BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: "Frankie" Kam, 70, retired businessman and politician

"Lots of my friends tell me, 'Frankie, why don't you move into Waikiki or Diamond Head or Manoa?' I say, 'No, no... I was born in Kalihi; my roots are in Kalihi, I stay in Kalihi.' So that's the way I feel."

Frankie Kam, Chinese, was born in Kalihi Kai on June 11, 1914. His father and mother founded Kim Tai Kam Store, a grocery store on the corner of Mokauea and Kaumualii Streets.

Frankie attended Kalihi-Kai Elementary, Kalakaua Intermediate, and St. Louis High Schools, graduating in 1934. In 1937, his father died, and Frankie took over the family-run store, renaming it Frankie's Market. A year later, he started Frankie's Taxi and Service Station.

Long active in community activities, Frankie sponsored a number of athletic teams. In 1946, he was elected to the Territorial House of Representatives and served one term. Four years later, he was elected delegate to the Territorial Constitutional Convention.

Frankie was also instrumental in organizing the Kalihi Businessmen's Association in 1947.

A lifelong Kalihi resident, he closed Frankie's Market in 1981 and leased the land to Southland Corporation (7-Eleven). Frankie and his wife, the former Mildred Seto, have four children. An avid golfer, Frankie now spends much of his time on local golf courses.
WN: This is an interview with Mr. Frankie Kam. Today is December 5, 1983, and we're at his home in Kalihi.

Okay, can you tell when you were born and where you were born?

FK: I was born on June 11, 1914, in Kalihi, at Kaumualii Street and Mokauea Street in a red, two-story building that still stands there today with a grocery store down at the bottom. We were born upstairs.

WN: All of you were born up there?

FK: That's right. Two brothers besides me and three sisters were born in that building there.

WN: Before your father started the store, what was he doing?

FK: My father was working at the rice fields in Waipahu. He was born here [Hawaii] in 1877. His father came from mainland China.

WN: And what about your mother?

FK: My mother was born in China.

WN: And they came from Waipahu to Kalihi to start a store?

FK: Yes.

WN: What was the name of the store?

FK: Kim Tai Kam Store.

WN: And who were the customers of the store?

FK: Well, mostly Portuguese at that time and a few different nationalities like Chinese, Japanese, Hawaiians.
WN: And did you help in the store at all?

FK: Well, as I went to grammar school at Kalihi-Kai School, all our brothers and sisters used to help. Before we went to school, we help at the store in the morning, went to school, and when we came back for lunch, we help them in the store. After we come back from school, we help them in the store again. So gave us good training for our future life.

WN: What kind of things did you do in the store?

FK: Oh, cashier and wait on customers and give change.

WN: Anything else?

FK: Well, it was a good experience when you young and you can learn to give change, and that could help anyone; can get work like that, so that really helped us, my sisters and my brothers.

WN: What did you sell in the store?

FK: Well, mostly groceries, produce, some meats.

WN: And your father, was that the only job he had--in the store?

FK: At that time, yeah. That's the only job he had, he concentrated on trying to make a go with that small grocery store.

WN: What did your mother do in the store?

FK: Well, help. Like any good wife would do, help in the store, sell, cashier, make everything look so nice and clean.

WN: So you practically grew up in that store?

FK: Yeah, we were all born and raised in the grocery store. Even today, my three sisters have a grocery store in Waimanalo called Mel's Market. They were butchers and everything.

WN: You learn to be butchers at your father's store?

FK: No, not too many meats were selling at that time. So they didn't do much at all, until we moved to newer store later years.

WN: Who was the bookkeeper at the store?

FK: Well, I was the bookkeeper at that time myself. That's all I do right now today, just take care of the books.

WN: So, you said you went to Kalihi-Kai School--is it at the same place it is now?
FK: The same place where it is now. They call it Kalihi-Kai Grammar School, maybe up to sixth grade. And then from there, I went to Kalakaua School, seventh to the ninth grade.

WN: What kinds of things do you remember about Kalihi-Kai School? What did you do there?

FK: Well, I remember not too many houses were here at that time, but I remember [near] Kalakaua School was all sugarcane field at that time. And I used to have lots of fun with my friends, pulling cane from the sugarcane cars—you know, as they'd bring the cane back to Kahuku Sugar Mill. So we had a lot of fun pulling the cane out, eating them afterwards.

WN: Did you go fishing at all?

