Of course, I have couple of girls working for me now.

IH: Hired workers?
LC: When we busy, we need the help, then my family come down and help me. That's around during graduation time, mostly. Otherwise, the other kind time, we not that busy where you need to get the whole family, everybody comes. Especially now, too, it's really slow. We expect to get busy around Christmas time, hopefully. That's when the prices go up higher.

IH: Have you always had the hired workers that stayed there on a daily basis?

LC: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, we have to. Oh, yeah, we had to. Because it got so through the years that I don't want to be there seven days and nights a week. You know, forget it. Those days are gone. We're getting (chuckles) old already. Tired, like her [GB]. She want to rest, too. So, we don't want to be down there all the time. So we had to get, hire people from the outside. And to hire people from the outside is much better than hiring your own family. I mean, hiring your own kind. They work for little while, and pretty soon, when they get paid, they don't come back.

IH: That's Hawaiians, you talking about?

LC: That's Hawaiians. So, you get the Filipinos or like some of the other stands, they get Vietnamese or something. I mean, they come. When you tell 'em work, they work. You tell 'em stay home and they'll stay home. But you cannot tell the Hawaiians that. You tell 'em work, this, you know, and all that kind, my goodness. Soon as the end of the week is over or one month, that's it. They can't come because they got to babysit or they got to go someplace. It's kind of hard. That's why, I think, most everybody there hires all the Filipinos 'cause they're dependable. You can depend on them to work. I mean, you can tell them come today, stay home two days, come the next day, and they'll come. But yet, your own kind Hawaiians, they won't. So you see the difference? That's why, you find all the lei stands today, most all the lei stands, in fact every lei stand, all have the Filipinos now. Maybe there's one or two Vietnamese or Korean or somebody, but most of them are Filipinos. 'Cause they're good workers. They're very dependable. Of course, they can't talk English so good, but they're really good workers. And most of them, you can trust them. They honest. So, that's why, it makes it easier for me and make it easier for us by not being there. Those days of me going down there seven days a week, day and night, that's been gone. Since my brother died, I was going to that lei stand day and night. I'd go four o'clock in the morning and I leave late at night, seven days a week. I did it for years and years.

IH: So what makes you hold onto the lei stand?

LC: Well, it's a family thing. Tradition, and it's the family thing.
Sometimes when you get so depressed, you want to give it up, but then you don't. I mean, you don't, because it's been in the family for so long that you don't want to. I was talking to Martina [Macalino]. She told me the same thing, too. I told her, "Yeah, sometimes I get so depressed. I think, oh, I'm going to give this up. I'm tired already." You know, selling leis for over thirty-five years or so. Some people retire from their state, city and county job, but we can't retire period. I mean, who's ever going to take our place after us. 'Cause I think the kids today, they don't like that kind of business we doing 'cause the hours we put in. Anybody can string leis and sell leis what we're doing today at the lei stand, but it's the hours. That's what make it harder for everybody. It's the hours that we keep. Through the years, it's not like how it used to be. That's why we keep thinking of the old grass shacks that we used to have and all those times when we didn't have to pay too much money or anything, flowers didn't cost much. So that made us feel better today. You know, with business so slow. (Chuckles) So we laugh about those times that make us feel better. But then, when we think about it again, oh my gosh, it goes back the same thing again. Even though we have somebody there working, but we have to still be there seven days a week.

IH: Yeah, that's hard.

LC: I mean, it's tiresome. So I try to go down there, not stay all day. Then I have to come home and do this and things like that. But only if it's busy or something, then I stay there longer. But otherwise, business hasn't been that good. So the girls have--you know, I told 'em, "Oh, close. Close earlier." You know, don't stay late. It's no sense.

IH: What are your normal hours of operation?

LC: Six o'clock in the morning till about ten, sometimes eleven [p.m.]. That all depends on the flight.

IH: That's a long shift.

LC: It all depends on the flight. Some flights are--whether it's for a foreign country, ah well, that's okay. We don't have to stay that late. But because of the construction and the weather, too, it's been like that for long time now. The flights, they're all different now. Maybe they got one at one, two o'clock in the morning, but nobody stays till that late, I don't think so. We don't stay that late. Forget it. You got to come down early or else. Too bad, if nobody's there. I don't know, but I know some of the other stands stay there really late. Late till the next morning ... 

IH: Oh, yeah?

LC: Yeah. Like I don't know whether Moana [Umi] and them, but I told her, "No. Those days of me staying like twenty-four hours a day are gone now."
IH: Oh, you used to do that, too?

LC: I told her, "I'm not getting any younger. I'm getting old. I'm tired. I don't want to."

IH: But you used to stay there for twenty-four shifts like that?

