Jessie Ke was born August 20, 1945 in Kapahulu, O'ahu. She spent her childhood on the islands of Moloka'i and O'ahu. While on Moloka'i, she lived with her uncles on her mother's side of the family; and while on O'ahu, she attended Saint Patrick's School, Lincoln School, Stevenson Intermediate School and Roosevelt High School. She became ill before graduating from high school and decided she wanted to recover and live by herself on Moloka'i.

In 1968 she moved to the Big Island with her first husband. They lived in Pāhala, and her husband worked for Hawaiian Agricultural Company (eventually called Kaʻū Agribusiness Company). She worked as a waitress and eventually as a wine stewardess at Volcano House until about 1970. She later worked at Black Sands Restaurant in Punalu‘u. She was widowed in 1974.

Her second husband, Daryl Ke, worked for the plantation from 1975 until the closure in March 1996. She also worked at the plantation in the mid-70s for less than a year covering seed and planting seed. She then worked in the home and raised her children. Beginning in 1984, she worked for Pāhala Summer Fun and at Pāhala Elementary School and Kaʻū High School collecting money for lunch tickets. In 1993 she began working with the school’s Kupuna program.
This is an interview with Jessie Ke. It’s December 14, 1996. We’re at the Hilo Airport, and the interviewer is Holly Yamada.

Okay, let’s start with when you were born.

JK: August 20, 1945.

HY: And where were you born?

JK: Kapahulu, O‘ahu.

HY: And where did you spend your early childhood?

JK: Mostly on Moloka‘i.

HY: When did you move from O‘ahu to Moloka‘i?

JK: I went there [O‘ahu] to go to school, so it had to be after—oh, when I hit the first grade.

HY: First grade. And why was it that you moved to . . .

JK: O‘ahu.

HY: . . . Moloka‘i?

JK: Oh, to Moloka‘i? My mother [Jessie Cabral Souza] allowed her brothers [Henry Keama and Louis Naukama] to raise me, yeah. Two brothers. She felt that it would be better for me to brought up by them. To learn, you know. My mom being Hawaiian, and my father [Walter Phillip Allen] being Caucasian, and my brother was brought up more my father’s way. And I believe she wanted me to learn more of her own culture.

HY: Now this was your hānaied family.
JK: Yeah, yeah.

HY: Do you know anything about your . . .

JK: Biological family?

HY: Yeah.

JK: No.

HY: Okay. So why was it that they wanted you to come back to school, then?

JK: To O'ahu?

HY: Yeah.

JK: Yeah, mainly for education. To go to school over there. My father had this thing about private school. So when I first came on to O'ahu, I attended Saint Patrick['s School].

HY: Till about what time?

JK: I attended Saint Patrick till about third grade. And then I went back to Moloka'i. In fact, I spent most of my holidays there.

HY: In Moloka'i.

JK: Moloka'i. And then I didn't want to go to Saint Patrick no more, you know. It was mainly because it was confusing for me. I had friends that I could play with throughout the day, you know, throughout the week. But when [went to] school (Saint Patrick), I couldn't participate with them (we were separate boys from girls). And so this kind of hurt me, and at an early age, I didn't like that. And I asked my dad. So I went to a public school. I went to Lincoln elementary [Lincoln School], went to Stevenson Intermediate [School], and then to Roosevelt [High School].

HY: Now what was your home life like when you were going to school on O'ahu?

JK: It was great. It was good. Yeah, I had loving family. I had a loving parent, you know, grandparents over there. But I really missed my island of Moloka'i.

HY: Now—excuse me—this was your mom's parents?

JK: Parents, yeah.

HY: Okay. So you were staying with your grandparents.

JK: Yeah. Well, my parents and my grandparents both live on O'ahu. And so I stayed with my mom all day, right? And only when I go to Moloka'i, then I'm with my uncles.

HY: And then can you talk a little bit about your home life when you would come back to
Moloka‘i?

JK: Oh, my home life on Moloka‘i was great, because I was able to do the things I enjoyed most, which was going down to the beach and gathering seafood, going up mauka, you know, and I love to hunt. I love to ride horse. And so I’m able to do all the things I’m not able to do on O‘ahu. Because on O‘ahu, you can’t even keep a horse, more less ride in Honolulu.

HY: Now when you say you like to hunt, what would you like to hunt?

JK: Well, on Moloka‘i it was wild pig, feral pig, and there was goat, and deer.

HY: And was it your uncles that taught you how to hunt?

JK: Yeah, I had two uncles. And one did not have any hands at all. He lost his arms, he lost his hands. So he taught me how to gather from the ocean. And my other uncle taught me how to hunt, how to ride.

HY: Would you, when you went hunting or did gathering by the ocean, were those ever used for commercial purposes? Or was it just for your . . .

JK: Just for the household?

HY: Yeah. Just for the household.

JK: It was both. My uncle, who had no hands, so that meant he was unable to get a job. No one would really hire him, right? And so (child crying in the background) whatever he gathered, such as squid—and we call that he‘e—he would dry it out. And this is what he would sell back to the market. When I say sell, it was not really for money. It was more like a trade. So he’d give the squid, how many pounds, whatever he had, and in return he’d have his feed for the pig, feed for the horses and the chicken. So it was more like a fair exchange, I guess you’d call it.

HY: And the chickens, were they for egg laying?

JK: Yeah, or for frying, you know, cooking.

HY: So it was to support your family there.

JK: Yeah.

HY: Okay. And what did you father do?

JK: My father was with the [U.S.] Navy. He worked at—all I know is he did welding. Yeah. I don’t know the exact description. And then when he retired from the service, then he worked with Serta Mattress [Company]. And he stayed there until he just gave up, call it retirement from there.

HY: And did you have siblings?
JK: I had one brother.

HY: And did he also go to school on O‘ahu?

JK: Yeah.

HY: So did you live with him then when you . . .

JK: We all lived together, uh huh [yes].

HY: And then after Stevenson, where did you go to school?

JK: To Roosevelt High [School].

HY: And then at some point—you didn’t finish?

JK: Yes, I didn’t finish school.

HY: And why was that?

JK: I became very ill. I had a problem with my heart, and the doctor said to my dad at that point that I most likely would not see twenty years old. And things had really gone bad. I had lost so much weight. I had hardly any energy left. And I was confined home most of the time. And so I decided that it was time for me to go home to my own island [Moloka‘i]. And I spoke to my parents, and I said that if I was going to die, I didn’t want to die on O‘ahu. Because I didn’t feel like this was really my home, and I wanted to go back to Moloka‘i. And I was just about seventeen at this point. And I already had the house from my uncle, who had passed on.

HY: So you inherited a house?

JK: On Moloka‘i, yeah. And so I went back there, and my parents were very supportive, as well as my grandparents, my brother. They took care of my financial needs, my food, my utilities and everything was paid for. The house, we didn’t have to worry about the house. So everything else was taken care [of] by my family.

HY: So did you live there, then, by yourself in your uncle’s house?

JK: Mm hmm. Yes.

HY: And how did you . . .

JK: I know for most people, it’s a bit hard to imagine that. How can you be seventeen and stay there? But at that time, versus the youth today, I think, even at fifteen, the children then were much more mature than the fifteen-year-olds today.

HY: More self-sufficient?