FK: Yeah, we go fishing now and then. There's a river by Gulick Avenue; there's a stream where we used to fish for o'opus, they called it at the time—small fish.

WN: And the kids that you went to school with, were they mostly Portuguese?

FK: Yeah, mostly Portuguese. I have a good friend, John J. Gouveia--lived on Kaumualii Street. He's the one that I used to go out with all the time. Today he's retired, so I see him off and on now.

WN: Someone told me that there were a lot of taro patches in Kalihi?

FK: That, I don't remember.

WN: For example, in this area here, Kalihi Kai. I know right now there's a lot of houses. Before when you were young, what was around here?

FK: I'm trying to look back and I can't seem to find what it was over here. I don't remember. I say it's mostly a few houses. Well, it could be taro patches and what, but I don't recall.

WN: Okay, that's good. So you went to Kalihi-Kai School and Kalakaua Intermediate...

FK: But I remember they had a big fire at the Kalihi-Kai School one year when I was going to that school. They had a big, big fire and maybe somebody that you can interview later on can tell you about the fire. That happened over fifty years ago. The principal that we had at that time was Kaaha--Mr. Kaaha. So maybe anybody that know of him could remember the fire that we had there at that school and it was something very hard to forget.

WN: Was the entire school demolished?

FK: Yes, so they put a new school now where it stands today.
WN: Where was the old one before?

FK: In the same location.

WN: Is Kalakaua School at the same location, too?

FK: Kalakaua School stands where it was sugarcane field. I graduated from Kalakaua School in 1930 and then after that I went to St. Louis College and graduated from St. Louis in 1934. And I wanted to go to continue my education on the Mainland, but I had to take care of the store because my father died three years later in '37. So from then on I had to take care the store and do everything; so that's why I couldn't go to the Mainland to continue my education. But I have no regrets because I felt that I was needed at home to help my mother, so I stayed back.

WN: Were you the one responsible to carry on?

FK: Yeah, I was responsible to do everything.

WN: What about your brothers and sisters?

FK: Well, my brothers and sisters--they help at the store, but I was the only one that stayed back day and night to work at the store. So in other words, I was dedicated with the store life.

WN: Because, you know, maybe Chinese families, Japanese families--they usually want the oldest to . . .

FK: That's right. Yes.

WN: You weren't the oldest?

FK: I was second. I was second oldest.

WN: So how did your responsibilities change from before your father died as compared to after your father died?

FK: Well, I had more responsibilities because I have to look after my brothers and sisters, you know, to see that everything goes smoothly and that everything was all right with all of us.

WN: Who was considered the boss, you or your mother?

FK: Well, I hate to brag, but I was considered the boss and so-called brains of the family. So I had to make all the decisions in whatever I undertake. But I do likewise, you know, ask my brothers and sisters, and my mother if we should do this or that.

WN: Did you change the method of operation at all?

FK: Yeah, I changed it and I made my new market like a supermarket--self-
service and everything. Had a butcher shop where my three sisters helped cutting the meat, bought a half carcass every time. They then cut the meat up in different sections--round steak, tenderloin steak, pork loin, like that, everything. So I didn't do that at all. I was just cashiering and greeting the people and all that--like a PR [public relations] man.

WN: After you look over, soon after about 1938, you started a taxi stand and service station?

FK: Yeah, right where my father first started the store, we opened up a taxi stand and a service station. I had one gasoline pump and I started a taxi stand with about two cars. I drove one myself and then somebody else drove one, so that's how we started in that corner.

WN: How far did you drive? All over?

FK: All over town. Those days where it was very cheap, it would be twenty-five cents one mile, we charge. Was a lot of work, but in those days, was a lot of fun driving cars, you know. Not too many people ride anyway, but at least it kept us busy.

WN: What kind of cars did you have?

FK: Oh, Chevrolets--the cheapest cars we can get hold of anyway.

WN: How did you get fares?

FK: Well, they used to walk up to the cabstand and say, "Hey, take me this," or "Take me to town." So that's how we did our business--people coming up to the stand and ask for a cab. I think at one time, got about five cars, I think. And we always used our gasoline pump to feed our cars. But there was few sales outside, too.

WN: Were there other taxi stands around Kalihi, too, at the time?

FK: I think they had one in upper Kalihi, King Street side. I think they had one over there. They start springing up soon after.

WN: So you were on the road quite a bit, huh?

FK: On the road quite a bit.

