"All the boys wanted to be cowboy, you know. I mean, we were all looking forward to be cowboy. But after we grow up and things closed, Dad them had a lot of friends that [still] had horses. So, that wen bring back the life of cowboy for us young guys. But it was only horses. No cattle, no nothing. But as you grew up older, you find ranch life is pretty rough. In the old days, you know, it's rough job because, like I said, you don't see Dad in the morning. You don't see Dad in the evening. He used to work like, sometimes, six, seven days a week."

Clarence Richardson, youngest of Ernest and Rebecca Richardson's seven children, was born June 28, 1939 in his parents' home in Kō'ele. His boyhood was spent riding horses and playing in and around ranch manager Ernest Vredenburg's home. Only twelve when the ranch closed down, Sonny's recollections are of the area in decline.

After graduating from Lāna'i High and Elementary School in 1958, Sonny joined the army and served until 1962. He then moved to O'ahu and worked as a truck driver for Kam's Express, Inc. until 1988.

At the time of the interview, Sonny had just moved back to Lāna'i and was working for Lāna'i Company, Inc.
MM: This is Clarence "Sonny" Richardson on Sunday, October 30, 1988 at Kō'ele, Lāna'i.

(Chuckles) Okay, brada, let's start with your full name.

CR: Well, my full name is Clarence Elsworth Lehua Richardson.

MM: Okay, and when were you born?

CR: Nineteen thirty-nine, June 28.

MM: And where were you born?

CR: In Kō'ele. Underneath the banyan tree.

MM: Were you born at home or in the hospital? [CR was born inside the Richardson home in Kō'ele.]

CR: And that day was rainy, shower, so they call me Lehua, in Hawaiian mean "light shower." That's why I had the name Lehua.

MM: 'Cause was raining?

CR: Was raining. She was a nurse.

MM: She delivered?

CR: Well, she was the one cut my piko and did everything. She was a retired nurse. And she was Ernest Vredenberg's wife, the ranch boss for Kō'ele ranch. So she did the nursing for grandma.

MM: So, had midwife or a doctor?

CR: Nurse, just nurse.

MM: Just her?
CR: Just her. Nobody else.

RR (Rebecca Richardson, CR's mother): Never know he was coming.

MM: Oh, so she delivered?

RR: No, but when she come, it's out . . .

CR: I was out already.

RR: . . . was already too late. [Nurse] came too late.

MM: Mm hmm. Okay. And then your parents' names.

CR: Well, they called me "Sonny Boy."

MM: No, but your father's and mother's names?

CR: Oh, my father and mother's name. Mr. Ernest Richardson and Mrs. Rebecca Richardson.

MM: What's your earliest memories of the ranch as a child?

CR: Well, at that time, when I was growing up, because Mrs. Vredenberg did the job of bringing me, so just like I was a spoiled brat, and the husband and her didn't have any children. And I used to get little more everything from there. So I can go ride horse, walk around the stable, go in their big house and play. And everything, like I said, you need, I got it.

MM: But were you the only ranch kid that could do that? (Chuckles)

CR: Yes, I was the only one could do that. And then when they---I think it was grandsons and nephews used to come in summertime. And I used to go there and play with them. I was real close to that side family.

MM: So, do you remember what that house looked like?

CR: Well, it's hard to describe because it's so big. You know, they had rooms, so many different kinds of rooms, like dining room, bedrooms and study rooms, and office inside the same place, and they had for the maid, you know. So. It was a beautiful home, though, when I saw it, when I was growing up.

MM: I know it was an old house. Was it fixed up real good?

CR: Oh, it was well taken care because they had a lot of janitors cleaning the yard, cleaning the walls, the windows, so. That house will never look dirty, outside and inside. And she used to like a lot of plants, a lot of fruits, plants, too, also. And we used to go in the garden and take all the fruits and eat it or take it and give it to my friends.
MM: So they had a vegetable garden?

CR: They had vegetables, they had fruits garden, like strawberries, macadamia nut, bananas, rose apple, and one more other plant they call pomegran or something like that.

MM: Pomegranate.

CR: Pomegranate. Yeah, used to have all that inside their yard.

MM: And was there fruit trees like that in the cowboys' yards or anything?

CR: No, I think that was the only place, because they had the gardeners taking care of the place. And well, they used to give. I know they used to give Dad them vegetables. The garden guys who take care of the garden used to bring vegetables up the house because, you know, they grow so much. Whoever was close friends to them, they used to give it away. Not wasting the vegetables or whatever in there.

MM: So, compared to your house, how much bigger was their house?