JK: Yeah. And remember, I said I was brought up basically over there, so almost everything that
was taught to me enabled me to survive, to gather for myself. So it wasn’t very hard. And able to stay by myself. And I think that being by myself was good, because I needed to find me, you know. At this point, if you figure that you’re so young, and you may never see the next day, you have that tendency to break down and cry. But in this case, it gave me that opportunity to reflect on my own life and all the things I had in life, and have had, yeah? The people that I was surrounded by.

And I came to realize that if I’m going to leave this earth, I don’t want to leave it just being sick. I’m going to leave it doing the things that I was told not to do. And so I went back down to the beach. I started to gather and eat all the things that I was told not to eat.

**HY:** Like what kind of things?

**JK:** Oh, *limu, 'opīhi, hā'uku'uku*. I don’t know why, but they felt that this wasn’t good for me. Even the salt. I ate seafood salt and not the regular food salt that we have in the stores. I ate a lot of the greenery from up *mauka*, you know, up mountain. Which would be *hōi'o*. I pretty much gathered the things that I was brought up with.

And to my surprise, instead of getting weaker and much more sick, I became much more healthier. Even my color came back. Because at one point I was so fair that even my veins you could see on my hands and my face. And there, I began to pick up a real dark tan. I started to come a nice color. And I’m very grateful, because at fifty-one, I’m still here. And the doctor said that I wouldn’t be able to have children. Well, I’ve had eight, but six remaining, yeah? So I think my going back to the island did me whole lot of good.

**HY:** And how long did you stay there, just healing yourself?

**JK:** I stayed there until 1968, then I came to this island [Hawai‘i].

**HY:** And why did you come to the Big Island?

**JK:** Because I had lost two—after my oldest girl, I had two sons. And after I lost my sons, I felt it was time for me to come here. Yeah, because the island I was brought up on, there were so many things that are unexplainable. People say, “Well, it’s only your superstition.” But because I was brought up there, I do have respect for the island and the ways of the island. And apparently, my husband had not behaved himself while he was on the island.

**HY:** This is your first husband.

**JK:** My first husband, [Thomas] Napoleon.

**HY:** It’s the Napoleon family?

**JK:** Yes. And a statement was made to him. And, well, he don’t believe in that. But after I lost my two sons, I realized it was time for me to come off of the island. And he wanted very much to come home to this island, ’cause he’s from Hawai‘i [island], from Kapāpala, and I said okay, we’d come home. And no sooner I reach on this island then I’m pregnant and I’m now carrying my third son. And so the good Lord have blessed me with two sons thereafter.
HY: Now, when you were still on Moloka‘i, you had recovered from your illness, and then you had gotten married and had three children, did you work at home? Or how did you make a living during that time?

JK: Okay, my husband was a cowboy with Moloka‘i Ranch [Ltd.]. And I was basically a homemaker.

HY: And did you continue to do things like hunt and gather . . .

JK: Yeah, because my husband, Napoleon, was also a cowboy by trade. And so it’s automatically that he also hunts. We had so much in common at this point.

HY: I see. Okay.

JK: Except that he was good at hunting, and he wasn’t good at being down the beach. He loved seafood, but he can’t gather. So this is my specialty.

HY: And when you came here, then, what kind of work did he do?

JK: Well, when he first came back to Ka‘ū, the first available job was with the Ka‘ū plantation, Ka‘ū Sugar [Company, Inc., at that time called Hawaiian Agricultural Company. When the plantation closed in 1996, it was called Ka‘ū Agribusiness Company, Inc.].

HY: Sugar. Do you remember what he did?

JK: He started with the cut kō, cut cane.

HY: Yeah.

JK: And then he became the mule skinner. He took care the mules because at this time, that’s when they had the mules taking out all the fertilizers. They didn’t use the trucks as much. And so he had the mule team going all the way up mauka taking and dropping all the fertilizers. And then the menfolks would come in, fill up their sack, and then start throwing fertilizer.

HY: So they would hand throw.

JK: Throw, yeah.

HY: I see.

JK: And sometimes if it wasn’t as busy, then he’d stay back and break in some new ones, some new mules.

HY: And where did you live at that time?


HY: Did the plantation provide housing for you folks?
JK: Well, we applied for a home, and so we lived below Mill Camp. It was Filipino Mill Camp at that time, it was called. And we stayed in one of the home down there.

HY: That was provided for?

JK: Well, we had to pay for the rent.

HY: I see, so you rented from them.

JK: Yeah. Remember, had union already. (Chuckles)

HY: Okay. And then what were you doing at that time?

JK: I stayed home to help raise my children. After my number two boy was born, and I needed to go to work, because what my husband was making wasn’t enough. And I went to work with Volcano House. It was also owned by C. Brewer [and Company, Ltd.].

HY: How did you get that job?

JK: Actually, I had wanted to work. My husband really was against it, because since we had gotten married, I had never been out of the home. And he really didn’t care to have me work. But I actually took my sister-in-law to go and apply for a job.

HY: His sister.

JK: No, his brother’s wife.

HY: Oh, okay.

JK: And when we got there, she kind of had cold feet. She didn’t want to go in. And she said, “Oh, I don’t think I can do it.”

So I told her, “It’s so simple. Just go in there and ask for an application and fill it up.” And so I told her, “Come with me and I’ll take the first step.” So I went in, I said, “May I have an application?” And then I started to fill it up.

And then Bobby [Robert] Wright was the manager at that time at Volcano House. And so he said, “Oh, don’t leave, Jessie. We may be able to give you (chuckles) an interview.” You know, I was all for it, because I wanted to show her how easy it is to do the interview. (Chuckles) So he said, “Oh, come on in.” And I went in, I sat down—she came in with me—and we went through the whole interview. And he told me, “Great, you can start tomorrow morning.” And that’s how I got the job. And she didn’t want to work at that point. She still didn’t feel that comfortable. So I went to work.

HY: What did you do there?

JK: I started off as a waitress. I only went one morning, for breakfast, and then they asked me to come for lunch. That would give me from ten o’clock to two o’clock, which was great, because that gave me enough time to get to work, go home, and take care of my children.
They later will ask me to fill in in the cocktail lounge, (baby audible in background) and had no knowledge of, you know . . .

HY: Of cocktails.

JK: . . . of doing that, yeah. But I was always willing to learn. So apparently, the girls that were scheduled to come did not come. And they had just trained me for one night for dinner. And the next night, I came to work and they put me in the cocktail lounge. And from thereafter, I was doing both, the breakfast and the cocktail. And then they asked me to just do the cocktail. Then for dinner, I became a wine stewardess throughout the night. And then whatever wines I sold, I had my commission from there.

HY: Now was this in the early [19]70s then?

JK: Yes.

HY: And for how long did you work there?

JK: Gee, about 1970. You know, that's a kind of hard one. I think 1971, or 1970. Maybe the ending of '70, but somewhere around there anyway. Then, I paused in between there, because I had had an accident, actually. And later on, I figured, well, I'll just leave, and then I got pregnant. But after my pregnancy, I will go down and work in Punalu'u. Again, this is also [owned] by C. Brewer in Ka'ū. And I worked there until . . .

HY: Is this the Black Sands . . .