WN: How did you have time to watch the store at the same time?

FK: Well, I depend on my other sisters and brothers.

WN: How profitable was taxi driving?

FK: Oh, not too profitable--make a few dollars but wasn't much. But kept us working even though not a money-making business. There is
always maintenance costs.

WN: How about the service station, how profitable was that?

FK: Oh, just as the cab business. You make a few dollars and be satisfied.

WN: Did you also make deliveries, too, from your store?

FK: No, hardly any deliveries at all. They all pick up, because they don't buy too much. Money at that time was very scarce and people not making too much money. Before, a loaf of bread, we charge them five cents a loaf. Everything was cheap and we would charge; sometimes we don't get our money back but that's one of those things. My father at that time dealt mostly on credit, trusting the people. Many people later years owe us money, but we couldn't collect from them, we'd just write it off.

WN: Did a lot of people not pay?

FK: Quite a few. That's why people kid us in those days, "Mr. Kam, when the charge book is all filled up, throw it away." (Laughs) Just like that--just something in a joking manner, you know. But we took it like a grain of salt. They want to pay, all right. They don't pay, we cannot do anything.

WN: How often did you bill the customer?

FK: Well, when a customer comes into the store, we say, "You owe so much." We don't send it out at all; we don't send any bills out to their house. When they come to the store, "Mr. Cabral, I see you owe me maybe ten dollars." And we leave it up to them if you want to pay or not.

WN: And what if they don't pay, you still give them groceries?

FK: Tell 'em, "No, we don't charge you anymore. You've gotta pay your bill first."

WN: So when you took over after your father died, did you stop this credit thing?

FK: I stopped it, but I have a few good customers that I know. I let them keep on charging. But once they don't pay, I don't charge them anymore. So mine was mostly cash and carry; I think about 90 percent was all cash and carry, maybe 10 percent was charge.

WN: So, that's a big difference, yeah, compared to your father?

FK: Yeah, a big difference. Right, big difference.

WN: Was cash and carry more profitable for you?
FK: Very much so, very much so. At least we know we're making money.

WN: So, in 1942, you opened Frankie's Market, the one on the corner of . . .

FK: Dillingham and Mokauea Street. I supposed to open on December the seventh, 1941. I was ready to open up and at that time there was the outbreak of World War II, and people were driving all around to different places. Somebody was going to Pearl Harbor to report for work that morning and just slam into my glass window on Dillingham Boulevard. So that delayed me for about three or four weeks and I didn't open until 1942.

WN: You mean, it's just coincidence that you were gonna open on December 7?

FK: That's right, just coincidence that I was going to open on December 7.

WN: That was a Sunday, right?

FK: That was a Sunday, and everybody was called to report to duty or whatnot and then somebody hit me, see. Did a big damage on my front window.

WN: Your new front window?

FK: My new---everything was all new.

WN: So what happened to the old store after you opened the new one?

FK: Well, we just leased the property from the people that owned the property at that time. So we have to move out. The present bakery that is here now, De Lite Bakery, the owner bought that property from them. So we stayed at that former location for about twenty years. We tried to buy it, but they wouldn't sell it at that time. Then my father bought this corner property and then that's where I put up Frankie's Market.

WN: You owned the property?

FK: We owned the property in fee.

WN: Who owned the property? Do you know who you bought the property from?

FK: Yeah, from Portuguese people, named Mr. Swift. So long time ago.

WN: So what else do you remember about December 7, 1941?

FK: Oh, I heard all the guns, boom-boom sounds and all. And looking up in the air, we could see the planes flying near. We had a grocery
store as I said, where the [De Lite] bakery has the warehouse now. That store was open, see, for business. We were to move down to this present store. So when looking back, I remember that we still had that store open on the corner; and on that same day, Sunday, December 7, while we were ready to open this store here . . .

WN: After you heard about the attack, did you remain open, down there [i.e., FK's old store]?

FK: No, we closed everything. Everything was closed and we had orders that all the lights would be closed during the night. Blackout, they call it. So we all closed up and went home and stayed home; just wait. When night came, the whole islands were all blacked out, just listening to the radio.

WN: A lot of Kalihi people worked for the federal government, huh?

FK: Yeah, many people worked for [Pearl Harbor] navy yard and Fort Shafter. All defense work.

WN: When you opened this store here, where did you folks live?

FK: Right in the back of the store. We had a house in the back of the store.

