BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Barbara Coito

Barbara Figueroa Coito was born April 23, 1948 in Haina, Hawai‘i. The second of four children, she grew up in a plantation camp which was part of Honoka‘a Sugar Company, where her father worked. As the oldest girl of working parents, she was responsible for many household tasks. She also worked for Hawaiian Macadamia Plantation in Honoka‘a.

The same year she graduated from Honoka‘a High School in 1967, she married Patrick Coito from Kohala. They raised four children. They live in Honoka‘a with her parents.

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Patrick L. Coito, Sr.

Patrick Coito was born May 22, 1946 in Kohala, Hawai‘i. His father worked for Kohala Sugar Company. Coito began working for Kohala Sugar Company upon his graduation from high school in 1964.

In 1973, Coito was laid off from his job when Kohala Sugar Company went out of business. He left Kohala and worked briefly for Honoka‘a Sugar Company.

He and his wife, Barbara, own and operate a woodcarving business out of their Honoka‘a home.
This is an interview with Barbara Coito and Patrick Coito, Sr., for the Hamakua, Ka'ū families oral history project on January 15, 1997, and we're at their home in Honoka'a, Hawai'i. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, Barbara. Why don't we start by having you tell me where and when you were born.

BC: I was born down in Haina, 1948, April 23.

WN: And what were your parents doing in Haina?

BC: Well my dad [Estifino Figueroa] worked for the plantation, and Mom [Mary Fernandez Figueroa] worked for Hawaiian Holiday. We didn't live too far (chuckles) from the hospital. We lived right (behind of it).

WN: You mean Honoka'a Hospital?

BC: No, Haina Hospital. Honoka'a [Hospital] wasn't even (built) yet, come to think of it. We live one, two rows below the hospital. That was my mom's first house or second house. For every pregnancy, she lived in one different house, so don't ask me why. (Laughs)

WN: How many brothers and sisters you had?

BC: I have one brother, and two other girls below me.

WN: So, one . . .

BC: With me, be four altogether.

WN: Four of you. And you were the oldest?

BC: For the girls.

WN: A boy, you, and then [two] girls . . .
BC: My brother was born first, yes, I am the second oldest.

WN: How far away were you from the mill?

BC: Oh, let me see, try and figure out. Wasn't that far, honestly. Luckily, was (two or three) minutes walk, yeah. Well, like I say, depend which house we were living in.

WN: So were you living in a certain camp?

BC: I don't know if the camps had name at that time. You know, as I was growing up, I don't know. But as I got older, I knew they were Haole Camp around the—let me see—Hilo side of the mill. Then there was—further up, they had all the Japanese and Portuguese people that was (above) up side of the hospital yet. I lived above the mill and on the left side of the mill. 'Cause for each pregnancy, like I said, Mom would move houses. (Laughs)

WN: Why?

BC: She get sick. She cannot stand the smell of the house when she's pregnant. That's weird. Honestly, (chuckles) because when I got pregnant, I never was like her. In fact none of us girls ever came like her. She's the only one. But I know when I first was pregnant with Darde, I couldn't stand the smell of rice being cooked.

WN: That's like my wife.

BC: I had to get out of the house and Patrick would have to do it. (Laughs) Yeah.

WN: So who were your neighbors, mostly?

BC: Family.

WN: Your family?

BC: Family, yes. Uh huh. Where the house that we were living below the hospital would be my father’s brother on the right side of us, and then on the down side would be my grandparents (Mariano and Annie Figueroa), my father’s parents. And then across the road would be my father’s sister and my mom’s sister. So we’re all family. We had Filipinos around us too. Japanese, I don’t recall. I know Portuguese people, yeah, and Filipino. But not Japanese.

WN: Were there other Puerto Rican families down in Haina?

BC: Only one that I know there was, in Haina. But I don’t know if there was any, 'cause they never say (they) were Puerto Ricans, I don’t know why. Just like these Puerto Ricans, they were in a shell. They were ashamed of their nationality. That’s how I feel [that they felt].

WN: Did you feel that way?

BC: No, no. I will tell 'em as I please.

(Laughter)
WN: Your brother and sisters too? Was there any kind of . . .

BC: No, they would say that they’re Puerto Rican. Yeah, they would. Never had a problem with that, never. Only my father’s sister would say that she’s French, not Puerto Rican. So that’s why [BC points to her baby toe] I would always go, “Yeah, this is the Puerto Rican French from her.” (Laughs)

WN: Oh, baby toe?

(Laughter)

BC: That’s what I would say. The subject came up, well always that subject, “Yeah, right there,” (WN laughs) “that’s her French.”

WN: Did you have any blood besides Puerto Rican that you know of?

BC: Well, my mom’s mom—my great-grandmother—I was told that she’s Indian.

WN: American Indian? Or [from] India?

BC: Navajo.

WN: Oh, American Indian.

BC: So I guess I’m, what, I have Indian in me because of my great-grandmother. But you know, when my parents went to Puerto Rico, many years ago, they found out to be a Puerto Rican, you have to be Colored. Colored and Spanish, that’s what makes a Puerto Rican. So you can see I have Colored blood in me also, because that’s the only way you can be a Puerto Rican. That’s (what) they found out in Puerto Rico. That’s what makes a Puerto Rican. Weird, because there are dark Puerto Ricans, and there are fair Puerto Ricans. There are blue eyes Puerto Ricans, green eyes, dark eyes. My mom’s side [of the] family, the Fernandez side, my grandfather, they have blue eyes.