CR: Oh, their house was about ten times bigger than our house. Our house was only a two-bedroom house. And fit all our family, three of us. Sister Mary Ellen Richardson. I mean, Mrs. Mary Ellen Nakoa, now. And Mrs. Charlotte Holsombock and myself. Then when Mom start raising all their hanai children, I think it was still enough for all of us.

MM: So, you had the run of the ranch when you was small?

CR: Yeah, I had very good opportunity of running around down to the stables and see what they're doing. My dad used to scold me a lot.

MM: For hanging around or . . .

CR: Yeah, for hanging around there, but because Mr. Ernest Vredenberg, the boss, I was just like a pet, he don't mind my being around there.

So, he would tell Dad, "Well, put the boy on that horse. Let him ride."

So I get the chance to ride all the time.

MM: How about all the other boys that grew up with you? Did you folks go out and help your fathers?

CR: Most of us, we really helped our dads because the kind life that we had is [for him] to go to work early in the morning, we don't see him. And when they come home, it's late in the night, we don't see our dad or friends like that. So what we do, we do all the chores, so . . .
MM: What kind of chores did you have...?

CR: Oh, like we had animals like chicken, dogs, rabbits, ducks and a few gardens, here and there in the yard. So when we get time with them, we spend. But our life wasn't as hard as their [parents'] life. They gave us a pretty good life of living. We didn't have like today, the children have all their things on platter. We used to work for what we need. But like I said, I was a little spoiled because the ranch boss was close to me and to my family.

MM: Let's talk about a typical day when you were small. What kind of schedule did you have?

CR: Well...

MM: What time would you get up?

CR: Well, we used to get up good and early, about seven o'clock. Do the chores around the house.

MM: What kind of chores?

CR: Clean yard, feed the animals.

MM: And then what time did you used to leave for school?

CR: School started 7:30, eight o'clock. So we leave home fifteen minute, because it only take about five minutes to go to school, and they used to have bus come pick us up, so certain times the bus leave. Already we did our chores in the morning. Then we come home, put our studies away, go out and play for two hours, then do our chores again. It's just like a routine that we learn how to work.

MM: So, after school, what did you used to do?

CR: Well, we were very fortunate because we had a playground. We had a clubhouse where we had practically everything that a young man or a young girl can learn about. We had golfing. We had tennis. We had basketball. We had Ping-Pong tables. We had pool tables. We had a lot of games that today you don't see on the grounds with children because it's not been carried on. Today, you got to buy their toys, plastic toys. So it cost money. But us, we didn't have money those days.

MM: Who provided all the games that you used to play?

CR: Well, in those days, it was just like a community. For each camp, they had something. You know, like, this was the Ranch Camp, then the ranch people have their own activities. You know, they mingle around together. Then in the city, they have Federation Camp, they have Down Camp and Up Camp. All kinds. All different kind. And they had their own facility-like to play in. Whatever they do. And
they had the [Kaumalapau] Harbor [community]. They had their own facility. So, as we growing up, as a young boy, we had a lot of games and we challenged all these guys.

MM: The different camps?

CR: Yeah, different camps. And that's how we get friends. That's how we came better and better. When we went school, together most of them is classmate of mine, so, we pretty good, we know each other. So when we starting to play in high school games, we just like one whole family, already. You know. It's nobody that you came from outside island or anything else. This is from the backyard, from the ranch, from the city, from the harbor.

MM: So, growing up with all the kids in the neighborhood, what kind of--besides having all of these athletic games and the pool tables and stuff, did you folks play outside, I mean, other things?

CR: Well, you see, we was very fortunate because our dad teach us hunting, fishing, you know, outdoor life. Then most of us, our dads train a lot of horses so they own a lot of horses, so we get a chance to ride their horses. So, we always look forward for after work because when they come back, that's the only chance we can jump on their horse. But like I said, I was the only spoiled one that I can go ride because Mr. Vredenberg, he was just like a godfather to me. So he used to take me around a lot.

MM: What kind of other games did you guys used to play outside?

CR: Well...

MM: Was it only the boys play together and only the girls or they all play together and...

CR: Well, we always match up the team with the girls. We never leave the girls out. We always look like everybody is equal. We play basketball together. We play football together, touch game. Volleyball all together. So, some of them came all-stars on the game of basketball, volleyball, softball, baseball. But, like I said, very close, and it's just like a big family. So it's easier for play with. You know, nobody get mad with each other. If you lose, you lose. You win, you going be champion all the way. So that's how we grew up together. We learn how for work with one another.

MM: What was school like?

