BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Harold Look

Harold Look, eldest son of Tai Chan and Violet Look, was born in 1927, in Honolulu, O‘ahu.

His father was an employee of American Can Company.

Harold Look grew up in Pālolo Valley where he could hike and pick wild fruit. He had a newspaper route and caddied at a nearby golf course. During summers, he helped at his uncle’s piggery and worked in the pineapple industry at a cannery and at American Can Company.

An alumnus of St. Louis School, he completed his studies in general agriculture at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa in 1950. While still a college senior, he held jobs at the Moanalua Dairy and the Pineapple Research Institute.

Following college graduation, he worked first on Moloka‘i, then Lāna‘i.

On Lāna‘i, he was hired as a potential assistant superintendent in research. When he was not offered the permanent position but offered a lesser job, he opted not to continue employment. He leased and operated for seven years a piggery that was no longer run by the Hawaiian Pineapple Company. While still operating the piggery, he was recruited as a substitute teacher.

In 1957, he and wife Janet left Lāna‘i for O‘ahu so that he could pursue a degree in education.

For almost three decades, he served as principal at various elementary schools.
Tape Nos. 56-24-1-12 and 56-25-1-12

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Harold H.P. Look (HL)

Honolulu, O‘ahu

March 20, 2012

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN) and Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto (MK)

WN: Okay, this is an interview with Mr. Harold Look for the Lāna‘i City oral history project. Today is March 20, 2012. And the interviewers are Warren Nishimoto and Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto.

So Mr. Look, good morning.

HL: Good morning.

WN: We wanted to start with having you tell us—we’ll give you an easy question. What year were you born and where were you born?

HL: I was born in 1927 at 1708 Kalihi Street [Honolulu, O‘ahu]. I was delivered by—what do you call those birthing ladies?

WN: Midwife?

HL: Midwife, yeah.

WN: And what were your parents [Tai Chan and Violet Look] doing, living on Kalihi Street?

HL: Oh, that was my grandfather’s home. He had a taro patch in the back of the home, in which I enjoyed when I was a youngster because there were crayfish in there, rainbow fish, and whatever fish that swam in the water—they were caught by us.

WN: Would you tell us about your grandparents?

HL: Yes.

WN: What their background is.

HL: Yes. My grandfather originally raised horses where Enchanted Lake [Elementary] School is now. He had some rice paddies but mostly provided horses for the merchants who delivered their goods over the Pali—until he found out that it was probably more productive that he could gain a better livelihood by raising taro because of the need for all the taro, because taro was a staple for the Hawaiians back then.

WN: He was an immigrant from China?
HL: Oh yeah, he came from a village, someplace in southern China.

WN: Do you know when he came to Hawai‘i?

HL: Oh, I think he came in the 1880s. He came as a bookkeeper, which was very unusual in those days because most of the people came here as field laborers, but somehow, because he had some knowledge of accounting he was brought over as a bookkeeper.

WN: Do you know who brought him over?

HL: No, I don’t because he passed away in 1932 or ’33, I think, he passed away.

WN: This is your paternal grandfather?

HL: Paternal grandfather.

WN: And what about your grandmother?

HL: My grandmother came over later, and I think that she’s his second wife. My father was born to [Grandfather’s] second wife. I have uncles that came from the first wife, but I just remember one of them. She had—my grandfather’s second wife had—was it seven boys and two girls? Gee, none of them are living anymore. They’re all gone. The last uncle that passed away was about five years ago, I think.

WN: And what number was your father?

HL: My father was number three. He was the third in the family and the second son.

WN: And what year was your father born?

HL: Let’s see, early 1900s, I’m not sure. I’m not sure. But I know my mother was born in 1907.

WN: So you were telling us last time about your father’s background. Can you tell us a little bit about it?

HL: Yeah, my father was fortunate enough to attend Mid-Pac Institute—Mid-Pacific Institute, which was a school—oh, excuse me, it wasn’t Mid-Pac then. It was [called] Mills College. It was Mills College then. It was a school for a lot of the local Chinese males that weren’t able to attend other schools. My father went there, and he stayed there, I think, for two years. Then, he left and went to work at the American Can [Company]. He used to tell us about how he used to help trim the ivy-covered walls of the buildings there [at Mills College]. They had to keep that trimmed so that they wouldn’t grow too bushy. I mean, not bushy, but too scraggly and wild, yeah?

WN: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [yes]. Yeah, they had a main—it’s still there, right? There’s a main building there.

HL: Yeah, just a main building [Kawaiaha‘o Hall]. It’s still covered with that vine-type material. I call it “ivy” but actually, it’s not ivy but similar to that.

WN: And what about your mother’s background?
Well, my mother was born in Mōʻiliʻili, right below where The Willows is now. My maternal grandfather had a farm there also. He raised hogs and chickens and ducks. He used to take his products to Chinatown every morning, and he’d come back and feed these animals and tend to his farm. Both my maternal and paternal grandparents were farmers.

So it was somewhere near where The Willows was, so about King Street . . .

No, it was more towards Kapiʻolani Boulevard. It was—I don’t know whether you remember the old [Honolulu] Stadium or not. The home on the side of the road used to be Dreier Manor. The old, old buildings that St. Louis High School bought.

Mm-hmm [yes].

Oh, the [St. Louis Alumni Association] clubhouse today.

Dreier Manor was a building owned by some rich individual, but St. Louis bought it over.

Oh, I see.

Mm-hmm [yes].

And that’s where the clubhouse is today. In the front, where First Hawaiian Bank is, it used to be part of Dreier Manor, the property.

So your father—well, your grandfather and your father moved to Kalihi after being on the Windward side?

Yup.

Moved to Kalihi Valley. And that’s where you were born?

Yes.

So do you remember—I know you left there pretty young, age five, but what do you remember about that taro—that farm in Kalihi?

Well, I remember there was a big mango tree on the makai side of the house that we used to climb and pick mangoes. I remember the taro patch. There was a little stream in the back of the taro patch that used to run down towards where School Street is now. And that fit into my grandfather’s taro patch.

And how big was the taro patch?
HL: Oh, I would say several acres. I remember going there and catching crayfish because the crayfish used to go there and eat the taro roots.

MK: You know, at that time, when you had your childhood days in Kalihi, how many siblings did you have?

HL: Well, my brother was born—my brother Wallace—just he and I. My youngest brother was born in Pālolo, where we moved after age five. When I was five, we moved because I was rather asthmatic. So all that damp air and the water from the stream there wasn’t conducive to my good health, so we moved to my maternal grandfather’s property in Pālolo.

WN: Oh, okay.

HL: So we came from one valley—from Kalihi Valley to Pālolo Valley. And now, I’m in Niu Valley.

(Laughter)

WN: Do you remember what your house was like in Kalihi [Valley]?

HL: Oh yeah. It was a house built, oh, about four, five feet above the ground with all one-by-twelves, and the floor had cracks in between. So we used to enjoy going to my grandfather’s house after we moved out because we would go underneath the house and look for money because people would drop their coins through the cracks, and they never bothered to retrieve them. So we went. My kid brother and I, we always used to go underneath the house to look for money. And we found money. (WN and MK chuckle.) Maybe about ten cents to a quarter, but that was a lot of money back then.

MK: You know, back in those days, would you remember what other people lived near your grandfather’s property?

HL: Oh, yes, I remember the De Mellos next door. They had the best mangoes. (Laughs)

WN: What *kine* mango?

HL: They had Chinese mango. The big, plump Chinese mangoes. On the *mauka* side, there was a big tamarind tree. We used to throw rocks and knock down the tamarind, and we used to add salt and sugar to it to improve the taste. (Chuckles)

WN: You used to take it out of the pod?

HL: Pod, yeah.

WN: And put salt?

HL: Salt and sugar.

WN: Sugar. Oh.

HL: Why? I don’t know. But that was (chuckles) what we did.

WN: You know, your grandfather had taro. Do you know what he did with the taro? Did he sell it?
HL: Yeah, he took it to the merchant down by Pauahi Street. There was a poi factory there. The poi factory there was kind of related to my grandfather somehow. But he used to take the taro to down by Pauahi Street. There was a—I think that area was just back of where that homeless shelter [today] is. There’s a—it’s a . . .

WN: On Pauahi Street?

HL: Yeah, on Pauahi Street. That’s between Kekaulike and River Street. They had a poi factory there.

WN: So near where the [Kekaulike] market is?

HL: Across the street from the market. You know where the City and County [of Honolulu] has the center for senior citizens—it’s more towards River Street below the markets. As you’re heading towards River Street, it’s on the right-hand side. There was also a peanut-processing vendor there who was kind of related to us. Well, I don’t know. Actually, when we were small, we never ask.

WN: (Chuckles) Right. Do you remember eating taro as a kid?

HL: I don’t know.

WN: And besides taro, did he grow anything else?

HL: I’m not sure. I don’t know.

WN: And your grandmother, what did she do in Kalihi?

HL: My grandmother. I think she did mostly taking care of the chickens and the ducks, while my grandfather and my uncles and the other helpers would work in the taro patch.

WN: And I know you were only five years old when you left, but besides catching crayfish in the taro patch, did you do anything—any work to help?

HL: No, they didn’t want us in that taro patch at that time. (WN and MK chuckle.) No, we weren’t near the taro patch.

WN: It’s a lot of hard work and dirty—you know, you get dirty, too.

HL: Yeah.

WN: So at age five, you folks moved over to Pālolo.

HL: Pālolo.

WN: This is your maternal family’s side.

HL: That’s right.

WN: Your mother’s family’s side.

HL: Yeah.

WN: So they moved from Mōʻiliʻili to Pālolo?
HL: Pālolo. Mm-hmm [yes].

WN: Okay, so what was that like—the home in Pālolo?

HL: Well, there were two houses on that property in Pālolo on Maluhia Street. It’s about five blocks in from Wai‘alae Avenue, between 9th and 10th. We lived in a back house—was a two-bedroom house with no hot-water heater. One of my responsibilities while living there was to—every afternoon, about three thirty or four o’clock—to start the fire and to fill the tub with water to boil water for our evening bath. We used to carry the hot water from the shed to take the bucketful of water into the house to use that as bathing water.