JK: Yeah, Black Sands Restaurant [part of Punalu‘u Resort]. And I stayed there until 1974. And then, because of my children, actually, this is why I left the job there. It was kind of hard, because my husband and I were working different shifts. And my husband wasn't really doing his part in helping with the children. And sometimes the children would be unattended. And one of my sons had fallen from the stairs, in fact. Slit him on the top by his brow. And for some reason, I just had this feeling, and I just told my boss I need to go home. And he asked me why, and I just told him I was sick. But I knew something was wrong. And I got home and my boy was bleeding. And after that, I decided, well, I need to stay home with my children.

And I stayed home for a while, and I found that this wasn't helping us out financially. So I tried to get set up—someone to help me with my. . . . My older ones was going to school, and I still had the younger one that I needed help with. And so I just started with Mauna Loa Macadamia Nut [Corporation], and thereafter, my husband passed away. So I felt with my husband gone, I couldn't be out working and leaving my children, because this would really be devastating for them. So I needed to be home for them.

HY: This was in '74?

JK: Mm hmm [yes].

HY: Is that right? Your husband passed away in '74?
JK: [Nineteen] seventy-four, yeah. So I decided to just stay home and take care of my children. But, see, when I did this, I felt that because I had my four children that the welfare [benefits] would help me. But I was very wrong, because they didn’t help me at all.

HY: Why was that, do you think?

JK: I don’t know. I mean, she [the welfare worker] explained it in all her technical terms, but I could never understand the real—the reason behind it. And I guess at this point, just the refusal of helping me, and even if she’s trying to explain it to me, but she’s not coming down to my level, okay. She’s explaining to me, but in her terms. And I guess I got so frustrated, I wanted to lick [i.e., hit] her. So that don’t help me much.

HY: So how did you survive then?

JK: Using my skills that I was taught: to hunt up mauka, I gathered from the ocean. Also [I hunted] goats, because I knew that the Filipino, they love live goat. So I normally went on my own. Whatever I caught, I would sell that. And I used that to buy my rice, my shôyu, the basic things that I need.

HY: You’d use for trade?

JK: I’d sell it. Maybe sixty-five [dollars], seventy-five dollars, one goat. And then I use that money for my gas money, and I also needed to buy, I call it mea’ai—candies. You know, I needed to buy fruits and things for my children. Some people say, well, that’s foolish spending. But sometimes I buy them a little toy. Or my older daughter, I’d give her a little something. Because it wasn’t much, but they needed something. Because it wasn’t much, but they needed something. They knew that to have no father, and have nothing, it can be really depressing. So as much as possible, I try to give them whatever I could.

HY: What kind of housing did you live in at that time?

JK: I was renting. Renting . . .

HY: Renting from . . .

JK: Yeah. A private owner, because by that time, the plantation did away with the bottom part of the camp. They were asking the people to leave. So most of the people were moving up slowly but surely.

HY: Was that when they put in the street system? Or the . . .

JK: No, today it’s all covered up. Yeah, today it’s all covered up with all the boulders that came down from up mauka. They just piled it down there and build it up. And that’s where Mauna Loa Macadamia Nut is today. So we moved up and were renting from a private owner.

But as soon as my husband died in October, the rent went from [$]350 to [$]375 [per month]. By November, it was up to [$]400. By December, it was [$]450. And by January, I still owed him. And do you know that even though I moved out of the house, he wanted to charge me all those months. I had moved out by January. But I had owed him for November, December,
and January.

And he was so sure that I would get help from welfare. And he kept telling me that if I went to the welfare, welfare would help me. And I was trying to explain to him that I wasn’t getting any help. In fact, the day that I came out of the welfare office again—I don’t know how many times—I heard my name. Because the welfare office was. . . . Here’s the building. The police station was right at the corner of the building, and the welfare office was in the middle.

So when I came out to go to my car, I heard my name. So, you know, “Gee, that’s my name on the scanner.” So I went into the police station, and it was Bobby [Robert] Gomes at that time. And he’s one of our old-timers that resided in Pāhala. And I said, “Boy, Bobby, somebody looking for me?”

And he said, “Yeah. This guy.”

And then when he mentioned the name, I said, “Oh, that’s my landlord. He’s my landlord.”

And he said, “Yeah, he put out one complaint.” So then I explained to him. So he told me—and he knew my situation, right, living in Pāhala—so he said, “If you haven’t got the funds, he cannot do anything.”

Well, personally, I felt bad, because I didn’t want to have to owe the person. And one of the questions I remember that man asked me, “Didn’t you get anything from the funeral?” I did. But you know, I can owe a telephone bill. I can owe a light bill. I can owe the store. But I sure as heck don’t want to owe a funeral parlor. You know what I mean? That’s a kind of bill that you don’t want. So whatever I receive, in fact, it covered the funeral expenses, and I had enough so that I could stack up some of my rice. I still had my girl that was only about eight months, so I needed to buy milk, my formula. So whatever extra money I had, it wasn’t like I went and try buy one car or something.

HY: And so did he evict you, then, from that home?

JK: In January.

HY: In January?

JK: Yeah. Before he could tell me to get out, I told him, well, you know.

HY: And then where did you go from there?

JK: My husband today, Daryl Ke, it was his mother who extended the invitation to come up to the ranch to live with her. And I really didn’t want to . . .

HY: This was Hawaiian Ranch [Company]?

JK: Kapāpala [Ranch Company].

HY: Kapāpala.
JK: Yeah, Kapāpala. Well, it was still under the care of Hawaiian Ranch. [Keauhou, Kapāpala, and Ka'alu'alu Ranch Companies merged to become Hawaiian Ranch Company.] But I really didn't want to. I have this thing about living with other people. But I had no choice. I had to make that decision because of my children. If it was just myself, I would have said, “Thank you,” and kind of managed on my own. But because I had my four children, I needed to rethink it over and don’t even let pride come into it.

So I stayed up there, I stayed with them. And I told her that I would stay with her for at least six months. Give me six months to get on my feet. Within that time, the plantation [Ka'ū Sugar Company] had hired me, 'cause being up at the ranch meant someone could help me with my children, and she had wanted my youngest daughter. So I felt that being up on the ranch, she could help me with my youngest when my other three would be going to school throughout the day. And this would give me time so that I can go and find a job. Well, the plantation had hired me. So I did cover seed for the plantation. I did that for a while. And then they put me on the planting machine.

HY: Planting machine.

JK: Yes.

HY: Is that exactly what it sounds like?

JK: Yeah.

HY: It’s the machine that actually plants the seed?

JK: That plants it, yeah. Plants the seed.

HY: And how long did you do that job for?

JK: Okay, I didn’t last a year. Because the ranch people had to move out, because C. Brewer [the parent company] was going to give that up, give up Kapāpala Ranch. And so everyone had to relocate. And so most of them was moving down either to Pāhala or Nā'alehu. And so since they were moving down, and then my sister-in-law extended, you know, told me to come and stay with her. So I felt like okay, it’s just about six months. It was January to June, just about six months. And I felt, okay, I needed to move out of the home. And so I stayed with my sister-in-law.

HY: And she was, you said, in Pāhala.

JK: And she just lived a street away from the Kes, you know, down camp, down Mill Camp. But it’s just one of those situations, because my husband today, Daryl, we didn’t have any—I didn’t have much interest in him at that time. (Chuckles) It was somehow after we moved off of the ranch and started dating, and his mom didn’t really care for that. And my sister-in-law and his mother, they were great friends.

HY: Your sister-in-law from your first marriage.