CR: Well, it's a everyday thing that you have to go to school, right? And, you meet different people, different style. And our days we had, you know, Filipinos, Japanese, Hawaiians, all mix, all kind nationality. So you pick up a little language here and there. Pidgin language, right? So, school was just like you learn things to work with a lot of people, you know. Not with only your friends
home here. I think my friends home here, I think it's only about a
dozens. And they used to call us like the dirty dozen. I mean,
well, less than a dozen boys. But, we had enough to get ourselves
through school and some of them reach the age of fifteen [when they
moved from the area]. Because the ranch closed in 1951, I think,
and all their parents move out of Ko'ele. Some went to Honolulu,
some went to Big Island. Some went back Moloka'i. So, in that time
of the year, was very quiet up this side. Only had few of us left
already.

MM: What did you feel when the ranch was closing. How did you take it
when you saw it closing up?

CR: Well, it was just like taking away your future. [If] you wanted to
be one rancher. You like . . .

MM: All the boys wanted to be cowboys?

CR: All the boys wanted to be cowboy, you know. I mean, we were all
looking forward to be cowboy. But after we grow up and things
closed, Dad them had a lot of friends that [still] had horses. So,
just like we had a club of horses. So, that wen bring back the life
of cowboy for us young guys. But it was only horses. No cattle, no
nothing. But as you grew up older, you find ranch life is pretty
rough. In the old days, you know, it's rough job because, like I
said, you don't see Dad in the morning. You don't see Dad in the
evening. He used to work like, sometimes, six, seven days a week.

MM: After the ranch close up, you still going to school here. So, the
main thing, it just got quieter, huh? Everybody moved away?

CR: Yeah, it get quieter. So, it left just a few of us, I think only
about four or five. Out of the dirty dozen that was growing up the
same age with us. We were just about, say maybe, two or three
years older, you know, as we were growing up, but that's all that's
left of us already.

MM: Did you do a lot of extra stuff in school? I mean, different sports
and clubs . . .

CR: Yeah, with clubs and sports, I was so active in it.

MM: What kind of clubs were you in?

CR: Well, we was in the [Boy] Scouts. We was in FFA [Future Farmers of
America]. And, you know, we used to do all kind of things. And I
used to learn a lot because my dad taught me, taught us a lot how to
do it. Future farming. Like plants, sow, cattles, pigs, chicken.
In our Future Farmers of America, we used to, every year, have kalua
pig, so, this is one theory that a young boy wanted to learn how to
cook it, what to use, and I think I learned quite a bit from my dad.
[I] came next to the best.
(Laughter)

MM: For [cooking] kālua pig you were [the best] (chuckles).

CR: Yeah, for kālua pig, for his horse works, his hunting [I took after my father].

MM: After you graduated, what did you do?

CR: Well, after I graduated I went in the service for two years in the army. Finish in the army. Then I thought, well, since no ranching job on Lāna'i, we might as well make a go in Honolulu and see what we can do. So I worked construction for about two-and-a-half years. Running equipment and all this. Then, finally, I decided, well, equipment is a little too dirty, hard work. So I ended up to be a truck driver. So I've been truck driver from 1962. I started in for Kam's Express [Inc.]. I think until 1988, I gave up on Kam's Express. All through that time, I still had a knowledge of raising horse and . . .

MM: Did you raise them in Honolulu?

CR: Yeah, I raised it in Honolulu. And just to keep my knowledge fresh, you know. Learning—like on the small ranches we learn about cattles, what kind of breed, how you do it.

MM: Is this on the weekend?

CR: Yeah, this was my weekend job or part-time job like, you know. So I wasn't away from ranching. I was always with ranching, so I didn't lose my talent of horsemanship and whatever cattle that I know about. So in August 21, I took vacation. Nineteen eighty-eight, retired from Kam's Express, came back over here, Lāna'i, working for Lāna'i Company now and seeing a lot of changes on Lāna'i.

MM: How do you feel about all these changes?

CR: Well, with all these changes, you're going to bring in a lot of tourists, but lot of crime. Going to be a lot of crime over here. And might just push away the local peoples out of jobs and a place where they can go out and enjoy. And taking away all their hunting ground. And like us, horsemans, we get lot of place to ride in the field. So, we'll be losing all that. It's just going to be like a private land where it's just going to be riding where you supposed to go and that's all. You cannot enjoy the island.

MM: Do you think there's any way you can keep the Lāna'i lifestyle?

CR: Well, because of these changeovers coming on, we just got to go with the engineers who design this place, what they can do with it. And because we know a little of the water rights, the land, they might run into trouble in the beginning. And if they do, then it's going to be a little too late.
MM: Do you see more Lāna'i people coming home? Are [people] coming back?

CR: Well, I talked to quite a few. Right now, it's about a dozen of us back here already. When I left here in 1958, get guys, like [Class of] '57, '55, '54, they all back.

MM: They came back within the last year or so?