WN: Is that right?

BC: Yeah. My grandmother, my mother’s mother, red hair.

WN: Wow.

BC: And look, none of the children, none of the grandchildren, none of the great-grandchildren got those things.

WN: Genetics is a funny thing sometimes.

BC: I know, I know. (WN laughs.) But sometimes I really wonder when it’s really going to come out, those bloodlines. (WN laughs.) Really. Because you look—you’ve seen William [BC’s grandson], the small, little baby, and you look Patrick’s baby picture, my husband.

WN: Yeah, yeah.
BC: That's all William.

WN: Really, yeah?

BC: Yeah, it's just like looking at Patrick all over again. See, that's where I can see that bloodline there. But for my mom's side, I cannot find nothing, because my kids' pictures, the family pictures that we have up there, each kid is different, the looks. Because, you figure, I'm Puerto Rican. My husband is Irish-Filipino. One of my daughters would have the Salvador-side look; one would have the Fernandez side. We didn't know that Pat was Irish until three years ago. That's when we found out, see? That's why my son, in that picture there, and you look his great-grandfather, my father-in-law's parents right here. Look at this, from the nose up, it's like looking at my son. And the Fernandez, I cannot find, you know. (WN chuckles.) I cannot see, but I can see my husband's side more strong.

WN: It will show up some day, I guess.

BC: Yeah.

WN: So what was growing up in Haina like?

BC: In Haina? Oh, crazy. Tomboy. (Laughs) I was tomboy. Cut my hair short, comb 'em like one boy, climb the trees, do everything the boys do.

WN: So you hung out mostly with boys? Your friends were boys?

BC: Girls. (Laughs)

WN: Oh, you guys all were tomboys, then.

(Laughter)

BC: Yeah, girls. Us girls and whatnot. My mom said I was the radical one, because my brother wouldn't go down the stairs when he was small. But when I came, I started walking, I was the leader. I would take him down the steps. I would take him do this and do that. (Laughs) So it was great. We used to play in the gulches, all us, the kids that we used to hang around.

WN: What was in the gulches?

BC: Oh, guava trees, all kind. Water, ponds, (frogs), all those things. Walk the railroad track, climb the water tanks. We used to do all that.

WN: So you were more or less, you know, you could just go out and play? You didn't need parental supervision or anything?

BC: Mm mmm [no]. My parents worked, that was it. Parents work, and you just stay home and do. . . . Like if you have to clean house, you clean house and that finished, the rest is your day. Nobody's around to tell you what to do. Just go.

WN: What kind of chores you had?
BC: Ho, by nine years old, I had a whole lot. I had to cook, wash, iron, clean, take care my sisters. I have to do everything a mother's supposed to be doing. (Laughs)

WN: Your mother was working.

BC: Both parents worked. I had to do all those things.

WN: What did your brother do?

BC: Moemoe, play, what boys do, play. That's all he had to do. He never did nothing.

WN: That's the oldest girl.

BC: That's the burden on the oldest, yep. It was hard for me. It was real hard. I know I have a very, very bad temper. I do, because I remember when my parents were working, [they] usually tell my sisters (to help me). I like play, too, not only them. But, oh, radical. I gave my sister dirty, dirty lickings [i.e., beating]. My grandmother had to come running. She live down, a couple houses down—one, two, three—we were the fourth or fifth house in, Grandma was the first one. Come running to rescue my sister, 'cause I wouldn't stop hitting her. My temper was just going, going, going, hitting. And that was the last time I really lost my temper like that. First and the last time. I always tell my kids, "Don't make me mad."

Used to take lunch to Dad when he was driving the crane. I, nobody else. Barbara this, Barbara that. Barbara makes lunch for her dad, Barbara takes it to her dad. Climb the—he would drive the crane, from the top. Climb that thing. Was scared, 'cause I hate—scared heights. Climb that thing, take him his lunch, then he takes me riding around in circle, this way, and then go back that way. Could see our house and whatnot. Used to be scary. We always have to watch where we cross, because the cane trucks, they don't watch how they drive, the drivers. Because they drive truck, they just drive so fast. They don't watch for the kids, eh? Ho, always gotta look to side, then go, then walk down the middle hill, go around like that, to where my father was. The road was always filthy (laughs), always with mud, especially when rain.

WN: This is out wherever they're harvesting at that time.

BC: No, right there. We live—you mean where the mill . . .

WN: Crane.

BC: The crane was right there.

WN: Oh, oh, I see.

BC: It was stabled [stationary].

WN: I see.

BC: Yeah, it was stabled right there. Yeah. And sometimes when the crane cables (broke), he would have to check the cables, go to the very top and fix it. And he's the only one who
would go. Nobody else would. They'd be scared, especially when it's windy. Oh, it's so spooky, get cold feet, and you watch Daddy climb that, and oh! Or you watch Daddy when (he) climb the front, you know. That crane that Dad used to drive, he goes on the top there, climb on top there to go fix the cable.