JK: Previous marriage, yeah. And so it didn’t help matters. If anything, it kind of hurt things for
Because I believe the mother solicited the help of my sister-in-law to help break us up, get us away from each other. Well, at this point, as far as really needing another husband, my main interest was more my children. But I always said that if the mother had been wise, the son would have stayed home. But by their actions, they actually pushed him away from them and into my arms, see? And that’s one of the things that happened.

I came to O’ahu to visit my brother. And when I was here and when I went back—see, my sister-in-law and I came down together [to O’ahu]. I needed to come and see my brother, and she wanted to go and visit with her mom. But when I went back [to Ka’ū], she didn’t go back. And I won’t stay in the home with her husband. I mean, that’s my first husband’s brother, but I was brought up that way, you know. And so I stayed at Shirokawa’s [Shirokawa Motel]. It’s a hotel in Ka’ū. I stayed there and to think what should I do. And I decided—because by that time, I had been working, but I needed to quit the plantation, ’cause I knew I couldn’t do this now. So I had received our social security for my children and myself. So decided, well, I’ll just take whatever steps I need to, and I’ll just find a place. But there was nothing in Ka’ū that I could rent. So I moved down to Pāhoa, down Nānāwale. And I found a home down there that we could rent. It was a three-bedroom home. So the next day, from the hotel, I came straight into Hilo. I contacted the person, went down to Nānāwale, checked out the home, and made my deposit and everything. And all my things was stacked up at my sister-in-law’s porch. So I just needed a truck. Well, apparently, Daryl—after work, I went back into Ka’ū, and he had seen me, so he asked me, and I told him, “Well, I’m not going to work with the plantation anymore,” because I needed to move. I don’t have anybody to watch my children, more less a place to stay.

But his mother really— and I knew his mother didn’t want him associating with me, so I decided not to tell him where I was going to move. And his mother was more than willing to have one of the son-in-laws give me a truck, lend a truck to haul all my things to Nānāwale.

So they hauled my things down, and my [future] husband Daryl, he had contacted one of the aunties down in Pāhoa, and she thought that he was helping me haul my things. So she gave him (chuckles) the directions to where I live. And so from there, we just kind of continued our relationship until I married him.

HY: And he was working at the plantation at that time?

JK: He was still at the plantation, so even—sometimes he’d be down Nānāwale and then he’d get up early, like five o’clock and he’d drive back. So maybe he’d come down twice out of the week.

And then an earthquake took place, 197[5], in November. And for me, that earthquake was a blessing. Of course, for others it wasn’t. But my brother-in-law was working down Punalu’u restaurant, Black Sands Restaurant, and he was a chef there. But when the plantation wrecked the restaurant, he didn’t have a job, right? So he had to move out of the house that he was renting, which meant the house was available. And I went in and rented the home, so this put me right back in Ka’ū.

HY: This was Daryl’s brother.

JK: Yeah. And, see, I never relinquished my PO [post office] box, my mailbox, because I never
intended to move away from Ka’ū. So even though I moved out of the district, I had always been waiting for a place to move back in. So after the tidal wave [and earthquake in 1975], I moved back into there. And I have been there since.

HY: Now, how far inland was there damage? Do you remember?

JK: Hmm. Not . . .

HY: Or was it just that . . .

JK: Not a mile. Not a mile. In fact, it just came into where the restaurant—basically the whole area, and just swept down.

HY: You worked there, obviously, prior to that time, yeah?

JK: Yeah.

HY: Okay.

JK: Yeah, I had worked there, and then after that, I quit. And then, you remember, I went with [Mauna Loa] Macadamia Nut [Corporation], and then this incident . . .

HY: And now how long were you at Macadamia Nut?

JK: I had just started. It had been only about a week. And it takes you just about that time to master picking up the nuts. (HY laughs.) And the first day I started—or maybe a little over a week, I had just started. And I felt like, “I don’t really want to do this.” Every day I’d go to work and think of new ways I can invent a machine to pick up these nuts. And I thought I would never get used to doing it. And I finally did. I was able to do well. And when I started . . .

HY: Was that just seasonal work then?

JK: Yeah, just seasonal. But you know, they have this thing about—and I’m sure you must have heard it—you know, Hawaiians are lazy and so on and so forth.

HY: Stereotype.

JK: Well, when I started with the macadamia nut, there were five of us that started all at the same time—one Japanese and four Hawaiians. And so they all had this image that we were all going to crash [fall asleep] under a tree. And at the beginning, I didn’t even pay much mind to the talk. But after three days of them needling and talking, I couldn’t take it. And so, it was over a week that I’d been with them. And by that time I had gotten pretty good. And so I decided that—there was an older woman who had been working. And I kind of kept an eye out for her. And so that day I told her, “Excuse me, I won’t be near you throughout the day.”

And I decided to try—there was this woman in Pāhala. She was a Filipino woman. And she was their top gun at that time. But I was determined to show that Hawaiians are not lazy
people. And at the end of the day, I had picked up, I think, five more bags, more than this woman. I’d broken her record, yeah. And I normally don’t do that. I normally don’t like to compete. But in this case, I just had to, I guess for my own satisfaction and for those that were around me, because the other three that had begun work with me, they were kind of offended. It was such a put down.

HY: Going back to, or up to the time you now moved into Punalu‘u house, of your brother-in-law—let’s see, Daryl was still with the plantation—and now what kind of work were you doing at that time, then?

JK: Well, when I moved into the house, I didn’t work already.

HY: Okay.

JK: I just stayed home and...

HY: Stayed home and worked.

JK: Because I decided to just become a homemaker. And then later I’ll have a son, my Daryl Jr., and then my Darylnn. So I stayed (at) home until Darylnn, my youngest, started school. Then once I got them all off to school, then I decided to go back [to work]. I started with Pāhala Summer Fun with the county. And then from there, I went into the school [Ka‘ū High and Pāhala Elementary School]. And later on into the...

I stayed with the school and the Pāhala Summer Fun for a couple of years, until I lost a son. And then I needed to take a break. I needed to give myself that time. And thereafter, the Kupuna program had contacted me, ’cause I had been doing some volunteer things for them. And so they asked me if I would be interested. And I felt, yeah, I should. Because this give me an opportunity to share whatever I was taught, to share with the students.

HY: This might be a good time to stop, and then we can...

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

HY: Okay, you were talking about after the birth of Daryl Jr. and Darylnn, you went to work in the school. Can you talk about what kind of work you did there?

JK: Okay, well, with the school, they asked me if I would be interested in taking care of their—it’s the tickets that the students have for their lunch. And you collect the money and so on. And at first, I didn’t think I would’ve been interested. But because they had so much complaints that the older kids were beating up on the younger ones, and weren’t allowing the younger ones in line, and so I decided maybe I should. Maybe I could make a difference. And I said, okay, I’ll try it.

HY: Did they want you to police them?
JK: No. Well, when the students would come in—apparently they were having so much trouble. They would have fights in line when the bus would come in from Nāʻālehu. And they always had this thing about Pāhala-Nāʻālehu.

HY: Was there a rivalry?

JK: Yeah. And so when they come in, they’d have problems. And the secretary was also doubling up doing this. And so when they asked me—in fact, I don’t even really know why they asked me. I hope it wasn’t because I look (like I) was a strong-arm.