CR: Yeah, last year or so, they all back here working now. Because, well, our type of living in Honolulu for the last thirty years, it was a fast life and we came back to our normal life, slow, on Lāna'i. But, in the future, Lāna'i going be pretty fast. But not as fast like Maui or Honolulu or Kaua'i.

MM: Do you want to see it that way?

CR: No, I don't want to see it that way, actually. But, it's going to happen. It's going to happen, it's going to go through. It's just like a test. They're going to see if can do or cannot. If Mr. Murdock cannot bring back his finances, he might have to sell. And somebody else going try.

MM: How do you think the rest of the island feels? Do you think everybody is anxious for the change?

CR: Well, not really, the way I see everybody talking about. But those who have job now, the younger ones who have jobs here, you know, they don't want to see this booming up because they're not in the life of going fast, you know. But they got to start learning because it going to be fast. That's why I said, in the future, the local peoples on the island of Lāna'i going get pushed out from jobs because they not used to to this fast life, you know. So, you going feel hurt for the young ones that never had a chance.

MM: So you don't think the Lāna'i people would be able to compete when everything gets moving full scale?

CR: Yeah, I look at it, it's a skill. They have to import workers for these kind of jobs. And when they do that, they ain't going get too much locals. But, you know, the old saying that when you jump out of your jeep, you leave your car key in, you walk out, you go hunt, the jeep is there. Maybe five years from now, you got to take that key with you because you turn around, that car ain't going to be there no more for you. It's not like the old days, everybody know each other. Before days, everybody so friendly that you can wave, smile. Even you can tell they from outside island and yet you still wave and smile. In the future, I don't think so we going see like that. You going pass me, I don't know you.

MM: So, is this your home now?

CR: Well, I'm very glad I'm home. Plus, my mom and dad have a very
good, brand-new house. And we live in a nice place. And all the family enjoy. A little hard work and all these [fifty-one] years they've been living in the old one. And now we just starting with a new one. So, let's make the thing look good. We thankful that we have something little better.

MM: In general, how do you feel about the ranch area now? Do you think you can still keep the cowboy spirit up here?

CR: Well, right now, they talking about bringing cattles and bringing back ranching. Ranching, to my knowledge, it's going to be a very slow starter because you have so much different ideas, different engineers who try to do all these landwork for the cattles, and to me, I think they not knowing how to use all the grazing land because there are fencings where the land is. Erosion when the animal eat. You know, they not even thinking about the erosion and they just fencing out things like that, you know. They're not thinking what the animal can do. So, I think that going be a very, very slow starter until they really analyze the land on Lana'i. The Lana'i land is pretty rough because I ride horses around here and I see what it is. And places where they fencing is, to me, not knowledgeable for agriculture of the animals because they're not thinking about the land value. We cannot take away the land with all this erosion if the animals start eating all the grasses and whatever on the side. But like I said, they have [college] degrees to do all this, so, they're going to learn, hard way, on Lana'i. So, the ranching department, I said, is going to take quite a while until they really find out why it was all this.

MM: Why you have to do it a certain way?

CR: Yeah. You know, if they studied the land over here, you also can really study what you're going to do. How you can use it for cattle-grazing or whatever grazing there's going to be. Right now, they cannot control all the wild game on Lana'i. So, they talking about water rights. To me, I think, that's why the water going lose, because they cannot control the water rights. I mean, by water rights, like taking care of the forest.

MM: They're not taking care of the watershed?

CR: That's right. See, it's getting dried up there. Just by riding horse, I know how used to be damp. In my days we used to ride. Used to be really damp up there.

MM: Up Lana'i'ihale?

CR: Going up the Lana'i'ihale way, all up on Munro trail, like that. Used to be really damp, but as today you go, it's sorry to see the thing going downhill.

MM: Even after the big rain?
CR: Even after the big rain. Because you know why? The seepage of the water is going down too fast. It cannot be caught. If go down slower, through the mountain, it's easier to catch.

MM: So the water is running off?

CR: It's running off. It's not staying where they think it's going to stay at the bottom. I get an idea of all this because in Honolulu, a lot of small ranches. That's what happens when they start overgrazing their cattles. Once they start overgrazing on the grazing land, you start losing all your water. You got to keep the grass moist all the time. You bring in moist for the animal. You bring moist for the feed. And yet, enough moist to seep in the ground for wells to pick up, you know. So I think Lana'i is going to really hurt on the water problem. I don't think they can supply the two hotels right now because it's all going be water system, eh? It's not like the old days that you have outhouse and everything. Now it's going to be all modern flushing. Need lot of water.

MM: Anything else you want to say?

CR: No, I don't think so. I'm very glad talk to you.

MM: So, let's see. I think that's all.

END OF INTERVIEW
LĀNAʻI RANCH
The People of Kōʻele and Keōmuku

VOLUME I

Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa

JULY 1989