WN: What did they use the crane for?

BC: [To PC] To put the cane into the mill, yeah?

PC: Feed the mill [with cane].

BC: Feed the mill.

[Interview is interrupted, then resumes.]

BC: Yeah, he used to feed the mill. He takes it out, puts it here. From here he puts it there. Just like he shifts it around, and then before he finally puts it into the mill. (Chuckles)

WN: But what happens when you were going to school, though? How did you bring lunch to your dad?

BC: I think Dad was working shifts, too. He was working shifts, too. On weekends like that, I would take the lunch to Dad. Otherwise, he would probably---cause [it was] walking distance to home. He can walk home.

WN: Did you have to cook the food, too?

BC: When I was nine, you have to learn how to do everything. Cook. [To PC] That's why you stay so plump, yeah? (Laughs)

WN: So that was one of the jobs you had.

BC: Mm hmm. Yep.

WN: With your mother working, then a lot of the burden fell on you . . .

BC: And both my parents don't know how to read or write. Then when I started reading and writing, I end up paying their bills for them. Go to the bank and pay their bills for them and whatnot, and learn how to make money orders for them and all those things, too. I had to do all that. That was those days. Still doing it. Still paying their bills for them. (Chuckles)

WN: So with all the chores, you still had time to . . .

BC: Play?

WN: . . . time to play.

BC: Yeah, if (I had) help from the rest of the family. If (my) sisters help (me), (I had) time. Halloween time, (chuckles) us girls used to go meet our friends, we go up to their house.
From there, we walk the whole Haina Camp. Go up, go down by Haole Camp, come 'round, then go home. Spooky, but. (Laughs) Come to think, it was scary. 'Cause down there, the camps, they don't have lights, eh, street lights. Just make lot of noise. (Laughs)

WN: What about holidays, other holidays, like Christmas, for example? How did you folks celebrate?

BC: Those years, they used to go houses to houses before celebrating, family, like that. Or people come serenade to your door-steps like that. I know I was a child when my grandfather passed away. I know I was real young, 'cause I remember going Kohala, not with my parents, you know. It was with my cousin and his wife. I remember my mom said for bring the kids to Kohala, because they, her and Dad was already was in Kohala when her father passed away.

Then we spent time in Kohala. Almost every weekend, we was going Kohala after that. 'Cause my mom's brother lived in Kohala. Was good. Meet the family. Got to Kona, pick up coffee.

WN: How often you did that?

BC: I think it was almost every weekend, too, picking up coffee, when us was young.

WN: You folks got paid by the bag?

BC: I don't remember how they used to do that. I really don't. Yeah, was by the bag. I hated picking up coffee.

WN: Why?

BC: 'Cause all the spiders, those creatures.

(Laughter)

BC: Going down under those trees. Oh, I hated it. That's why they said I used to steal from Grandma. Go to Grandma's bag and steal her coffee from her (WN chuckles) and fill up my bag.

PC: Tell 'em how you used to do it.

BC: (Laughs) Ho, they said when I used to pick up coffee, I used to go to grandma's bag, and I go, “Knock, knock, anybody home?” No, grandma no answer, then I say, “Oh, nobody home.” Then I take her coffee, fill up my basket.

(Laughter)

BC: And then fill up my bag, and they always wondered how come my bag was getting full so fast (WN chuckles), and Grandma was wondering why her bag stay going down.

(Laughter)
BC: Then Grandma caught me doing it. “Knock, knock? You the knock, knock, eh?”

(Laughter)

WN: How much did you folks have to pick? Did they expect you to pick, what, 100-pound bag or something?

BC: I don’t know, honestly. I really don’t know that. ’Cause my parents never told us the whole detail. All I . . .

WN: You never got paid, either.

BC: Yeah, well, getting paid is our parents, not us.

WN: Yeah.

BC: So I really don’t know. But I know when we went, would be us, my grandmother, and my mom’s youngest brother, and maybe couple more of us. Big family would be. Go and pick coffee.

WN: Did your father go too?

BC: Oh, yes, Dad was the driver. Mom wasn’t able to drive, I think, until before we moved to Honoka’a, I think, that’s when she got her license. I know when we moved Honoka’a, I was twelve years old. So Mom got her license couple years before that maybe, before we moved up here. Took Mom quite a while before she could drive.

WN: Did your father go too?

BC: Weekends, yeah. If Dad doesn’t work Saturdays and Sundays, we would go, as soon as he pau work Friday, no matter what time. If he’s working three [P.M.] to eleven [P.M.], if you finish eleven o’ clock, by twelve, we’re on the road already, going to Kona to pick up coffee early in the morning.

WN: Wow, in those days, must have taken ages to get to Kona, eh?

BC: Yeah, the old (Kona) Road, going Kona. Yeah, in those days, plenty cattle running on the road, walking, crossing the road and all that too. That was [what] Kohala was like, too, yeah? Cattle on the road every time.

[Taping interrupted, then resumes.]

WN: So you went to---what schools did you go to?

BC: Honoka’a High and Elementary [School]. All the way up to twelfth grade.

WN: So while you were going to high school, did you have any plans on what you wanted to do?

was tired of taking care everybody. I met Patrick in Kohala. Every time we would go Kohala, when we got older, then we went dancing. Every weekend, they had dance in Kohala. Yep. Was okay. I think I met Pat eleventh grade, I think it was. [to PC] I met you—what grade I was?