(Laughter)

JK: But anyway, when they asked me, I said I wonder if I should. But I decided maybe I should try it. Because my youngest one was in school, and I had been doing volunteer work, reading and what have you, with the students, and after that I’d have free time. So I said maybe I should. So I decided to take it on. And to my surprise, once I started the job, it turned out real well, because there were no fights. And they had had so much back talk from the students, especially the high school students. Never the elementary, but mostly high school—swearing at them and so on. When I got into that position, there was a lot of aloha between me and the students.

I always kept a little coin purse—and this is my own personal coin purse that I kept in the can—that if a student came and didn’t have any lunch money, because some students have to pay, and sometimes they didn’t want to go up to the office. And so I normally just let the money out to them and they would pay me back. And to the high school students, sometimes they want more than one lunch, you know, the older kids. And my son could eat three lunch. (Chuckles) So there were students, when they had a favorite lunch, pizza, baked chicken, and they’d like more than one lunch, so they’d come and see me. And I’d say, “Sure.” If they did not pay me back, then the next time they needed it, they wanted an extra lunch, they wouldn’t get it, right? So that meant they always had to clear their account with me in order to. . . . So it worked out real well.

And the thing I think I enjoyed most was that there was never a student that swore at me. Not one, be it from a seventh grader up to a twelfth grader. I’ve always had their respect. And I think I had the hardest thing with my own. My own son would always cut in line, lunchtime. Because then they would ask me if I would help during the lunchtime, watch the line. So I said, “Sure.” And I’d always find one child sneaking in and that was my own. And I had this thing that if you cut in line, you go to the back of the line. You cut in line again, you go to the office. And so he’d cut in line again, and I’d send him to the office. So I think the students realized that I was being fair. I wasn’t pulling any favoritism.

And I always told my children, “You know, when I’m at school, I am not your mother.” And so I wanted him to understand that, don’t take advantage. So it worked out real well.

I stayed with the school, and once my son passed on, I decided to take a break. And I kind of rested up, and later on I’ll start with the Kupuna program, yeah. And this is where I am today.

HY: Can you talk a little bit about what you do there?
JK: Kupuna program? Okay. Well, we have—basically, we need to, depending on the grades, [teach] a little bit of our [Hawaiian] language—our culture, our history. And we introduce a lot of our own personal crafts. You know, like making the hook to catch the crab. How to clean the pako, because it's becoming a lost art. Not very many do it today. And if you just pick it and cut it, you need to boil it to get out the poison, that bitter taste from it, yeah? So, even how to take care of the taro. And so that's just the basic of what I do.

HY: What age group of students are you teaching?

JK: I'm working with—I started with fifth and sixth [grades]. Then they asked me to take four, five, and six. So these are the three grades that I'm working with.

HY: And you've been doing this since what time?

JK: This is my third year.

HY: And when you worked at the schools, prior to that, how long did you stay there?

JK: Let me see. (Pause) I think I started in 1983 to 1990, or 1984 to 1990. Somewhere around there.

HY: Let's see, three years. So you went right from there into your Kupuna program?

JK: No, from 1990, I stopped both the county and the school, 'cause the county, I was doing that during the summer. And then in 1990, I stopped both, the school and . . .

HY: The county you were doing? I'm sorry.

JK: Pāhala Summer Fun. The school work.

HY: Oh, right, okay.

JK: And then I just kind of rested from both. Then in 1993, I started with the Kupuna program.

HY: So there was a bit of a gap there.

JK: Yeah. As I said, I just needed that short time to get myself together. To make sure that—see, because I was working with young people, I had to make sure that I was all together with myself, because . . .

HY: This was after your son passed away.

JK: Yeah. Because I had to make sure that if I'm with them, I couldn't be grieving, because that would affect the students. Or if I had any kind of anger over this, I couldn't bring that to work with me. I needed to be there for them. And so I had to stay—I needed to take a break, to make sure of where I was. And that my foot was really on this foundation and I was . . .

HY: Stable.
JK: Yes. And then once I took off from work, I realized that even though situations in my life had changed, I personally had not changed, that I was able to do the things, and I just needed to make sure that I was there [emotionally]. Because I knew that anything that I would have done, it would have—if I went to work and I was always crying, that would affect the children. And I have no right doing that. Or if I was angry and I would take it out on the children, naturally I have no right doing that. No right, first of all, because that’s plain old common sense. And second of all, I would be really ruining the children. And that was never my intention.

HY: Now, during the [19]80s then, your—Daryl, well, all the way up until the layoff this year, he was with the plantation, right?

JK: With the plantation, yeah.

HY: Was there any time during that period where you felt that his position, or the company in general, would not survive, or that it was an unstable situation to be in?

JK: Well, there was always talk that the plantation was going to close. It was always in the air. And in the early part of the [19]80s, when we first heard it, I think. . . . Well, I believe it was even when my first husband was still alive. But anyway, when I was married to Daryl, and we’d hear this talk every now and then, and at the beginning, a lot of the families was kind of frightened and kind of stocked up [on supplies]. And we just waiting for it to come this year or next year, and then it didn’t come. And I guess everyone kind of leaned back and said, well, it’s not coming. Or maybe it is coming, but not right now. And that’s how Daryl and I felt. If it’s going to come, it’s going to come. But we can’t be stressing ourselves over something that is not here yet. And so we just kind of take the day one day at a time.

And so when the news came, it wasn’t where we were shocked. Because we had already heard it for years. You know, it’s kind of like, you already know it’s coming. And because of the situations taking place with the other plantations—not only with the plantations but other businesses—you see that some are popping up, but quite a bit are going down. So you know that our situation in life is changing. So what makes C. Brewer in Ka‘ū any different? Then pineapple [industry] went down. So when we finally got the news that the plantation was gonna close, yeah? And you cannot hate the plantation, because they have been there for us all these years. So you just accept things gracefully as you can. Anyway, that was for us.

HY: And I think in the early [19]90s, they did have some layoffs, is that right?

JK: Yeah. Yeah.

HY: Was Daryl . . .

JK: They had smaller ones earlier.

HY: Yeah. Was he concerned about . . .

JK: Daryl wasn’t laid off, but they had eliminations, job elimination. So Daryl, at one time, used to work out in the field. But before they eliminated, there was a knapsack. And he started off with knapsack on the back, and then he went behind the machine and sprayed. But before that
situation came up, there was an opening down at the mill. And he had wanted to go on the truck. I wasn't too keen about that, anyway, because that's pretty strenuous. But then there was an opening down at the mill, and then he decided to try for that. 'Cause he had gotten that job in the bagasse room, so he moved down to there. And then a few years thereafter, this is when they will eliminate the job that he had out in the field, so it was a good move for him. And then from there, he stayed in the bagasse room for quite some years, and then, just recently, he moved to the powerhouse. And that's where he stayed until the layoff.

HY: At some point you moved from Punalu‘u back in . . .

JK: No I stayed in . . . No, when Punalu‘u had the tidal wave, I moved . . .

HY: You moved there.

JK: From Nānāwale, from Pāhoa, I moved back to Pāhala. So I always stayed in Pāhala.

HY: Okay. And how did you obtain the current house that you’re in now?

JK: Well, Daryl and I went through the plantation and purchased the lot from them. And then we got our home from a package dealer through FHA [Farmers' Home Administration]. And went through the whole formalities of finding a package dealer and getting our home together.

HY: When you say package dealer, what does that mean exactly?