LC: No. You stay twelve, one, two o'clock in the morning. But that was long time—I did it for years and years. I figure, well, if I stay, finish my flowers, maybe if I stay a little bit later, maybe I'll catch these few cars that's coming. That's leaving two, three o'clock in the morning. No luck. We stay there for nothing. Lack of sleep and all of that. Oh, not worth it.

IH: Yeah, that's true.

LC: It's not worth it. And here, we trying to make money. We trying. But it's hard. It's hard when you got all of twelve stands. Really hard. You can't. Only time I think you can make money is if you stay there yourself seven day and night a week. Close whenever, open when—you know. Then, so all the money, instead of you paying anybody else, you keep it for yourself. (Chuckles) But you can't. It's hard. And then, too, I don't think the kids today want the lei stand. Even if it's to, say if I want to give it to my daughter like that, I don't think I'd want her to have to go through what we had to go through. You know, through the years, it didn't get better, it got worse. We had it better when we were at the banana wagons, and the grass shack, and the wooden buildings. But where we are now, through the years, because we had to pay so much to the state, that I don't think I want my daughter to take over the business. 'Cause it's too much headache.

IH: How does she feel?

LC: You see, we don't own the lei stand.

IH: Would she like to take over the business?

LC: Well, she don't mind helping, but she says, well, I guess she's still young, too. And then, she's got three young babies and that's harder for her. So, I know her and the rest of my family, they don't mind coming down to help. But for my daughter to take over the business, I don't think I'd want her to go through that kind, what I had to go through, what we had to go through. I mean, to me, through the years, it's not getting better. It's getting worse. And for her to struggle, like how we did, all these years and the hours and all, I don't think I'd want her to do that. I know the only one that want the lei stand, that still want to keep it over there, is myself and my sister. You know, and the kids and girls [GB's daughters]—oh, them, well, because they don't have to worry about doing everything. I'm the one have to worry. They only come down there and help me string the flowers. All pau, everybody go home. (Chuckles) But they love it. My sister always
did love this business. She always did.

IH: Oh, yeah? And her girls like it, too?

LC: And her girls love it. The girls love it, her girls. She's got two girls, two, three of them that always help me all the time. They work. You know, they married, they work outside, but time for when I need help, they're always there.

IH: Oh, that's nice.

LC: They love it. They love the flower business. They love it.

(Chuckles)

IH: Oh, that's nice. Well, maybe they would like to . . .

(GB leaves. Interview stops, then resumes.)

LC: My sister, she loves this business. She always did. See, she worked so hard all her life that she couldn't finish school. Lucky she went past sixth grade, being that she was the oldest girl. She had to do this and do because we were little. So, she had to really help my mother with the flowers, and kids, and house, and cooking, and stuff like that. So she . . .

IH: But she was able to go to business school after, huh, or something.

LC: Well, but afterwards. She went for a little while. Then she got married. Her and the husband started to go into real estate, buying homes and houses like that. She thought, gee, this lei selling is for the birds. I mean, there's no future in this. You know, it'll stay. It'll always be here. So she thought she wanted go do something else. Buy and sell, buy and sell. That's what she's been doing. You know, on the side, and plus, still come down the lei stand.

IH: But she still love the lei stand?

LC: Still come to the lei stand every day. Well, she used to work across the street at the terminal, Department of Transportation. She was a custodian over there. She put in ten years, I think? Ten or maybe longer. And that's how, when she gets through working over there, she comes right to the lei stand. Except, well, hardly ever when she got a day off. You know, hardly ever she don't come. She still comes. And everybody used to get mad, "Oh, boy, here comes your sister. Here comes your sister." She's all business. She's very business. She don't know what it is to relax, you know. She doesn't know what it is 'cause she's worked so hard all her life that to her, if you don't work, you don't get nothing. She said, "Nobody give you nothing on a silver platter. You have to work hard for it. Nobody gave me anything, so I have to work hard for it." And she always put it in my head all the time. "Don't give, don't give." You know, sometimes I'm at the lei stand and, well, maybe it's
getting late. I think nobody's going to buy this lei, well, I'll cut and give. So I see somebody going past, some people just walking. I cut the leis and I just give. "Oh, come, come." And I give 'em the leis free. Oh, she get mad at me. "Don't give it away. Don't give the leis free. What's the matter with you? You know we have to pay for that." Yeah, I know, but the people look so sad, just walking. So, might as well give it to them. (Chuckles) She get mad at me all the time.

She's not one to waste. When we stringing flowers or anything, picking 'em, eh, we got to pick up everything. And if some fell down, we had to pick that up even if it was wet, in the mud or dirt, or what, we had to pick it up, and clean 'em, and see that it's good, and we use it. No matter what it is, she was like that. She don't waste nothing. She was telling me all the time, "Every one of these flowers cost money and it's expensive. We had to pay for it. They didn't give it to us free. So make use of it." She tell me that all the time. "Don't throw this away, string this. Don't give this away. Pick that up, pick that up. Wash it, it's still good. Pluck the petals." You know, if it's a little bit brown, the outside, you know, the rose or something. "Pluck the outside. You can still use it." Oh, boy.

I used to tell her, "Oh, no. But it's too brown."

"Never mind." Never mind, that's what she tell. She said, "No, never mind. You can use it. You can. After all, you know how much this costs? So and so and so. You know how much this cost?"

"Yeah, I know. I know all of that."

IH: But do you think all of the stands run their business like that? Like really business is business?

LC: Well, I guess, pretty much. You know, pretty much. Of course, all of us lei sellers make lousy bookkeepers.

(Laughter)

LC: We make lousy bookkeepers. All we know is how to make, sell the leis. Sell the leis and that's it. But to keep all of this kind, keep track of everything, I doubt it. Not me. My sister is the one. She keeps track of things. And she make sure that this and that and this. "We don't need this. Don't take that. Oh, that, we can use. That, we don't need that. We don't need that over there. Take that away." You know, she's like that. She always try to see that, I mean, I don't spend too much money. You know, that I make more by cutting down and this and that. She always reminding me and she always tells me that. I hear it all the time from her. When I come home, she calls me up. When she goes home, she calls me up. "Did you do so and so? Did you take so and so?" You know, oh, my goodness. The place had to be clean. The lei stand had to be clean, everything stacked neatly. Icebox all scrubbed. You know, no junks
around. "Throw this out. We don't need that. Take it away." You know, "This good, can keep. Save it." But she was like that. We never had to buy stools. We fixed the stools. It fell apart, you'd fix it. (Chuckles)

I told her, "But this poor thing. I mean, it's gone. We can't use it no more."

She said, "Oh, no, no, no." She's going to take it home. Her husband's going to fix the table, fix the chair, fix the handle of the icebox or something like that. He'd come down and help us fix this and that around the icebox. She says, "No, no, no. If we have to go out and pay the electrician, oh, no. They want too much money. No, no, no. He can fix it." So she tell the husband. He does all kind. He fix anything. So he come down and fix this and fix that. Oh, my goodness. So she really helped me...

IH: Did your mother enjoy the lei stand, also?

LC: Oh, yeah. My mother loved the lei stand, especially during the war years out in the Waikīkī and all that kind. My mother enjoyed it. Well, around that time, that's when my mother, she was going church. She see that the kids were going. She was kind of mellowing out like a little bit. All that yelling and grumbling, going to sell lei at the boat, and all that kind, I guess it kind of got to her, too. And then, my kid brother, the third to the last, he went into the Korean War just around that time. Just before she died, he went into the Korean War. Only from May to November, he died. He just made nineteen. You know, high school, and then they went and joined the army, that first all-Hawaiian company they made during the Korean War. So, he went. He went from here to the Mainland. Train in Mainland, he went to Korea. He barely got there, couple of months, and he died. So from that time, she really came down. She was so depressed. My father died. And now, this boy. You know, he's so young. Barely out of high school, this and that, working or what, my goodness, then he died. That's when she really came down. I mean, she started to go to church more often. And then, us kids was the one that's at the airport. You know, my sister, myself, my brother. She started staying home, and going to church, and all of that kind. So, she wasn't...

IH: Do you know what prompted her to move to the airport? Did she have other family that was there or something?

LC: Well, you know the Venturas. Well, of course, Mama Sophie is like my mother's second cousin. You know, we kind of related. You know, the Venturas and the Serraos. Because Auntie Hattie is Mama Sophie's sister. Well, Charlotte and Queenie, the daughters, we're practically the same age. When they were young, too, they were selling leis here and there all over the place. So, we're kind of close. So, that's how my mother started going down there because they were selling leis and everybody else was selling leis, too. And plus my Auntie Lizzie Silva, she started selling leis first, eh? That's how
my mother. . .

IH: Yeah.

LC: More so, she was with her all the time.

IH: Isn't Dorothy Andrade [Onaga] a cousin too, related?

LC: No, we're just real close good friends. Dorothy Andrade. She and I went to school together.

IH: The Venturas had told me that she was a cousin or something to them.

LC: Not that I know. I remember 'cause they're from Damon Tract, too. They lived further down this way, we lived up this way. And because we're kind of close with the whole family--we went to school together--myself and Dorothy came good friends. That's why, when they had all the shacks over there. . . . I don't know if you talked to Almar [Napu'elua]. Did you talk to Almar?

IH: No, I didn't.

LC: Oh, she's a nice lady to talk to. Almar would remember, too. She would remember lots, but.

IH: She had a stand on that truck stands?

LC: Yeah. Her and the sister Red [Kawelo]. Well, she died, but she was out there, too. She was one of them, Almar. Then we moved into, you know, the grass shack. And she came there with all her kids. Almar and all her kids. She get six daughters, I think. Six or seven daughters . . .

IH: When you folks moved to the truck stand, did you have any problems with the other lei sellers? You know, when you first, like moving into the place?

LC: Oh, no. No, we didn't. All the one from the outside, you know, from the junk cars to the grass shacks, no problem. Of course, they didn't want to move at first.

IH: Yeah, I know that, but I mean, when you first moved to the airport. When you moved into the trucks, the banana wagons.

LC: Well, that, I don't remember all of the. . . . My sister, I think she would remember, you know, all the banana wagons over there. They kind of, seems to have gotten along 'cause there wasn't that very many of them. But you know, that was what? In nineteen. . . . What year was that?

IH: In the '40s.

LC: Yeah, about '40s. Just around that time. You know, during the war.
They had a war and all that kind, the time. These were practically the same people. I mean, whoever went there, you couldn't tell 'em, "Ey, you don't belong here." 'Cause it was kind of big. That whole area was kind of big.

IH: It was a big area?

LC: Kinda big. I mean, from that--what you call that street that goes? Nimitz [Highway], I think. Nimitz to where the other service road [Aolele Street] is today. Where the service road is, that corner. . . . I mean, was the grass shack. And they had this real small narrow service road that goes into the terminal into the airport. Well, from that corner all the way up to the corner [of Nimitz], that was all kiawe. So, that was pretty big. So all the junk cars wasn't that close.

IH: Oh, it wasn't?

LC: I mean, it wasn't that close. They were kind of far apart. Didn't have that many.

IH: Oh. See, I was under the impression that it was all close together.

LC: No, not that close. You know, the cars are not that close. They were kind of far apart because you couldn't stay that close because they had buckets, and tables, and oh gosh, all over the place. So, how can you stay close with the next lei seller (chuckles) looking at you?

IH: So, how many blocks did it cover?

LC: Well, they didn't cover the whole block, but they were right in that area.

IH: Okay, was right on Lagoon Drive?

LC: Yeah.

IH: But then, did it go . . .

LC: You see, they didn't have this nice road right there. You see, the road was narrow. Was a small, narrow road. But the kiawe, you know, that section on both sides, was big area over there. Nothing but kiawes over there. Was big area. So you were kinda little bit more inside from the road like. I mean, not that far in, but you could drive from the road and drive, and just make a little turn, and you're right on the dirt, practically right next to the cars over there. But you wasn't blocking traffic or anything like that. So that was nice over there. Did anybody ever bring you pictures of that?

IH: Mm hmm [yes].
LC: Chee, I don't think I've seen it. Maybe Onaga might have, but I've never . . .

IH: Auntie Sophie has a few pictures of that, too.

LC: Oh, yeah? Through the years, I think I've seen from somebody else, but I don't know what happened to those. That looked awful. When I saw--I think Onaga had it once. When I saw that, my God, is this how the wagons used to, the junk I see. I went, oh, my God, talk about beach people. Gee, this is worse than the beach people. I told him, "This is worse than the people."

He say, "Yeah. Oh, but that was nice. Oh, I liked that. But we gotta move to the other side, well."

I told him, "Oh, Dicey [i.e., Mike Onaga], why didn't you blow up a bigger picture?" You know, really makes. I mean, gosh, that's history, you know.

He said, "Well, at that time, you don't think about those kind of things."

I told him, "Oh, my gosh." Was so awful. And who had it? I don't know who had it. Show me some years ago when we moved to that, you know, before we moved now. I said, "Look at this old junk car where we used to sell. What's that?" They sold. I don't know whether that was Almar's kids when they were small. Almar had a kid. The kid was in a bucket and one of the other kids was bathing the baby in this big tub right practically on the side of the road.

IH: Oh, no.

LC: And couple of them was running around, standing around over there. And then somebody took. I told them, "Chee, this look like Almar."

They said, "It is Almar and her small kids."

And I went, "Oh, no. Chee, this is a nice--does Almar know?"

They said, "No, she never know it."

I don't know who had that picture. I forgot.

IH: So you folks used to spend long hours down there, too, then?

LC: Long hours, oh gosh. It's the hours. You know, the work was easy to string flowers and that kind, but oh, the hours, that's what kills you. That's what really wears you out. Was that long hours we had to keep. Was too much for my mother. My mother, she couldn't take it. Especially after my brother died, she couldn't take the long hours. My brother was going down there more often. Then I had to go. You know, 'cause he couldn't stay there day and night. I had to go help him. Then my sister would. When she's finished
doing whatever, she had to come down and help us. Oh, my goodness, that was . . .

END OF INTERVIEW
KA PO'E KAU LEI
An Oral History of Hawai'i's Lei Sellers

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa
JUNE 1986