

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: SEIKO KANESHIRO, 53, owner of Ono Ono Poi
Factory and taro farmer

Seiko Kaneshiro, fifth of seven children, was born in February, 1925, in Kukuihaele to Okinawan immigrants, Naozo and Shira Kaneshiro. Seiko's father Naozo first worked for Pacific Sugar (Kukuihaele Plantation) and then for the plantation store, until he opened his own general merchandise store in Kukuihaele in 1923.

Seiko was a student at Kukuihaele and Honokaa schools. He also attended Japanese School until World War II started. As a boy, Seiko helped in the store and in his father's Waipio taro patch. After high school graduation in 1943 Seiko started farming taro full time, and in 1950 he took over the farm when his father went to live in Hilo. Two years later he married. He and his wife have five children.

Seiko opened up his own poi factory in Kukuihaele in 1960. At present he continues to farm taro and manufacture poi. He is also experimenting with raising prawns.

Seiko has a black belt in judo. He used to compete in as well as teach the martial art.

Tape No. 4-13-1-78

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Mr. Seiko Kaneshiro (SK)

April 3, 1978

Kukuihaele, Big Island

BY: Vivien Lee (VL) and Yukie Yoshinaga (YY)

VL: This is an interview with Mr. Seiko Kaneshiro. Today is April 3, 1978. We're at his house in Kukuihaele.

I wanted to ask you first about how before you got your own poi shop [1960], you were an agent for other poi factories? Is that right?

SK: Before I started my poi factory, I was dealer for my own business. I used to buy the taro from Waipio and then sell it to the factories in Hilo.

VL: What factories?

SK: Hilo Poi factory.

VL: At Puueo?

SK: No. Was run by Higashi. Mrs. Higashi. And I used to ship some taro to Honolulu also.

VL: Honolulu Poi?

SK: Yeah. When I had excess taro. Whatever the poi factory in Hilo could not take, I ship it to Honolulu.

VL: How did you become an agent? Or is that what you would call yourself? At that time.

SK: Well, I was a dealer.

VL: Oh, dealer.

SK: Uh huh. I also produced my own taro and I used to buy taro from the other farmers.

VL: How did you get into being a dealer?

SK: My dad used to have this business before. And he used to buy taro from the other farmers also. And then when he moved (to Hilo) I just continued the business.

VL: Do you know how he became a dealer?

SK: Well, when the war started, he used to run the [family] store and since he was an alien, he couldn't keep on running the store so at the same time, he had the small farm in Waipio. After the oldest son took over the store, he [father] concentrated on the taro business. And then, well, I worked with my dad also. Doing the farm work and then looking around for taro to buy.

VL: Now, was this unusual because didn't most people just raise taro and then sell it? But your father wanted to be a dealer also?

SK: Well, during that time, the farmers down Waipio never shipped the taro to Honolulu. I guess later on the Honolulu Poi start coming in to get their taro from Waipio. So quite a bit of people at that time were kind of stuck with their taro so my dad used to help buy their taro and then sell it to the factories.

VL: Would the factories tell him how much they wanted? How did they work?

SK: The factories usually know how much to grind for the whole week. So we make a schedule that, so and so person pull so much and then make the quota. But sometimes, during the holidays, the factories use more taro so they notify us and we ask the farmers to dig that much more taro for the poi factories.

VL: This was around war time?

SK: That was, yeah, just about war time and after the war.

VL: What would the dealer get for payment for this service? Was your father paid for being a dealer?

SK: Well, no. Well, we buy it for so much and then we sell it again for so much, to the factories. Because he was in business he have to make his profit also.

VL: So about how much would he buy every week from others?

SK: At that time, the Hilo Poi used to manufacture quite a bit of poi. So, during that time, he was shipping out about, I guess, 200 bags of taro a week.

VL: And do you remember how much he would buy it for from the farmers?

SK: At that time, my dad used to buy it by the field. You know, this field has so many bags, then he figure. Well, it's like a gamble. You don't know whether the crop is going to be good or not. But that's how he used to buy it.

VL: He would buy the whole field?

SK: Yeah, it's not harvested. It's a matured crop but not harvested.

And if the patch has about 50 bags, then he figured it's gonna get about 60 bags so about 10 bags he would make money, on that 10 bags.