JK: Okay. When I called FHA—because I thought you call them and you explain to them you want to put up a home—they explained to me I needed to find a package dealer. This is a person who will put all the escrow papers and design the home for us and everything. And this is what it's called.

HY: The whole package dealer.

JK: Yeah, a package dealer. (HY chuckles.) And I was given three names, and I selected this one, who turned out to be a real dear friend. (Chuckles)

HY: So then in this year, when Daryl was laid off, what were your—now that this had finally happened, even though there were rumors about it all these years—what were your feelings about what you were going to do?

JK: Well, my husband never really—I guess we were brought up in that time—for me anyway—where you really don’t want to have depend upon the welfare, and because I had had a bad experience. But I feel that if I need to, for a short time, then I would seek help from them. But up until this point, I will continue to work with the Kupuna program and just apply wherever I’m able to. And if I can, I wouldn’t mind working someplace else five days and still be able to use the two days that I have with the school. Because I really don’t want to give up the students. Because if you think about it, the hours is not that great. It’s only four hours out of that, you know, for the two days. But the people that I come in contact with, the young people, it makes the work so much joyful, yeah?

HY: What kind of support system is out there for you? Maybe you can talk about it in terms of the
union. Were they supportive at all?

JK: I don’t really believe they were. But then again, everyone is entitled to their own opinion, and I’ve always felt that I really never did care much for the union anyway.

HY: What about C. Brewer? What kind of provisions did they make for their workers?

JK: When Daryl—when they were finally laid off, they had programs set for. . . . There was a computer class, there was that . . .

HY: Training programs?

JK: Yeah. They went for that landscaping. They had several other things that was offered out there, yeah?

HY: Now they [C. Brewer] had offered the—I’m not sure what it was called—but they had offered the workers [lease-free] land to either farm [five acres] or ranch [fifteen acres]. Was that an option that you folks considered?

JK: Yeah, Daryl and I did. We spoke about it. We discussed and went over. . . . When you’re first presented of this idea of five acres for five years and it’s free lease, it’s really great, because you think to yourself now I can do all these things and collect all this much money, right? But you also need to look at the downside of it. I mean, it have its bright side, but it also have its downside.

And when we evaluated the two sides, we could do the planting, but we need to—before you can plant, you need to clear the land. And so this means you need to have equipment. We don’t have equipment ourselves, so we need to hire someone outside. That calls for funds, right? We need to—some were saying that they will give you the seed to plant, if it’s coffee or starters for taro. Like me, I wanted taro. I think I’d do much better with the taro. But Daryl was thinking of coffee ’cause everyone else was talking about coffee. But it’s still—it’s not really they’re giving it to you, ’cause whoever is handing it to you now, you need to give it back, right? And so, again, it’s somehow or another, there’s money that will be involved there. You need to have water, too, and fertilizer. And the water, how do we get the water to the land? There’s no water pipes, okay. So it’s either we’re going to depend on nature, which is foolish, and you have to pipe it in, or we have to buy a container to take the water up. And we weren’t able to come up with that kind of funds. And if we have to make a big loan, what kind of equity do we put up? Our home? And that is really risky.

And then again, when it came to healthwise, Daryl isn’t in the best of health where he could do this basically all by himself. And then this would mean both he and I would have to be out there. Our children are all grown. They’re pretty much on their own, have their own families, their own lives. So do we call them in to help us on this land? It’s not possible. So manpower was another [factor].

So after we went over the pros and cons, we realized that it wasn’t wise. It wasn’t wise for us. And of course, you’d always have the ones who have already started, and it was always glorious. You know, “You should have, because you’re gonna this and that. Oh, look at us, we’re. . . .” And I never—with all that feeling coming in, I never once have ill feelings
towards them. 'Cause I feel that it's great. If you feel that it's good for you, it's good for you. Each one to find their own gap in life. But for Daryl and I, it wasn't for us.

HY: Did you consider the ranching option as well?

JK: We did. This is something else, too, because ranching would have been great. But if we---you don't just take the cattle and put them—okay, the grass is all there. The feed is all there, right? The cane is there, if you had cane land. You don't just take the cattle and leave them there. You have to fence them in. That's a lot of work. And that I know because my husband was cowboy, and I was brought up with that kind of life. So if anything, that would have been ideal for me. I love ranching. But I also know that you can only put so much head of cattle in a certain amount of paddock. Because the turnover of the grass and so on and so forth. We needed water. Livestock need a lot of water.

So to work the cattle, I would at least need horse. I have my own saddle, so that's no problem. I need a horse. We need the cattle, we need to purchase the cattle, right? They not going to give it to us free, like they do the coffee. Then to put up the posts, you need the posts, you need the wire. You need the insurance. And again, we weren't able to do that. I mean, maybe we could have. Maybe we could have decided to go and take out a big loan. But I could not see ourself taking on this big note and not being able to make a go at it. Because we have other ranchers outside. So what makes me think I would do much better at getting a market for my cattle? And you need to consider, too, that times are hard.

And you can't put your home up there, right? In the pasture. So you know that if you have a hundred head of cattle, you have to count on losses. You have to count at least ten cattle out of there. If you don't, then you're not facing up to reality, because that's part of life. They either gonna die from sickness, or they gonna get ripped off. One or the other. (Chuckles) And that's life. That is life.

HY: Is that a common problem with ranchers, then? Their cattle dies or people steal them?

JK: Well, you know, for me on Moloka‘i, and coming to this island, I haven't seen anything change.

HY: How do you steal a cow?

(Laughter)

HY: I mean, it seems like such a . . .

JK: It's possible.

HY: . . . conspicuous thing to steal.

JK: If they want it, they will take it. And it happens. But over the years—even with Hawaiian Homelands. They used to have the homeowners buy the cattle and keep in one paddock. And so they all worked together. And so when they ho‘ohuli—means they change cattle from one paddock to the next—and if you counted, like you had five hundred heads, all of a sudden you down to only four hundred-something. But you already know that either they died, and if
you don't have their carcass, well, you know it's at somebody else's home, and you might have been invited to that *lu'au*, you know. (Chuckles) So from a very young age, I already knew that.

HY: So, at any rate, the risks seemed too high to go for either of those options.

JK: Yeah.

HY: So the people in the community that did take those options, are they in the minority, then? Or did most people go for that, that you're aware of?

JK: Perhaps. I'm not really sure. But I know that we were contacted again, because I think three families had given up their lots, and so they wanted to let us know that we still had an opportunity to come in. And we thought about it again. And the second time was much easier to make that decision. 'Cause we just needed to remind ourselves about the realities, yeah? It's not that we don't want to take risk. But in this case, we realize that the risk was too great. And it was because, as I said, I wanted to raise taro. And if seven others are raising taro, all of us getting our things to the market is really unreasonable. And so we decided, well, we'd just find another means of supporting ourselves. Unless C. Brewer put up another hotel or something. (Laughs)

HY: Now is that something that you would look forward to?

JK: Well, you know, when C. Brewer wanted an environmental impact statement for Punalu'u, they had this model that they were supposed to have put up. And apparently, as soon as they had the environmental impact statement and all the clearance and everything, then they turned around and they sold it. So I don't think they want to commit themselves again to Ka'ū. Not like that.