WN: You folks same age?

BC: No, he’s older than I am.

PC: You was only in ninth grade.

BC: Around there, yeah. Ninth, tenth grade, that’s when I met Pat. He’s older than I am. I hated boys, right, Pat? I even snubbed him too. (Laughs) He was so polite, and I looked and I went, “Bye, goodnight.” Whatever. (Laughs) Yep. When we used to go parties like that, when we were young, in Pa’auilo, I think it was, I remember. I don’t know whose party it was. I was young, I know. My sisters used to go find the boys for come dance with me. I would just stand against the wall, and I wouldn’t dance.

WN: And you’re older than them, eh?

BC: Yeah. (WN laughs.) They wanted me to get out of their hands already.

WN: So you went to—you graduated in ’67, yeah?

BC: Yeah.

WN: So when you graduated, what did you do?

BC: I got married right after graduation.

WN: Oh, you guys got married.

BC: Yeah.

WN: And where did you live?

BC: We lived in Kohala. I don’t know what’s the name of that place, Ka . . .

PC: Kahē.

BC: Kahē? Kahē it was called. It was outside of Hāwī, yeah? Right outside of Hāwī. In fact, before we got married, Patrick wen look for a house, rented it and everything, then we went there. We got married out here in this church here [in Honoka’a], Our Lady of Lourdes. Then we held the reception in Kohala. It was a good wedding, because we didn’t have no liquor. (Laughs) Get all bunch of people stay till late, late. They like drink, they bring their own booze. And then Darde came in February, ’68.

PC: The other one came first, your brother.
BC: Oh, my brother, yeah. (Laughs)

PC: You ended up taking care . . .

BC: Yeah, that’s right. My brother. We’d just got married, and my brother moved in with us. (Laughs)

WN: Oh, yeah? (Laughs)

BC: Yeah, my brother. That’s what I mean. You figure you running away from helping everybody, but as long as I live, Warren, I’ve never been alone. Always had somebody.

WN: Did your parents want you to live with them?

BC: I really don’t know that. I never did ask. But I was always the one home. Always the one helping. My brother came, Ronald, my cousin from Kona came, too. He was looking for a job, so I . . . My brother and Patrick was good friends. ‘Cause my brother, when he graduated from Honoka’a [High and Elementary School], he went to work Kohala plantation [Kohala Sugar Company]. And he stayed with my mom’s brother. And then Ronald left, I think. Darde was born in February. My brother left, when was . . . [to PC] Before she was born? Or right after she was born?

PC: Right after, in March.

BC: Right after Darde, he went into the service.

PC: Drafted.

BC: Yeah. Then in May, that same year, Patrick left Darde and I, that’s the time had the Vietnam War. They took him to Schofield Barracks [on O‘ahu].

PC: Was really the [Hawai‘i] National Guard.

WN: Oh, yeah, yeah. That’s right. You [PC] was [Hawai‘i] National Guard?

BC: Yeah.

PC: Oh, yeah, that was rough kind. (BC laughs.)

BC: Yeah. Then I moved back home over here with my parents for a couple months, and then October the same year, I moved down to Schofield Barracks. Right? But when I went, I went along with his uncle’s children, because his aunty passed away and his uncle was in the [Hawai‘i] National Guard also. So I went down for help him. He got a place for me, and Uncle Jack got a place for his children and him. So I baby-sit his kids, too, help him watch his kids.

Then down there, I got pregnant with my number two. See, if I didn’t go, I wouldn’t have got pregnant. But I got pregnant (WN chuckles) with number two. And then we stayed---I lived in Schofield for six months, I think it was.
WN: How was it over there?

BC: It was okay. I liked it. He never knew how to drive until (chuckles) we moved down there. I made him buy a car. We needed a car.

WN: Did you drive? You were driving?

BC: No, I didn't drive until Pat Jr. was born.

WN: Neither of you drove.

BC: He drove.

PC: I had a license.

BC: I had to make him drive.

PC: But the only place I drove on the island, actually on this island, was over in Kohala, Waimea, like that. I never drove a car in Hilo until after I got back from Honolulu.

WN: (Chuckles) Must have been an experience, though, driving in traffic. (BC laughs.)

PC: Yeah, but we used to go all over the place. (WN laughs.)

WN: Yeah, oh yeah. Really. So you were there how long? Six months?

BC: Six months down in Schofield Barracks.

WN: And Patrick, you went Vietnam?

PC: Oh, no.

BC: No, thank God. No.

WN: You didn't have to go?

PC: No, what they were doing, they were getting like a levy, pulling and replacing the people that died in Vietnam. You know, like the different companies that needed certain people, they would take 'em from our company and place them in there. But my time was too short, already. I had only about six months left when they started doing that. So what they did was they turned around, they were taking the people that had a year or more left in their time, 'cause that basically was the time that you'd be spending in Vietnam, one year. So I kind of lucked out and didn't have to go.

BC: I was glad, too. I was real glad that he didn't have to go.

WN: So after the six months, you came back here.

BC: Came back home. We living here. We came home together. He, Darde, and I, the three of
us. We came back here.