WN: How big was the bucket?

HL: Maybe what, three, four gallons bucket size.

WN: And how many trips did you have to make?

HL: Oh, we made couple trips because the tub that we boiled the water in, it was half of the fifty-five gallon drum. The drum was cut in half, and we used one half to boil the water with a wooden cover. So it was a lot of my responsibility as a kid to start boiling the hot water for baths. So part of the job was also to cut kiawe wood to be sure that we have enough wood to boil the water.

WN: And Pālolo had plenty of kiawe?

HL: Oh yeah. Next door was a kiawe bush that we helped ourselves to. We had to cut the kiawe wood early because they would have to be dried. Otherwise, the wood be too green, and it would get too smoky when we burned them. We needed too big a fire to burn the green kiawe wood, so we had to cut the wood early and let it dry and then use it.

WN: So you folks move from Kalihi to Pālolo mainly because of—well, one reason was for your health.

HL: Yeah, I was asthmatic.

WN: So your grandfather continued to live in Kalihi.

HL: Yes, he did.

WN: I see. And while you folks were in Kalihi and then you lived in Pālolo, what was your father doing? What kind of work?

HL: My father worked for—after he attended Mills College, he was able to get a job with American Can [Company]. He worked at American Can, and that was the only job he had until he retired.

WN: Oh, okay. All the way through, he was with American Can?

HL: Mm-hmm [yes].

WN: I see. So it’s a long commute from Pālolo to American Can, though.

HL: Yeah, well, I remember the first car was a 1927 Chevy, touring, no windows—just a canvas roof. But I inherited that car when I started to drive, so—and he bought another car.
WN: (Chuckles) So in Pālolo, what were your maternal grandparents doing there?

HL: My grandfather, he retired from farming. So he was home to keep an eye on us. He was, more or less, our babysitter. That’s why we had to learn to do things according to what Grandpa wanted.

MK: So because your grandfather came from a farming background, in Pālolo did you folks have, like, any livestock or vegetables growing or anything?

HL: Chickens.

MK: Chickens.

HL: Raising chickens. Yeah, raised chickens and ducks. He had quite a big piece of property, so we would develop a fence around certain part of the backyard, a fence maybe six feet high. And we had chickens and ducks in there.

MK: So like what were some of your chores in Pālolo? Besides doing the hot water. (Chuckles)

HL: Well, we used to help my grandmother to go down to Mō‘ili‘ili where The Oasis [nightclub, restaurant] used to be and pick up all the old cabbage that was left back after the Chinese had it. The Chinese guys that harvested the cabbage. We would haul the cabbage home on a four-wheel cart. Pull it home from there to Pālolo, which was maybe about couple miles. But in those days, we thought it was fun. One way to get out of the yard, too.

(Laughter)

WN: And this is for home-use cabbage?

HL: No, we used that to—well, yes. Part of the cabbage, we kept for home use—to make salt cabbage and what have you, if not fresh. The rest, we used to chop up and mix with middling and feed to feed the chickens and the ducks.

MK: And the chickens and ducks were just for home use?

HL: Just home use, because my grandparents used to give that to some of his other children too, because he had about ten children, I think. He had seven girls—no, Aunty Jenny, Rose, my mother, Aunty Girly—he had five girls then. About, what, six boys, I think. He had a big family.

MK: So both sides, you have a lot of aunties and uncles then.

HL: Yeah. So my mother’s side, we have just two survivors—an uncle and an aunt. The uncle is almost a hundred. And my aunty is about close to ninety, I think.

WN: So what was Pālolo like as a community?

HL: Wild. (Chuckles) It was a—a lot of dairy farms were there. Ho-Min Dairy was there. Then, up above was chicken farms. There was another dairy [Tanaka Dairy] run by a Japanese fellow. I forget—it was on the St. Louis Heights side of Pālolo Avenue. Oh, Cummins Dairy was there also. But Cummins Dairy was on Pālolo Avenue and so was this chicken farm. And Ho-Min Dairy was on Pūkele Street. That’s off 8th Avenue.

WN: So when you say, “It was wild,” it was like very country.
HL: Country-like, yeah. Up where Pālolo [Elementary]School is, there used to be all guava groves and cattle up there. People used to raise cattle. There was also a golf course there too, where Dole Intermediate School is now.

WN: You mean Jarrett.

MK: Jarrett.

WN: Jarrett [Middle School].

HL: Yeah.

WN: Oh, is that where the golf course was?

HL: Yeah.

WN: And it was nine-hole?

HL: Yes.

WN: Oh.

HL: During the Second World War, the golf course was mostly kind of closed down, and the Pālolo War Housing was built up there, above where Jarrett [Middle] School is. That used to be my newspaper route.

WN: Mm-hmm [yes]. Well, talk about your newspaper route. What was that like? Did you have a bike?

HL: Yeah, I was real happy that I was able to get that route. I started on Pālolo Avenue—Pālolo and Wai‘alae. Where McDonald’s is now, it used to be See Chong [Company] store. That’s where we used to pick up our newspapers, and I had roughly about 286 customers. So I used to peddle my bicycle from Wai‘alae all the way up to the golf course. I asked the district manager if I could have the newspaper delivered up at the golf course so I can come down the hill instead of peddling up the hill—but he turned me down because he needed the time to do more drinking.

(Laughter)

Because my route would be the only one that had that drop off at the golf course, see.

WN: Was the golf course like the end of the valley at that point—at that time?

HL: Yeah. Above that was all the ranchers—people raising cattle, raising pigs, and things like that.

MK: You know, you mentioned that golf course. Were you ever like a caddy during your youth?

HL: Yes, we used to go caddy. At that time, the pro was Joe Spencer. He was a professional then. And he had kids too. Some of the boys were our age. Herman and Roy and Joe Jr. We did the caddying mostly on Saturday and Sunday. The other times was Jimmy Ukauka and quite a bit of other golfers that I forget who they are already. But we used to caddy for them on Saturdays and Sundays.
MK: How much money would you make caddying?

HL: Twenty-five cents. (Chuckles) This was in the late-1930s and early-1940s. When the war broke out, they still had the golf course open, but they had barbed wires across the fairways so [enemy] planes couldn’t land. But then, when the war continued after [19]41, they closed it down and had the war housing built up there.

WN: So you had two good part-time jobs. Paperboy and caddy.

HL: Well, actually, caddying was more so that we could learn the game ourselves, too, because we couldn’t do it on our own. But watching them golf and do things like that, it added to our, quote, “growth.”

(Laughter)

WN: So you could golf over there?

HL: Yeah, because the Spencer kids—some of them were our age too, so—and we went to the same school, so we got to do some golfing too on the side.

MK: You know, in those days, the money that you saved from your newspaper route, where did that go?

HL: Into my savings. I used to make good money. My newspaper route, I used to make almost, what, ninety dollars a month. In those days, The [Honolulu] Star-Bulletin cost ninety cents a month, just from Monday to Saturday. The Star-Bulletin wasn’t on Sundays in those days. So with two hundred and eighty-six customers, I made close to ninety dollars a month. I liked that because you know, ninety cents, people usually give you a dollar so you get a ten cents tip. (HL and MK laugh.) And with two hundred eighty-six customers, you get twenty-eight dollars more. (Laughs)

WN: Yeah.

MK: That was a lot of work though as you were growing up. (Laughs)

HL: Yeah, it was. But I survived, so it gave me a better appreciation for money.

MK: You know, being a newspaper boy, did you get to know the neighborhood too, going house-to-house?

HL: Oh, yes. From Wai’alae Avenue up to where Jarrett [Middle] School is now, was my route. So it used to take me over an hour. And they used to give snacks to me and what have you. A couple times, they said, “Oh, when you’re finished, stop by and have dinner,” with them.

I said, “No, I got to go home.” (MK chuckles.)

WN: (Chuckles) So you would go up Pālolo [Avenue] to the golf course and then come back on Pālolo too?

HL: I would deliver both sides going up.

WN: Tenth Avenue, too, then?
HL: No, no, not 10th. Just on Pālolo Avenue.

MK: So in those days then, what kind of people lived on that street? You must’ve gotten an idea of . . .

HL: Well, mostly Japanese. A few Chinese and Portuguese and some Hawaiian. So majority was Japanese.

MK: And they were like workers or farming over there?

HL: Yeah, most of them were workers from outside, except on the dairy side, a lot of them were Portuguese, the Cummins Dairy. Kee Fook Zane, they had the Zane Lumber Yard in Mōʻiliʻili before. They were there. Several [building] contractors. They liked [living there] because their big front yards, they could stow all the materials. In those days, no more zoning codes.

WN: What about things like—what about stores in the valley?

HL: They didn’t have any stores up in the valley. The only store they had was See Chong Store at the beginning on Waiʻalae Avenue, where McDonald’s is now. Used to be See Chong Store. So we used to get our snacks there before we hit the road.

WN: Was [M.] Kosasa [Grocery and Butcher] store on 10th Avenue there at that time?

HL: Kosasa store was there. That was a hangout before when we were kids. That’s Sidney’s parents, huh?

WN: Yeah. So you said that was your hangout. What did you folks do over there?

HL: Well, they used to provide a good trade-in for some of the disposable containers that the . . .

WN: Like soda bottles?

HL: What happened with M. Kosasa’s store is that if I traded in [two] bottles, I would get my two cents. Then they would take the bottles and put it in the back. But because two cents can’t buy too much, my kid brother would go back and swipe the bottles. (MK laughs.) And we get—until we get enough money to purchase, for instance, the ice cake. It was two cents for me and two cents for my brother, so after swiping the bottles once, we were able to buy that ice cake. (WN and MK laugh.) The ice cake was two cubes of ice cake, in the . . . freezer, that we got to eat.

WN: So one cube was the size of an ice cube.

HL: Yeah.

WN: Oh, I see.