WN: You mean, you built the house at the same time that you built the store?

FK: Yeah, same time.

WN: Okay, and prior to the war, you organized a baseball team?

FK: Yeah, we had some boys who were not doing hardly anything at all, just hanging around. So I got the idea of, well, let's sponsor a baseball team for the boys in this area. So that's what we did. Get all the boys together, "Okay, I'll sponsor you boys. I'll buy everything for you boys. Baseball caps, shirts, everything, and I'll sponsor you boys." We had about maybe twenty boys or so. So I felt that I should keep these boys busy, you know--keep them doing something. So that's why since that time on, I've been actively sponsoring teams. I used to sponsor the bowling team, baseball team, football teams, different kinds of athletic teams.

WN: What was the name of the baseball team--the first one?

FK: We called it "Frankie's Cab Boys."

WN: Cab Boys?

FK: Cab, C-A-B, Cab. Cab boys, and then "Frankie's Bowling Team." They always call me "Frankie, Frankie," see? Instead of calling me "Frank," they called me "Frankie." So, "Frankie's Market."
After that, I went into golfing, so I got addicted to golfing. My good friend "Dyke" Izumi that owned Dyke's Tavern below Nimitz Highway—he had a tavern and a grocery store. So he was playing golf at that time, so he got me interested. He sold me his first set. I remember it was a Lawson Little golf set. So once I got hold of the game, I liked it very much. So that's just all I did from that time on today—I just play golf. I don't do anything else.

WN: You worked hard for that set.

FK: Well, my only relaxation is playing golf. I like it because I try to walk; I try not to ride.

WN: You did a lot of community things such as the baseball team, and I know that during 1944, there was a big plane crash in this area. How or in what way did you help out?

FK: Well, you know where I'm talking now? It's where it happened right here, where we're sitting down now in my parlor here. And these people that live here [i.e., the neighborhood], the whole—across the street was all demolished, burned to the ground. Only my store any my house was left alone. The good Lord spared me and my family and my business. So from that day on, I always thank the good Lord every day for my success in whatever I do—business, politics or sports. I thank the good Lord from that day on for sparing me and my family. There was all these people that when the plane crashed, their houses were all demolished and about thirteen people got killed in that crash near here.

WN: What happened?

FK: Well, two B-25 planes collided right in midair, right above here and just engulfed the whole area. There were fires that you've never seen before. So big, just everything went up in flames. Even my good friend Kam Fong Chun. I guess most people remember him in "Hawaii 5-0." Why, his wife and child died in this crash here—right across the street from where we're talking now. So, many of my friends and neighbors—they come to the store (all the time)—all got killed; thirteen of them. So, that is one tragedy I will never forget. Every time when we sleeping, hear the planes going over, it still brings back memories to me—that rumbling noise and all that.

WN: You were telling me that you started some kind of a fund?

FK: Well, yeah. I was so fortunate and happy that I put about over a hundred empty gallons—I took them to all the different businesses in Kalihi for donations for the families of the people that died, and the houses that got demolished. And we collected about $3,000 by people dropping in pennies and nickels and dimes in the different gallons that I put up in the different businesses—about a hundred businesses. We collected together and I had a committee with the Reverend and some good friends in the community. We distribute that
money to all the different people that were unfortunate.

WN: How much did you collect?

FK: About $3,000. So that's why from that day on, I always think of the unfortunate people that got killed in this crash here. I always try to do something for the other unfortunate if possible.

WN: Soon after that you started a newspaper column?

FK: Oh, yeah. In 1947 I started a gossip column, they call it a neighborhood column. It came out once a week or so in the newspaper. I called it "Frankie Kam Says What's Cooking in Kalihi." I just talk about people who got married, and how many children they got, what are their names, their ages, the former name of the wife, and where they work. So something neighborly, in this area. I talk about editorials, you know, "Donate to this or help keep Kalihi clean," or something like that. And been going for years and I get lots of people commenting on that. They say, "Frankie, you're the only guy do a thing like this in all the islands."

I've even had editorials written about it, that "Frankie's doing this and that." When I put my advertisements in the newspaper, I don't advertise prices. I just put my picture of the store down on the bottom: Frankie's Market. And then above, I have an editorial, "Frankie Kam Says What's Cooking in Kalihi," and I put an ad to help the March of Dimes or help the Red Cross and then below, start talking about the families and their children. So people come up to me and say, "Frankie, I saw my children's names in the paper, their birthday." And they're very happy. I thought I'd make some people happy anyway.