WN: You were pregnant at the time.

BC: I started my pregnancy, yeah. And then his uncle, the one that—Uncle Jack had a house down in Union Mill [Kohala Sugar Company]. We stayed in Union Mill for a couple months, and then the plantation gave us a house, 'cause he was working for the plantation in Kohala, land. So we built the house, and then Pat, Jr. came before the house was built. Pat Jr. was six months old when I got my license. That's how I decided to get my license. With three kids, I had to. So P.J. came, we had the house. I think we stayed in the house maybe three years, maybe, no? Three, four years, or less?

PC: Oh, about year and a half.

BC: Then the plantation phased out.

WN: Year and a half?

BC: Kohala plantation.

WN: [Nineteen] seventy-three, yeah?

PC: They didn't actually phase out. What they did was they told us they was going to phase out, so then we started looking for jobs in case we no work the plantation.


WN: We're going to talk about Kohala now.

BC: Oh yeah, because the phaseout.

WN: And, yeah, tell me about the phaseout, what you remember about it, and how it affected you folks.

BC: Yeah, I came this way first [from Kohala], 'cause I had the Hawaiian [Macadamia Plantation job]. I worked down there, the [macadamia] nut factory for a couple months. And then Patrick came—I don't know how long it was before you came, yeah? You followed us afterwards, 'cause you were one of the last ones to be left without a job, yeah.

WN: So Patrick, you were working for the plantation. So when did you start working?

PC: For Kohala Sugar [Company]? Nineteen sixty-four, right after I got out of high school. And then I had to build a life there, you know, build a house, everything and... In fact, I think about two months after we moved into our new house, that's when they called a big meeting in the theater they had in Hāwī. And nobody knew what was going on, and here comes all these big wheels from Castle & Cooke, [Inc.]. They come up, they make this announcement
that they gonna start phasing out the sugar operation in Kohala, starting from that particular day. I think they completed the phaseout in around '74, I think, '75, something like that.

It was kind of hard because what they actually did was a lot of us that had some time in there, either they were going to give us severance pay or, you know, some back pay. We either took that or took another job placement. And then what the union did was help us out and found us jobs here, like over here in Honoka'a. So I took one of the positions here. And I came over this side and work.

WN: So they offered a lot of Kohala Sugar [Company] workers jobs with [Honoka'a Sugar Company]?

PC: Well, all over. They wanted to relocate a lot of them to different places. And what they said they were going to do, too, was they were gonna try do some diversified agriculture and try to create some jobs. They had a task force going. Well, that was really a big rip-off.

WN: The Kohala Task Force?

PC: Yeah, 'cause a lot of the [state] money that was appropriated was just used, and people just took the money and took off. You know, like this one person that said he was going to do some quail farming. I don’t know how much they gave him. He brought all the quails—he had them in a building there—and he took off with the rest of the money. They had to go do—I don’t know what they actually did with the quails, but they ended up getting rid of all the quails. It was a couple thousand quails or something.

BC: Maybe that's how come we get so much quails on this island.

PC: No. (WN chuckles.) But that task force was really just one big rip-off.

WN: That was state [funded]?

PC: Yeah.

WN: So you started working '64. What is your birth date?

PC: May 22, 1946.

WN: And your parents, did your parents work for Kohala Sugar [Company], too?

PC: Yeah, my dad worked just about all his life, I think. But he was in the merchant marines, and when he came back, he ended up working for the plantation until he retired. My mom basically was one housewife until after the plantation phased out, then she went and worked at the Mauna Kea Beach Hotel.

WN: So you grew up thinking that you’re gonna work plantation, but.

PC: Yeah, plantation life, and probably retire working for the plantation. . . . You know, this one guy that worked with me one of the jobs that I had—I had this job driving a machine. This was in irrigation. They had this overhead sprinkling type of irrigation. Actually, Kohala
[Sugar Company], what they were doing, too, a lot, was using it like a test plantation to use all the different types of equipment. And the overhead irrigation was one of them. And to move the pipes that was used, aluminum pipes, they had this one machine with two helpers. And then the helpers would load the pipes on the trailer. This one Haole guy came work with me for one summer, and we were talking during one lunch break, and he turn around and said, “If I was you, I’d go look for something else.”

I said, “Why?”

He said, “Sugar is not gonna be here until you retire.”

I said, “No, sugar’s gonna be here.” In fact, was I think about a year after that when we had the announcement.

WN: Yeah. So who was this guy?

PC: David Humphrey.

WN: Was he a bigwig or something?

PC: No, no, he was just my helper. (WN laughs.) He was picking up pipes, and he turned around and said, “Sugar is not going to be here much longer.”

WN: And he was right.

PC: And I told him, “No, it’s gonna be here.” Look what happened.

WN: So how did you feel when you heard the news of the phaseout?

PC: I actually felt real bad, because, you know, you had your goals set already, looking at what you’re going to do, and I moved up into one position in the plantation where I was driving cane truck. So that’s pretty good pay. And I figured I could probably move up to some other type of job later on, but it’s pretty much set. But when they said it was gonna phase out, you know, I say, “Well, time to start looking for something else.” I probably would’ve been working down at this Haina plantation [Honoka’a Sugar Company] right through until the phaseout if they gave me the job that I really wanted.