HL: So it was one cent, one, so we were able to get—just make four cents, and we got four ice cubes, yeah. (MK chuckles.)

WN: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: Yeah, back in those days, ice cakes were treats, yeah?

HL: They were.
MK: Yeah.

WN: What about churches in the area?

HL: Well, we used to go to Sunday school at the Good Samaritan [Episcopal Church], I think, on 10th Avenue, 10th and Pa‘ale‘a, I think. It’s about five or six blocks away from where we lived.

MK: So you folks were raised as Christian?

HL: We attended Christian activities. (WN and MK laugh.) But we weren’t baptized or what have you. After a while, we used to go to the one that was developed two blocks away from Maluhia Street on Ka‘au Street, I think. Two blocks away. We used to go there for Sunday school, because my parents were very—my mother was Chinese-church oriented. Chinese Buddhism. But to keep us busy, she sent us to the Sunday school church.

MK: And then, as a youngster, were you ever involved with the Kaimukī YMCA?

HL: No, we weren’t.

WN: Did your parents and grandparents speak Cantonese to you?

HL: Yeah, my mother did. She tried to get us oriented to the Chinese language. We used to go to Chinese-language school too.

MK: Oh.

WN: Okay.

HL: We went to Chinese-language school from, oh, when I was attending St. Patrick’s School. So I went to Chinese school for four years before the war broke out. The Second World War. We used to catch the taxi down after school.

WN: And where was the school?

HL: Mun Lun [Chinese-language School].

WN: Oh, Mun Lun. Okay.

HL: Down at Kapena [Lane].

WN: Downtown, then.

HL: Downtown. It’s down on the end of Smith Street.

WN: So if you were heading mauka on Nu‘uanu [Street], it was on the—sort of on the right-hand side?

HL: Heading mauka, no, Schuman Carriage was on the left-hand side, and all those little shops on the left-hand side as you’re heading up towards the Pali.

WN: Oh, okay. That’s where Mun Lun . . .

HL: Mun Lun School was in the back of that.
WN: I see.

HL: See, Schuman Carriage and the other stores were on Nu‘uanu Street. And Mun Lun School was on the back of Smith Street.

WN: Okay, well, let’s talk about your schooling. What schools did you attend?

HL: Oh, I was privileged to attend Ali‘iōlani [Elementary] School until they found out that I no talk good English, yeah. (Chuckles) So they released me.

WN: Oh, because it was an English standard school?

HL: Yeah, it was English standard in those days. (WN chuckles.) I remember the principal, Miss Scobie, called my mother and I in for a conference as she said that I worked hard, but I was not able to meet their English standards. So I told my mother, “Don’t cry. Don’t worry. I don’t have to go school. I can go pick kiawe beans and beer bottles—go find beer bottles and what have you and make a living.”

My mother said, “No, we’re going across the street to St. Patrick’s.” So I went to St. Patrick’s School. And after St. Patrick’s, I went to St. Louis [College, a high school].

WN: So you were at Ali‘iōlani for like a couple months?

HL: (Chuckles) Yeah.

WN: And that was, what, kindergarten? What grade was that?

HL: It was kindergarten.

WN: Oh, I see.

HL: Yeah, kindergarten, we were there. No talk English. (Chuckles)

WN: (Chuckles) Were there others that had to leave Ali‘iōlani?

HL: No, not that I know of. My cousin was able to stay, but I wasn’t.

MK: Did he speak English any better than you?

HL: I don’t know. I don’t think so. (HL and MK chuckle.) But it wasn’t my decision to make. (HL and MK laugh.)

WN: I always wondered, you know, if you lived in the district, and Ali‘iōlani is, you know, the school for that district, and then you don’t meet the English standard, was the only choice going to private school? Like St. Patrick’s?

HL: No, I could’ve gone to Pālolo [Elementary School].

WN: Oh, okay, there was Pālolo.

HL: But Pālolo School was almost twice the distance from my house than the distance going to St. Patrick’s.
I see, I see. Backing up a little bit, you said you could pick *kiawe* beans? What was that like?

Well, we used to pick *kiawe* beans to sell to the dairy. It was, what, ten cents a bag. But then, when we got there to the dairy, they would pound the bags so it comes down maybe three quarters, so they used to give me seven to eight cents a bag, instead of ten cents.

Burlap bag?

Yeah, burlap bag. Potato bag, yeah. The one—that hundred-pound potato bag. So when we get there, the owner would just pound the bag down till the beans got all crushed, and it came down to only three-quarters full, yeah?

Okay, we’re going to . . .

Okay, this is tape two, session one with Harold Look. And you have a question.

Okay, you know, we were talking about your childhood in Pālolo Valley. And I was wondering, you know, what kinds of activities did you and your brother and your friends do, you know, in the valley—in the streams or wherevers in the valley.

Well, in the Pālolo Stream, we used to go down there to catch shrimp and catfish. We also had a swimming hole that we developed. We used to make a big pond like—removing all the rocks and what have you and building around it. And that became our swimming hole. There was, at the end of Maluhia Street where we lived, our friend’s father had a farm down there that ran from Pūkele Street all the way down to the river. So we used to gain access through his property to get to the river, and we worked on that. We also used to pick all those Job’s Tears—those beads? My maternal grandmother used to make leis with that. She had a sewing machine, and we used to—with the drill, make holes in the beads to make the leis. So we were quite busy. And we used to catch quite a bit of catfish. And then *opae*. We used to boil it and eat. (Chuckles)

And how big was the catfish?

The catfish was about that big.

About seven inches?

Yeah, and some of them were bigger, but we rather get the small ones. Easier to catch. The big ones were too elusive.

How did you eat catfish? How did you cook catfish?

We just boil it and then, like anything else, we always carried in our back pocket, us kids—*shōyu*, with chili pepper, and a little vinegar inside. We used this on everything that we ate, whether it was mountain apple, catfish, or crayfish.

(Laughter)

That was our sauce—for all sauces.
WN: You carried it with you?

HL: Yeah, in the back pocket. You know, in that pepper bottle? The small pepper bottle? We always had the concoction in our back pocket.

WN: What was that again? It was vinegar . . .

HL: Vinegar, shōyu, and a little chili pepper.

WN: Chili pepper. And salt.

HL: Salt, yeah. Just shake it up and put it in our back pocket. (WN laughs.) Wherever we went, whether it was green mangoes or green mountain apples or what have you, we used that sauce.

WN: Wow. And the catfish, you would cook it right there?

HL: Yeah, we put it in a gallon can. Cook it and boil. We just throw the sauce on top and eat.

WN: You make fire and then . . .

HL: Yeah. (WN chuckles.) In those days, it was to each his own. There was no such thing as game warden or civil patrol or what have you. It was a matter of just survival.

WN: So mountain apple, green mango, what other fruits?

HL: Star fruit, too.

WN: Star fruit.

HL: When that was in season. And even soursop, yeah. That—we used to enjoy hiking into Pālolo Valley because it was wild. Everything, we go over there and see. Even the green guavas, we used to cut and eat. Well, I won’t say exactly green, it had to be a little color on it.

WN: So the green guava, you would put that concoction on top, too?

HL: Yeah. Everything. (HL and WN chuckle.) It was all-purpose sauce.

MK: And then, when it came to like games, what did you folks play? Games or sports.

HL: Oh, we played peewee. You know what peewee is? You use the broomstick, and you cut the parts in certain sizes and angles or what have you. We did that. Marbles, yeah. Spinning tops. And baseball. And then, see, baseball, this is what happened to me. See my scar here? I slid on the dirt area where I was playing, but there was a rock sticking out, and it cut my kneecap here. This hung over to see the white bone. So when I went home for that, I got a conk on the head from my father (laughs) because I wasn’t supposed to be out there playing baseball. (Laughs) They took me to the doctor, and they sewed me up. But that’s okay.

MK: Oh, so in those days, if you got hurt like that, where did they take you for medical treatment?

HL: To the doctor’s office. My doctor—Dr. Mei Hing Li.

WN: Were there organized sports that you participated in?
HL: No. Organized, yes, with the neighborhood. That’s all. The neighborhood kids.

WN: And did you play—you played baseball—like was there an open area to play?

HL: Yeah, there was—next to the store was an empty lot, so we used to play baseball there on Maluhia Street. No Little League in those days. (Chuckles)

WN: Okay, so you were at St. Patrick’s School.

HL: Yes, went to St. Patrick’s from kindergarten.

WN: Till what grade?

HL: Until eighth grade. And then I went to St. Louis. I also interviewed for Maryknoll [School]. I got accepted by Maryknoll because I was waiting word from St. Louis whether I’d be accepted or not. But I thought, in the meanwhile, I better take a test to be sure I had acceptance at least a school. Then St. Louis accepted my application, so I went to St. Louis instead of Maryknoll.

WN: So when was it that you were going to Mun Lun? While you were at St. Patrick’s?

HL: Yeah, at St. Patrick’s. That was from 1936 until the war broke out. When war broke out, all language schools were closed.

WN: Even Chinese[-language] school?

HL: Chinese and Japanese schools were closed.

WN: I see. So after St. Patrick’s, which is in Kaimukī, you would take a [streetcar] to Mun Lun.

HL: Mun Lun, yeah. In those days, you had the streetcar with the rail running down, so we used to catch the streetcar that were the open-air one. So we used to hang on the running board. And when they stop and came to collect our money, we jumped off and caught the next one.

(Laughter)

And that’s the only way we had extra money to spend to buy goodies.

WN: (Laughs) So you wouldn’t spend then to get onto the streetcar.

HL: Yeah.

WN: I mean . . . (Laughs)

HL: So we got a free ride down, because the conductor would start in the front, collect the fare and walk in the back, see. So by the time he got to the back, we jump off and catch the next one. That was part of survival in those days. (WN and MK chuckle.) We didn’t know how to steal. (Laughs) We knew how to cheat. (Laughs)

WN: And how would you compare Chinese[-language] school with regular English school?

HL: Well, Chinese[-language] school was no monkey business. You just had to sit there. And no such thing as individuality. You learn as a group. Everybody recites. The Chinese teacher would write
on the wall, and then he would point out what was what. Then you had to repeat after him—the class had to repeat. So I went up to the fourth grade before the war broke out.

WN: And what did you enjoy more, Chinese[-language] school or English school?

HL: English school because we could do what we wanted in English school. Chinese school, you just have to boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. (Chuckles)

WN: Oh, I see. So it was more strict.

HL: Oh yeah. And a lot of them were China jack, too. They came from China—the instructors, yeah. So their acceptance here or their job security was dependent on how well we learned. Or they would be sent back to China.

WN: And what kind of a student were you in English school and Chinese school?

HL: Oh, I got whipped a couple of times with rattan because I failed to listen. (Chuckles)

WN: This is at Chinese school?

HL: Chinese school. (Chuckles) But that’s all part of the learning process, I guess. I don’t know.

MK: You know, at Chinese school, was it mostly just basic reading, writing, speaking?

HL: Yeah.

MK: And all by looking . . .

HL: By rote. Actually all rote learning. You repeat after them.

WN: And what about the writing?

HL: The writing, we used to—with the kanji, we used to write in English how to pronounce the word. If your teacher saw that, we used to get rapped on our knuckles because we’re not supposed to put down any word on the side. (Laughs) But it was interesting. It didn’t hurt us, but it was a good experience.

MK: So going to St. Patrick’s and then going Downtown for Chinese-language school and coming back, how . . .

HL: Coming back, we used to catch the jitney—jitney taxis. We had to pay, that time. But again, too, in the front seat with the driver, then you get the long body and in the middle—between the front and the back seat, there’s the fold-down seats. We used to sit there. So in the front, there used to have three or four kids. So when we passed the policeman, the two of us had to hide underneath the dashboard. (Laughs) Because you’re not supposed to have more than two people in the front.

MK: Oh.

HL: I remember that. It cost only a nickel to get home from Smith Street to 9th Avenue.

MK: So like how late would you come home from school then?
HL: About 5:00 or 5:30. Then, I had to make hot water for the bath. But it was fun. We survived. That’s why we appreciate the hot water heater. When you turn on the faucet, the hot water comes out. (Laughs)

WN: That’s right, yeah.

MK: You know, at St. Patrick’s, who were the teachers?

HL: Nuns. They’re mostly sisters of Sacred Heart.

MK: And how were they?

HL: Oh, strict. Very strict. But like anything else, us kids, we used to try to work around them. (Chuckles) But we weren’t too successful because the nuns, they don’t stand for any monkey business. If you’re wrong, you’re wrong, you know. No such thing as in between. Oh, maybe we should’ve done this or maybe we should’ve done that. You’re either right or wrong. But it was a good experience. No regrets.

MK: And at St. Patrick’s, what were your favorite subjects?

HL: Gee, I don’t know. I used to be very competitive with—I don’t know whether you remember Walter Nunokawa. He was a university [professor] . . .

MK: Oh.

HL: He was my classmate. Either he was one or I was two, or I was one and he was two. We were very competitive in those days. It wasn’t because I wanted to be a scholar, but I wanted to be better than him. (Laughs) See, Walter had a good—I would say, whatever, he had an interesting childhood compared to mine because he was a Boy Scout, and he did certain things at certain—and I had to go Chinese school, I had to do this, I had to do that. I felt that, hey, I’m missing out on something. But till today, Walter and I are still friends. So I see him every so often at Burger King in the morning with his gang doing his morning chitchat and BS-ing. (Chuckles)

MK: You were a good student then.

HL: Well, I don’t know whether you call a “good student”, but it’s survival too, yeah? Otherwise, I have to probably go to another school if I didn’t do well. St. Patrick’s was convenient. It was only about six blocks away from my home in Pālolo.

WN: So when you moved over to St. Louis—St. Louis was, by then, at the new campus?

HL: Yeah.

WN: Kalaepōhaku, right.

HL: Yeah, we were there for about three months. Then the war broke out. So then, after, we went to McKinley [High School].

WN: Oh, so what happened to the St. Louis campus during the war?

HL: It was turned into a 147th General Hospital.
WN: Oh, I see.

HL: It was an army hospital that took care of wounded GIs from the South Pacific. So we had only three months at St. Louis campus.

WN: So you finished your high school years on the McKinley campus?

HL: McKinley campus, yeah. The principal from McKinley was Dr. Miles Cary. So we got to know him better than our St. Louis principal. (Laughs)

WN: I was wondering, did you folks mingle a lot with the McKinley kids?

HL: Yeah, we did. In fact, the St. Louis boys mingled too much with the McKinley girls that the McKinley boys got jealous. There used to be fights all the time. (Laughs) So Dr. Cary—Miles Cary—he used to come and—Dr. Miles Cary, one of his weaknesses was he always said, “Ah, ah, ah.” You know, he always said, “Ah, ah, ah.” So we were told that we need to be good brothers and sisters by Dr. Cary. (Chuckles) So for a while, things went okay, then starts flaring up again. Which was a—enjoyed it.

WN: So you guys wore ties?

HL: Yeah, we had to.

WN: McKinley boys didn’t.

HL: No. That distinguished us from them. I guess a lot of the girls felt wearing a tie made us more of a gentleman than the boys who didn’t wear a tie. (Chuckles)

WN: Oh, I see. That’s right, you went from all-boys campus to coed campus.

HL: Yeah, coed.

MK: And then, were all the classes separate?

HL: We were separated. We were in the bungalows. The old bungalows. We used to call them “Chicken Coops.” They’re the old bungalows on the Pensacola [Street] side of the campus, that long row of wooden buildings. We called them “Chicken Coops” because when you walk, they squeak through the floor—all the one by twelves.

MK: So none of the classes were mixed?

HL: No. We weren’t in between; we were separated.

MK: So during those years, was St. Louis still able to have its own athletic program and everything?

HL: Gee, I’m not sure. I don’t remember because as soon as school was over, we had our other activities to attend to.

WN: What about like lunch? You mean, you would have lunch in the same . . .

HL: Cafeteria, but different times though, yeah.
WN: Oh.

HL: We didn’t mingle.

WN: I see. . . . Okay.

MK: And you graduated in 1945.

HL: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: At that time, what were your aspirations?

HL: Me? It was to be a pig farmer. (Chuckles) My mother didn’t approve. (laughs) So I went to work at Hickam Air Force Base as an aircraft instrument repairman. I lasted almost three—two-and-a-half months. I quit. I couldn’t stand it because you’re in a windowless building. Claustrophobia. So I gave up. I had to beg the registrar at the University [of Hawai‘i] that I wanted to take the test so I can go to college. I passed my test, so they accepted me a couple weeks late after school started.

WN: This is in 1945?

HL: Forty-five.

WN: Oh, so then you just worked at Hickam for that summer after you graduated from St. Louis?

HL: Yeah.

WN: I see.

HL: My cousin was in an apprenticeship program there, and he got me connected with the right people, so I got accepted for the apprenticeship program too. But I couldn’t stand being in a windowless building. You’re in a cubbyhole working, yeah. It was interesting work, but I didn’t feel comfortable doing it, so no sense.

WN: So you got accepted to UH [University of Hawai‘i]?

HL: Yeah.

WN: In what field?

HL: Agriculture. General ag. I found out later that general ag wasn’t very high on the list in the College of Tropical Agriculture. Because the programs were dominated mostly by vocational ag people. Those who wanted to be agricultural teachers.

WN: I see.

HL: So that’s where I met my friend, Kengo Takata, and we had a big squabble because I couldn’t join the agriculture club because I wasn’t in voc-ag. So we had a couple run-ins and after a while, he said, “Well, the board decided that you can join.” I thought, It’s about time. (laughs)

WN: You know, you said that you wanted to be a pig farmer.
HL: Yeah.

WN: What made you want . . .

HL: My uncle was a pig farmer. He had a pig farm down here at Blowhole. Where that Hawai‘i Kai Golf Course is now. He had his pig farm down there. We used to go down there every weekend to help him on the farm.

WN: While you were going to high school?

HL: Yeah.

WN: Oh, I see. So he had a pig farm in . . .

HL: Blowhole.


HL: We used to help [him] collect garbage every weekend too.

WN: You mean going to homes and getting the . . .

HL: Yeah. We go home-to-home to collect garbage. The slop cans. (Chuckles)

WN: So they [families] would just leave the slop outside?

HL: No, they would hang it on a pole in the yard or against the house. They used to dump it, and we used to exchange cans.

WN: Oh, I see.

HL: We used to carry maybe six empty cans and come back with six full cans. My uncle used to drive his truck, and he never stopped. So we had to run like hell to catch up with the truck. (WN and MK chuckle.) So I think that accumulated to a part of my physical fitness, yeah.

WN: So these were set homes that you knew.

HL: Yeah, that was his route.

WN: I see. Would any money exchange hands?

HL: No, we just helped people get rid of their garbage.

WN: I see. And you would do that on the weekends?

HL: On the weekends, yeah. During the summer months, we used to spend summers with him, until we got old enough to go out and work at the [pineapple] cannery and American Can [Company] and what have you.

WN: So besides picking up the slop, what else did you do at your uncle’s piggery?
HL: We helped him slaughter, kalua. Kalua pig for the market, like that. He used to supply the market with kalua pig. In fact, I think the piggery that my cousin them have shares in, they still do that, I think. They provide kalua pig at the markets. So we used to start kaluaing the pig at maybe the evening before and overnight. So the following morning, the imu was all ready to be unearthed, and we’d shred the pig. A lot of hard work, but you see the results. It’s not like teaching, you know. You can stand before a class and you hope that something good will happen, whereas with the kalua pig, you cook the pig, and you go there, and the pig is done already. (Chuckles)

WN: And how often would he slaughter pig?

HL: Oh, my uncle, it’s nearly every weekend, but during the week too, if he had orders—special orders—he would slaughter too and kalua. So we always used to have something to do. Cut kiawe wood, cleaning the pits, picking ti leaves, or what have you, what needs to be done to prepare the hog for market.

WN: And he had a set place where he had the imu?

HL: Oh yeah, it was made of cement. (Chuckles)

WN: Oh.

HL: Cemented area with a hole in the middle, and we just—the only dirt we used is just to cover the pig. That’s all.

WN: Oh, I see.

HL: So underneath, we’d put quite a bit of banana stems or what have you to keep the moisture in.

WN: So that really interested you, and that’s what you wanted to do?

HL: Well, at least that’s what I knew I wanted to do. But I didn’t realize the background work of it. The preparations and what have you. The cost factor.

WN: And what were your mother’s objections to you pursuing that?

HL: Well, I guess she saw how hard my uncle had to work and the hours he had to put in. Well, I guess—as a parent, I guess she didn’t want her son to be just a hog farmer. As the Japanese said, “Buta man.”

WN: And while you were at UH, what kinds of part-time jobs or part-time work did you do?

HL: Gee, I don’t recall doing any part-time work because I was drafted after one semester. After that, when I came back to UH, I got my G.I. Bill. So I used to get, what, seventy-five dollars a month, so I had money. They [U.S. government] paid for my tuition and my books and my supplies.

WN: So in February [19]46, you were drafted. You served in Saipan . . .

HL: Saipan.

WN: . . . during the war. I mean, after the war.

HL: After the war, yeah. The occupation. Although we got credited for World War II service, yeah.
WN: And then, you came back [to college] under the G.I. Bill. You said senior year, you worked at Foremost?

HL: It was Moanalua Dairy then. That was 1950. From January or February 1950 to June 1950.

WN: What did you do there?

HL: I was hired as a relief foreman although I didn't know a damn thing about running a milk plant or making ice cream or cottage cheese or what have you. But the foremen were all due to go on vacation, so they just gave me a crash course on how to pasteurize milk and how to make cottage cheese and ice cream. It was good money. I used to make, what, over a hundred dollars a week. Back in 1950, so over four hundred dollars a month. That’s a lot of overtime because once you start preparing cottage cheese like that, you have to stay till the end and cut it up and package the cottage cheese. The same with ice cream, too. I learned a lot.

WN: And exactly where was this dairy in Moanalua?

HL: It was across Kalihi Theatre. You ever heard where Horita office is? There’s a two-story Herbert Horita [building]? That’s where it used to be. It was on the mauka side of King Street as you’re heading towards [Fort] Shafter.

WN: How much time do we have? Okay, well, we’re almost done today. Okay, so you were working at Moanalua Dairy senior year. You graduated. And then . . .

HL: And then, I went to PRI.

WN: Pineapple Research Institute. What did you do there?

HL: I was working as a field experimental assistant, second class, with a Jim Metcalf. The PRI used to be right by the [Andrews] Amphitheater [on the University of Hawai‘i campus].

WN: Right. Today, I think it’s called Krauss Hall.

HL: Yeah, I don’t think is there anymore, yeah. [Krauss Hall is still standing.]

WN: What did you do?

HL: We used to drive to Kunia every day to work on and experiment on irrigation. We used to do irrigation on the pineapple fields. We used to measure the sun, moisture, content, the acidity, measure the plant growth, and the amount of chlorophyll in there. A lot of experimental kind of work, but it was interesting.

WN: And these are kinds of skills that you got while as an undergraduate at university?

HL: No. (Chuckles) All learning on the job. My soils professor liked the way I did things, so he recommended me for the job because PRI approached the College of Tropical Ag[riculture] to see whether they have anyone that’d be interested and could fit their needs. So he asked me to try it out. Besides, I didn’t have to go to class for one semester. (Chuckles)

WN: And after that, you went to Moloka‘i to work?

HL: To Moloka‘i.
Okay, what were you doing there?

I was hired there to work with their—there was a field department. I thought that there would be something that I would enjoy doing, but when Mr. Larson—Harry Larson, the manager of Libby McNeil & Libby at Maunaloa—looked at me, dark Oriental, he said, “Look like a Filipino.” So he put me in the field to work with the field workers, just like a gang foreman. After two weeks, I told him, “No, I don’t want the job. I quit.” He wouldn’t give me a chance to do any other department, so I said, “I quit.” And I came home. Then, about a month later, Jim Metcalf recommended me for Dole [Corporation] on Lāna‘i because he knew the supervisor there.

Okay, I think we’ll end here. Okay, so we got you up to Lāna‘i. What we’d like to do is to continue another time with your Lāna‘i experience. Would that be okay?

Yeah, I guess so. (Chuckles)

Okay. (Chuckles)

END OF INTERVIEW
Tape Nos. 56-26-2-12 and 56-27-2-12

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Harold H. P. Look (HL)

Honolulu, O’ahu

April 4, 2012

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN) and Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto (MK)

WN: Okay, this is an interview with Harold Look for the Lāna‘i City oral history project. Today is April 4, 2012. And the interviewers are Warren Nishimoto and Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto.

So Harold, this is session number two out of two.

HL: Good, I’m ready.

WN: (laughs) Good. You know, we left off—last time, you were drafted into the army, you served in Saipan for about ten months. And then, you returned to UH under the G.I. Bill, and you graduated from UH in 1950.

HL: Fifty.

WN: Okay. Let’s start from that point on. From 1950, after graduating from UH, what happened? What did you do?

HL: Well, during my senior year at the university—I think I mentioned that I was given permission by the dean of the College of [Tropical] Agriculture to work as a part-time relief foreman for Moanalua Dairy. And then, after that semester was over, when I returned to school, I was hired at the Pineapple Research Institute by Jim Metcalf. I worked there for about three months, and then, he recommended me for a position on Moloka‘i, working for Libby, McNeill & Libby. But I was there just for about two months, and then I left because I did not agree with the managerial practices that they had.

After leaving Moloka‘i, I was recommended for a position on Lāna‘i, working in a research department as a potential assistant superintendent for research. When I got there, I was told that I needed to go through a probationary period of three months. So I agreed to those terms and served my three-month probation. At the end of my probation, I was told that the position that they offered me was no longer available. In return, they offered me a permanent position as a first class research assistant at the same salary as the assistant superintendent. However, I did not agree to those terms. I told them that I would resign my position and leave the company because I cannot accept those conditions. Mr. Swede Desha, who was from a prominent Hilo family, was the personnel manager at that time. He came over to my room at the Lāna‘i Inn—to encourage me to accept the position because he said, “The old man is making a big exception for you, so why don’t you be gracious enough to accept it?”
I told Swede, “It’s not the money. I was promised a position. I served the terms of employment as I was asked to do. And when I completed my probationary period, I was turned down for the position because it was offered to somebody else.

WN: How would you describe the two positions—the differences between the two?

HL: The assistant superintendent is more of a supervisory role, whereas the assistant first class is a—quote—“working position,” where you actually go in the field and do all the work. Whereas in the assistant superintendent, you would supervise the people working in the field, such as the first class assistant, the second class assistant, and what have you. So I felt that it was something that—I didn’t care to do that—to work under those conditions. So I left.

WN: And without answering names about the person who got the job, what kind of qualifications did they have?

HL: He came from the University of Michigan, I believe. He had his master’s degree in corn hybrid. I felt that it was quite a different background from what they had originally requested. But again, I was in no position to say that it was a matter of status, as far as I was concerned.

WN: And you were going through a three-month probation?

HL: Yes.

WN: Did that other person go through a probationary period, too?

HL: No. No, he didn’t. I guess because he has his master’s degree, he didn’t have to go through a probation. But I didn’t have a master’s degree; I just had a bachelor’s degree.

WN: And who was the person that hired you at—for Lāna‘i?

HL: Offhand, I can’t recall. But I knew it because Jim Metcalf recommended me for the position.

WN: Oh, I see. Swede Desha was sort of—he was higher up than that?

HL: Yeah, he was the personnel manager . . .

WN: Personnel, I see.

HL: . . . for Dole [Corporation] on Lāna‘i.

WN: I see. So what were your thoughts and impressions of when you first came to Lāna‘i? For example—well, first of all, why did you take that job?

HL: For one thing, I felt that it’s about time I leave my house—leave my mother’s house (WN laughs) and go out and paddle my own canoe. That’s what I wanted to do because, well, growing up, we lived in a—well, my father worked hard, his salary was meager, and I felt that I didn’t want to be a further burden to them, and I wanted to go out and do things on my own. I always said, “I’m going to move as far away as I can (laughs) so I can do my own thing.”

MK: You know, coming from an urban setting—coming from Honolulu, O‘ahu and going to Lāna‘i, what did you think when you first started living on Lāna‘i?
HL: Actually, I didn’t mind it because I liked the weather. In the evening, it’s rather cool. It’s cold because you had about, what, 1800 feet elevation. So in the evenings, it’s rather cool. The mornings are cold. But again, once you start moving around, things get comfortable. I didn’t mind it because there were a lot of people that I befriended. I became, say, comfortable with the environment. The only thing that I found out that was shocking on my own was the high prices of the groceries in the store because everything had to be imported. From the first quart of milk down to the last bean, you know, on the counter, everything had to be imported.

WN: You know, I know you were at Libby on Moloka‘i for a little while, but could you make any comparisons between working for Libby and working for Dole?

HL: Well, they had the same type of echelons in the community. You were either in or you were—in between or you were out. (Chuckles) It was, oh, I would say, just like a caste system. You had your supervisors, you had your *lunas*, and then you had your field workers. So there were just like three different echelons in the community. I heard through some of the laborers that I worked with that said that, oh, the supervisors weren’t encouraged to mingle with the laborers. So everybody had their place in the community. And, I said, “Well, they’re the boss, so what else can you do, yeah?” This is why I refused to accept some of their practices, and that’s why I left both companies—Libby and Dole.

WN: And yet, the Dole job, had you gotten it, was supervisory, right?

HL: It was supervisory. But I felt that at least I would have an in to the people at the low level because of my Oriental upbringing.

WN: And when you first got to Lāna‘i to work for Dole, did you see any opportunities to improve the company?

HL: I think it would’ve been rather difficult because the plantation manager was more or less looked upon as a god. Really a caste system.

WN: And how were your relations with the upper echelon?

HL: Well, after a while, the manager that hired me left, and the new manager came in and—after we got married, my wife and I were invited by the plantation manager to go to his house to play bridge. And then, I told Janet—I guess there’s not that many people who play bridge, so that’s why they invited us to go and play bridge with them. (WN and MK laugh.) And Millie, the plantation manager’s wife, took a liking to my wife, Janet, so that’s how she sort of used it as an excuse to invite us to their home.

WN: And what was their home like?

HL: Their home?

WN: Their home.

HL: Exquisite.

(Laughter)
Compared to the plantation homes, it was—plantation homes, it was just like a closet in their homes, yeah?

WN: And then, where did you live when you first came to Lāna‘i?

HL: I lived at what is called the Lāna‘i Inn today. I rented a room there. I had room and board for, what, 125 bucks a month or something like that. I stayed there for about three months after I left the company, until I went into my own business.

WN: Now you being, you know, local Hawai‘i boy, put in this position of supervising immigrants and other locals in the fields and so forth. I mean, well, not in the fields, but you were, in essence, above them. How did you feel about that?

HL: Well, as I said, I would rather be there than be someplace else because I would have been in a position to help the locals pull themselves out of that caste system.

WN: Did you know how to play bridge before?

HL: No. (HL and WN laugh.) But somehow, we learned. Among the schoolteachers, we did some bridge playing among ourselves, too. See, because Janet was teaching school at that time. So we would get together. Every weekend, we would rotate homes, yeah, between the teachers who played bridge and that’s where we got to pick up bridge.

WN: Okay, so you—after the three months and you found out that you weren’t going to be getting that job, you resigned.

HL: Yeah.

WN: Okay, so in essence, you sort of gave up that salary. What happened next?

HL: I used to—I wasn’t quite proper then. I used to go gamble with the Filipinos and poach deer out of season, and what have you. After three months, I said, “Hey, here I am. Just about twenty-three, going on twenty-four. I can’t do this the rest of my life.” So I decided, well, the piggery was vacant at that time, see.

Dole used to run a piggery. You cannot run a piggery on union hours because the workers would stall and stall, and when it’s almost pau hana time, then they would start feeding the hogs and doing this and doing that to maintain the farm. So Dole gave up the piggery. It was an excellent piggery. It’s made up of all these concrete pens, sheltered with pipe railings and water running through the entire system. So I approached Dole and asked them if they would be willing to lease the property to me. And they did, and I think I paid about $115 a month to lease the piggery, which composed of almost, what, over ten acres. So I went out there, and I talked to my uncle who was the hog farmer here at Koko Head. He came up and he looked around. He said, “Hey, it looks pretty good.”

So I said, “Okay, yeah. I’ll try it out.” I did that for seven years, until my family was—the kids were getting ready to go to school. So then, I decided, well, maybe I should go back to school too and get my teaching credentials since my wife was teaching. The kids were ready to go to school. So we moved back to Honolulu.

WN: Mm-hmm [yes].
MK: You know, since the piggery was not operating when you first took over, . . .

HL: No, it was vacant.

MK: . . . you had to restock and everything?

HL: Yeah. I had to import all my hogs—the breeding stock. I also imported dry feed, because in that Japanese and Filipino community, you don’t get too much garbage because they eat practically everything. So twice a week, I used to go around the camp and collect garbage. But that wasn’t enough food for the hogs. At capacity, I had, what, close to 400 hogs.

WN: Four hundred?

HL: Yeah. And a thousand chickens.

WN: Wow.

HL: And then, the [demand] for hogs on Lāna‘i was high. I used to slaughter about eight hogs a week for the local consumption. Then, the Filipinos would also come down and buy hogs directly from me to slaughter and to sell in the camp too.

MK: So all the livestock that you raised and everything was just for local consumption on Lāna‘i?

HL: That’s right. Just on Lāna‘i.

WN: Why was it that the [company] gave up that piggery? Do you know when they gave it up?

HL: No, I don’t. When I went there in 1950, it was vacant already.

WN: Oh, I see.

HL: Dole could have made a good profit from the farm if they ran it properly. But again, when it’s unionized, you cannot do that because the union has the upper hand. I think that the union looked upon it, too, as an opportunity to get back to management (chuckles) for some of their practices.

MK: And then, you know, you mentioned that you had chickens there too. You had poultry.

HL: Mm-hmm [yes].

MK: That was for the meat or the eggs?

HL: Eggs. That was the eggs. And meat, too. The stewing hens. People didn’t believe that I got five dollars for stewing hens. But the Filipinos liked the stewing hens because they’re fat. You know, when they get to the end of their laying life, they tend to get a lot of fat, especially with the Rhode Island Red. The Rhode Island Reds get real fat.

MK: So until you started operating the piggery and the poultry, where were all the Lāna‘i people getting their pork and . . .

HL: Well, the pork used to come from Lahainaluna School [on Maui]. I think they bought some of the eggs from Lahainaluna because Lahainaluna was an agricultural-based school. But when I started the business, they had to stop because I think there’s a law saying that the schools cannot compete
with the local markets. Because they get all free labor, and they're supported by the [government]. So when I wrote a letter to the district superintendent on Maui about Lahainaluna selling their hogs on Lāna‘i, I told them that I think it was a violation of the laws or something. So they stopped it. So that’s why I was the sole [provider] of hogs on Lāna‘i.

WN: So from the time that you took over, to the time you actually started raising hogs and chickens, how long a span—what time span was that?

HL: Well, actually, it was because of my uncle here on O‘ahu. He was able to send me hogs that were ready for the market, too. So that helped me. So I made a few dollars off those transactions. That helped me to sustain and pay my rent—my lease rental to Dole.

MK: And then, how did you manage taking care of all the livestock?

HL: Well, when I used to slaughter my hogs, I used to get up 1:30 in the morning to boil the hot water, to gather the hogs and get them ready for slaughtering. I would get through by 6:00, 6:30 because the markets wanted their hogs by 7:00. So I had the hogs all ready for them to pick up. After that, I would have my breakfast and then feed the hogs. After I got through feeding the hogs, I would feed the chickens and then wash the pens. And then collect garbage and feed the hogs again. And do whatever necessary chores around the farm.

MK: And it was a one-man operation?

HL: One-man operation. I didn’t know any better in those days.

(Laughter)

WN: And where were you living at that time?

HL: On the farm.

WN: On the farm?

HL: There was a house out there—that cabin. It had two bedrooms. A typical plantation house was there—a small house. I think this whole area here is bigger than the whole house. So I lived there. There was no electricity, so everything was by kerosene stove, kerosene water heater, and gas lanterns.

MK: And then, whereabouts was this property compared—you know, in relation to the rest of the . . .

HL: It’s on the way to Mānele. As you’re going down the road to Mānele beach from town, you go straight down, and there is a bend in the road that goes to Mānele, and this one goes to the pineapple fields. The farm is about—at the base of one of the pineapple fields.

WN: So the left fork.

HL: Yeah. The road to the right, you go to Mānele. And the left.

WN: And what’s there now?

HL: The piggery is still there.
WN: Oh yeah?

HL: The home was there, and the doctor, that fellow, who got in that plane crash . . .

WN: Oh, Dr. [Nicholas] Palumbo?

HL: Yeah, Palumbo . . .

MK: Oh, veterinarian.

HL: . . . took over after I left. Well, he leased the place after I left.

WN: Oh, I see. And so, who were the—I know you said Filipinos would come on their own to buy hogs to slaughter, but who did you supply the pork to? What businesses?

HL: To the Richard’s Shopping Center, Pine Isle Market, International [Food & Clothing Center]—there were three stores that I supplied to.

WN: And those stores, you would supply the pork to?

HL: The pork.

WN: And in what form did you deliver the pork to them?

HL: Oh, they came to pick it up from the slaughterhouse.

WN: So there are like the different cuts? Like the shoulder and the . . .

HL: No, no, I just dressed the hog, and they came to pick up the whole hog, and they did their own cutting up and what have you.

WN: Oh, okay. Did you grow any kind of attachment to some of these hogs? I know it’s a dumb question, but. . . . (Chuckles)

HL: No. Yeah, you do actually—you have your favorites, but like anything else, you have to pay your bills. So the attachment stops there. (Chuckles)

WN: And what was the process of slaughtering a hog?

HL: Oh, at first, it was a struggle because I was but all of 126 pounds, and I used to tackle those hogs that are 250 to 300 pounds. I used to get kicked all over the place. So what happened in the end is that I developed a—there was a rail track running from the piggery to the warehouse. I had converted the end of the warehouse to the slaughterhouse because I had to make the walls of all impervious layers—all sheet metal so that you could wash it down and what have you to meet the board of health specs. The railroad track came right up to where I had the slaughterhouse. I used to build a cage on those railroad wheels and cart the hog up to there. I made sure that the head was always first. Then, when I opened the gate, the back foot was there so I had a block and tackle. I would hang it by the hind feet—you know, hind leg, and then stick them. The rail went to the slaughterhouse, and I would dump the hog on the table near the boiling water, where I would just pour water and scald the pigs and clean them up.

MK: Oh, and you did that all by yourself.
HL: Yeah.

WN: So you actually had to hoist up the . . .

HL: Yeah.

WN: Wow, you had a lot of strength then.

HL: Well, at that time, I thought I was Superman.

(Laughter)

WN: So besides the garbage that you collected from neighbors, what did you feed the pigs?

HL: I imported the grains from Honolulu, and everything was shipped on Dole [Corporation] pineapple barges. It was Purina dry feed. So it used to cost me quite a bit because Dole didn’t have as cheap of rates on their barges.

WN: I wonder, did pigs—hogs eat anything—any part of the pineapple plant?

HL: When the pineapple strike was on [in 1951], yes, I used to feed them pineapple. But I would get fat from the butcher shops. And the cattle, when they strip it, get a lot of fat in there. I used to boil that with the pineapple and with pig grass. You know, pigweed. We used to pick that in the pineapple field because the pineapple fields are right outside of the farms. During the strike time, everything was neglected, and no chemicals went on the plants, so I used to just pick the pig grass and feed them.

WN: But only during the strike you did that?

HL: Yeah, during the strike.

WN: So that’s not the most ideal feed for them?

HL: No. Usually, it’s a little garbage and dry feed, yeah. But after a while, I gave up collecting garbage because it was too time-consuming, and it was cheaper for me to buy the feed instead of spending my time collecting garbage from house to house.

MK: And you know, you mentioned the strike on Lāna‘i. That was a long [seven-month] strike.

HL: Yeah.

MK: And you know, people kind of had a hard time.

HL: They did.

MK: Did any of the residents come to you, asking for some assistance during that time?

HL: Well, some of them did. Some of the people that I developed a good relationship with did. So I used to give them some of my stewing ends. A couple times too, I advanced the sale of hogs to people because they had problems. Like one of the ladies, I remember, her son had passed away, and you know, Filipino style, they have a big party after the service and what have you. And she
still hasn’t paid me for the hog. There were several cases like that, but again, what the heck. That’s part of doing business. If you don’t take any chances, you don’t make any money.

MK: And then, during the strike, how was your business affected with the regular stores over there?

HL: Well, the stores were pretty good—they extended a lot of credit to those people because they were part of the community. A lot of the people lived there for years, the store owners. There was no newcomer—not like WalMart coming in to Honolulu, see. All the stores that were there were there before the strike, and they were there because a lot of the people who started the market were part of the community before they opened the stores.

MK: And then, when they had that strike, what were your thoughts on the strike?

HL: Well, at that time, I was anti-company too. (Chuckles) I can see where some of their claims were legitimate. And the company knew that they could break the union if they wanted. They could break the union if the union didn’t make any concession. But they held together, so . . .

WN: So you helped by extending some credit to the stores and to individuals for the pork that you sold?

HL: Yeah. But the stores were pretty good. They were pretty much up-to-date with their payments. Somehow, I guess they had enough savings from their previous profits that they were able to maintain their level of service without cutting back, except to maybe reduce some of the credit that they extended to the citizens on Lāna‘i.

WN: And they asked you if you could supply some food for the soup kitchens?

HL: Yeah, Peter [Pedro] de la Cruz them came down, and we made some contributions but nothing major.

WN: You know, I read where Lāna‘i—one of the reasons they were able to survive so long on strike was that they had the means to go out and get their own food. You know, like hunting and so forth.

HL: Yeah, they did. They had a hunting unit. They would shoot wild goats and what have you, so—there are a lot of goats on Lāna‘i.

WN: Are there wild pigs on Lāna‘i, too?

HL: I don’t think they had at that time, but they may have had after because there were some Filipinos raising pigs in a camp that they shouldn’t have been. But I think some of them ran away, so that might’ve started a colony of wild hogs. But at the time when I was there, there were no wild hogs.

WN: Okay. And you know, you said that maybe the store—most of the storeowners were longtime residents, you know, and they were part of the community. And in essence, you were sort of a newcomer, yeah? How were you treated as a Lāna‘i person?

HL: Well, I think I was pretty well accepted. Part of my personal philosophy is that life is what you make of it. You can be the best farmer but the worst member of the community, or you can be a so-so farmer and be a good member of the community. Like anything else, I believed we all have
to make our contributions to the status, or welfare, or whatever you want to call it, in the community.

WN: Were there any instances where you felt sort of like a newcomer?

HL: Well, yeah, at first, when I went into that research department, a lot of people were kind of hesitant because I didn’t have any strong agricultural background in pineapples. But after a while, a lot of the people who worked in the department, we became good friends. In fact, I still remember some of them. People told me, “Oh, he’s an odd guy, so watch out.” Because he was a recluse. He liked to do things by himself. He was smart though. I guess people felt that because he was the professor type that he couldn’t communicate with them. But he was okay. Actually, I don’t think I’ve had any bad incidents with Lāna’i residents when I got there.

WN: Because I know you spent a lot of your time working, but were there times—what did you do for recreation when you first got to Lāna’i?

HL: Hunting and fishing. And then, (chuckles) they had a small golf course there, so I started to golf, but then, after I started my farm, I didn’t have time to golf. (WN and MK laugh.) They had that Cavendish Golf Course. It’s a small golf course. So it’s a putt-putt golf compared to the golf course at the Lodge [at Kōʻele] and Mānele [Bay Hotel].

WN: It [i.e., Cavendish] was nine holes, yeah?

HL: Yeah, nine holes. You get over hills and what have you.

WN: Do you remember what your lease was when you first started?

HL: Gee, I think I paid about $115 a month. And then, when we added our—had the addition to our family, I enlarged the house, too. So I brought another house down from the camp—about a similar size. And the carpenter foreman helped me put it together. We brought in electricity about six months after we got married. That cost me about 600 bucks to bring in a line, I think. But an electric foreman, who was in charge of the electrical department, had his workers help me put up the poles and pull the lines in—electrical lines that were going to the well on the base of the mountain. So before that, I had to get an electric generator. So every night, when it gets dark, we had to start the generator—run your generator for electricity.

WN: That’s because you were kind of isolated or was the whole town like that?

HL: No, no, we were isolated. We were about, what, four miles away from the town.

WN: Right, right.

HL: Dole refused to bring in electricity for me. They say if I wanted, pay for it. So I paid for it.

WN: Yeah, you weren’t really—you weren’t part of the company.

HL: No. I guess I wasn’t on very good terms with them because of my disagreement with their hiring policies. (Chuckles)

WN: Now you got married in 1952?

HL: Yes.
WN: How did you meet Janet?

HL: Well, I met Janet when she was here on O‘ahu. She had her steady, and I had my steady. So when we were on Lāna‘i, we didn’t have our steadies with us. (Laughs) So we were married. But she came up in September of [19]51, I think. And by February of [19]52, I convinced her that she should be my wife.

WN: I know she’s a Maui girl. I’m just wondering how she felt. Maybe we can ask her. You know, how did you convince her to come to an isolated island?

HL: Well, she was assigned there. See, in the old days, . . .

WN: Oh, okay. She was already there.

HL: . . . you had to go to the outside islands before you could get a [teaching] position on O‘ahu. So her first assignment was on Lāna‘i.

WN: I see. And what school was this?

HL: Lāna‘i High and Elementary School. She was a second-grade teacher there.

WN: So you got married in [19]52 and maybe about a year later, 1953, while you were still running the piggery, you started substitute teaching.

HL: That’s right.

WN: Well, what made you do that?

HL: The principal, Riley Ewing. Riley Ewing used to come down and say, “Hey, Harold. You’re the only unemployed college grad. So why don’t you come and help me out? I need a sub.” So I said, “Okay, but you got to let me know ahead of time so I can finish up my main chores before I go to school.” So I used to get up earlier to feed the hogs and to feed the chickens and what have you and then go to sub.

WN: So you would pretty much finish your chores by eight o’clock?

HL: By 7:30, yeah.

WN: Seven thirty. Now, was that a money decision or something else?

HL: Well, part of it was money, but again—I got to know Riley quite well because he’s a character, too. He loves to talk. (Chuckles) So he used to talk about his farm days. So I said, “Well, I got nothing to lose.” Some things I can just put off later in the day.

WN: So Riley was the principal.

HL: Riley Ewing, yeah. E-W-I-N-G.

WN: Oh, Ewing. Oh. I thought, Yuen. (Chuckles) He was the principal of Lāna‘i High and Elementary?
HL: Yeah.

WN: Okay. So you started substitute teaching. And I guess in those days, all you needed was the college degree?

HL: That’s right.

WN: But you had no teaching experience.

HL: No.

WN: What was that like when you first started?

Let me—let’s wait. Let’s change tapes right here.

HL: Okay.

END OF TAPE NO. 56-26-2-12

TAPE NO. 56-27-2-12

WN: Okay, this is tape two, session two with Harold Look. We were talking about you starting substitute teaching at Lāna‘i High and Elementary in 1953. And you know, you didn’t have any teaching experience. What was that like?

HL: Well, I found it enjoyable. I enjoyed it. I got to know, more or less, what we need to do as parents with our own children. I thought that it was a learning experience for me. Like anything else, sometimes if you’re put on the spot, you have to perform. So I think I enjoyed it, because while working on a farm, I’m there by myself all day long, no human interactions. You get to be quite lonely, too. But working with the kids was an experience that I really enjoyed.

WN: And how often would you get called to substitute?

HL: Oh, sometimes once or twice a week. Quite often.

WN: Were you the only substitute teacher on the island?

HL: No, there were a couple of teachers, but they didn’t have their bachelor’s degree. So that’s why Riley came to hunt me down (chuckles) and said, “Hey, you better come help us.”

WN: And what grades did you teach?

HL: I taught all the way from second grade up to junior high school. That’s where I met Liberato “Libby” Viduya—in the eleventh grade. When I taught Libby, it was for a semester because the teacher went on maternity leave. So I was teaching them English (chuckles)—English literature, which is not my favorite subject. (Laughs) But we survived.

WN: So you were teaching junior high English lit.

HL: Mm-hmm [yes]. Yeah, it was funny.

(Laughter)
And I guess, second grade, third grade, you would—what do you do in second and third grade? Reading stories, things like that?

Well, spelling and arithmetic. That’s where I met Dennis Hokama—in the second grade. He was in my second and third combination.

Ah, okay. What kind of a student was he?

Well, he was rascal. He was always out of his seat.

(Laughter)

You know, Lāna‘i style, everything is so laid-back and relaxed that the kids don’t feel any pressure. Even if the teacher is there, that doesn’t bother them.

What kinds of differences did you see? You just mentioned one difference. But what differences did you see from, you know, the children on Lāna‘i as opposed to when you were going to school?

Well, the Lāna‘i kids seemed to be more carefree. They’re not set on like the people in Honolulu, where the school—there’s no monkey business. You stay in your seat, and you stay there until I give you permission to leave. But the Lāna‘i kids, they want to go talk to their friends, they walk over and talk to their friends and stuff like that.

(Laughter)

That’s real country style, it’s part of their culture.

And what kind of a teacher were you? Were you strict? Not strict?

I think I was rather lax, because, you know, I was a kid once. So I know how it is to (chuckles) be, “Sit there and don’t move until I tell you to move.” (Chuckles)

Now, when you first started substitute teaching in [19]53, ethnicity-wise, what was the makeup of the students?

Oh, in the second and third grade, which Dennis was, there was only one Caucasian child I remember. His father was the assistant superintendent—some kind of position in the plantation. He was the only Caucasian I remember. Most of them were all either Filipino or Japanese.

With the Filipino children, was language an issue?

No, not necessarily. I think that’s...

These are kids born...

Yeah, they were born here, that’s why. They weren’t—they didn’t come from the Philippines. They weren’t immigrant children.

Mm-hmm [yes].

No, they were born here, so they didn’t speak the language like their immigrant parents.
WN: And did you have to deal with parents at all?

HL: Yeah. Because I’m pretty good in pidgin too, so... In fact, that’s the reason why I got kicked out of Ali‘i‘ōlani School. I no talk English, yeah.

(Laughter)

In those days was English standard.

WN: Mm-hmm [yes]. Was there—at the school, was there an emphasis on agriculture?

HL: Yeah, we had a good ag teacher there. My good friend, Kengo Takata, was the ag teacher. He came from Pāhala—Kapāpala in Pāhala, Ka‘ū [district] side. He had a good ag background, so he was a strong ag teacher. He really got the kids to do quite a bit on the farm, in addition to his strong support of the FFA, Future Farmers of America. I think, since his days, Lāna‘i has not produced any first-class—first-place winner in the public speaking contests.

MK: You know, I noticed that you were doing substitute teaching from about 1953—still doing the piggery, yeah. Then, eventually, you made the decision to go back to school to get a teaching certificate. What made you do that?

HL: Well, for one thing, the farm work was getting to be too—a one-man operation, and there was a demand for more hogs and more eggs and what have you. So I figured, oh, maybe it’s a good time for me to quit and go back to school. And my children were getting to be school-aged, too. There were no KCAA as they have here in Honolulu—the Kindergarten Children Aid Association. So I talked to Janet about it, and then I told my parents, “Is it all right if we move in with you for about a year while I go back to school?”

My parents said, “Okay.” We stayed with them for a year.

WN: So this was in [19]57 when you came back to Honolulu.

HL: That’s right.

WN: So what did you need to do to close down the piggery?

HL: Well, for one thing, I had to get rid of my breeding stock. So my uncle said, “Oh, send them back to him.” So I sent my breeding stock back to my uncle’s farm.

WN: How many?

HL: Oh, there was about, what, forty-five. About two boars and about forty-three sows. Then, the rest of the hogs and chickens, I got rid of on Lāna‘i.

MK: So did anyone continue the business there?

HL: No.

MK: That was it, then.

HL: Well, there was another. He started to raise hogs on Lāna‘i also, but I don’t know what happened to him after that.
WN: In the seven years that you had the piggery, [19]50 to [19]57, did your rent go up at all?

HL: I don’t think it did, no.

WN: What about your costs to run the business?

HL: Oh yeah, it went up because of the cost of feed. Everything had to be imported.

WN: So you were looking at the rising costs of the piggery and you were substitute teaching, so you were looking at your long-term career?

HL: Well, yeah, it was part of that. Part of it was, like I said, it was getting to me physically, too. So it was quite tiring on my—I wasn’t very big at that time. Doing all that heavy work was kind of getting to my tired bones. A lot of aches and pains. So part of it was for my physical well being.

MK: Plus you had kids.

HL: Yeah, well, Janet did a good job with the kids, so I was fortunate there.

WN: So that’s when you made the decision to go back to school to become a full-time educator.

HL: Yes, I did. And I have no regrets.

WN: What were your thoughts about leaving Lāna‘i? Did you think that you would come back?

HL: No, I don’t think I would’ve gone back to Lāna‘i even to teach because of the limitations of activities for the family and for the kids.

WN: Well, you probably had some friends that you had to say goodbye to.

HL: Yeah, we did. In fact, some of them moved back—moved to Honolulu after a while too. But most of them have passed away already.

WN: Okay, well, after you got your degree, you had a lot of positions teaching as well as principalships at different schools: Kukuihaele; Pa‘auilo; August Ahrens, where you were vice principal; Holomua on Moloka‘i, where you were principal—teaching principal; ‘Iliahi School in Wahiawa as principal; and then you ended your career as principal at Alvah Scott.

HL: That’s right.

WN: Yeah. And you retired what year?

HL: December of 1989.

WN: Okay, well, we just wanted to ask you about—we’re doing this project for the Lāna‘i Culture and [Heritage] Center. And, you know, the goal is to preserve the history of Lāna‘i. How do you feel about that? Is it important to preserve Lāna‘i’s history?

HL: I think it is. I feel it’s very important that people know how living conditions were on the plantation camps and how domineering the company is to all the employees. Because if there’s such a term as semi-slavery, maybe that’s it. It was a lot of hard work involved for the people there. The laborers, especially. I can see why a union was formed to protect them and their
families. I guess the philosophy of the company was that you keep the people suppressed, and you’ll be able to control them better. It was something along that line, but to me, it was very undemocratic in a democracy as the United States. Maybe the same thing happened to the immigrants from Laos or Korea or wherever. Like the farms on the ‘Ewa plain—a lot of people are held in semi-slavery to me.

WN: And what do you say to people who say the opposite, like, “Oh, you know, the company took care of us, provided us with a home, a job, things like that.”

HL: Well, what types of homes, yeah? What type of jobs? What type of care did you provide for them? I mean, when you read the newspaper about their living in cramped quarters, and they’re cooking out in the outdoors and what have you, I don’t know whether that’s a good labor practice or not. Maybe it is for their pocketbook but not for the people working on the farm.

WN: And where did you see the role of the school in all of this entire system?

HL: Well, I think, first of all, we need to respect people for being a human being. You should provide conditions or situations where the practice is acceptable to promote democracy, to promote the people’s well being, and not abuse or take advantage of their status or situation. Quite often, because a people have power, they can call the shots. And to me, that’s not fair, yeah. Maybe it’s because I see my father was abused as an employee of American Can when he was there. And we, as kids, had to suffer through some of that, too, because when he came home, his frustration was taking it out on us and my mother. So it’s a matter of—developing a sensitivity to others and their needs. It’s just like when the [students] used to come to the office because they misbehaved. And I said, “How come you did that?” You give them a chance to explain why they did it. And I remember, I always used to tell the kids, “This time, I’ll let you go. But the next time you come back, you’re going to get double.” (Laughs) Maybe it’s a threat, but then too, better let them know there are consequences to be had. That you can do what you want, but remember, there are consequences if your behavior is not promoting the welfare of yourself or others.

WN: And you know, you spent a lot of time teaching these children—or educating these children who are coming out of this semi-slavery system. Did you have any kind of philosophy as far as trying to combat this system, in the schools?

HL: Yeah, well, what I always did with the kids who had problems or wanted to talk about things, I always say, “Why?” The question, why? Wait, not why—how come? Because they have to give me an explanation of why they’re doing things. If I feel that I can help them see the other side, then it’s my role to do that for them. My teachers are the same way. If they come in and they say, “Oh, I have this kind of problem, that kind of problem,” then my question, “How come you feel that way?” This is why, today, I have teachers who’ll come up, and they’ll swear by me 100 percent. They’ll back me up all the way. (Chuckles) And the reason why—when they were having problems, you helped them to open their eyes to see what the options are for them. Life is learning.

WN: And I always wanted to ask about Lāna‘i and how different Lāna‘i is from other places or similar. And you know, you taught at places like Kukuihaele, Pa‘auilo, August Ahrens—these are all plantation communities.

HL: I didn’t teach there. I was supposed to go there. I went to Pa‘auilo instead of Kukuihaele

WN: Oh, yeah, yeah. I’m sorry.
HL: Because Janet was expecting.

WN: Yeah, you never went to Kukuihaele.

HL: No.

WN: Okay. But Pa‘auilo, August Ahrens—these are all like plantation areas. Was there a difference in Lāna‘i children?

HL: No, the same plantation hierarchy. At Pa‘auilo—one of my students, I remember, and I’m very proud of him is Pieper Toyama at that Buddhist . . .

WN: Oh, Pieper Toyama, yeah!

HL: At the [Pacific] Buddhist Academy.

WN: He is head of school at Pacific Buddhist Academy, yeah?

HL: Yeah, he was my student. I remember, he was so darn smart that I used to have him help me—“Pieper, why don’t you go to the library and do some research on this.” (WN and MK chuckle.) Give him a project and he’d go down there and do it. And he’d come back. I said, “You sure you checked everything out?”

“Oh, yes, yes.” (Chuckles) He was smart. He was a very smart person.

MK: I guess one more question. You know, since you were administration at these schools that were in plantation communities, were there any instances when, maybe as a school administrator, you might have any differences with the plantation management or any sort of relationship with the plantation management?

HL: Not that I know of. Nothing that specific. But when the kids used to come and say, “Oh, my father is this, my father is that.”

I said, “Well, you know, some of the things that your father is doing is because he has to survive in his position. But if he feels that he is not comfortable, maybe he should talk it over with his plantation manager or something.” Because I don’t think it would’ve been wise on my part to tell him, “Oh, your father should do this, or your father should do that.”

Because if it doesn’t turn out right, “Mr. Look said so.” (HL and MK chuckle.)

WN: Okay, I think we’re done.

MK: Yeah.

WN: We’d like to thank you very much for your time.

HL: Thank you.

WN: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW
Lānaʻi: Reflecting on the Past; Bracing for the Future

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