WN: What newspaper was it in?

FK: Well, came out in both papers, you know. Once a week or once a month, I put it in the Advertiser and the Star-Bulletin--I'd alternate it so.

WN: What gave you the idea to start a column?

FK: I don't know. I guess the good Lord above said, "Frankie, do something." I always thank the good Lord for everything that I am successful in. The failures, I blame myself.

I'm going to tell you about this guy Joe Louis [former world heavyweight boxing champion] now. See, 1946 was my first post-war tour. The war ended in 1945 so Loui Leong Hop, he was a former sport editor for the Honolulu Star-Bulletin. So he made a tour to go to New York and see Joe Louis fight with Billy Conn, the second fight, and so I went on this tour. We took three months and we saw thirty-six states. We traveled mostly on Greyhound buses. Joe Louis fought at Yankee Stadium and he knocked out Billy Conn. But
before that, we went to see those two boys at their own dressing room. We saw Billy Conn and we saw Joe Louis. We met them, we took pictures with them, I shook hands with Billy Conn and Joe Louis. And then we all came back and then twenty-five years later, I played with Joe Louis in the Hawaiian Open Pro-Am Tournament. That was 1971 and I can never forget.

You know, to play with anybody, they had a drawing, you see, before the tournament. A couple of nights before, we had the tournament drawing, who was going to play with who. So just happen, the girl picked my name out and put it right next to Joe Louis'. I told myself, "Gee, the good Lord really, really, really want me to play with Joe Louis."

WN: What kind of man was Joe Louis?

FK: Oh, he's a wonderful man. Gee, I really liked him a lot. So when he died I was shocked and disappointed that a good man like that. . . . Well, Joe Louis had his hard life, too, being world champion for thirteen years--the longest--and I respected him very much. I was very happy to have known and met him. I will never forget Joe Louis. That's why that year I invited Joe Louis to play in our Hole in One Tournament in Hawaii. He accepted and I gave him a membership card to be a member. He accepted it. He said, "Frankie, I'll be down to play in your tournament," that same year, June 11. But one week before the tournament, he wrote to me that he couldn't make it. So the wife wrote me a nice letter saying that they couldn't make it. I invited his wife and his son--three of them--down to be my guests.

WN: June 11--that's your birthday, isn't it?

FK: That's my birthday, yeah. That's when we hold the Hole in One Tournament every year at the Pali Golf Course--on my birthday. This year made twenty-six years already that we held it at the Pali Golf Course. No one yet made a hole in one.

WN: You know, about '46, you ran for election to the [Territorial] House of Representatives and you won. What made you decide to run for office?

FK: Well, I thought I would try to do something good for our Kalihi area. So I felt that, well, I'll give it a try anyway, see how I make out. So the people of Kalihi respond very highly for me and elected me to a public office. First time I ran and I got elected. I wasn't in a union at that time, but there was a few of my friends that were in the union and they had strong union support. I was nobody, no union support, nothing. And I got elected almost with the highest vote. I was very much surprised that the people elected me in Kalihi to be their representative. So I got elected in 1946 and then I got married in 1947, so I didn't care to run anymore. I felt that, well, I have to take care of my wife. So funny thing, how I met my wife. I went to the U.H. [University of Hawaii] to
WN: You were talking about how you met your wife.

FK: Well, after I got elected, they had a course at U.H. for something like improving your speech. So I told myself, gee, I may as well go ahead and help myself. So I joined that class. We had about twenty or thirty in that class taking speech. And then, at that time, there was a girl there that I was kind of interested in. I didn't know her and she didn't know me at all. About two or three classes gone by and one night I was brave enough. I ask her, "Could I take you home tonight?"

"Oh, okay."

So I took her home. She lived up in Kaimuki area and I introduced myself to her, she introduced herself to me, and then I found out that she is a schoolteacher at Kalakaua School, in speech. So she was trying to improve her speech, too. And from that night on, I kept on taking her home every night till the class ended. I told her I had a market on Kalihi and I was elected a representative from the fifth district. And that's how I met her and talked to her and got acquainted with her. And then we got married on November 30, 1947. So November 30 this year--just passed--that's our thirty-sixth anniversary.

WN: That's a few days ago.