WN: Which was what?

PC: Driving truck. See, when I came over [to Honoka’a Sugar Company], they told me they going place me in one temporary position as a cane-brooming operator. That’s when they load the cane and they push the cane into piles, you come with a tractor and then you just rake up all the excess cane and you just pile it up. They told me that would be only temporary until the first opening they have for cane-truck driver. But never happened. I work there one year, and I seen a lot of other guys going into a truck-driver position, so I turn around, I said, “Forget it.”

WN: So how many years did you work for [Honoka’a]?
PC: Only one year.

WN: Oh, only one year? And so you just quit.

PC: I just quit. The nights much colder here than in Kohala.

(Laughter)

PC: Gotta work shifts too, eh?

WN: Yeah. So how old were you at the time when the phaseout was . . .

BC: Which phaseout? The first one or the . . .

PC: Kohala one?

WN: Yeah. Twenty-six maybe? Twenty-seven?

BC: I know Darde was just five years old. She was just five years old.

PC: Twenty-eight, about twenty-seven.

BC: Yeah.

WN: Okay, so when the phaseout occurred over there [1973], what was it like in terms of what they were offering workers?

PC: Well, basically the older people, what they were telling them was to take early retirement, and they were going to prorate their severance pay, and that prorated severance pay would take care until the time that they needed to really qualify for social security. Then lot of people, that's what they did.

BC: Yeah, a lot of them.

PC: And then they started taking people and started from different—you know, the younger ones that didn't leave, started placing them on the older people's jobs. And then, like I said, a lot of the other people like myself, were offered jobs [at] different plantations, so we just moved over. In fact, there was a lot of people that, you know, came from Kohala that went to work down in Haina, Pa'auilo, and 'O'okala sugar mills.

WN: What about the housing?

BC: Housing? (Chuckles)

WN: How was the housing . . .

BC: Way different than Honoka'a. (Laughs)

PC: The housing there, what they did was they subdivided along the roadways, the main
roadways. I think the lot we had was twelve thousand, fourteen thousand square feet, something like that. And we paid a dollar for it. And the dollar was mainly just to transfer papers over, just to make things legal. You know, they wasn't giving it to us. And once we paid that dollar, we worked, clean up our property. Everything was all surveyed out.

BC: Water pipes, everything.

PC: And we took care of everything else. The county put in water lines. Everything was all set. All you had to do was build your house.

BC: Build your house, that was it.

PC: And then lot of the people, you know, like older people that were living in the plantation houses, had the first chance to buy those plantation houses and move it onto their respective lots.

WN: Oh, I see. So they actually moved the houses onto the lots.

BC: Mm hmm [yes].

PC: Yeah.

WN: What about the lots that the houses were on already? They had plans for . . .

PC: No, those were all in plantation camps. They did away with the plantation camps. All the houses were moved up along the main highway. And they did away with all the camps. I think there were only---I think the only one that ended up with a camp was Hāwī. But basically the rest, everything was moved up. You know, houses, people just moved it onto their lots. In fact, the plantation moved the houses for them also, put 'em on the lot and everything. Then they started remodeling their own homes, fixing up their own homes.

WN: Now what about you folks, your home?

PC: Ours, what we did was we had one of those homes for . . .

BC: FHA [Federal Housing Authority], yeah.

PC: It was real nice house.

WN: You mean Kohala?

BC: Mm hmm [yes].

PC: Three bedroom.

WN: Oh, so you continued to live in Kohala and you worked Haina [i.e., Honoka’a Sugar Company]. Is that what happened?

PC: Well, when I was working there, we had the house built and everything and then we lived in
the house for a little over a year. Then I moved over this side, you know, to look for a job. But we still had the house there. And FHA made me sell the house, because they said I couldn’t rent out the house to anybody.

BC: Yeah, not even to family.

PC: Yeah, I couldn’t rent ’em out to family or something.

WN: Oh, in other words, if you were to buy a house out here, FHA, you’d have to sell the Kohala house?

PC: No, even if I didn’t buy a house out here, I had to sell that house mainly because they said part of the loan policy is that you cannot have somebody else paying your mortgage or something like that was.

BC: That’s what they said.

PC: That’s what the guy told me.

WN: So you sold the house.

BC: Yep.

PC: Sold the house.

WN: And then where did you live here?

BC: Right here [Honoka’a].

WN: Oh, right here.

BC: We’ve been here since Darde was five years old [1973].

WN: Oh, I see. But you worked for the company for only one year. And then what happened after that?

PC: And then I went from one job to another, you know. I went from cutting scrap iron to driving truck for a wood-chipping company from California.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

PC: The last job I had before starting my own business was driving tours for a tour company down at the hotel.

WN: So which job did you like the best? (BC laughs.)
PC: I wish I knew [about going into business] twenty years ago.

WN: Well, tell me a little bit about your business right now.

PC: Basically woodworking. We make bowls out of different kinds of woods like koa, *milo*, mango. Whatever we can find on the island. And this all started because I had a back injury at one of the jobs, and the doctor took me off work. So he sent me to vocational rehab[ilitation]. And I learned from down here at Brentley Center, [Inc.] how to work with wood and turn bowls and that kind of stuff. Then slowly we started building up our own business.