VL: You mean so he would pay for about 50 bags and then hope that he gets 60?

SK: Yeah, he get about 60. It's like a gamble. Sometimes he might make more, sometimes he might make less. Yeah.

VL: How would he estimate?

SK: Well, just by looking. When you harvest, you can tell. From experience harvesting three or four lines from our crop we would know how many bags would come out. And from that estimation, more or less you can tell how many bags he's going to get.

VL: So would they pull three or four lines first? So that he could estimate?

SK: Through our own field, we could estimate. By looking at the size of the patch, well, we more or less know how many bags this patch would produce and how many bags this other field would produce. So, it's like a gamble. If you have a real good crop, you going to get more taro from that field. But if you have a really poor crop, some of the taro would be, the Hawaiians would call it loliloli. That's because the water has not been taken care of properly and the taro gets light.

VL: Watery?

SK: Gets watery. And in that way, you won't get as much as you expected.

VL: Now, would your father go and feel the taro of these other farmers?

SK: Yeah. Before he buys the taro, he more or less go and feel the size and growth of the plant.

VL: How would he be able to tell that it was going to be really good? Is there something about the stalk part that can indicate that?

SK: Yeah. After raising taro for quite a while you more or less can tell.

(Laughter)

YY: You just know.

SK: You just know. The taro usually comes out kind of round shape. The plants are all about even. You know, you don't have too high or too low. They're more or less even in height. And the matured taro plant usually shrinks. You know, while they're growing, they really get tall. But as time gets near for harvesting, the plants

gradually shrink. And the color of the leaves changes also. And by looking at it you more or less know whether you going to have a good crop or not.

VL: And then about how much would he pay, then, to the farmer? He pays by the field.

SK: He pays by the patch. He says, "This patch will produce, let's say, maybe 50 bags," and he'll give the person so much. And then if he agrees, then the deal is made. If he doesn't agree, then they do little more discussing and then come to terms. Then the deal is made.

VL: At that time, how much a bag was he paying?

SK: Oh, during that time, taro was really cheap. I think used to be about \$4, \$4.50. Somewhere around that amount.

VL: Most often, was your father correct in his estimates?

SK: Yeah. He....he made. Sometimes, well he didn't make as much as he thought he would. But as a whole, he was on the safe side.

VL: Then how about transportation to Hilo?

SK: Transportation. At one time, we had our own transportation truck. And we used to take it to Hilo about three times a week. And then when coming back, we used to haul the freight for the store. So both ways had freight.

YY: How about, say the farmers would harvest the taro and they would leave the bags on the bank? Or would they haul it up? Who would haul the taro up the pali?

SK: Oh, at that time, we didn't have any animals so there was a man, a Chinese man, he had lots of animals so my dad hired him to haul the taro from Waipio. Then eventually we got our own animals from the plantations, and from the ranches and did our own hauling. (We owned about 30 mules.)

VL: Who was the Chinese man?

SK: Mock Chew. Samuel Mock Chew's father. He used to do the hauling for us.

VL: What would you pay him to haul?

SK: Gee, at that time....I forget how much it was. And some of the farmers, they wanted the groceries from the stores so they took the groceries for the payment of the taro.

VL: So instead of giving them money, you would give them groceries?

SK: Well, if they wanted groceries, then we gave them groceries. If

they wanted cash, then we gave them cash.

VL: So then how much would Hilo Poi buy your taro for?

SK: At that time, gee, I forgot how much my dad was buying for.

VL: In other words, how much was he making a bag?

SK: I guess about 50 cents a bag. That was, well, I was still young so I didn't think much about the price of the taro and how much they were making. I was still young, going school. And after I finished high school [approx. 1943], I did a full-time work down Waipio.

VL: What was your job to do at that time, after high school?

SK: My job was to harvest our own crop and do cleaning, maintaining the field. Both my dad and I used to do that.

VL: Just you two?

SK: Yeah, just both of us. And well, sometimes when the job got backward, we hired some people from Waipio.

VL: Is that day work?

SK: Yeah, during that time, used to be day work and, I think, we were paying about \$4 or \$4.50 a day.

VL: Why did you decide to go full time into farming, after high school?