FK: Yes, just a few days ago. So we have three boys and a girl now. My oldest son is thirty-four years old, he is a graduate of Punahou School and Boston University. Came back, he plays music. He plays guitar and he sings at the restaurant on University Avenue. McGillycuddy Restaurant, it's like a nightclub restaurant.

WN: Moose McGillycuddy's?

FK: Yeah, Moose McGillycuddy's, you know that, you've heard of that name. He plays for them. And then my second son graduated from Punahou School, Stanford, UCLA [University of California at Los Angeles]. He's an attorney now. At present, he's a prosecutor with [Charles] Marsland. And my youngest son is twenty-nine. My attorney son is thirty-two years old, and my number three son is in New York. He works for the Morgan Guarantee Investment Company. He is single, but these two boys, Michael and Frankie, are married. And my youngest girl is a graduate of Punahou School and Boston University. She's still single yet, but she works for and helps out at the drive-in at Waimanalo. She's really a big help, but at present she's on vacation for two weeks in New York City, staying with my son there.

WN: So when you got married, that was the reason why you didn't continue
in politics?

FK: Yeah, that's why I didn't care to run for politics. That was in 1947 when I got married. So I laid off two years because the next election was '48, you see. I got elected '46, and then every two years there is an election. I didn't care to run at that time [1948], so when 1950 came and there was a Con-Con--they call it a Constitutional Convention, delegate to the convention--I told myself I better run, too, see if I can get in. So I run for the Con-Con and I got elected with the highest vote in this area. So in 1950, a group of us went to Washington D.C. to testify before Congress for statehood. Then in 1959 we got statehood in Hawaii.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: When you ran first for House of Representatives in 1946, what party were you a member of?

FK: The Democratic party. They call it "the poor man's party."

WN: Who did you defeat?

FK: We had some good men in office at that time. Charlie Kauhane and Mitsuyuki Kido were Democrats with me. So we got three of the Democrats in and I believe Hiram Fong got in and James Gilliland got in and I think it was Bina Mossman. Three Republicans and three Democrats got in, so was a tough race and I was surprised that I got in so easily. But I guess maybe the people didn't forget me, you know, on account of the airplane crash. They felt that Frankie was a good man, so they said, "Let's give Frankie a chance anyway."

WN: You said Democrats were the poor man's party?

FK: Poor man's party.

WN: Was Kalihi mostly Democratic?

FK: Mostly Democratic.

WN: Why was that?

FK: Well, everybody got the notion that the Republican party was the rich people party and that the poor man's party was the Democratic party. And so you see, these poor people all vote for whoever is running as a Democrat. If he's the best man, they vote for him. Maybe like Hiram Fong--he's a Republican, but he's a good man. So they still vote for him, see? That's one thing with politics. Some people like you, some people don't. So that's why after the Con-
Con, I did not care to run anymore after that. I felt that I'd be too busy with my businesses. At that time, I had a drive-in at Waimanalo.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: So, while you were in elective office, who took care of the store?
FK: My sisters and my brothers.
WN: Your wife, too?
FK: My wife too, right.
WN: And in '49, your mother died?
FK: My mother died.
WN: Did that change the way you ran your store at all?
FK: No, no. Didn't change at all. We kept up the modern way of running, something like a supermarket.
WN: Okay. In 1947, you helped start the Kalihi Businessmen's Association. What made you do that?
FK: Well, I wanted to get all these business people together, talk about Kalihi, improve Kalihi. So I got hold of a few of the friends that I knew; like "Dyke" Izumi, Tad Iwanuma and a few others. We had maybe about a half dozen to start off with. So I felt, let's go ahead and do something for Kalihi. So that's how I got hold of these few people that had businesses out here already. I got them together and said, "Hey, I'm going to start a Kalihi Business Association, get all you guys do something for Kalihi." So we started with one dozen members or so--now I hear that the present Kalihi Business Association has close to 150 members now.

WN: What were your original goals for starting the Businessmen's Association?
FK: Improve the Kalihi area. That was my big goal--to get the store people together in a friendly way and to help improve the Kalihi area. We were fighting at that time to get a bank in Kalihi, get the Kalihi tunnel, and a lot of other things that we thought of later on. So now, you see, we got a lot of banks here. The Kalihi tunnel is all there already. So we are very happy that we did something.

WN: Besides "Dyke" Izumi and Tad Iwanuma, who else was involved in the starting of the business association?
FK: Well, we had Ted Yap up on upper Kalihi Valley. He had a business
there called "Ted's Market," and Beatrice Chong. She and her husband had Chong's Market on Middle Street, and then they had Henry Omine from Libby's Service Station. Oh, after that we picked up a lot of new members.