WN: Been doing that for twenty years?

PC: No.

BC: No. Maybe ten.

PC: Only about 9½, 10 years now. That’s why I said I wish I knew about it 20 years ago. (WN laughs.)

WN: Nothing like being your own boss, eh?

PC: Yeah, really.

WN: So now the sugar plantation here is closed down, yeah? Can you folks compare the closeout of Hāmākua [Sugar Company] compared to Kohala [Sugar Company]? Your folks are kind of rare in the sense that you can probably compare.

BC: I say yes, it’s real—two different phaseouts, honestly. One is sad, real sad.

WN: Which one is sad?

BC: The Hāmākua one. Real sad.

WN: You didn’t have that sad feeling when Kohala closed?

PC: No, Kohala phased out over a long number of years. Like, I think it was—I forget what year was they told us, but from the time they told us, it was something like about four or five years before they actually closed. And in the meantime, people were already placing themselves in different places. And that’s one thing Castle & Cooke, I have to give them credit. They really worked with the union and looked back and took care of the people back in Kohala. Some people don’t agree with it, but you look at that phaseout there, and you look at what happened here. Basically, here [Hāmākua] was just, they just dropped ’em flat. “We closing down, went bankrupt, this is it, this is the last harvest, and that’s it. You do what you have to do.” But over there, at least they phased out gradually, you know, where, like I say, people were able to place themselves in different jobs. Not here, but.

BC: Not here.

PC: And then, plus [Kohala] offered them all the housing and all that kind of stuff, and what they
[Hāmākua] doing right now is just railroading the people as far as in the different housing communities, you know. Telling them they can't do this, they can't do that. Just giving them really a rough time.

WN: So the problems that Darde is going through, Darde and Darren, in terms of what they can do and what they cannot do [to their homes], community-association-type thing?

PC: There was nothing like that over in Kohala. Everybody was pretty much well taken care of.

WN: So like Kohala was more like, “Okay, it's closing. This is what we're going to do.” And then people were able to.

BC: Do things.

WN: ... obtain their house and so forth and then they're independent. Hāmākua’s different.

PC: Yeah.

WN: More like they still like to have some control?

BC: Yes. They want to control the people out here, yet. That's what it is.

WN: So what was it like with—I just interviewed Darde, yeah? And she talked about her growing up and so forth. How were you—how did you raise your kids as parents? (BC laughs.)

PC: Well, we tried...

BC: Tried our best.

PC: Tried giving them whatever we didn't have.

BC: Yeah.

PC: But, you know, times were really hard. You know, before, we couldn't take them to the movies, out to dinner and that kind of stuff that often. I think we see a lot more of that now than before. That's why I say I wish I had this thing [i.e., business] going from twenty years ago. They probably would be different kids right now. (BC laughs.)

WN: In what way?

PC: Well, maybe most of them would probably be all college graduates or something.

WN: You know one thing that Darde told me about her growing up was that the family was really close. Were you folks aware of that, “We have to keep the family close”? Or was it just a natural thing that you folks were close?

BC: I wanted it close, because, like, the way he [PC] was brought up, real different. He was brought up real different, honestly. (Chuckles) Hundred percent different. I wanted him to know what is love and all that.
(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

BC: And so I wanted my kids to learn also what is love, and caring and helping one another. That's what I wanted. So we did. We taught--our kids had fights with neighborhood kids and whatnot. But we also tell them, "Turn your back and walk away." That's the best thing to do. No fight back.

PC: I always used to tell them it takes more of a person to walk away from something like that than just to jump in and try to prove you're stronger than them.

WN: She [Darde] also told me that you folks spent a lot of time at the beach.

BC: Oh yes.

WN: Fishing and so forth.

BC: Camping.

WN: And you know, all that takes is the gas money to get there. But that's all you spend.

PC: You live off the land.

BC: Live off the land. That's what we taught our kids to do. They like it. We even have one daughter that's living down Waipi'o now.

WN: One of your daughters?

BC: One of our daughters lives down there. And she likes it. I can't blame her because that's what she likes. The outdoors. And I taught my kids to like outdoors, to like nature. Nature is important, it really is. Not like some of these people, they want to take everything away from us. No, I like them learn. The clean air. I wish I could live outside too. (Laughs) But I would not be able to go without a toilet.

(Laughter)

WN: You need some comforts, eh?

BC: Yes, yes, I do. I do.

WN: But to me, family, close-knit family is a really important value. I think we might be losing some of that, yeah?

BC: Yeah, because, eh, we have our ups and downs, you know. But gosh, you have to sometimes push it on the side. You cannot let that come between you and your child. Cannot.

WN: But also a very strict household?

BC: Yep. (WN laughs.) Strict, but she still got away with murder.
(Laughter)

BC: Yep, Darde still got away with murder. After being an adult, that’s when she told us all those things that she did. All those things that she shouldn’t be doing—taking the car to Hilo instead of going to school.

(Laughter)

WN: So what would you folks like to see in this area in the future? What direction do you think would you like to see over here go in terms of economic development or lifestyle?