But then there was another hotel coming up at Ocean View. And I have been looking forward to that, yeah. I had met the man. He had come in and sat down in several of the meetings. And I'm just sorry it wasn't a reality. But I really wanted it, because it would have been great, not only for us because we had a job, but the people of Ocean View would have had a medical center for them, a fire station. And he more less had in his plans, had it been a reality, that the workers would have had a place to put their little ones, you know, like a day care center. So what more can you ask for? Because when I started there wasn't anyone that you really could depend on to watch your children. That's why I stopped working, right? At Punalu'u. Now here, he's making it possible for a mother to go to work, the father to work, and still have someone to watch the child. You know, even if you have to pay for it. But as long as you are paying for good service, why not? Because I'm sure that if my child is choking, I want the person who is watching the child to be able to do CPR [cardiopulmonary resuscitation] at least.

HY: How do you think the layoff has affected your family life?

JK: Not much difference. Not much difference, yeah? I'm not resentful. Basically, for me I'm still the same. I don't know. Maybe it's me, personally, but I have my priorities in life. And, like I said, if I lose a job, I have a way at least of hustling to find another job. I just have to be consistent. If I want a job here, I just have to apply, and if they don't hire me within the
week, I’ll just call and call and call until they do. But if I lose someone, I can never undo that. So for me, that is much more precious.

Okay, we lost a job with the plantation, and it’s true, it had been so convenient. We lived there, worked there. But now that it’s gone, life haven’t stopped. It still goes on. We just need to find a new job someplace else.

HY: Is relocation a consideration, or do you want to stay where you are?

JK: Personally, I really want to stay in Ka‘ū. There’s just something about Ka‘ū that is so much like my own home in Moloka‘i. And I always feel that you have to be accepted by the land, by the place itself. If you’re not accepted, then you won’t last very long. And over the years that I’ve been here since 1968, I’ve noticed people have come in and have had this attitude about Ka‘ū and have never lasted very long. So you kind of have to love the area, as well as the district loving you back.

HY: What about services? Now you’d mentioned, you were thinking about welfare again. Were you able to get any assistance this time?

JK: Well, Daryl and I, we haven’t gone to it yet. I will when I need to. And if we do, if we needed to, then we’ll stay there [on welfare] for a little while, until we get on our feet, and then it’s off. And in fact, now I think they have some changes as it was in the paper. They don’t intend to have families living off of the program forever, right? And to me, that’s how it should have been.

HY: What about food stamps? Were you able to get assistance?

JK: No, we’re not taking that right now. As I said, when we reach the point when we feel that we really need to do it, then we’ll do it. But right now, one of my sons is working, and so he decided to buy a cow. So that’s why everybody is busy today. And with that will go part of our house meat. So that means we really don’t have to buy meat. We just have to thaw it out early. If you have a crowd that’s coming over, make sure there’s something available to be cooked. We just pick up our basic, our rice and flour, cornstarch, and just bake and do whatever.

And in our home, we have the propane tank. When I lost my son, I was using the regular big gas tanks. But when I lost him—you never plan for a death, especially a death of a child. And so it kind of just sweeps you off, right? And so whatever money we have, it goes into caring for that situation. So this going, contributing towards his funeral expenses and taking care whatever was left behind; he had a son that was three weeks old. And so now, we need to make sure that we can take care of this child. And of course, he will have social security, but not right away. And so that kind of sets us back, because we need to take money even from our own personal home.

So I told my husband having a big tank is great, except that when we refill it, we have to pay the whole thing at one time. So if you filling up ninety pounds, your bill might be $130. And when you fill, you have to pay it right there, before you can fill it again. So I said maybe we should scale down. So we’re thinking of the smaller tanks, the fifteen or twenty gallon. And I said, “Why not go with the small smaller tanks?” So we tried that. I discontinued with the gas
company, and we tried with the small tanks. And I tried monitoring that for a month. Well, at that time, we still had three kids home, my husband, and myself. So that put in—oh, we had four kids, four home, and my husband, so that was still six of us at home. And we went over a month with that five-gallon propane tank. Now on holidays, it might be a month, a month and a week, because we do a lot of baking, right? Turkey and what have you. But if on a regular basis of cooking, we go maybe a month and three weeks. So I decided this would work out great for us. So this is how we stayed from, since 1989. No, 1990, actually.

HY:  Good cost-cutting. Now Daryl did get some severance pay, is that right?

JK:  Yeah.

HY:  And how long did that last for?

JK:  This is basically what we’re using, our own severance [pay].

HY:  This is what you’re living off of now?

JK:  Yeah. And for medical, yeah.

HY:  And it includes medical [insurance]?

JK:  Yeah, [the severance pay is used to pay] for our medical [expenses]. And that’s why I said that if I don’t find a job, or he don’t find a job by then, then I don’t want to deplete our funds, and then I might turn to the welfare to see if I can get medical from them, and maybe food stamps.

HY:  How long will his severance pay take you to? How long does that run?

JK:  You mean how long will it . . .

HY:  Will you continue to get severance pay?

JK:  Well, they gave it all one time.

HY:  It was a lump sum?

JK:  Yeah. Lump sum, yeah.

HY:  And what about . . .

JK:  Well, with this lump sum, see, Daryl had some dental problems. And so I found out just before he finished work—we knew that he had had high blood pressure. But just before he finished with the plantation, we found out he had diabetes. Well, I kind of expected it, because it’s hereditary—his mom, his aunts, yeah? So I always told him, “Be careful. You may end up having it.” Well, naturally, he told us just when the plantation was ending. And so I decided that with his teeth, if he have a tooth problem, it may not heal up as quickly. So I explained to him what was on my mind. And I thought that maybe we should have him pull every teeth was remaining, and this would just make him buy dentures, put in dentures. And
he didn’t care too much for that idea, simply because he felt that would be wasting money. Well, a wife never looked at it that way. And I felt that you worked hard all these years, you deserve to have it. And he said, “No, no, no.”

But I’m so hardhead, I go ahead make the appointment, set it up, and then tell him, “Okay, you going dentist on this day.” And I then I said, “It’s up to you. If you want to pull it all one time or go two or three at a time, that’s your choice.”

So when I had the severance pay, I put it into our savings, and then I made arrangements with the dentist to make sure that I clear it. I took care of everything, so when he goes to the dentist there’s no bill to pay, ’cause it’s already taken care of. So that part of our severance went out. And then I had so much set on the side for his pills, because his pills was like seventy-eight dollars a month.

HY: So is there medical insurance coverage, or you were taking severance monies to pay medical?
JK: We paying. That’s how I’m doing it.
HY: I see.
JK: Out of the severance, yeah. This is why I said that Wal-Mart had applications out, yeah? So I was trying to get a job with. . . . I fill up an application, because what caught my eye is that they have medical. And as far as driving, that doesn’t bother me.

HY: So you applied for a position in Hilo.
JK: Mm hmm.
HY: With Wal-Mart.
JK: Yeah.
HY: And you haven’t heard from them yet.
JK: No.
HY: And what kind of work would Daryl like to get into, then?
JK: Well, actually, he went to school to become a carpenter. But at that time he was slim. You can’t find him climbing on your roof today. But Daryl is a real hard worker. So he’ll pretty much do almost anything, anything that is honest. Yeah, anything that is honest, he will do. (Chuckles)
HY: Has he had any luck getting any work since the layoff?
JK: No, not yet.
HY: And can you talk a little bit about the impact on the community, this closing? How has that affected---well, I guess maybe you could just talk about your relationship with the rest of the
community, the people around you. And how do you folks feel? How has it changed?