WN: What did you think of Kalihi as a place to have a business?

FK: Oh, I like it. I was born and raised in the business--of Kalihi. I like it very much and I hate to get out of it. That's why I don't want to move from Kalihi. I want to live here, even though I don't have any business in Kalihi but I have my house here that I am staying now. People ask, "Why don't you move out to Diamond Head or Manoa like that, Frankie?"

I say, "No, I was born and raised my whole life. I like this house very much." It is accessible to the downtown area and all different places. I'm right on Dillingham Boulevard and now with cars, airplanes and whatnot, you can go anywhere without any trouble at all. Life is more simple now, and I like the Kalihi area very much. But you cannot stop progress. You see, they're building on every corner. They're building below on Dillingham; there is all industrial centers now, zoned for industrial. So I don't know what Kalihi will look like five or ten years from now. People are selling their houses at high prices now. So on Dillingham Boulevard, used to be three or five dollars a foot; not it's thirty, forty dollars a foot now on this boulevard. Things have changed.

WN: How else has Kalihi changed? How about the people?

FK: Well, in this area where we are living now, most of the people in my younger days have all moved out and sold their houses and moved out to Kailua, Kaimuki. . . . And as I see it now, we have mostly Filipino people living here now. So I guess they like it here, too, and they're all moving out here. I think over 75 percent is mostly all Filipinos in this area.

WN: Are these recent immigrants?

FK: Mostly recent immigrants.

WN: Why is it that a lot of people moved out of Kalihi?

FK: Well, I guess they want a change. They feel that there is better places to live than Kalihi. But for me, I don't feel that way.

WN: And when did you close Frankie's Market?


WN: So you still own the land that 7-Eleven sits on?
FK: Yeah, we still own the land. We just lease it to them for about twenty years. After that, it's renegotiable for a new lease for them if they want it.

WN: Why did you close the store?

FK: Well, I felt it was a lot of work with all those big supermarkets coming up now. These mama-san and papa-san store--hard for them to exist. My wife and I felt that we should lease it out to them [7-Eleven] at a reasonable price, anyway. So saved us a lot of time and money to try to open up and keep up a grocery store.

WN: Why do you feel that mama-san and papa-san stores couldn't exist?

FK: Well, you look at all the stores now, all have gone out already. They hardly can make a go of it, unless they want to eat food at cost price. That's the way we did it before now, like all the Chun Hoon and the C.Q. Yee Hop family. All buy food at cost price and eat and feed their family. So that's the advantage that we have while you have a grocery store. You can buy your food at cost price and feed your family. That was the reason why that many people opened up grocery stores.

WN: Oh, it wasn't to make money?

FK: Well, to make money and feed your family at the same time, at cost.

WN: But now, not too many people do that?

FK: Now, not too many people do that because they feel that competition is too keen now with all the big supermarkets coming up. You can buy cheaper at the supermarket than buying at your wholesale company.

WN: If Frankie's Market was still operating today, do you think you would still be making good money?

FK: No, I don't think we'd ever make money, open up a market today. I'm really happy and glad that we got out of it. I have no regrets getting out of the grocery business.

WN: Did you want any of your sons and daughter to take over at all?

FK: No, I don't like any of my children to take over the grocery business. Maybe a drive-in business, I would like them to take over. It's a very small business, you know--just hamburgers and hot dogs and whatnot.

WN: In Waimanalo now?

FK: Yeah.

WN: When did that start?
FK: Nineteen fifty-three [1953]. I would like one of my children to take over the drive-in now. We hate to give it up because my wife and I just working too hard. That's why we don't have a chance to go away for a vacation, one week or two weeks. We have a hard time to go away. So we would very much like to have one of our children take over and continue the business.

WN: So hamburgers like that, is good?

FK: Well, it's small inventory, see? Everything is small and you don't have to stock up too much. Like a grocery store, you have to get warehouses to stock up everything. You get thousands and thousands of dollars in inventory. Like a drive-in business, you buy one week supply every time, that's all you need. Less money invested and that's profitable. For a family business, drive-in, you can make money.

WN: Why did you open on in Waimanalo?

FK: Well, at that time, prices were very cheap. So that's why I bought it.

WN: You own the land there, too?