PC: Well, I think they can probably bring in a lot of different types of jobs, like they get tourist industry, they got all kind diversified agriculture. But basically, what I’d like to see is they leave us with our gathering rights and that kind of stuff to go up in the mountains and not fence off a lot of areas like how they been doing. And basically this is all because of the endangered kind of stuffs. You know, endangered species, endangered plants and all that kind stuff. They find one weed where they don’t see anywhere else, they say it’s an endangered plant found here only in the islands and then they put ’em on the list, and then they say, “Oh, we gotta fence up the area because you folks might walk on it and trample it.”

But if you’ve been born and raised, you know, going up in the mountains, hunting, going down to the ocean, fishing, going up pick up ferns, hāpu‘u, whatever we want from the mountains. And basically what I want to see, they just leave it there so that our grandchildren can enjoy the same thing. You know, our kids can teach the kids what we taught them.

WN: You want to keep this area country as much as possible.

BC: Yes, real country.

PC: I don’t see anything wrong with some parts of the island being developed. But I don’t want to see overdevelopment.

BC: Like Honolulu, it’s overdeveloped. (WN chuckles.)

PC: Way over.

BC: I cannot handle already go down there. I cannot. I cannot. It’s too much.

PC: Like Kona. Kona is coming the same way.

WN: Yeah.

BC: You haven’t been to Kona since you came this way, have you?

WN: I’ve been there about a year ago.

BC: You have to go now.

PC: One time, there was only one high school there. Now they ending up, they going have two
high schools now. And they talking about possibly, in the next twenty years, one more high
school.

BC: Where? In Kona?

PC: Yeah, gonna split 'em up. Kona is stretching out . . .

BC: This way.

PC: From Kailua, it's going this way.

WN: Well, I'm just wondering that—to me, one of the big issues, the big debate that's going to be
facing us within the next twenty-thirty years, or even now, is you keep a place rural and
country, and at the same time, try to find jobs for people so that they can stay here, instead of
having to, after high school, move to Honolulu or someplace. I don't know. What would be
the solution, you think? 'Cause you want your kids to stay here in this area, or your
grandkids.

PC: Well, you know, you got lot of things that I basically—what it is, too, is the type of
education. You know, a lot of the kids, in order to get real good education and be good at
something that they want to look at, they have to go out of state. And when they go out of
state, they end up placing themselves after they get through with school. They don't come
back.

BC: Yeah, I seen a lot of children doing that. A lot of them. Well, like they say in the news, I
think it was, or somebody talked to me about it, they said Hawai'i is poor in jobs for a lot of
these young people. Poor.

PC: What maybe they should try to do is like, if they have maybe a few different types of school
courses that are going on, maybe like a commercial college to teach the person welding
or. . . . They should do like what they had before. They used to have what they call the
Hawai'i technical schools. And some of my classmates went to it. And as soon as they
graduated from there, they were placed in jobs.

BC: Yeah.

PC: That's the kind of program they ought to work on. You know, have something where the kids
can get the training here, study here, and then be placed into a job. Not have to go to college
here or somewhere else and then find job somewhere else.

My son has a lot of friends that went to college—there's one that has a degree in electronics.
And he's down at the Four Seasons [Resort Hawai'i] washing pots and pans. Basically, I think
it would really help out if they could create something where you train through the program,
you have the different people that looking for these workers already. You know, they get job-
placement programs.

WN: Are the jobs here? Or do you really see the future as people having to drive out to Kona side?

BC: Yes, that's what is happening right now. They all driving far distance to work.
PC: You figure you get people working at the hotel that comes from Hilo.

BC: Come from Hilo!

WN: Whew!

PC: They driving through Saddle Road going down to . . . . That's why they talking, too, about the realigning of Saddle Road to make it a lot straighter. And basically if they can create jobs here [east Hawai'i] along the coastline in the different communities, welding shops, cabinet-making shops, that kind of stuff.

WN: So now with the closeout of the sugar, there's really no industry in this area. So what do you see replacing sugar?

PC: Right now, if you go Hilo side, you see . . .

BC: Papaya trees.

PC: Papaya farms. And they talking about a forest industry. But they not gonna hire that much [local] people. What they doing is they contracting the job out to somebody else. That's why I turn around, I told 'em—I went to one of the meetings they had down here. I said, "You guys wanna create a forestry industry. You said you folks gonna plant and harvest so many thousand trees after seven years or nine years, something like that. You say you guys get all the expertise. Why don't you guys have somebody come down here, train the people and then you guys use the people from the community to work that?"

They said, "No, it's easier for us to contract it out to somebody else." But then again, nobody here in the island going be able to get that contract because they don't have the experience to do that type of work.

WN: Hmm, it's a tough situation, yeah?

Well, okay, I think we're just about done. (BC laughs.) Yeah?

PC: I wen take up all of her time.

BC: No, 'cause I told Warren I would want you in this interview too, because we been through two phaseouts.

WN: Right, right.

BC: That's what I told him. Yeah. So no worry. (Laughs)

WN: Is there any more you want to say while I still have the tape recorder on?

BC: No.

WN: Anything you want to say about your lives, your present, future?
BC:  Nope. Just hope they leave our land alone. (Laughs)

PC:  Yeah.

BC:  Leave our land alone already. (Laughs) Yeah.

WN:  Okay, that's a good way to end it. Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW