BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Irene Asing Sims, 70, retired lei seller

"The lei-selling business was the best business I have ever been in. And if I wasn't in the lei business, I don't think I was able to survive with my children... to be what they are today."

Irene Sims, Hawaiian-Chinese, was born July 18, 1915 in Kekaha, Kaua'i, the second child of Annie Mokunui and Ah Fong Akeo. She was raised by her mother's hānai parents, the Kaualohas, who were taro farmers.

Sims stayed on Kaua'i for her early education, attending Kalaheo School until completion of the eighth grade. In 1931, she moved to Honolulu to finish her education at Kamehameha, where she graduated in 1935.

Shortly after high school, she married William Asing, a city and county employee. Because of her growing family, she worked as a sales clerk at retail stores and took in laundry.

Beginning in the late 1940s, Sims sold leis outside Waikīkī's Lau Yee Chai Restaurant. She also later sold on the waterfront on Boat days and at bottle clubs. In 1951, she opened a permanent lei stand near the airport on Lagoon Drive. She served as an officer of the Airport Lei Sellers Association. Sims retired in 1978.

Today, Sims enjoys attending senior citizens' functions, and gardening at her home in Kaimukī. One of her seven children, Ellarene Yasuhara, is the present owner of Irene's Lei Stand. Sims, however, still takes an active interest in the lei business.
IH: This is an interview with Mrs. Irene Sims at her home in Kaimukī, Honolulu, Hawai‘i on October 16, 1985. Interviewer is 'Iwalani Hodges.

Okay, Mrs. Sims, can we start by asking you where you were born?

IS: Yes. I was born Kekaha, Kaua‘i.

IH: And when was that?

IS: And that was July 18, 1915. Kekaha is a very hot place. I didn't realize until as I grew older and staying there. And also, Waimea is the next town. It's beautiful, but it was a little too warm for me, it seems. My grandparents had a taro patch, a little home, but was very well taken cared of. The taro patches were not too many but maybe about three or four. But those taro patches were the patches that kept us alive. My grandparents—of course, we were little at the time—worked very hard. We enjoyed living there. That was my hānai grandparents, now.

IH: Oh, that's not your real grandparents?

IS: Well, how was it now? Oh, I know now. My grandparents [grandmother] married my tutū kāne. My mother was adopted by my grandmother, this grandmother. And hānai, you know what I mean?

IH: Mm hmm [yes].

IS: Okay. So, we lived there I don't know how many... I may be mistaken. Maybe it was my real tutū kāne and tutū wahine, I think. Anyhow... .

IH: So, they hānaied your mother?

IS: They hānaied my mother. My mother belonged to a Mokunui. And this tutū kāne that hānaied her was Kaualoha. And so, we took them as real tutū kāne and tutū wahine, you see. We moved into Waimea. We
stayed with my other auntie and another grandmother. I don't know how we were related, but it's through my mother's side, I know. Another grandmother. You know, an aunt, auntie, is like a grandaunt. But we always say "tutu," I don't know why. Because she was so, I guess, old, and we called her "tutu." They, too, had a beautiful home right on the beach, but they were having hard times. I don't know why. I guess because there was no jobs around, you know.

They lived on the fishing business. You know, when the 'o'opus come down, when they spawn? Okay, they go down and they catch as many fish as they can. Now, they kaula'i. Kaula'i means "to dry." They dry the fish. Through the years they could live on that fish. You know why? When you dry that fish, you can keep it for years and eat that fish. You can fry; you can, what you call, even eat raw. And that's a small 'o'opus. Did you know that?

IH: I don't know what kind it is.

IS: Hinana, they call it.

IH: Hinana?

IS: Yes. You know, we look forward when the season is coming because we like to go down there and catch those little fishes. It was so . . .

IH: How did they catch the fish?

IS: With the net, the small-eye net. Really small-eye net, you have to go and catch it. You'd be surprised. We have the same thing that they sell at the store. I think the Japanese call it . . . Oh, not--what is it? There's a name to that Japanese fish [net], because we used to buy that at the store. But this is what we used to have to go down to the river and catch. We used to go crabbing, also. Just to keep us. . . . Well, I guess, that's all we had to live on.

IH: Did you also sell the fish?

IS: Yeah. We used to sell fish to get some money to buy other things. But those were hard days. I attended school at Waimea School. I attended elementary school. Then, later, we had so many families that we were asked to go to one house, to the next house, like that. That's Hawaiian style. We live like a big family. We always have to like give up our time with our different families. And so, then we went to Kalāheo to live. Kalāheo is a place above Wahiawā. Now, we have a Wahiawā here [on O'ahu], but there's a Wahiawā there [on Kaua'i], too. Now, Wahiawā is near the ocean. And then, we have Wahiawā up the mountain. We were staying up the mountain, Wahiawā up the mountain. It was a one house and so far away from civilization. It was so frightening. For me, I know it was very frightening.

IH: How old were you then?
IS: I was about, I think, nine or ten years old. About that age. Let's see, I had a brother that was about, he was about. . . . Well, he was born there and we raised him. My sister was about—I think at that time, if I was ten, she was fourteen. And then, I had a cousin that used to live with us, too, Mary. She was about twelve, I think. So, we were all raised together and we attended Kalāheo School.

IH: How did you get down to school?

IS: We used to walk. We walked about maybe a mile and half or two miles to school every day, barefooted. Those were the hard days that I mentioned to you the last time. We had to catch water when the rain comes and we didn't have no running water at all.

IH: Did you have electricity?

IS: No electricity. We had kukui hele pō. You know what kukui hele pō is?

IH: That's, ah . . .

IS: The lantern that you carry. You had to carry this lantern wherever you go. But that's all right. That was the only means of light. But was fun, you know what I mean? We had . . .

IH: What were your parents doing when you were living there?

IS: I was staying—at that time now, we were brought up by my grandparents, you know.

IH: Oh, your parents didn't live with you?

IS: No. We were brought up all these years by my grandparents. That's why I love them. I wish they were still alive. I wish I could do as much as I could for them, like how they did for us.

IH: How did you go with your grandparents instead of staying with your parents?

IS: Because my mother married somebody else, which my grandparents did not, I guess. . . . I don't know the whole story about it, but they had preferred taking care of us than having my mother take care of us. I think in those days, if you were young and you have parents, they think the parents could take care of you more than you can. And so does the grandparents, too, feel that they can care for the children more than you can. They're afraid of what you would do and not care for the children. You know what I mean? Go out and be careless about your children. So, they prefer taking care of the children than you . . .

IH: That happened in a lot of Hawaiian families?
IS: Well, only because the Hawaiians love children. You know, it is a fact because you find Hawaiians are always adopting children and that's it. So, you see, with us, we had a brother also that was adopted. In olden days, they believe that when a family asks for that child, you're to give the child. You cannot hold back and say, "No, I cannot give it to you." Because those days, they believe in kahunanism, you know. They can curse you. They say, if you don't give the child, they'll curse, and you will not have the child also. You know what I mean when they say that. So, you have to give the child when they ask. So, according to my grandmother, when I came, these people had asked for me. But because I came and I was, I guess, a nice-looking baby, they didn't want to give me to the family that had asked for me. So, they promised to give my brother, the next child. So, when that child came, nice-looking boy, they didn't want to give. And that son, that brother, died.

IH: Oh, no.

IS: And that's the reason why, Tūtū always say the Hawaiians had powerful words. Maybe we think it's nasty when they say they curse, but that was the way of them expressing themselves. You should, I guess, oblige to them when they ask you for something. Like if they don't have any children, they want a child. They want you to give them that child, you see. When you don't do, you disappoint them. They wait and wait for that child to come when you make a promise. So, anyway, that's it.

And then, Tūtū folks was always in the taro business. When they moved to Wahiawā, we had one house there, then they moved down also to get taro patches down in Hanapepē Valley. There, they had the river where they can cultivate their patches and raise their taro. Beautiful place. So, we used to live at two places because in Wahiawā, we lived with my brother-in-law. My sister got married to this fellow, Mano'i. We stayed up there and he took care of us. He took good care of us. He worked for the Kaua'i Pine. During the weekends, we used to get all our work done on Saturday mornings and then we used to walk down, oh, say about four, five miles or six miles to Hanapepe. Those days, we didn't have no means of transportation, so we had to go with walk. But that was good fun, though, you know.

(Telephone rings. Interview stops, then resumes.)

IS: We'd go down there to stay with my Tūtū folks because we go down there to help them. 'Cause they were selling their taro to Waimea Poi Factory.

(Telephone rings. Interview stops, then resumes.)

IS: But, anyway, we used to go. We walked back every weekend to go and help them at the taro patch. We used to go on the flume, that's what you call it, yeah, where the water comes down on the...
IH: Mm hmm [yes].

IS: And we walked there on that flume to get where my grandparents lived. It used to be so dangerous. You know why? That flume takes all the water down to Robinson's. You know the cane field in Makaweli? Well, that's where that water go, there. So, we used to walk on that flume, go down the hill, and get down to that valley where my tūtō folks used to live. Beautiful place, though, I tell you. You took from above, oh, it's so beautiful. You see the taro patches, well taken cared of. We used to have vegetables growing there. We used to have horses and cows. Our next-door neighbor was about a mile away. Not an actual mile, half a mile, maybe. They were growing rice. Yes. And so, it was a beautiful valley. We used to also go out there and catch 'o'opus. Because when it's hot, the 'o'opus sleep in the sand, and it's easy to catch. Oh, we used to love to go down there, especially to go catch 'o'opus.

IH: On the beach?

IS: No, in the river.

IH: Oh, in the river.

IS: These 'o'opus are in a river. You know 'o'opus? I tell you, I'm surprised they didn't choose 'o'opu to be our Island fish.

IH: State fish, yeah.

IS: It was brought up by someone. But 'o'opu, it's a rare kind of fish. But that fish, 'o'opus, I don't know whether O'ahu is the only--no, no, Kaua'i. I don't know if they have 'o'opus here. Do they?

IH: Here? Oh, yeah.

IS: They do?

IH: Mm hmm [yes], I think all the islands have.

IS: Okay. They do, yeah? But you don't find that kind of fish elsewhere, so I don't see why they didn't choose that fish. I was hoping that they would, but anyway. We used to live on the 'o'opus. We used to be champions. When we going catch, ho, we used to catch. . . . You know the strings? Boy, I tell you, in no time we can catch a lot of that fish. We used to go home and we lāwalu. You know what that?

IH: Lāwalu?

IS: Yeah. You can cook it in ti leaves, you can fry it, you can dry it, and you can steam it. Tūtō folks used to steam all that fish. When we cooking taro, they put it on the taro--in another bag--and put it right on the taro, and we steam that fish like that. Anytime when you want to eat, it's already cooked. Just eat that with poi. Ey,
that was good enough, I tell you. We raised our own vegetables. Tomatoes, Hawaiian onions, and Japanese onions--you know, the regular onions we cooked with. We raised our own sweet potato and papaya...

IH: What is Hawaiian onion?

IS: It's an onion with smaller leaves. It's really more hot than the other one. You know, when you lomi that? Yeah, it's more, what would you call that? It burns more when you eating it. That's Hawaiian onion. And underneath is purple. The root part? It's purple. Oh, tūtū folks used to raise a lot of those. 'Cause we used to eat, with our raw fish, we always used onion and tomato. You know, you lomi inside with it. So, we always had green onions, that's one thing. In those days--and I wish people were like those people before in olden days--they raise their own vegetables and just get the vegetables from the field, from the garden, whenever you want. We had Irish potato. We used to grow our own Irish potato. Believe it or not, tūtū folks were very, very knowledgeable about these things. Our sweet potato, in our stew, we used to have sweet potato. You'd be surprised. Even taro, taro is another thing you can cut and put it in that stew. People don't know that. Now also, you can also use, when you making your stew, the poi, you mix the poi up and you pour it inside, it's a Hawaiian stew. Did you know that?

IH: Mm hmm [yes].

IS: Okay, that's how we used to make our stew. Little potato, a little tomato. Tūtū folks used to raise also those green peppers.

IH: The bell peppers?

IS: Yes, bell peppers. We used to have that, and tūtū folks used to raise their carrots. Sometimes, we used to have the turnips, also. And their head cabbage. Oh, right alongside the patch, the taro patch where we could reach for the water to water the garden. We had all this--maybe, oh, about maybe ten feet--right on the side of the taro patch, they're all vegetables. Squash. Tūtū folks used to raise squash. And we also raised chickens. We had chickens and ducks. That was, anytime you want to eat chicken, you just catch your chicken and cook it, and have a good meal. That's what I mean, good chicken. The chickens today are really done too early and you don't get the real taste of chicken unless you get it from your own place, cook it right away. You have the real taste of chicken. And then, even ducks. That's why, I said, when you 'eleu--you know what 'eleu means?

IH: Smart?

IS: No. 'Eleu means you're not lazy, you're always doing things. If you are that kind of person, you never starve. Tūtū folks always said that. So, we were just terrific kids. We used to know how to do all kind of things, I'm telling you. Tūtū folks didn't have to
tell us. We get up early in the morning, we do our chores. We know what we have to do. And then, after that, we go out and help tōtū folks in the taro patch. We'd dig all the taro, and we bagged them, and then we tie all the bags. We get the horses ready and we'd put all these bags of taro on the horses—one, two, three, sometimes four bags. We girls and my brother used to take one horse apiece. We lead 'em up to the hill, up maybe about mile and a half up on the hill there, because the cars don't come down to where we were. They come to a certain place way above us, about a mile and a half away. They come there, and we just go up there, and we just unload our taro. They come there and pick up the taro. We make sometimes three or four runs up there with the horses. Yeah, that's how my grandparents were able to have this taro transported up there on the horses. That's why, we raised horses, too, for that purpose. We had a lot of grass growing. What you call that, now? I don't know what you call that kind of grass with a lot of hairy. . . . Oh, forgot now what's the name of it. Of course, they had honohono grass and all of those.

Once upon a time, we used to raise pigs, too. Yeah, tōtū folks used to raise pigs because we had lot of taro and all those other. . . . You know, when you cook the taro, the taro that you can't use for poi—we used to pound our own poi, so there's certain part of the taro that you can't use. That part of the taro, we give to the pig. That's the reason why we began raising pigs because we didn't want to throw away the waste. You know what I mean? We gave it to the pigs.

IH: Why couldn't you use it for the poi? It's the wrong kind of . . .

IS: Because it doesn't make good eating. And that, you just eat like that. That's loliloli, they call it, part of the taro. They don't use that part of the taro. We would know what is good for poi. It doesn't get sticky, you know what I mean? It's more of that, what can I say, now? I don't know how to express it to you, but in Hawaiian, they say loliloli. It's kind of chunky like when you bite in it. Anyway, so we raised pigs. When we used to have luaus, we had our own pigs. Ey, they used to make good kind of kālua pig, I'm telling you. We had the yard there that we could maybe put up a table that would hold about 200 people. That was so beautiful. We had running water come right into our yard in the back. Just on the side, tōtū folks made a little hole there where we could wash our dishes and we could bathe on one side. Then this water runs down to the taro patches, and then it flows down into the river. But it was such an interesting place to live. That's why, till this day, I always want, I hope, I wish that one day I will have a house that has a running stream right into it because of that kind of place that I lived before and I just enjoyed it.

And then, on Sunday evening, we used to have to walk home to our other house at WahiaWā because we have to go to school. Where tōtū folks were staying, if we were to go to school from there, it would be maybe about five or six miles. That's the reason, we went up to
live up the other house. When you think about it, we come home, maybe we have dinner down there at Hanapepe, and then we come home in the evening because it's cool. You know, 'cause you have to climb the hill. When we used to walk home, at certain places, very mysterious, I would say. Because in olden days, they bury their people right in the yard. Where we have to pass, where the road was built, they took part of the graveyard. The Hawaiians used to say, when you pass through the graveyard, don't forget, don't curse, don't swear, and always speak well, because they said these people are listening there. That's what they said.

That's where I saw this big white dog. They speak of this Poki. The Hawaiians believe that during moonlight nights, you see these things come out. A long time before, I know Tūtū folks used to talk about this dog, and I never believed that one night I would see it. They used to talk about this big white dog. Funny, we were coming home one evening up this hill, and this is where a lot of our 'ohana lived, right down by the bridge there. A lot of them died and were buried there. And then, as we were coming up on that hill there that night—I think was about 8:30 or 9 o'clock that night—funny how we saw this. . . . I know I saw it. They say not everybody can see these things, only certain people can see it. Now, I happened to see that dog. And that's why, people say the Hawaiians, they don't believe in kahunanism, but this is the truth about when they told me. You know, they used to tell us the story about this white dog, and I saw it. So, I told Tūtū, I could see it that night. She said, "Well, sometimes those things come to show you that they're taking care of you." Like what do you call that, when they say they have these. . . . You heard about it, haven't you? What they call that? 'Aumakua.

IH: 'Aumakua.

IS: Yes, 'aumakua. "So, maybe it was your 'aumakua that came to take care of you." Sometimes there's a warning. They come to warn you. And so, because of those days, and everything that happens that Tūtū folks used to tell us even at home. Sometimes, some nights, we're sleeping and maybe a picture would fall. We would never know what was the cause of it. When it falls, Tūtū say—like olden days, they had those glasses, oval like this. Now, funny, the picture fell, but the glass didn't break. Now if it did, then they would say it would have been death in the family. They had their own beliefs, you see what I mean?

They say that if someone tried to open your door, you see the handle of the door or the knob of the door shaking and you open the door, there's no one there, that's no good. That's a bad sign. So what they do, they either put salt in the water and they pipi kai. You know, they take it and sprinkle around the house to take the evil away. I don't know if anybody, if you believe in that, but Tūtū folks used to believe in that, to take the evil away. Oh, they used the ti leaves, the green ti leaves. They say a prayer, whatever, to take all the evil away. Or they sometimes used the gun. They
just shoot in the air, something like that. Yeah, that's what they believed in. You know, things did happen. Strange things did happen in our house. That's the reason why I believed in these things. I said, "My grandparents wouldn't say these things if it wasn't the truth." And now, when you're really there to see it and really happen, how can you say that isn't the truth? How can you? I cannot say that.

IH: So, did your grandparents follow Hawaiian religion?

IS: They did.

IH: Did they belong to any other religion?

IS: Well, in those days, I didn't know what was God at that time. Of course, tūtū folks always said, ke akua. Now, in those days, ke akua can be other kind of .... It would represent something else. Because the Hawaiians believed in worshipping the fish, like the shark. Even that big fish in the river. What they call that? What's the name of that? Gee, was right on the tip of my tongue. 'Akupa.

IH: 'Akupa?

IS: Yes. That's the kind of fish with the big head. That black fish. Now, they also worship that. You should put that down, the 'akupa. Anyway, they worship that, they worship sticks. Yes? They worship the sticks, some wood and all that stuff. Certain kind of trees, they worship those things. But you see, the Lord does not believe for you to worship any kind of idols. But olden days, they didn't know really what they could worship, so they worshipped these things. I suppose that's the reason why. They worshipped the lizard and all those kind of things. But those things like kahunanism, they talk about kahunanism. Those things actually happened, I saw. They talk about that ball of fire. Sometimes, there's a curse and they say to this family, "Hele 'oe." They said, "You go there and you do that to this family," and all that. They said, when they curse, this ball of fire falls right on a house or just go around near the house there and do damage to that family. See, this ball of fire. And that, I saw, too. Yes. Now, funny, strange, I didn't see it on Kaua'i. I saw it over here on Coolidge Street. How (do) you like that?

IH: What happened?

IS: On Coolidge Street. It was so happen that one evening we were sitting there on Coolidge Street. We were staying with my cousin at the time. The people that used to own St. Louis Alumni, what's the name of those people now? Do you know?

IH: I can't remember, but I. . . .

IS: Now, they were old Hawaiian people. I forgot what their name.
IH: Yeah, it used to be a big house.

IS: Yes, a big, and they say it was a very mysterious house, too. Strange, but I happen to be standing there that evening. We were talking. This ball of fire came from King Street. You know by (Mō'ili'ilī) Park? The entrance of that park, I saw it just rolling right into that yard that's owned by that old folks. What you call that, I don't know what their names are.

IH: But it's (now called) St. Louis Alumni?

IS: Yes, the one that owns St. Louis Alumni. They said that house was very, very spooky. That's where I saw that red--that ball of light. And tūtū folks used to talk about those lights--those big ball of lights. Would roll into there, just hit you. It's a curse of some kind, they say. When they angry with you, they send their curses like that. That's how it is. That's how I saw, that night. Funny, tūtū folks used to tell me about it. I never saw it on Kaua'i, but I saw it here. So, I was surprised, surprised. So, anyway . . .

IH: Did your grandparents speak Hawaiian at home?

IS: Only Hawaiian.

IH: So, do you speak Hawaiian?

IS: Yes, I do. But I wish I could speak fluently like they (could). The only way we could interpret was to just speak Hawaiian to each other. Not interpret, but we used to hold a conversation by speaking Hawaiian.

IH: Did you speak Hawaiian to your children?

IS: I wish they knew Hawaiian.

IH: They don't?

IS: A few words only, but they don't know Hawaiian. But one of my daughters that went to school, I think she took Hawaiian when she went [Brigham Young University] Lā'ie. And today, they're taking at Kamehameha [School]. They're teaching at Kamehameha. My grandchildren are now learning at Kamehameha, which I'm very happy about that. During my time at Kamehameha, they didn't teach us Hawaiian.

IH: Oh, they didn't teach you any Hawaiian?

IS: No, no, no. Not at all. Funny, yeah?

IH: Why was that?

IS: Because they didn't have the teachers, I guess, and maybe they didn't think Hawaiian was that important. They didn't think the Hawaiian
language, you see. So, today, when— that's the reason why I have to give credit to all of these people that's been fighting for the Hawaiian. . . . Like you, what word can I say now?

IH: Hawaiian studies?

IS: Yes, Hawaiian studies. Because if we didn't have all these people that went to Kaho'olawe and went down to fight for all these places, maybe we wouldn't have all these things coming up today. And I'm glad that we have people like Haunani-Kay Trask [assistant professor of American Studies] that's going to (the) University now. She's very knowledgeable, that wahine, in the Hawaiian, isn't she?

IH: She is, uh huh.

IS: She's a fighter, you know. She's very strong. She believes so much in what she—about the Hawaiians and all that. So, you need people like them. It's very important to have people like them. People that are not afraid to speak up. I mean speak up about the truth and also to fight for your rights, I think.

But anyway, we went to school at Kalāheo. I graduated from Kalāheo School. And not too long after that, my sister, family, moved up to Kukuiolono Park. You heard of that Kukuiolono Park?

IH: Mm hmm [yes].

IS: Okay, we had a house up there. That's where we lived. I finished Kalāheo School, then I came to Kamehameha School.

IH: Was that for high school that you came to Kamehameha?

IS: Yes. I started at Kamehameha as a ninth-grader.

IH: Were you boarding up there?

IS: Yes. I boarded up there four years. At first when I left home, it was so sad. Not being away from your family, it was something new to me. I just couldn't take it. I was such a crybaby, I would say. At school, I used to cry every night 'cause I used to miss my family. You didn't realize how hard it was to leave your family until you're really away from them. I cried every night, I tell you. It took me some time before I was able to control myself and got used to to staying at the school. But I loved my family and I missed them so very much. I wish sometimes I think, ho, I would think about doing some nasty things like running away so that you could go home. I said, no, I better stick to it up there.

IH: How was it moving from the country into the city? How was that change?

IS: Was a big change for me. Ho, I said, when I saw the lights here, when I saw all these big beautiful schools— in fact, we passed
McKinley High School and saw that school. I used to admire that school because it was so beautiful. The way that school is built and all the trees on the side, so beautiful, I thought. And then, they took me out all to these places like Diamond Head and all these, oh, my goodness. It was like being at, I don't know, like a big carnival-like that you see all these big things that very exciting. I said, "My goodness, I never knew that there was such place like this." With all these lights and everything. And then, there were streetcars that... I used to watch the streetcar go and I said, "My goodness, you mean they have such thing here that you can ride and take you all over?" which I didn't have that on Kaua'i. My goodness, I usually use my feet to go wherever I wanted to go. We had no transportation. We want to go, we have to walk. Very seldom we had cars that would take us anywhere. And so, we were really country jacks. I was a country jack, I would say. But I learned quite fast. Once I was settled at Kamehameha, I really learned fast. And I enjoyed my four years at Kamehameha. That's what prompt me to come to be a business lady. I had wanted to become a business woman because when I was up there I said, "One day I'm going to try to have a business of my own."

IH: So you decided that when you were in high school?

IS: At high school. I was thinking about it because when I came out of the Kamehameha School I said, "One day I'm going to marry a rich, rich man," and it didn't happen. The husband I married had an ordinary job, I would say. I don't know, where he was working in an office at the Board of Health, I don't think it was real fabulous, I would say. It's not a fabulous job, I would think. I said, "Well, so Irene, you just married a man that doesn't have money, so you have to work." All the more, I thought about my business. I said, "One day, I'm going to get into business and I'm going to have to work." And I worked. That's how I told you, I worked very hard. When I had my children, I knew the job that I was doing at the time, I wasn't able to support my children. If I wanted to educate...

IH: What did you do?

IS: Well, I was working at the store. I worked at Sears, I worked at Liberty House. And right after I get through working at one store, I go into another store to work till nine o'clock at night. I would work from eight o'clock in the morning. That's how ambitious I was.

IH: Eight o'clock in the morning till nine o'clock at night?

IS: Well, I work at one store. And I worked till nine o'clock at that other store just so I could support my children.

IH: Who would take care of your children?

IS: They were all in school at the time. They were all in school. When they were young, I had a girl that took care of my baby, and I
used to go out and work. But when they were little, I used to do laundry for people, too. I take ironing in the house. All of those things just to get extra money.

But my three boys, I told you, had paper routes, also, when they were very young. They had paper routes until when they went to high school. Then they couldn't do it anymore because they were in sports. They played football and all those kind of sports. They couldn't come home early enough to deliver their papers, so they gave up. But during the summer months, they used to work part-time, hard workers. During the weekends, they deliver paper. They would go to the stadium to sell, they would sell at the different corners of the streets. That's how they used to make little extra money.

But my children were very hard workers. They used to do all the chores in the house when I used to work. I didn't have to come home and do it, they did it all. That's how I trained my children. They would have to help me along, because after all, we have to live together, learn how to do things. I think that's the only way you have to help your children, teach them, so they would know what to do when you're not around.

IH: Right after high school, you got married. That was 1935?
IS: No. Let me see, 1936, I had my son. Yes, 1935.
IH: Nineteen thirty-five you graduated?
IS: Yes, '35.
IH: You got married the same year?
IS: Yes, I think (it) was '36 that I got married. I had my son in 1936.
IH: You started having children right away, then.
IS: Yes, I started. I think I was the only one in my class that have that many children.
IH: Oh, how many children did you have?
IS: Well, I have seven altogether. When everybody ask me, "Irene, how many children do you have?"

I say, "Seven."

"My goodness, you have the most of all the classmates."

(Laughter)
IS: Not that I wasn't proud. I said, "Well, I think it's a good time to do it, when you're young." That was my excuse, you know.
IH: Did you have them one right after another?

IS: Yes, I did. I had them very close. The two boys were a year apart, and the rest were all two years apart. So it was hard. That's the reason why I had to work hard. And so, when I was working at the stores, I know I wasn't making enough to support my children. I was a waitress, I was selling leis down at the Lau Yee Chai [Restaurant].

The good part about selling leis was this, 'Iwalani. You know, they used to have the bottle club. You remember the bottle club? Maybe you don't know what that is. A bottle club is a club where they open after hours when all the bars are closed and you bring your own bottle and you drink. That's it. What we used to do, when we used to sell leis at Lau Yee Chai, what leis we don't sell there, we go at that bottle club which was right across the street...

IH: From Lau Yee Chai...

IS: Fong Inn's. That building was owned by Fong Inn. I don't know if you know who he is. He was one of these Chinese fellas that were very--a very prosperous fella. He owned that building, and he opened that up as a bottle club. So people used to come on taxis and limousines and whatnot at night to bring all these people that want to go to the bottle club. Ey, we used to make money down there, I tell you. We used to sell our leis...

IH: This is down (in) Waikīkī?

IS: Yes. After that, this lady, oh, all these other people that used to sell at Lau Yee Chai used to go finish up over there. They go and sell leis there. We used to make a lot of money there.

IH: Was Lau Yee Chai a popular place to sell leis?

IS: Very much so.

IH: Why was that?

IS: Because it was an eating place. It was an eating restaurant. And very exclusive. It was one of the best on the island. People used to go there to have dinner. When we'd go there to sell leis, they used to buy leis for their girlfriend or their wife, or whatever. And they used to hold big parties there. A lei always go with that kind, parties like that. So, we used to sell a lot.

IH: Where was it located at that time?

IS: That street going in the front, is that Kūhiō [Avenue]?

IH: Kūhiō, in the back...

IS: Yes, that one. Kūhiō and Kalākaua [Avenue] on the other side. And
that side street [Kuamo'o Street]. Right on that corner there.

IH: Oh, so right at the beginning of Waikīkī.

IS: That's right. It was a very nice place for evening.

IH: How many lei sellers would be there?

IS: Let me see, how many of us? One, two--this fella Akoni, that dark fella. Now I mention it, lot of people know who he is. Very good lei . . .


IS: Yes, Akoni. Very dark fella. He was really the one that started that business down there. And then, everybody else saw he was doing so well that everybody wanted to come in, too. Then we had Maryann (Ka'eka). Oh, poor thing, she was such a nice person. Well, she was there and another Maryann (Hew Len). And Jessie Haili. You know, Jessie Haili, the one that sings?

IH: Oh, Leina'ala Haili?

IS: Leina'ala (the singer), she used to sell with me down there.

IH: Oh, yeah?

IS: Yes. She used to sell inside for the restaurant. And then, she used to come out and just sit down with us. We used to sit down, play ukulele. She used to go. . . . She's a good entertainer, you know. She used to play ukulele, we used to sing, and, oh, we used to have a good time down there. Yes, we used to have a good time. Then, later . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

IS: Now, what I want to tell you is this. You wonder and people wonder how I used to get all this business going, it's because when I was working at the Liberty House at that time, I used to order my flowers and have the growers drop it off at the house 'cause I had an icebox in the house, in the garage. They used to put all the flowers there. My children come home and I come home. We start with our flowers. They string it. They start stringing it for me, so when I do come home from work, the leis are all strung because my kids do all the work for me. When I get through, they do all the housecleaning after that. And then, I'd go to sell leis down at Lau Yee Chai.

IH: What time would you go down there?
IS: About maybe seven, eight o'clock [p.m.]. And we start selling
because dinner time is about that time there. So, we go there, and
you be surprised. We used to sell up to, sometimes, if only at Lau
Yee Chai, which at times we didn't go to the bottle club, we used to
get through about twelve [midnight]. And come home. My children
used to be home by themselves. Sometimes, the father used to be
home to take care. 'Cause my husband used to sometimes stay out and
he used to have a little beer with his friends and forget to come
back, sometimes, early, so. But those kids were well taken cared
of. The Lord really took care of my children. At least, (I) made
some money that night.

IH: So, when you went to Lau Yee Chai, you folks all sat on the sidewalk
outside with tables out there?

IS: Well, I tell you what happened. First of all, I started to work for
Lau Yee Chai. I worked for them first inside the restaurant.

IH: As a waitress or as a lei seller?

IS: No, no. As a lei seller. There was a bar there, a lei bar. A
place where—that they could sell flowers. Okay, and (Leilani) Saiki
used to be the owner of that bar, flower bar. I worked for her when
Leina'ala [Haili] quit. So, I went out there to work for her. Then,
after that, I found out, I said, gee, they were making so good
money in there. I was making good money for Saiki, selling flowers—
corsages, and leis, and everything else. I said, "Well, I'm going
to sell for myself out there." So, that's how I quit and went on
to sell on the sidewalk.

IH: Oh, so, when you first started selling leis was after you quit inside?

IS: Right. After that, after I quit, Leina'ala came back to sell again
for the same lady. That's how I knew Leina'ala so well. Then
after that, we went to the bottle club. Oh, that's where we made a
lot of money.

IH: So, the owners—well, Mrs. Saiki, she didn't say anything about you
folks being outside selling?

IS: She cannot. We had little problems there, only because Akoni was a
high-pressure seller. You know when I say "high-pressure seller,"
he puts a lei on the person and then he asks them for the money.
That's not fair. That's not right. Sometimes people used to get
little angry about that and they used to complain to the proprietors
of Lau Yee Chai. They took him to court, in fact. Do you know, he
won out? Yeah, because as a public highway, the sidewalk is public.
The people there had nothing to do with the sidewalk. Anybody who
wants to do business on the sidewalk, it's a public sidewalk which
you . . .

IH: Did you have to have a business permit at that time?
IS: You have a permit. We all have license to sell. So, he had a license. So they couldn't do anything about him. After that, no. She had nothing to do, although she lost a lot of business because we were taking all the business away from her. Of course, she had corsages that we didn't have. And whoever wanted to use corsages, but we used to catch 'em outside before they got inside. But we used to do pretty good business, I must say. And then, later, when we went to the bottle club, oh, that was terrific. Ho, go home about four o'clock in the morning. Imagine, work all day during the day at the store, come back, and go down there [Waikiki] and work. I was getting so skinny and I was losing weight. But I had to continue . . .

IH: When did you sleep?

IS: Hardly. And then, I said, "This cannot go on." Because I had to quit one job. That's how this—oh, her name is Ka'eka, now. Maryann Ka'eka. You see, just came back to me now. Her name. We talked about it one day at the Lau Yee Chai. And we said, "Say, why don't we go try go down to the airport and see if we can open up our business down there." Gee, we were thinking, "How will we start?" Because we heard that those people down there, the airport, were the kind of people that wouldn't allow people to come in to work--I mean, to open up a stand, because they knew they had . . . That was a gold mine, you know, I would say. They were making good business. Tremendous business down there. So, they didn't want anybody else to come in.

IH: Is that when they were still on Lagoon Drive?

IS: Yes. They had the Venturas, they had the . . . You know Harriet Serrao [Kauwe]? The mother [Hattie Serrao] was there. They had Eddie La'anui. And Dorothy's Lei Stand. That's the one, you know, Mike, the one you . . .

IH: Onaga?

IS: Onaga. Okay, his wife [Dorothy Andrade Onaga] had a lei stand there. And Richard Serrao, that's Mrs. Serrao's son. Then Queenie [Ventura Dowsett] had a stand, too. I think there was about one, two, three, maybe five, six, seven stands.

IH: Oh, so that's when they were still on the trucks?

IS: Yes. Then another one came in, Arthur's [owned by Arthur Hew Len]. And then, another one came in. Oh, they didn't call Arthur's, it was Maryann [Hew Len]. That's Arthur's mother. And then, they had Martha's, and then they had . . . Martha Akui. That's, you know, which . . .

IH: Milan's grandmother.

IS: Milan's grandmother. Okay. Then they also had Gladys Lei Stand.
Then came us. But my lei stand was named Irene's and Maryann's Lei Stand at that time. We were the last one. Now, when we came in...

IH: So you came in with this Maryann Ka'eaka?

IS: Yes. Maryann Ka'eaka, right. They didn't want anybody new to come in because they felt if more people came in, we're going to take the business away from them. But I'm sorry, I had seven children to support. I said, I was going to open up my business here. And so, I had a determination of getting down there and work. And so, because they say, "Oh, they're going to fight you when you get down there." So, I was doing Mr. Kennedy's laundry. He was connected with our police department. I told him one day. I said I wanted to open a business. Take a car down there at Lagoon Drive and open my lei business.

He said, "So?"

I said, "I want someone to escort me down there."

He said, "Oh, anytime, Irene."

And so, he had one of his officers when I was ready. I drove my station wagon and he took me down there. I had convoy. Anyway, we went down there. He parked way down, and saw I parked my truck over there and started to hang the leis up. He stayed there and waited until if anybody was going to cause trouble. Nobody. It was so peaceful. Was very nice, and I was very happy. But I prayed a lot about that. That had lots to do, you know. And the Lord really took care of me.

It was during that time that I think it was nice that I went down there. It was the right time. You see, my oldest son had taken the test at Kamehameha School and he didn't get in, although he passed. You know, he passed the test. It so happened that one day--Mr. [Allen] Bailey was the vice-principal of the school at the time, I think--he came and he was buying leis from Gladys Lei Stand. I happen to see him. He saw me and he said--after he got through purchasing his lei, he came over to my stand--and he said, "Aren't you a former Kamehameha girl?"

I said, "Yes, I am."

He said, "You did look familiar and I knew you were a Kamehameha girl."

I was the former Irene Akeo. That was my maiden name and that's the name I went under. I told him, I said, "You're Mr. Bailey, aren't you?"

He said, "Yes."

I said, "My son took the test at Kamehameha. I was hoping that he
would get into Kamehameha."

He said, "Well, what is his name?" Took all the information. He went back at Kamehameha. He called me, I think, a day after and he told me to send Hogarth up to Kamehameha. "We have a place for him."

IH: How nice.

IS: Yes. I say it was MEANT for me to go to the lei stand. And so, he got into Kamehameha. After he got there, all his brothers and sisters got into Kamehameha. Not through him, now, they had to pass the test. But I was able to get six of my children in Kamehameha. I would have had seven. Elwood had taken the test, that's my other son. He passed the test. When they called him to go to Kamehameha, the only reason why he didn't go was because he was attending McKinley [High School] and he made the football team. So, he didn't think, if he went to Kam [Kamehameha School] at that time, he would be on the football team. So, he didn't want to leave. So he stayed at McKinley, but lucky he stayed there. He was awarded the most valuable player of his team.

IH: Oh, terrific.

IS: Yes. And he had a trophy. I took care of that trophy until he married, then I gave it to his wife. After my children, well, Hogarth. . . . Sad, but anyway. When he graduated from Kamehameha, he got married to this girl. Nice, very nice girl. Japanese-Haole girl. And had four children, of course, with her. They went away to the Mainland to live in Winona--no. Wayne [another son] was at Winona [Minnesota]. In Oregon. Pendleton, Oregon. That's where they come from, my daughter-in-law. They went there to live.