JK: Well, take our Christmas parade this past week, this past Sunday. Normally, our streets would have been crowded and loaded with our families and their children. And this year, it was—I mean, you find one spot with cars, and then the rest all the way down was empty space. So that in itself make you wonder—where are all the families?

And around the whole community, I really don’t know. I try not to—I don’t want to get into everybody else’s business, ’cause that’s what cause trouble. But sometimes you hear that a husband and wife is not together, so. And sometimes you hear that the children are giving problems.

As far as in school, when they first was coming up about this layoff, a lot of families—a lot of husband and wives—confronted each other, but not their children. And I think it’s most common with local people, that husband and wife will discuss, “Well, where do we go from here?” But they always forget about the children. And children need to know that, made assured that, just because your dad don’t have a job or your mom don’t have a job, then you won’t be evicted or won’t be starving. And so that’s what I noticed, the concern of the students.

HY: You noticed that through your work [at the Kupuna program]?

JK: Yeah, because students that were very akamai—you have students that are real noisy and boisterous. But there are some that were real good kids, and all of a sudden, they weren’t turning in their work. Their body was here and their mind was someplace else. And so after going through the rooms, I kind of realized—something have to be heavily weighed upon their mind to bother them like this. So I made an open discussion, and I said, “Instead of doing this, let’s discuss,” you know. . . .

Of course, some of them may say, from DOE [state Department of Education], “That has nothing to do with Hawaiiana.” But any time it affects an ‘ohana, it is still Hawaiiana for me. Because we are basically family, right? We teach family values and so forth. And so I allowed the students to have a chance to say what they were not able to say to their parents. And so they were able to say it to me. And when they say it to me, then we can discuss it, more or less. I won’t give them personal advice, because each household is different. But we could discuss things in general. And I wanted them to realize that even though. . . . You know, because the first thing come to their mind is that we going starve.

HY: You found that they were very worried about it?

JK: Yeah. And so what I did is I made it possible to bring in, so that we could prepare things that was taken from nature itself, and prepare it and show them how this can be used, and it is part of food. It is not pleasant [tasting] when it’s plain. But you need to add a little bit of this and a little bit of that to spice it up, and it becomes ‘ono. And with that, it kind of give them the assurance that, “If my mom or dad, we no more nothing in the house, at least I can get this and we can eat and carry us through another day.”

I even had things from the koa. But I told them it didn’t have to be koa. It could be mango. You can take this piece of wood, and I had them work on project. And they created a
papamū. This is a checkerboard made from koa. Nothing was bought. Everything was gathered. You know, we use either nuts or shells or pebbles as the playing pieces. I said put this together and you could sell this, three dollars. And this would allow you to buy bread or something else, bread and jam. I just wanted them to know that there were other means of caring for yourself and your family, and I didn’t want them to be frightened. If anything, I wanted them to be able to take hold and take control and say, “We’re not going to starve. I have this way we can . . . .” Because, right in Ka‘ū, right in Pāhala, these things are available for them. They just need to go out and get them.

Yeah, and so I noticed once we did this with the fourth graders, the fifth and the sixth graders, my students were, thereafter, more alert when I came in. When I greeted them, it wasn’t like, “Aloha, kupuna” [in a tired tone of voice]. It was, “Aloha, kupuna” [brightly]. And I had my wide-eyed students again.

And I know it’s hard, because even with my parents, they normally, any time came to business, they discuss it among themselves. It was never like we come in and it’s an open discussion. But I find that when a plantation go down like this, you need to include them, because it affects them as well.

I know we had two incidents where it was Ka‘ū students, Ka‘ū youths, who ripped off a Japanese tourist, yeah? Ladies. But I really cannot say that it was because the plantation went down. Because, I mean, I don’t know who the youths are. But to say, “It’s because the plantation went out of business, this is why the kids are turning to crime,” not necessarily. Their mothers could be working for Mauna Lani [Resort], or the fathers could be working for the Hilton [Waikoloa Village], you know. So we really don’t know.

HY: So you don’t feel like the crime rates . . .

JK: No, because the first thing come out, somebody said, “Oh, you see what happen when the plantation go down.” But there’s no proof that the parents . . . Because we don’t know who the kids are, right? So how can I blame you unless I know for sure. And, again, it would only be hearsay. And if I accepted that, then I would be passing it on and say, “Oh, C. Brewer knock off everybody, so now our kids turn to crime.” And yet, it wasn’t that way, right?

HY: I think we’re almost at the end here.

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 26-18-1-96; SIDE ONE

HY: Oh, this is a continuation of the interview with Jessie Ke.

You were talking about your feelings about the kids, how they actually expressed some worries to you. And you didn’t feel like crime actually has risen because of the plantation closing.
JK: Yeah. Because even before the plantation closed, they had youths that were still doing it anyway. You know what I mean? So I think it’s just because of their age, first of all, and it’s just one of those things. It has nothing really to do with the closing of the plantation. I know I’ve heard that when Laupāhāhoe [Sugar Company, which ultimately became Hāmākua Sugar Company] had closed down [in 1994] that there were a lot of stealing, a lot of crime, a lot of broken marriages. But even broken marriages, I don’t think the plantation really have a lot to do with. I think it’s really the individuals themselves. The marriage must have been already on the rocks, and the closing of the plantation just kind of helps speed up the situation.

HY: What about your own kids? Have they expressed concerns about what’s going to happen to their families and the community since this has happened?

JK: Yeah, my daughters. They’re concerned as to how we were going to manage. And I guess ’cause they feel that, here we are. We took care of them, and now, at this time in life, there’s nobody to take care of us, right? And they want to be able to help us, but they’re not able to. But I told them—I try to remind my girls—see, my boys weren’t worried. But my girls were, my two oldest girls. And I just have to kind of remind them that even when I didn’t have the father, Napoleon, I was able to manage. And we will now together, me and the father now, we will continue to manage, because there’s two of us working together, instead of just one. And then I always remind them that, what is most precious in life? And once I bring them into reality, then they realize it’s true. Job, I can find, and I will manage.

HY: What do you see for the future of Ka‘ū?

JK: Well, you know, there’s a lot of talk that it will become a ghost town. I don’t believe that. If anything, I think the first initial shock, everyone has left here. But after we regroup our ideas and, you know, where we want to go, I’m sure we’ll find other business coming up. Maybe somebody decide on growing mangos or something, or opening up some kind of business. But I see the people of Ka‘ū, they’re not lazy people. They’re very industrious people. So they will come up with new ideas, with new business.

I always tell Daryl he would do good in woodwork. Of course, we just need to get the machine. I like to do Hawaiian craft, and all that. I wouldn’t have mind doing the ipu, you know, the hula ipu. I wouldn’t have mind growing that. But then again, like I said, considering demand and all that, and then if the bugs destroy it, and . . . It’s another thing, too, about using herbicides versus organic. I would really rather go organic. But I would need to experiment first before I can do that. But maybe somebody else will do it.

HY: Is there anything else you’d like to add?

JK: I can’t think of anything right now.

HY: Okay. Thank you very much.

JK: Okay, I thank you for coming all the way back.

HY: My pleasure.

END OF INTERVIEW
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