FK: I own the land in fee. In my father's time in Kalihi, you could have bought all of this whole block for, I think, dollar a foot or so, they were selling it at that time. It was very, very cheap. But in those days, money was scarce--hard to get money. But now, look at the prices. As I told you, on Dillingham Boulevard, I hear it is thirty, forty dollars a foot now. You go on down below Nimitz industrial center--they selling seventy-five dollars a foot. That's the difference. Like everything else, those old days were very cheap but no money. I told my wife that I only wish my father had money at that time; then he would own all this. Sometime, you buy too much land you get land rich but money poor. Some people get too much money, but they cannot buy now, it's too high.

WN: So who owns a lot of the land today in Kalihi?

FK: Well, all individuals are buying their own land now. Small lots like this; 5,000 square feet sell for $100,000 or more and people buying now. There is no big landowner in Kalihi--all individual owners.

WN: Bishop Estate owns some in Kalihi.

FK: Not around here. This is all individual owners. From King Street down to Nimitz, all individual owners.

WN: So you lived in Kalihi all your life?

FK: All my life in Kalihi; born and raised in Kalihi.
WN: You know, people like to say they're from Kalihi because they sort of moved up...

FK: Yeah, they move up, like many of my friends I see in the newspaper. They all say, "I come from Kalihi," right? "Born and raised in Kalihi." I hate to say so, but I'm the true blue Kalihi, they call it. Born and raised in Kalihi, still in Kalihi. Lots of my friends tell me, "Frankie, why don't you move into Waikiki or Diamond Head or Manoa?"

I say, "No, no."

They tell me, "Hey, the other people, they made their money, they move out Diamond Head and whatnot, why don't you do that, Frankie?"

I say, "No, no, I was born in Kalihi; my roots are in Kalihi, I stay in Kalihi." So that's the way I feel.

WN: What makes Kalihi unique or different from other districts?

FK: I don't know. Everybody has their own way of thinking or why they want to live in certain areas all their life and don't move out. The way I feel, I don't know. This area to me is a nice area for me and all my friends that were neighbors of mine--they all moved out. So they feel the other grass is greener than this grass in Kalihi. Like anything else, you know, sometime they don't look in their own backyard--they don't see it's better than the other side. As the saying goes, you can see the forest, but you don't know what's in it. So I have no regrets staying in Kalihi. Maybe my children don't want to stay here but as long as I'm living, I like to live here.

WN: What do you think are the problems that are facing Kalihi today?

FK: I don't see that there is much problems in Kalihi at all because some other areas have more problems than Kalihi. But they feel because we have the prison right next door to us, they figure that's what make it look bad. Because we have Oahu Prison right next door to us, but I don't feel that way because some other districts have a worse reputation than Kalihi. But I feel that Kalihi has a good reputation.

WN: Well, Mr. Kam, you've been a businessman, you've also been very active in the community, you've done a lot of things for the community of Kalihi. As you look back, would you have done anything differently?

FK: I don't think so. I would do the same thing as I did. Like a lot of people ask you, "Would you go back and do the same thing?" Some people say no, some people say yes, but for me, I would say that I'd live the same life over again if I had to live it over again.
WN: Well, before I turn off the tape, you have any last things that you want to say about your life?

FK: Well, I feel that I have lived a active life. Today, I am sixty-nine years old; I feel like thirty-nine. I have my golf game every day. It's the only bad habit I've got. My wife just kid me all the time, "Gee, you've got nothing to do, only play golf." I go to the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] afterwards and go swim and exercise. I'm a senior citizen now. And I feel that I had a useful life, a good life, and I feel that I did quite a bit for my sixty-nine years and I have no regrets. I feel that all these young people coming up today--do the same thing. Help the communities where they live and born, if possible.

As the saying goes, "What does a man gain if he gains the whole world and then loses his soul?" But the other way I look at it, "What does a man gain if he gains all the world and whatever he wants in the world, and loses his health?" See, a lot of people work so hard to get wealth and their health is not good, you see. So the main thing in our life: be healthy and have a healthy body and your wealth can be gained. But if a person has wealth and health together, he's the greatest. So that's the way I feel and whatever I have in my life, I thank the good Lord above for watching me and my family throughout our lifetime. So I want to give thanks--we give thanks every day to the good Lord, for giving me a wonderful life on this earth. And I want to thank you for your time, in listening to my story on my life.

WN: Okay, thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW
KALIHI: Place of Transition

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