I had these other children. Wayne went to Winona. First, Wayne went to Hardin Simmins University (in Texas). He thought maybe he could get a scholarship, but he got there a little late so he lost out on getting a scholarship. Because his former coach was coaching there, I think. And he lost out on the scholarship, but we paid for his schooling, $800 at the time. Eight hundred dollars for college, now. That boy was so ambitious. He worked part-time to support himself while there. And then, his coach--this other coach that used to coach him also, was at Winona State Teacher's College in Minnesota--wrote him that summer and told him, how about coming up and play for him at Winona State Teacher's College. So he wrote me and told me, "I want you to read this letter, Mother. One of my coaches asked me to go up to Winona State Teacher's College to play for him."

I said, "We'll talk about it when you get home." So, I told him, "What do you think about it? It's really you that's going to play. What do you think about it?"

He said, "Well, Mom, this is to relieve you for paying my tuition."
"And so, if you feel that you're going to get a lot out of it, you go ahead and go to Winona State." He said it would be a full scholarship. So, he went early that year, went back early, and he got a full scholarship. He went to school there, now. He was a sophomore, junior, senior. He had three years' free scholarship. That's why I didn't have to pay for him, so I was happy about it. And then, Elwood, my third boy, wanted to go into the service. I offered all of my children if they want to go to college, "You go ahead. I will support you." And only those who had gone, which I didn't want to push it on some of them. Like Ellarene, that's my oldest--you know Ellarene. Well, she's the oldest of my daughters. She graduated 1959 from Kamehameha. But she was offered a job already. As soon as she graduated, she was offered a job to go away to dance for Maiki Aiu's [hula] studio. When she asked me, I wanted to send her away to this college. She asked me. She wanted to go to dance. I said, "You know, when you go away to dance like this, when you come back, I'm not going to send you away to college. You're going to work for yourself if you want to go to school."

So, she said, "Okay, Mother. If you don't mind, I'd like to go away."

And I didn't want her to one day tell me, "I had an opportunity once, Mother, and you didn't give me that opportunity."

So, that's the reason why, I said, "Okay. As young as you are, Baby, I hate to see you go away like this because you're too young."

"Yes, but Mother, I promise you, I will take care of myself."

And she did. And she became a very popular person. Very. She learned through this travel, going away. Have that self-respect, very independent. That was so important. To become independent and to have that--I don't know. When she was away from home, she had that aloha for her family. So, when she came back, oh, she was so happy to be with us. That's why she said, "You have to go away before you really know what it is to miss your home." That's true, you know. So, she went to dance. I don't know how many years she was in dancing from one place to another. She went to Japan, but she traveled. That's the good part about it. She traveled when she was young and somebody else paid for all the expenses, which is good. I have to say, when she came back from all that entertaining, when she stayed with us, she took good care of the family while I was away working. She did all the cooking and work at night at the Tapa Room. She was working the Tapa Room as a dancer. Yes. She also was in that program with Lucky Luck. Well, she was one of those Hilton hula maids. Yes, so popular that time. They went all over. They went to Canada, they went to Japan. Hoo, they had so much fun in Japan, too. They went all over, I must say. So lucky, you know. All over the Mainland. Oh, they were so lucky. But anyway, that's Ellarene.

And Arlene came. Not all of your children will like to go to college,
you know that. So, she told me, "No, Mother, I'd like to go to a business school."

I said, "Fine."

So, she attended a business school. And then, there was a opening for Castle & Cooke, [Incorporated]. She took the test, she passed, and she got that job at Castle & Cooke. So, today, she's a woman boss for about—used to be seventeen men, but a lot of them have retired. I think, now, it may be about seven or eight men. She's working for Castle & Cooke under O'ahu Transport [Company, Limited]. That's the title of the business that she's in. That's under the Castle & Cooke. She has an office of her own. She has four lovely children. She has one daughter that's attending University [of Hawai'i at Hilo]. One is going to Honolulu Business College, her oldest son. And then, the other one is a senior, I think, at Moanalua [High School]. And then, one at University High [School]. And anyway, that's my second daughter.

Then my third one is the one that's a schoolteacher at Kailua High School, Mrs. Ing. She's such a nice, nice person. Well, she went to school in the Mainland, Utah, then came to California, then finished up in [Brigham Young University] Lāʻie College.

That Maydell is the one that flies [airline stewardess]. Maydell Morgan is my youngest daughter. That's the one that flies for Hawaiian Airlines. She's been there for, let's see, fifteen years now. She was going to Lāʻie College with this other sister of hers. But because she didn't have... The following year she didn't want to drive alone from where I was staying. She said, "No, I'm going to work full-time at Hawaiian." That's the reason why she didn't finish college.

But all in all, I have seven lovely children.

IH: Are you folks Mormons? Because she went to Lāʻie?

IS: Because I'm a Mormon and because these two girls are Mormons, they were able to get into the Mormon school. They don't pay as much, you know what I mean? And so, yes. That's how they got into Lāʻie.

IH: How did you become Mormons if your grandparents were...?

IS: Were, yeah, already Mormons.

IH: Oh, they were Mormons? But they didn't practice it too much?

IS: No, funny, you know. At that time, when people were talking about religion, they always thought that, I think, the Hawaiian way of worshipping God was the proper way of doing. That's how they believed until later. I don't know, later, they used to talk about God, Ke akua. Now, Ke akua could be Our Heavenly Father; and yet, Ke akua could be the idols that they worshipped. It could be that, too.
So, I don't know how they, in that case, but afterwards, tūtū folks. . . . You know, Grandmother, oh, when she says a prayer, beautiful prayer in Hawaiian if you understand. I think in later years, they believed in Our Heavenly Father. That's when we were going to church then. We had to go to church every Sunday. We used to go. Even Tūtū, they only used to go--sometimes they go, sometimes they don't, but we used to go to church. But, you know, if I wasn't working at the lei stand, I would have had all my children in the Mormon Church. But that's okay. I feel that as they grow older, they can choose their own religion. It's up to them what religion they want to go to. It's not for me to force them into the religion that I'm in. I don't think it's fair. So, some of them are Baptists. Some of them are Catholics. Some of them are Mormons. So, it doesn't matter. We all worship the same God, I feel.

IH: So, would you like to stop here?

IS: I think we better stop right here.

END OF INTERVIEW
IH: This is an interview with Mrs. Irene Sims at her home in Kaimukī, Honolulu, Hawai‘i, on December 17, 1985. Interviewer is 'Iwalani Hodges.

(Interview in progress.)

IS: ... (If) ever (I would) go to the airport, the main reason was because to support my children, to get more income. And I was told that the airport was a good business place. I thought, well, I must go down to the airport and make money there. That's the reason why I had Mr. Kennedy (from the Honolulu Police Department) have an escort to escort me to the airport. He sent one of his men. I was told before I went there (that there might be a problem). Some of the lei sellers at the airport that were already there told me that, "I don't know whether you're going to have an easy time of getting your car in to sell leis because, you know, the people here are so involved in their own people that they didn't want anybody else to sell leis. You might have a hard time getting in."

IH: Is that because they wanted only their family members there?

IS: Something like that. They (knew) there was so much money in the lei-selling business. Whoever was there, that's all they wanted, and they didn't want nobody else to come in. But I said (to myself), "No, I'm going to try. We all have to work for the support of our family. (Therefore), we have to go where we can make a little bit more money." (Then) I thought of going (in) to the lei stand (business at the airport).

IH: How many trucks were there when you went?

IS: I think there were about six. Yes, and I (would be) number seven.

IH: When you went there, were you actually the seventh one in line?

IS: Yes. In other words, the last one. (When the customers enter,
they stop at the front stands. They (probably) feel it's (much) easier (to stop at the top). The people in the front are usually the ones that make the money. Unless it's filled up, then they come down (to the rest of the stands).

But you know, the navy used to have a boat [seaplane] by the name of the Mars. That boat used to bring in good, good business for us lei sellers at the airport. I still remember that boat. That plane used to come in about two or three times a week. When they go out, oh, we used to make tremendous business. The navy used to give us a lot of business. When (the parking was full) then people (started to park further) down, then I (would) get to be the first one (to get the customers). You see, when it's way in the front, then (they) have to walk back to the lei stands. (Therefore) I (would) get a chance to make the money because I would get them first.

At first, it was (a) little hard for me to get customers because it seemed (that) people already (were) used to going to one particular stand. But, after (a while), business (was much better) for us down (at the lower end). I'm so glad that I had gone to the lei stand at the airport. (I have fond memories about these times.)

IH: Well, you mentioned that you were hesitantly because you thought that maybe you would have trouble when you moved in there. Did you actually have trouble?

IS: Not at all. And you know, according to what I hear from the other lei stands who were there, they said some of the stand owners previous to them gave them a bad time.

IH: But you didn't have any trouble?

IS: No, nothing at all. I (was) so happy. Maybe because they knew I was protected by the police department. (This) fella from the police department (told me), "I'll have a man stay there and see that nobody bothers you. And then he can leave." And nobody bothered me, not even the Venturas. They said the Venturas used to give them (a) bad time. Well, I don't know. Not with me, I know they didn't. They were very good to me. When they used to go to the bathroom, they always ask me, "(Hey), you want to go to bathroom (at the airport)?" We all (went) down (together on one car). So, they were good to me, you know. That's one thing I can say about the Venturas.

IH: Did you have to go somewhere else for the bathroom?

IS: We had to go down to the main terminal [at the airport]. Of course, if you had a friend next door that was staying in one of the Damon Tract homes (then you would be able to go to their home). I had a friend that (lived) there, but I didn't want to bother them. I didn't feel that I should go into their home all the time. I didn't
bother them at all. Only the water. I used to get water from them. And I (paid) for the water. We needed water for our flowers. I used to get water from those people.

IH: So, about what year did you move down there?

IS: Nineteen fifty-one, I think it was.

IH: Oh, that's right before you moved into the grass shacks, then?

IS: Yes. I was one of the newest lei sellers there. When I got there, there were twelve stands.

IH: On the grass shacks?

IS: (No, on the old car lei stands. This other lei seller and I shared a lei stand,) Irene's and Maryann's Lei Stand. There were others that were renting the stand from somebody else. (Some owners) had two stands or three stands (and some of them) leased it out or rented it out to somebody else. (The different lei stand owners decided to have a meeting.) It was brought up where those (owners) who had two or three lei stands (would) relinquish whatever extra lei stands they had to those that (were) renting because they all had families to support. (Thus, everyone had only one lei stand.)

IH: Now, this is in the grass shacks?

IS: No, this was down on the road.

IH: Oh, on the road, still.

IS: When they did allow that, then Maryann had her own stand in the back of me. She had her own car. Then, Richard (Serrao) and his wife had another lei stand. Then, Red Kawelo had a stand, too. She was working with her sister Harriet (which was Patt's Lei Stand). They (were at) the beginning of the (road).

IH: Harriet Serrao?

IS: No, Harriet (Patterson). How did Harriet get the lei stand? I'm not so sure, now. I don't know how Red Kawelo came in, but they got a stand. See, I was number seven. Eight, nine. Yes. No, I'm sorry, I take it back. Agnes Makaiwi got number [fifteen]. Well, she was well known at the boats. You know, the boat? She was the president of the lei sellers down there. And so, they gave her (the last stand). She asked for it, and they gave her this one lei stand. They built one for her, so that she (became) number [fifteen].

IH: She came in when you folks were still on the trucks?

IS: No. She was one of those that were given the privilege to move into
the shacks. She had drag, too, (being a) popular lei seller—(especially) with the transportation people. She knew a lot of people (and) she had pull. So, she got that stand. Also, at the time they asked us to go in, they told us that we were only going to pay twenty dollars per month, like a poll tax. Some time ago, we paid such things as poll taxes. Do you know about that?

IH: No.

IS: You don't know, yeah? It's new. And so, we didn't have to pay any kind of rental but that.

IH: What was that? A poll tax?

IS: They said they weren't going to charge us any kind of rent nor were they going to charge us for any maintenance to upkeep (such as) the bathrooms and cleaning around the stands, (etc.). They weren't going to charge us, and they didn't.

IH: That was just like tax that they charged you? That twenty dollars?

IS: We didn't pay any kind of rental like how we're paying today.

IH: I know some people say it was rent, and then one other person said it was just for maintenance of the place.

IS: Well, I would say (it) was like a poll tax. At that time, there was such (a) thing as poll taxes. But I may be mistaken. I just assumed that it was some kind of (a) poll tax we had to pay. But that's all we paid. I was very surprised, (when) they moved us way down to the shacks [the wooden building, in 1962], they started to charge us rental. Not at the old lei stand, now.

IH: Okay. On the trucks, they didn't charge you?

IS: No, they didn't charge us. Not even at the stands. You know, where the...

IH: The grass shacks?

IS: Grass shacks. There was no such thing as rentals like how we're paying today.

IH: It was just that twenty dollars?

IS: Twenty dollars and something, we paid. I thought it was awfully cheap. You know, it was so cheap. Well, they [Hawai'i Aeronautics Commission, HAC] were the one that asked us to come in. That's the reason why we went in.

IH: Yeah, do you remember how that transaction came about that they approached you folks about going onto the property?
IS: I think the main reason why they took us in was because of traffic congestion. When the cars parked to buy leis, they used to double-park. They parked on this side where the stands (were) and parked across the--just in the medial strip. (The cars) used to cause (a) hazardous situation. That's the reason they had to (send) police (officers) to direct the traffic because of all (the) congestion from the cars parking to buy leis. We used to do pretty good business down there.

IH: When you folks were still on the trucks, were there quite a few commercial flights coming in or was it mostly military?

IS: No. We had quite a few military, but the Mars, this big Mars, this flying seaplane used to give us tremendous business. I still remember that. And if you ask some of the lei sellers like the Venturas and Hattie [Serrao], they would tell you, too. And Mike [Onaga]...

IH: Yeah, they all mentioned that Mars plane.

IS: They did, huh? Oh, that plane used to give us good business, I have to say.

IH: But then, were there also commercial flights coming in and out with the tourists...

IS: Oh, yeah. We had all the Pan American (flights and) United. All the old-time planes were coming in. But they alone were giving us good business.

IH: This Mars?

IS: Whoever was flying, whatever planes were flying at that time, was enough business for all of us. That's one thing I can see. The leis were cheap at that time where you could buy fifty-cent leis. My goodness, two and three for a dollar, you know.

IH: So, do you think people bought more leis at that time?

IS: Oh, they bought. Well, it depends now. Some of the stands were a little higher 'cause it depends if you can catch (your prices). Sometimes leis are made differently.

IH: But today, the customers, they go into the lei stand, maybe they buy one lei.

IS: Oh, yeah. But you see, the prices are much higher now. In fact, way higher than what it was before. Before, they (could spend) just a dollar and have three leis. Very inexpensive. But the flowers were cheap, then. Oh, the flowers were (very) cheap, compared to the (prices) of flowers you pay for today. Oh, it's so, so high. That's why my daughter [Ellarene Yasuhara] said, "You know, we couldn't sell (leis for the) prices that you folks were selling before. Not today."
IH: Oh, yeah. The flowers, I think, cost more than that.

IS: Right.

IH: At that time, were the flower growers delivering flowers to you?

IS: Flowers (were delivered) right to our stand. That's (the) convenience we had. We had the flower growers bring all their flowers. We had a choice. Many growers were planting and selling flowers. Some of them were cheaper. The lei sellers used to think, well, if they can't make money, they're going to buy the cheapest flowers and string (them) so they can make more money. You would find in the different stands the different quality of leis. You can tell which lei stand makes good leis and (wouldn't) pay too much for it. I knew what stands were making good leis. But if those people were making cheap leis and (could) get good prices for (them), that's good and well (for) them. That's one thing with any kind of business. There's always going to be some kind of friction among the (people) as far as price is concerned. But you see, no one can tell you how much to sell your leis. You sell how you want to sell, whatever price you want to sell, that's up to you. If you take a loss, that's you, you know what I mean? We had quite a few lei sellers that used to sell their leis much cheaper, but that was all right.

IH: So, when you folks were approached to go onto the airport property, who approached you?

IS: At that time, the Hawai'i Aeronautics [Commission, HAC] (was) in charge of us. It wasn't the State [Department of] Transportation as it is today. It wasn't. It was the airport--aeronautics. They were the ones that were in charge of us at the time. I've forgotten that fella's name. He was such a nice fella.

IH: So did they come to you individually?

IS: Well, whenever they had anything to talk to us about, they used to get in touch with the president of our association.

IH: Oh, you folks organized from the time . . .

IS: Oh, we had--oh, yes. Yes.

IH: . . . that you were on the trucks?

IS: I'm not so sure about that. But anyway, we did hold a meeting that one time, I remember, down when we were on the trucks. That's how everybody else was given a separate truck to do business, you see. After that, the aeronautics [HAC] asked us to go in. So, we went in with the promise that they were going to pay for all the maintenance. I think it was no rent whatsoever but this twenty dollars and whatever for poll tax, I thought it was. I may be mistaken, so don't quote me now. As long as we stayed in the shacks, we paid that sum of money every month. And then, after we were
moved [in 1962] into the shacks down at the main airport now [the site prior to the present one], then they started to charge us rent. Rental and 10 percent of what you make.

IH: Oh, and how much was the rental at that last place?

IS: I think (it) was ($100 on a month-to-month basis).

IH: Oh, isn't that what it is now?

IS: It's $200, and then you pay 10 percent of what you make.

IH: So, that was a big jump, then, from the grass shacks?

IS: It was. I was very surprised. But you see, I don't know. I was very surprised too, but I didn't know whether there was anything I could (do to perhaps) get to the state or whoever, the aeronautics, and tell them why did they go up with the rent. They (said) because (there were) new shacks and all that. And then, I guess, to cover the expenses on the electric and water. Now, we don't know about these things. It could be that, you know what I mean? But they (said) we didn't have to pay for water, no electricity, nor for the dumpster. We didn't have to pay for any of those things. But I thought ($100) was quite a big jump from what it was.

IH: Did that force anyone out of business? Do you know?

IS: You know, to tell you the truth, to me, ($100) wasn't that expensive as far as rent is concerned. But to some people, they couldn't make it. I don't like to mention any names, but there were about one, or two, or three stands that were having (a) hard time in paying their rent. In fact, quite a few, maybe more than that. In fact, one or two lost their stands, too. And so, they were replaced, of course.

(Telephone rings. Taping stops, then resumes.)

IS: Talking about the rental, and then they imposed the 10 percent on your gross. I didn't think (it) was right. But you see, at the time I wasn't an officer [of the Airport Lei Sellers Association]. Now, you may be against it, but how many of you? You have to have (the) majority who thinks like you and will vote (with) you. But a lot of them didn't think like that. I'm a fighter, you know. I'm the kind of person that if I think (an) injustice (is being) done to me, I will speak up for my rights, I will.

IH: Didn't all the lei sellers think that was a little bit unreasonable?

IS: Well, a lot of them, seemed like (they) didn't care. They didn't (seem to) care about anything. There were just a few of us there that took our business very seriously. And then, anything that came about, we were aware of, and we wanted to do it right. There are others that have to try and back you up, too, but they don't think like you.
IH: Oh, because I would think because that concerns money . . .

IS: Is involved. Well, it's just like at one time when the State Transportation sent us the permit where we had to sign. In that permit they (wanted to) impose the electrical, the water, and the dumpsters that we had to pay every month.

IH: On top of the rental?

IS: Yeah, on top of the rental. You see, and (a) lot of these people were alarmed. They had to read their permit before they signed it. (Some of us) made them aware of (the permit) because once they sign it, they (would) agree to pay all these things. We knew how much, because they had it on the permit, how much the light would have been, the water, and the dumpster. It was something so enormous. I (knew) for myself, I wasn't able to pay the rental at [$100] plus all these utilities. I thought it (was) very unfair for them to do such a thing. We held a meeting with the State Transportation before we signed it. We called for a meeting and we told them that it would be impossible for us to be paying these utility bills. This is what they told us, "The others are paying." Like the airlines and all those other people (who have concessions).

IH: They make so much money, though.

IS: Yeah. So, I told them, I said, "But you see, that's where the . . . ." What is it? Godfather. . . .

IH: Grandfather.

IS: Oh, grandfather clause came in. We told them that there was something that the state had promised us they weren't going to charge us for anything at all. And yet, now, they're trying to bring all this up for us to pay, which is unfair. I said, "Had we known in the beginning, we wouldn't have come in." You understand?

(Telephone rings. Taping stops, then resumes.)

IH: So, when you folks went to the [State] Department of Transportation and brought up your objections . . .

IS: They objected to us there when we had this meeting. They didn't want to give in. The next thing we had to do was to go to see the governor. Well, we had all the lei sellers go up to see the governor at the time.

IH: What governor was this?

IS: Governor Burns. He did away with it. He called in and told the State Transportation to take away that (particular item).

IH: Oh, you mean, for the utilities?
IS: Utilities. To do away with that and don't let . . .

IH: So, did they want to add that into your contract for the new place? Is that what it was?

IS: Well, they did it for the other . . .

IH: Was for the last place?

IS: The last place we stayed at before they moved into this new one. See, and now, that's why I told Ella [IS's daughter, Ellarene Yasuhara]. The state did not feel that they were obligated in (any) way to the lei sellers. (But yet,) it was a promise by the State Transportation [Hawai'i Aeronautics Commission] when they took us in that they were not going to charge us (the) utility and rent and all that.

IH: Did you have that on paper? When you went to the governor?

IS: Of course, it was on paper. You know, it was in the minutes. Where are the minutes, I don't know, but it was in our minutes.

IH: But I mean, when you approached the governor to tell him about this grandfather clause, was . . .

IS: He had his secretary there to take the minutes. We (had) a secretary (also to) take the minutes (for that meeting) with Governor (Burns). Those things went to the State Transportation, and the State Transportation should have that till this day. Why is it that they didn't impose all those other things that they had already written in the permit? The governor called them and told them to do away with it. That's the reason why, they're not paying for electricity, water, the dumpster, and for parking. We do not pay for parking. That's the reason I told Ella, this last time when I spoke with her (and) she said, "The state is going to charge (the lei sellers) for parking."

I told her, "Now, if you going to give in this time (to the state), they're going to impose something else on you folks. (If) they can get away with it, they're going to get away with it. It's because you folks (are) giving in to them. Don't you ever give in to them this time. You fight them."

That's why she's hesitating now. She's getting around to talk with some of the (other lei sellers) around there.

IH: So, before, you never had to pay for parking either, then?

IS: No, we always had free parking. Now, the people at the airport who are employees, or whoever, have questioned that, too. (They are asking) why the airport lei sellers are not paying? But you see, they don't know (what had taken place before). The state should be able to answer that question. They have all the answers. It
shouldn't be hard to give them an answer. But they used to question it. It was promised by the state [territory]. They would bring us in from the road, that they (weren't) going to impose anything on us.

IH: But was that promise made verbally or did they put it in writing?

IS: Oh, it was put in writing. Because if it wasn't in writing, would they allow us to park there free and not pay electricity? Must have been in writing. Okay, it's down there at the State Transportation. They have it in writing. They know the rules and regulations of the lei sellers, between the state and the lei sellers. They know what it is. They have it all in writing there. Sure, they do. Okay.

IH: You mentioned going to Governor Burns one time. What was that for?

IS: We went to Governor Burns. What was it for, now? I've forgotten what it was. You know, I really don't know. But we did go for. . . . I wonder if some of the lei sellers do recall on that?

IH: I know that most of them mention that Governor Burns always helped them whenever they needed the help, but I never really found out specifically what problems they took to him.

IS: What was it? I just wanted to know what was. . . . Maile [Lee] should know, because she was the recording secretary. She had it all in her minutes. She should know. I've forgotten now what. I know when we went to see Governor Burns for one thing and (it) was (usually) a big issue. He (would) just clear it (up) right away. Now, what was it? What was it now? In fact, when they imposed the 10 percent on the gross, we didn't think (it) was right at all. The state said, the reason why they had to impose the 10 percent was because at the end of each month, you're supposed to send in your gross, (and) there were some of the lei sellers that were making a tremendous income. They felt, I guess, if you can make a good income like that, why can't you pay 10 percent to them? You know what I mean?

IH: Is there a big difference between the amounts the different lei sellers make?

IS: Yes, there are. Yes, there are. Yes. You see, those people that were there a long time ago before I got there, made customers. Had customers, you know, so many customers. Like Rachel's. Rachel [Pakele] was one of the most popular lei seller there.

IH: Yeah?

IS: Yeah, I have to tell you that. Why? Because she was established down at Maunakea Street. Then they said, "Oh, go down to (the) airport. You know, Rachel is down there as another branch." Okay. So, you should have seen, most of the cars that used to park in the parking lot used to go to Rachel. Rachel had tremendous business. But she's a nice person to begin with. Very nice, down-to-earth
lady. One of the best lei sellers I knew down (at the airport). I have to tell you that. That's the truth. Never bothered anyone. She used to mind her own business. She used to buy her flowers. That's the lady I said, I heard her. That came out of her mouth. She said, "Well, when you want to get anywhere, money talks." And that's (the) truth. That's (the) truth. And she had it. Of all the lei sellers, she was very prominent. Anything she wanted, she could buy.

That's the lady that first rode the Cadillac at the airport. She started buying Cadillacs every year. And then, you know, others, like [Mike] Onaga's wife [Dorothy] also owned a Cadillac. Then I, too, owned a Cadillac. Then we got a little spoiled. And so why not? Say, hey, why not? Not only the lei sellers could buy Cadillacs because the Cadillacs of those days were cheap. Not in this 16, 17, 18,000 [dollars] that you have to pay today. Hey, you can get a Cadillac maybe for $5,000. So, why not ride in style. So, we did. I did. I know I did. That's why, every year, I used to change my car to buy a Cadillac. We used to do that. But you see, when you turn in your old Cadillac, you (would) get (a) good price because it's still new. You see. So, you can get a good price on your turn in. So, we used to ride in style. At least, I used to ride in style. And I used to feel so comfortable. Ey, press button and all the stuff in the car.


IH: So the lei business was a good business, then, for you.

IS: Well, what can I say? Yes, it was, in a way. I wasn't able to support my children if I wasn't in the lei business. Now, I have seven children, and I was able to send them to college if I (had) to. I was able to support them. At least, I would try to support my children and see that they all get a degree. But if from their own side, they didn't want to go, I couldn't force them. I didn't want to force them. I could if I wanted to. But some of them wanted to go to commercial schools, which is not bad. Okay, then they got a good job today because they went to the commercial schools. For those that wanted to be teachers, okay, they got (their degree as teachers). I wanted them all to be schoolteachers, but that's okay if they didn't all become schoolteachers as long as they have good jobs today. And so, I have to say, the majority of my children all have good jobs. In fact, I should say, all of them have good jobs. Good-paying jobs.

IH: Weren't you the president of the [Airport] Lei Sellers Association at one time?

IS: Yes. Yes, I was.

IH: When was this?
IS: This was in (the '60s). (I was also vice president in the '60s.)

IH: What kind of things did you have to do as a president of the lei sellers?

IS: Well, that's when the state did impose the charges on the...

IH: Utilities?

IS: Utilities. And I was (vice) president at the time. And you know me, I fight for my rights. I'm going to fight 'em, and I did. That's how we went to see Governor (Burns). Yeah, 'cause I told them, "You know, it's very unfair. I know the lei sellers won't be able to pay all these utilities." We went to see (Burns), and (Burns) said, "Okay, we'll take care of that." Until this day, (the lei sellers are not paying for any utilities). That's (the reason) why, I told my daughter, "I know you don't have the same kind of temperament like your mother. Sometimes, it's good. Sometimes, it's not good. But you stay as sweet as you are. Because you're getting along very nicely with that kind (of a) personality." I told her, "Don't give in. You have to try and fight for your rights."

IH: Ellarene also mentioned something about when they tried to put in the vending machines at (the airport).

IS: Yes. Yes, those vending machines.

IH: Can you tell us a little bit about that?

IS: The State Transportation built this little place in the back for the lei sellers to string flowers, string their leis. We had tables and chairs and benches and whatnot in there. The state has always wanted to get after us to pay something. But you see, at that time, I wasn't the president. I wasn't for the idea of them giving up cleaning our bathroom. The state used to clean the bathroom. But they used to make a fuss about us not keeping it clean. They said they (came) in there and everything (was) always so messy. I told this person that used to (clean), "This is not the only bathroom you'll find that is messy. We're not the only ones that uses the bathroom. We have to allow the outsiders to come (to) use the bathroom if they want. So how can you blame the lei sellers only? This is just like a community bathroom where you allow outsiders. Any time, people, your customers ask to use the bathroom, you allow them to come in. So, you cannot blame us."

But anyway, at that time when we moved into the new lei stands, they felt, well, they want to make money. Maybe they thought we were (a) little stupid in our ways. You know, they think most lei sellers were dumb. They told us they were going to bring their machines. This was, you know, the drinks, like Coca-Cola and all those. Those Coca-Cola machines. Also they brought in their cigarette machines because they knew there (were) some lei sellers
(who) would be buying cigarettes. And then, they also brought the 
machine where you could play music. Different recordings, you 
know. They thought they could bring it over, okay. So, they called. 
At that time, I think I was the president.

IH: So, this is the last stand that you were at? Or the one you're at now?

IS: The last location I retired from was the one before where they are now.

IH: Yeah. Is that the one that they tried to put in the vending machines?

IS: Yes, uh huh. Mr. Kraft sent his man over and he said, you put 
these machines in the lounge where we string (our) flowers. So, I 
told the fellow, I said, "What are you going to do with those 
machines?"

He said, "Oh, Mr. Kraft said we could put these machines for your use."

"And so, where does the money go to?"

He said, "The money goes to the state."

I said, "I should say not. Why is it that you folks... This is 
for the use of all the lei sellers to string their flowers. This 
is for our use. We don't need a machine. If we do, we can bring 
it in ourselves. And I tell you why. Now, you say you want to 
bring your machines. Supposing we use up the whole area here with 
tables and chairs. Where are you going to put the machines? Because 
that's for our own use. We use it as we wish, the way we want to 
use it, okay?" I told him, I said, "So, you don't unload. You 
take those machines (back). We (are) going to get our own machines 
and put it in there."

And so, he went back, came back again. He said, "Oh, yeah, Mr. 
Kraft said he wants to talk with you."

I said, "Sure. Any time."

So he came down and he talked to me. I said, "Mr. Kraft, how could 
you folks do such a thing? (In our) permit (it reads) that this 
area is for the use of the lei sellers for stringing leis. And now, 
you folks want to bring your machines in to make money (for the 
state)? And the money doesn't come to our association, it goes to 
the state? You cannot do that. You can't do that."

So, you know, he couldn't get over (chuckles) it. I said, "So you 
take your machines back, 'cause I tell you, if you don't, I'm going 
to go further and take you to court."

He said, "Well, let's not (go) that far."
I said, "Well, then you know better, then. You take these machines away 'cause we going to bring our own machines." And quickly, I called the different machine companies to bring their Coca-Cola machine, and the cigarette machine, and the recording machine. We put it in there.

When he called me up the next time, he said, "We had a meeting," and all that.

I said, "I'm sorry, but we have our own machines here. And we're going to use that money for our own use." There was nothing he could do about it. (And we ended up doing our own cleaning of the bathroom.)

IH: Almar was president?

IS: Yes, she was the president for (a) short time. But we impeached her, so that's the reason why I became president. Then, when we had (a) re-election again, they voted for me to become (their) president.

IH: Why was she impeached?

IS: Because she had a meeting with one of the officers of the State Transportation, and to my understanding and I'm quite sure with the other officers that were in office with me, felt that anytime when she has a meeting with anyone at the airport or whoever she gets a meeting with, she's to come back and give us all that information. She didn't want to. For what reason, I didn't know why. She was stubborn about it. Now, I don't know what really transpired between she and that fella when they had this meeting. Maybe it was concerning her, or her business, or they didn't want us to know, or whatever. She didn't want to tell us at all. That's the reason why she was asked to leave her office. Interesting, isn't it? That's how I became the president of the airport lei sellers, 'cause I was the vice president then.

(I remember when we went to Governor Ariyoshi when we wanted to get our children signed on to the permit for inheritance. He helped us with that. It hasn't been written into the contract, but we have gotten some verbal agreements.)

IH: Is the association a pretty strong body among the lei sellers? Do all the lei sellers respect that association?

IS: Did they respect the association?

IH: Uh huh [yes].

IS: Well, we had a good turnout at all our meetings, as far as that. We (are) a small (group), only twelve of us. We had some associate members, and all that. Like husbands become members, too, something like that, whoever wanted. We had a pretty good turnout as far as the lei-selling stall owners.
IH: Do you feel the association has helped the lei sellers as a group?
IS: Sometimes. In certain issues, they did. Not in all.
IH: Well, it's hard to get twelve people to agree on everything.
IS: Right. But when it came to fun, like going out to parties, (like) our Christmas party, they (were) all for it, let me tell you. Ey, they all out for that. But I tell you, the lei sellers good sports. I tell you, we had good times. We always leave, you know, those little arguments and ill feelings in the back when we go out. We don't take it with us. We (had) a good (time).
IH: Did you folks used to socialize a lot?
IS: A lot. Let me tell you, the lei sellers. You ask the other lei sellers. We used to have (a) good time.
IH: But they don't go out too much now, eh?
IS: Not anymore. I'm surprised . . .
IH: Why is that?
IS: Well, maybe they're more old fuddy-wuddys than we were.
(Laughter)
IS: We had the jazzy ones there, let me tell you. Ey, we had good times. You ask Martina [Macalino], (or) Lillian [Cameron]. My daughter [Ellarene] (attended the parties, too). Well, she had a lei stand down there after that. She took over Maryann's (in 1965). Ey, when those lei sellers went out to a party, you would never believe that they are lei sellers. You look at them, they (were) all dressed beautifully, I'm telling you. Have new dresses, muumuus.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO
IS: . . . what else can I talk about the lei-selling business?
IH: I kind of want to hear something about how you folks used to socialize. I know that Arthur Hew Len, Lillian's brother, was an entertainer.
IS: Oh! He was. He was the best.
IH: Did that have something to do with it? Did he have a lot of parties and things like that?
IS: He was a jazzy old fella, I tell you. You know he always--well, he
was in the entertaining field. So, you know those kind of people, they always want to have good time. They believe in that and I do, too. I love it.

IH: Did the musicians used to come down to the lei stand and play music down there? His friends?

IS: Well, whenever we had parties. We had parties in the back of the lei stand, the old lei stand [the wooden building], where I was. We had all the place blocked off. We had our parties in there, beautiful. And we had entertainment. Oh, I tell you. That's the kind of party you like to go to. Lovely, lovely time we had over there. Boy, I tell you, we had catering. People catered the food. And we had the growers donate pies and cakes and whatever they (could) donate to us, I tell you. Well, we invited the growers, too. They were welcome to come.

IH: The flower growers?

IS: The flower growers. Ey, till this last time we went, I think (it) was two or three years ago, the last time we had it at Royal Hawaiian [Hotel], one of the growers (was) there. Oh, we had so much fun with her. But I'd say, they were all included. We felt that they were sort of like a family, too, because they were bringing our flowers every day. We see them every day. And they were the ones that helped us in our business, too. Without their flowers, we (couldn't) do business. Isn't that true? So, I think we had good (flower) growers. We (all) had good fun, I tell you. I cannot forget the good times that we had when I was a lei seller. Whenever we went out, we always had a good time. Good fun. And of course, we had (some) rascal ones like the jazzy ones that sometimes (chose) to go out by ourselves. Oh, we used to have (a) jolly good time, let me tell you. I still say, it was through the lei-selling business that I became what I am today. And I have to give the credit to the lei-selling business that my children were supported by it. Of course, we all worked hard. My children, everybody, worked. Luckily, I had (a) lot of children. They were able to help me with my stringing and all that running around and everything else. I give a lot of credit to my children.

IH: So, it seems to me, from my observations, that as lei sellers in business, during business hours, you folks were very competitive. But then away from business, it seemed like the atmosphere was different. You were all good friends.

IS: Yes. I always said that at the lei stand, we (were) all there trying to make money. When there's money involved, you find people (are a) little more aggressive. You know what I mean? They're trying to make as much money as they can. They get sometimes little selfish, though. (There is) greed, also. But that's part of making money. I'm sure the other business people, too, are like that.
So, it was something that comes and goes every day. It's just common. To me, it was.

IH: Do you think the lei sellers are good business people?

IS: To their kind of business, like the lei selling. Maybe they're good because they know about flowers and all that. They know how to string leis. I'm going to tell you, if there's any kind of different leis to be made, the lei sellers, the Hawaiians, are the best. I give the credit to the Hawaiians because they can make any kind of lei. Any kind of flowers, they can make it up into beautiful leis. Something about them, maybe artistically inclined, I would say. They know their color scheme. Some way, somehow, don't say they don't know, because when they finish a lei, it's beautiful. They use their own common sense on what kind of flowers to be put into that particular lei. And they can make beautiful leis.

IH: And so many combinations.

IS: Yes. So many combinations. That's why I say, anytime when you want leis, the place to go is the airport. They're so talented that way, you know.

IH: So, do you feel that that's the reason that they were able to make a good business of it, it's because they knew [their flowers]?

IS: I think so, too. Because a lot of people have mentioned to me that they go to the airport (to buy leis) because of the combination of flowers are made into leis so beautifully, (especially) the combination. That's what attracts people, the combination leis. Of course, we do have people, lei sellers at the Maunakea and Kekaulike Street, but they don't have the combinations like we do at the airport. I don't see. The way they string their flowers are not like those people at the airport. There's something about these people at the airport, they're very experienced about and they know their color combination. Now, I'm not trying to down anybody from the streets, now. They may, too. But I think because so many of us are lined up there, the competition is so great that you would have to know how to make attractive leis to bring the customer to your lei stand. That is very important. If you put something very attractive there, when the people see it, oh, they're wondering what it is. They're going to come and look and see how and what kind flowers are those that you have up there that is so attractive.

IH: But doesn't hanging the leis out on the board ruin the leis without being in refrigeration?

IS: Well, as far as hanging the leis, in order for you to sell, you have to display it so that the customers can see (them). You cannot put it in a refrigerator. The refrigerator is situated in such a way that the people can't see the leis in the refrigerator. I'm talking about the glass refrigerators. They have glass doors and all (that). So, you have to display (them) the way you have it out on the board.
there, (for them to) see. The leis are there all day long. Although that's the reason why, we have to have water. We have to wet our leis every day—I mean, till you close. So, if you're a good lei seller, you try and sell and push the leis that's been there earlier, so that it doesn't wither. But you know, the lei sellers just know what to do with their leis. I know when I was selling leis, I (knew) what to do with my leis. I (knew) how to sell it. Only you would know about (your) leis. You know where are the old leis. You know where are the fresh leis. And you know how to push your leis if you want it to be sold, you don't want to throw it away. It's up to you (what price) you want to sell it for. Sometimes, people (are) looking for cheap leis. Why don't you get rid of it so that you don't have to throw it away, yeah? So you sell it for a cheaper price. I would know how to do it.

As far as the lei-selling business, I think those people at the lei stands at the airport, those lei sellers that I used to work with, were terrific people to work with. We had our differences. But to me, after the [Airport Lei Sellers Association] meeting is all over, that's all pau. You know what I mean? You are to put everything that transpired in the meeting that you didn't like, put it in the back, and start again with our business. Go back to your business and try and work your business out to make sure that you're in the business to make money. That's it. And that's how I survived in my business. Because I always—after my business is all over, I'm coming home, I have my lady to replace me. I get into my car and drive home, tired but happy. Happy because I've made my sufficiency. You know, the money that I made, I'm very satisfied. So, I feel that the Lord is always with me and always helped me along with my business. So I give credit to the Lord and my family.

IH: You also mentioned the relationship between the lei sellers and the flower growers was a good relationship. I was wondering if some of the growers today are the same ones as long time ago, like when they were selling to you on the trucks.

IS: There are those that I still know when I was in business. I think there's one, two, three, four of them that I still know that comes to the airport that I know that I used to do business with them at the time when I was at the airport. Now, there was quite a few of them that used to come and sell flowers at the lei stand that are not in business today. Well, only because some of them were staying out at Hawai'i Kai and the land was taken away from them because of. . . . What would you call that now? Because of (land development).

IH: Oh, that's when they started developing, wasn't it?

IS: Yes. Right. So, they took the land away for homes, you see. That's the reason why some of the growers had to move away from Hawai'i Kai. (Many) of our growers were from Hawai'i Kai. We had carnation growers out there, we had orchid growers out there, we had chrysanthemum growers, and even some tuberose growers were out there, too.
IH: Do you remember the names of any of those growers?

IS: Well, there was one, that was Mister--that Korean guy. Was it Mister... Ah, shee, I'm sorry. But there's another Japanese boy, Higa. George Higa was out there. He used to bring carnations to me and he used to bring other flowers. Like sometimes, some tuberoses, and vandas [orchids], and crowns. And then, there was another Chinese guy. That Ching, I think his name was, that used to bring a lot of vandas from out there. He used to have a lot of vandas. Now, he's passed on. And then, we had some growers from Kāne'ohe and also from Kailua, and way down Waimānalo--this side, behind, they're near the mountains--that were tuberose growers. But they're not coming here anymore. They're not coming to (the) airport anymore, I understand. Only Helen and Mrs. Yamada. Helen is one of the oldest growers, too. She started when she was in Mānoa with her mother.

IH: Do you know her last name? I think I've seen her at the airport.

IS: Yeah, Helen (Nam). She's married to (Chinese), though.

IH: Are most of the growers Orientals?

IS: Most of them. In fact, all of them were. During olden days when we were on the road, we had (some) Korean (growers). Lot of Koreans used to raise carnations. And they used to raise the carnations on the slopes of (Wilhelmina Rise). You know, up here, the Sierra Drive?

IH: Oh, Wilhelmina Rise?

IS: Wilhelmina Rise. That's where they used to raise the carnations. And also the one, the mountain right next to it. Is it Maunalani?

IH: [Yes.]

IS: Yeah. Well, that hill there, too, they used to raise carnations. They raised a lot in Hawai'i Kai. The popular pink carnation and white has a beautiful fragrance. That's the kind of carnations they used to raise, the Koreans. And one package of 500 flowers, we used to pay--ah, I think was dollar and a half [$1.50] or two dollars, that's all, or less. And that used to make about two or three double carnation leis.

IH: Wow.

IS: Yes.

IH: How much you pay for the flowers, now?

IS: (Chuckles) well, I tell you, I don't hear of any local carnations that are grown here.

IH: Oh, yeah? All Mainland?
IS: No. Not here on O'ahu, I haven't heard.

IH: Oh, now they're on Maui.

IS: But on Maui and on the Outer Islands, yes. Maui, quite a bit. It comes in from Maui, most of the carnations. And I hear now from Ellarene that they also bring in from Kaua'i, which is good. And then, I understand also, they have some on Hawai'i. I don't know, from where--Kona or wherever. But a lot of the flowers are being brought in from the Outer Islands. For instance, the pikake, the carnation . . .

IH: Oh, yeah?

IS: Yeah, pikakes are being flown in from Moloka'i.

IH: Oh, yeah?

IS: Oh, yes.

IH: But they still have pikake farms over here, eh, in Ka'imukī?

IS: They do. But the people here, these growers here, have been very greedy as far as--excuse me for using the word "greedy," but the prices have gone up so tremendously. Now, you pay for pikake, an outrageous price, I'd say.

IH: So you folks go to Moloka'i.

IS: So, the prices on Moloka'i are so much cheaper. And then, another thing, too, what some of these lei sellers are doing, they're getting it from individual or private growers from Wai'anae. You'd be surprised 'cause quite a few of them (are) from Wai'anae. I understand they are some Hawaiian boys, also, Hawaiian families that are raising pikake. And they string their own. Those people, they're just crackerjack at doing those things, you know. They can make all kind of styles, any kind of way of stringing the flowers. Very attractive. They're pretty reasonable. I wish they can compete with these other Orientals. Because it's so important today when you own a lei stand or any kind of flower business to raise your own flowers. But the thing is this, you have to have people to work for you. You cannot work by yourself or even depend on your children to help you, because they have their own families today. Not like before when they weren't married, that's different.

But today, not too many people would like to go into agriculture. For my days, I love to work with my hands. Get in the dirt. I used to love that. That's why, today, I still go in the dirt and still do my yard work myself. Of course, I can't stay too long, but I try to. To me, if I don't go out in the yard, there was like I didn't do anything today. I feel like there was a loss. I have to get in there to do something at least in the yard or do something around the yard.
But you know, 'Iwalani, all in all, the lei-selling business was the best business I (have) ever been (in). And if I wasn't in the lei business, I don't think I was able to survive with my children. It was that business that helped me to feed my children, to clothe them, and to send them away to school to get an education and to be what they are today.

IH: It seems that it must have been a good business because . . .

IS: It was a good business as it lasted.

IH: I was wondering, why do you think that the business has been able to be passed down to children and grandchildren?

IS: Through generation.

IH: I was wondering, why do the children decide to pick up the family businesses?

IS: Well, that's one thing I can say. I hope my daughter Ellarene does not regret that she got into that business. And today, too, because the children feel they don't want to get into that kind of class of work. You know what I mean? [They think] that thing is low class.

(Telephone rings. Taping stops, then resumes.)

IH: Why did Ellarene take over the stand?

IS: She took over the stand in nineteen seventy. . . . In the '70s, anyway--'77, '78. I retired officially in 1978. I got married in nineteen [seventy-two] with this second husband of mine, and he didn't want me to go back to work. So, I think (it) was '72. Actually, I was staying home--kinda staying home, you know, going to work once in a while, and Ella was taking over. But you know, to tell you the truth, Ella was a lei seller when she was very, very young. She was going to Kamehameha School, I told you that. And I would pick her up every after school to come to the lei stand to help me string leis. I'm surprised that she ever graduated from Kamehameha because she didn't have the time to do her studies. She used to rush home sometimes at night, sometimes the wee hours of the morning, poor thing. I love her very much.

IH: Why do you think she decided to take over the stand when you retired?

IS: Well, she was the only girl that I had that was able to get or take over my business. And I tell you why. When she got married to her husband, the husband told her not to go to work. Quit dancing. So, she had to quit dancing. She was a [hula] dancer at the Hawaiian Village, yeah. And she was dancing every night. But he told her to quit. But because she was the kind of working kind of a girl that she didn't want to stay home and do nothing. So, I told her, I said, "Well, if you do not want to stay home, how about you taking over your mother's business?"
She said, "Well, yes, I can do that."

"Because you're so good in stringing and you've been in this business for so long, I know you can take over. You can just get into the business right now and take over the business because you're so good at it. You know, you studied my ways of doing business, and you are capable of taking over the book works and everything."

And you know, I'm going to tell you. When I told the growers that I was going to give up my business, I was going to retire, and Ellarene was going to take over my business, oh, I tell you, the flower growers were so happy. You know why? They used to adore that girl in some way, somehow. They loved her. I told them, I said, "Will you folks support her in some way by (continuing to give her) flowers?"

"Oh, yes, we will. We will." They were all for it.

IH: Did you have any problem switching over the lease to her?

IS: No, no trouble. Because Irene's Lei Stand had a good record at the State Transportation. I'm not lying now. I'm one lei stand (who) didn't have (any) trouble with the State Transportation, as far as paying my rent or paying my 10 percent on it. Hardly any . . .

IH: So, there's no problem handing your lei stand down to . . .

IS: Was no problem at all. In fact, it was such a good news to the State Transportation that I was having my family come in, and to have Ellarene. Because they knew Ellarene, too, you know, those people, and they really loved her. That girl, she's so good, that girl. She's just so well liked by people. So, she had no trouble, whatsoever. So, today, even if she wants to relinquish her presidency, as a president of the airport [lei sellers], they don't want her to quit. But I told her, I said, "One day you have to give up your position. You cannot be the president of the airport lei sellers (for too long)." 'Cause you're only allowed two years, I think. Unless they re-elect you, and that's what they did. And so, she said she wanted to quit, but they said, "No, no, no. We want you to continue on." And that's the reason why she's still the president. I said, "I don't know. Yeah, you better tell somebody to take your place. You're tired now." I know she's very tired, but she tries, she still struggle.

IH: Do you think her daughter [Christina] will take over the stand when she's ready to retire?

IS: I sure hope so. But you know, that girl is a smart girl. That granddaughter of mine, ho, she goes to school, she makes good grades. She's taking up. . . . What do you call those kind of machines, now?

IH: Computers?
IS: Computer. She's doing so well in computer. I tell you, she has good grades. I don't think she would... She knows. She knows about her mother's business very well. She would be the one really to get into the business. And I know she can take--she can really do it. She has it in her. Like born with it. Like how Ellarene born into the business. Although I wasn't a lei seller, but, boy, when I became a lei seller, all my children, like they were born with a needle in their hand. Let me tell you, those kids were clever. Oh, boy. Good stringers, boys and girls. My sons are good stringers, I tell you.

IH: You used to have them at the stand, also, your boys?

IS: They used to come down to the lei stand and string flowers, but they didn't man the stand. They didn't take care of it, but the sisters did. They [the boys] were in the back stringing flowers like nobody's business. And if I were to tell those kids, "You stay home today and I want all these flowers strung," they stay right at home and finish all the flowers and deliver (them) to the lei stand. That's how, so good, those kids were. Work hard. But you see, all the good went to them. You know what I mean? So, I told them, said, "Your mother's business is your business. So, we all work hard." And they did. That's one thing. (I am very proud of them.)

IH: If your granddaughter chose not to take the stand, what then? What would happen to it?

IS: Oh, it would be a great loss to me. Because I always told my children, I made them understand, "If it wasn't for the lei business you wouldn't be here today. You wouldn't be a schoolteacher today. You wouldn't have gotten this job." Like Arlene is working for Castle & Cooke. "I wouldn't have had the money to send you to school. So you give the credit to the lei-selling business. Because you helped your mother with the lei-selling business, that's why you have a good job. So, you don't ever forget that." I hope someday that some of my grandchildren would take an interest in the lei-selling business.

IH: You mentioned that they look at it as a low-class job?

IS: Well, I tell you, I did. Shame on me, but...

IH: You did?

IS: Yeah. You know, I was so high-minded, so probably felt that that wasn't the kind of job for me to do. And I used to be ashamed when I saw my friends see me with leis in my hand. Funny, yeah? Then one day, I said, "My goodness. It's my friends that have to buy my leis if I approach them. And that's how these people are making all the money. You get over there and go and sell your leis to them." That's how I had to break off from that being proud. That proudness in me--there's a proudness in us, you know. I guess that was a time I felt that I shouldn't be lowering myself to become a lei seller.
I don't think I'm the only one that felt that way. I think many others. I was the kind that had, I don't know, I just didn't want to become a lei seller.

IH: But why was it considered a low-class job?

IS: To me. To me, it was. I don't know about the other people. To me, the lei sellers were like sort of begging the money from the (chuckles) people, that's why I didn't want that. I didn't want to beg them for the money, you see. When you go up to them, see, everybody is there trying to sell the lei. So, in other words, you're trying to beg them to--either you make it little cheaper so you can get the sale. And I didn't want to do that. To me, I had little more pride in myself and I shouldn't ask or lower myself to go begging. That's how I felt. That's why I thought it was kinda low to go asking money from people. (Laughs)

IH: So when you moved down to the airport then as a permanent stand, did that seem more like a business to you?

IS: Yeah, right. It was more like 'cause everybody was doing the same thing as I was doing, so it wasn't so bad. But when we on the street, didn't seem too good to me. I don't know how you felt, but to me, it was. But then, after I saw the money that came in, I said, "My goodness." It was a low-class kind of a business that (brought) in the cash.

(Laughter)

IH: I don't think the customers had that attitude, did they?

IS: No. How could they? It's me. I'm the one. You think you so high-minded . . .

IH: It seems that the customers, they appreciated lei sellers.

IS: Oh, sure, they appreciated, of course. But it's me, that I felt that the lei-selling business was low class. Because I wanted to be a schoolteacher to begin with. And I worked in the store. That's all dressed so nice and everything else. Now you have to go and that, ooh. And I look at those people, and there was something about it that I saw.

IH: Well, were most of the lei sellers uneducated? Could that have been part of it?

IS: Some. That's part of it.

IH: But it seems to me, from the people I've talked to, the original lei sellers were pretty much uneducated because they come from poor families. But then, they send all their children to private schools. So, they must have seen the value in education, since they didn't have the opportunity to get it.
IS: Yes. You see. Which is true, which is true. So, but I say, sometimes, you just have to step down from your high horse and be natural. I guess that's the way you have to live sometimes. Get down from your high horse. I was a little too proud, I think, at that time. But you can't blame me. Because, funny, I came from a very poor family, but when I went to Kamehameha School I thought I was somebody. And when I graduated from Kamehameha, it made me feel more proud. I said, "Boy, I did establish something that I never thought I would." And I said, to get a diploma from a high school and get it from Kamehameha School, I thought I should be very proud to graduate from that school. And then, having these seven lovely children, I said, "My goodness, God has been so good to me, to award me with all these precious gifts, especially my children." I feel so very proud of them. I am.

IH: Did most of the lei sellers have big families?

IS: I think so. Almar had quite a---oh, she had a big family. She had, I think, about eight or nine, you know.

IH: It seems that it was the initial reason for a lot of the lei sellers to go into business, was to support their family. They had big families.

IS: That's true.

IH: And although the husbands worked, it wasn't enough to support such a big family.

IS: That's right. But you know, in Almar's case, her children helped her. Every one helped, the girls especially. Boy, they were down there every day to help the mother. That's one thing I have to say about the Hawaiians. They talk about the Hawaiians that they (were) lazy. The lei sellers' children were not lazy. They were there every day to help out. And I think, that's the reason why the parents became so prosperous, because of the help of the children. Because if they had to (hire outside help), the money wouldn't be in the family, you know what I mean?

The children, the lei sellers' children, could dress in the best clothes, they could eat the best foods, they could ride the best-looking car, if they wanted to. That's right. That's one thing I can give the lei-selling business credit. They could. My children, when the [lunch] wagon came, they ran to the wagon. They bought anything they wanted. Poor things, they (were) hungry, too, yeah? So, I used to allow them to eat, as long they don't waste. You go ahead and buy. Come back. Shee, they used to wait for the wagon to come. And then when there was time for us to go to anywhere they wanted to go, I said, "You need a new outfit?"

"Yes, Mother, can we?"

And if I thought (it) was all right that they could have, why not? I
used to buy whatever they wanted. I allowed them to buy. And I bought my children cars, my two girls, when they were going to Lā'ie College because they were students there and they had to commute from here to Lā'ie every day. They were boarders there until the father passed on. The father died, so they came back and lived, stay home with me, because I was the only one at home. So, I bought my two girls a car, bought a Mustang. Ho, these girls used to ride in style going to school. Then, these two boys was going to Kamehameha [School], I bought them. They were working during the summer and they needed car to go to their place of work because when they used to come back, all dirty. They used to come back on the bus and they said they didn't want to sit next to another person because they were so dirty. So, I bought them Model-T's or what you call that? You know, those small cars, Ford? I bought each of those boys a car. And they had their own car. Now, see, I was able to buy my children these things. Not to spoil them, no. Because they needed the car. To go to school, they used to use the Ford. To take the two brothers and the sister to go to Kam [Kamehameha] School. They used the car to go to school, okay? That's for good use, that's all right. Now, I was very careful on how I spend my money. Not foolishly, wisely.

IH: Is it still a good business today?

IS: Well, I don't know, you see. But I tell you, as far as I know, as far as my granddaughters and my grandsons who go and sell with us, I can't say we didn't do too well. (It was) pretty good. Although the money doesn't come into our pocket, but we (go to) help out, yeah? We know. 'Cause I know. You have to be in this business to know. People may lie to you and they'll say, "Oh, not so good," but it's just a front. Like I cannot boast about it, but I can say, "It was a pretty good business." At least, we survived. Let's put it that way. It was a pretty good business. But I love the lei business. After I retired, I said, "Chee, why didn't I get into this business long before that." During the war [World War II], maybe I could. But that's thinking to be rich. If you wanted to be rich, you could have, you know. If you were there before the war started or just during the wartime, that's when the lei sellers used to make tremendous business, I tell you.

IH: Oh, yeah. With all those servicemen.

IS: Yeah, and even after the war, we still had servicemen here. That's how we had that bottle club open. They used to come to the bottle club (in Waikiki).

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

IH: So you weren't selling leis during the wartime, then.

IS: No, I wasn't.

IH: Not even down at Lau Yee Chai [Restaurant]...
IS: I was working at the stores. And that store, dress up, dress up, and you can't even make money. Oh, shoots. Ey, the money was going for our dressing up, eat lunch, and pie and coffee, and that was all. So, as I say, I wish I was in the lei business long before that. That's why I say, see, these are the things we have to remember. The lei-selling business is still there, though. It's still a good business to be into. That's why all those lei sellers are down still at the lei stand.

IH: Still there. (Laughs)

IS: Yes.

IH: Yeah, I figure, must be a good business, and they must like it to have kept it in the family for two and three generations.

IS: Oh, yes. You know, Sophie [Ventura] who's been in the business for some time, she has homes. She goes to Las Vegas as many trips as she can make it. You wouldn't go if you didn't have the money, eh? And you have to have the money to gamble. She knows. She knows about the business. She's been in the business a long time. I know. And all those lei sellers know, too. Of course, there's bad days and good days, like any kind of business, it's like that. So we have to expect those things, expect those days to happen. But I must say, can't beat the lei-selling business. You're never broke. You always have money in your pocket. (Chuckles)

IH: That's the main thing, boy. (Laughs)

IS: That's the main thing, boy, I tell you. Go into the flower business, if you are someday, you'd be surprised. There's good profit on it. In the flower business, those flower growers, they're millionaires. That's the truth, I'm telling you. They are. I know so. I know so, because I have been in the lei business. I know how much the flowers are. You can buy so cheap, and you know the profit that you make, you make over 100 percent profit, that's right. People won't tell you that, but that's the truth. These growers today, they're millionaires.

IH: Do the lei sellers still get along good with them? The growers today?

IS: With the lei sellers? Hey, if wasn't for the lei sellers, they wouldn't be rich today. They have to give the . . .

IH: Do the lei sellers have a good relationship with them?

IS: Oh, yes. But I'm going to tell you. These lei sellers, they're not that dumb, you know. And those growers better not get smart with them, I tell you. Because when come to business, they know their own kind of business.

IH: Has Yamada been around for a long time? Yamadas?
IS: Mrs. Yamada has been there for a long time.

IH: Because she seems to be bringing most of the flowers down there.

IS: Well, she's a new grower because she wasn't there when I was there. I retired actually 1972 slowly, you know what I mean? Staying home and go to the business (once in a while). Ellarene was taking over like that, you see. And finally, I retired officially in 1978.

IH: And she wasn't there yet?

IS: No, Mrs. Yamada was coming during that time when I was retiring and Ella was taking the flowers from her, so.

IH: Because I know that she brings most of the flowers.

IS: Oh, yes. Most of the tuberoses come from her and from Helen.

IH: TuberoseS, even gingers, she brings.

IS: Yeah. And even Helen brings in a lot of tuberoses. So, we have good growers. I know Ella has good relationship with the growers. That's one thing with that girl. She never fights with the growers. Some of the lei sellers fight with the (laughs) growers.

IH: Well, you try to get a better price.

IS: Yeah, they try to. But Ella, she has (a) good relationship. They like her. They love that lady. I tell her, I say, "Ella, you (were) sure born with a silver spoon in your mouth, (laughs) in your hand and everything else, I tell you. You're so good in stringing." She's a fast stringer. Have you ever seen her string?

IH: Yeah, I've watched her. She's really fast.

IS: You know, that girl, she's fast.

IH: She's really fast.

IS: Nimble fingers, you know.

IH: She doesn't even look at the needle.

IS: Yeah. Terrific, that girl.

IH: She's talking to you, looking at your face, and she's just going with the needle.

IS: That's what happens when you start when you're young, very young. When I used to bring her to the lei stand, string, you be surprised, that girl. I'm still working on one tuberose package, she's gotten two already. Terrific, that girl. Ho, and she put 'em up in no time. That's why I said, who makes the money? Who help me to make
the money? My children. They string up the leis. Because if I didn't have leis, I cannot make money, you understand. So, they are the ones that make the money. So I always give them (credit).

IH: But you know, I don't see children hanging around the lei stand too much nowadays.

IS: Oh, yeah?

IH: Everybody talk about before . . .

IS: Yeah, before.

IH: . . . their children were always there.

IS: Ey, and those lei seller mothers, we used to be so strict, I tell you. "You sit there and you finish all those flowers!" And they used to obey. Very obedient. That's what you have to have from children, is being obedient. I believe in that. And my children don't say no. I never heard my children say no, and I don't want to. "Oh no, I'm not going to do it." No, my children never used those words. If they do, I give them a hand. I slap them. "Don't ever talk back to your mother." I always taught them that. So they never talk back to me. Was always yes or don't say anything, they just go to it and do it. That's one thing with my children. I love my children, I adore them for what they are. I wish I had more. Sometimes, I wish I had more. Such good children, I wish I had more. I have so much love from these children, too. They're so good to me. They help me, they love me, they come here. Oh, they try and help me. Like this one [Maydell]. See, she knows I need the help. She's coming to help me. Lovely children. And I'd say, my son-in-laws are very lucky to have my (daughters). I think [vice versa]. My daughter folks should be very lucky to have their husbands, too. Their husbands are good to them. That's one thing I can say. Good to them--why, because they have good wives.

IH: Yeah. That's right.

IS: But my mo'opunas, I have to watch them as they grow up, yeah? You know, you expect so much of them, but if they can come through, it's okay. But all in all, that's what it is of the lei business, I'm telling you. I just love the lei business and I'm sorry that I had to give up the business 'cause I'm not young anymore, I cannot compete with those lei sellers at the airport. But I'll try and help my daughter as much as I can at home. I plant little things for her that she can have, like plumerias and the coleus leaves and the asparagus [fern] leaves. And whatever I can plant, I'm going to try and help her. If I do get to Waimānalo, which I hope, I will help her, too. I will plant a lot of flowers for her.

IH: Yeah, you have to have the property to do it, yeah?

IS: Oh, yes. That's why, I told Ellarene. I said, "You know, Ella,
it's too bad that you don't go apply for Hawaiian Home Lands. You should. And if you have a piece of property down there, you can convert it, put into flowers. Don't think only that you have to build a house or because you don't want to live among those kind of people. I beg your pardon. I tell you something. It's those kind of people going to help you out when you need the help." Her husband is very different kind of a man. Nice man, though, good husband to my daughter. But he's not the kind, outdoors kind, to do yardwork or do that kind. I don't think he could work in the fields. You find people that cannot.

IH: Yeah. Every one has their own talents.

IS: So, you have to find or hire somebody to take over, that's all. Plant for you. Never mind, spend the money but you getting the flowers for your lei stand. That's what you have to do as far as you in business. That's what I did down my old (home)--I had plumeria trees all over. You know, I could pick one big basket full with that pink plumerias. Yeah, I had three (or four trees).

IH: Where is this?

IS: Down where I used to live, down at McCully. I had three of the big trees. When those boys used to pick the flowers, they used to be so tired of picking the plumerias. So many. Big baskets like that, full. Chee, imagine, when you had to string (them) up. My girls used to say, "Wow, Mother." But that's all right. That's all they can say. They have to just string 'em up, that's all.

IH: At least you get the flowers free.

IS: Yes, of course. But all in all, I enjoyed the lei-selling business, I have to tell you. I worked with those lei sellers at the airport and we became good friends. Well, sometimes we have our arguments and all that, but that's part of business. But we put it all behind when we think about it again. We always think and start fresh. That's it. I always think of the lei-selling business. Maybe I wouldn't have had this home. You see? It was through that business I was able to live like this. But that's one thing I can say. People cannot say Mrs. Asing or Sims were at the lei stand and she had nothing to show. I have something to show. Isn't that so?

IH: Oh, yeah. Definitely.

IS: That's why I can say, it wasn't for nothing. It was hard but fun. And I enjoy it. I can speak about the lei-selling business that it was a good business. Although we had our hard times, but that's all right. Things have to happen that way, that's all to it. But all in all, I'd say, I have to give the credit to my children, because they helped me in my business . . .

END OF INTERVIEW
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