SK: Well, when I graduated, that was the war time and the government used to stress on food production. So, since we were raising taro, then I had to help on the farm and work full time on the farm.

VL: What do you mean you "had to?"

SK: Well, you see, during that time, when you reach the age of 18, you had a classification, the army classification. Class 1-A or....I forgot what the other classification. But since we were working in the food production, we were classified as 2-C and we have to put more time in the farm. So, I almost did full time work down Waipio.

VL: So if you didn't go into farming, you would have been drafted?

SK: Yeah, then I would have been classified as 1-A. Then would have been (Laughs) drafted into the army.

VL: When did you kind of take over as dealer?

SK: When my dad left, I more or less knew already what to do and how to go about. So when he went to Hilo then I had to carry on. So, that's when.... [See "Written Addition #2" at end of this interview.]

VL: He went 1958?

SK: He went to Hilo....uh, let's see. He moved to Hilo about....I think just about 1950. Oh, did I have 1958?

VL: (Laughs) I had 1958 but I don't know if that's correct or not [information from preliminary interview]. I may have made a mistake. Was it after you got married?

SK: Before I got married.

VL: Before 1952 then.

SK: Yeah, I think was about 1950. Just about that time.

VL: So you sort of just took over?

SK: Yeah.

VL: Did you make any changes?

SK: No. Just carry on the same practices.

VL: So you paid also by the field?

SK: Yeah, at that time. Then gradually, I guess, the farmers wanted we buy by the bags so from that we started buying by the bag.

YY: When was that; do you remember?

SK: Let's see. After he left so nineteen maybe fifty. From about 1950.

VL: So when you had an order to fill from the factory, how did you determine who was going to give you how much?

SK: When we buy the field, we know how much bags would produce from this field and how many bags would produce from that other field and so on. By getting the total figure, then I would know how much taro would be going out for the next maybe couple of months. Usually you know we plan it ahead so that we won't get short later on. And then when the taro get less, we keep on looking for more taro from the other farmers.

VL: So then does that mean that you would tell the factory how much you were going to give them?

SK: No, the factory usually tell us how much they need. Usually it's been steady, same amount, except for during the holidays, they use more taro. Then when I think the taro's getting short, then I keep on looking for more taro from the other farmers.

VL: Have there ever been real severe shortages?

SK: Yeah, there were several times we couldn't get the taro so we have to cut down the order. Then they, in the mean time, would be looking for taro from some other places.

YY: What caused the shortages?

- SK: At that time, sometimes the field get neglected and that much behind the farmers would be, so that's one of the reasons of the shortage. So if you just keep on going, keep on planting right after harvest, then it won't be too bad. But if you neglect it and don't plant it right away then you going to be back that amount of time.
- VL: Did you ever have a farmer promise that he would give you his field and then he didn't?
- SK: Yeah, I had some cases like that.
- VL: What would you do?
- SK: Well, just couldn't help. Cases where after I bought the taro and, we usually advance so much money. Then some other agent for the other poi factories give little bit more for the price of taro. Then completely stop mine and then they give it to the other agent. That's when I really get stuck because I expected the taro from this certain farmer and he gives it to somebody else. So I'm short of that amount of taro.
- VL: Would you get your advance back?
- SK: Well, several cases I got the amount of taro I needed, for the amount of advance that I made, then stopped. And some cases I got my advance back.
- VL: Then would you ever deal with that person again?
- SK: I'd think twice before I deal with them. And few times, I made them, some other farmers sign certain kind of agreement that they would furnish me the taro until the whole field is harvested. And that seemed to work all right.
- VL: Did that happen very often; where they would short you?
- SK: No, not quite often. Just a few, maybe twice happened to me like that where somebody else offer more for the price of taro than what I was paying.
- VL: This somebody else, would it be somebody from Waipio or from outside? The dealer.
- SK: From in our locality.
- VL: So Waipio had a number of dealers?
- SK: Not exactly. Some, the poi factories, they have their own agents and the agent look around for the taro and they notify the factories and the factories, since they are in need of the taro they'll offer little more. The price on the taro.
- VL: Were you the only one for Hilo?

- SK: For Hilo Poi, yeah, I was the only one. Because Hilo Poi Factory, the factory was owned by my dad and Higashi rented the building from us so we supplied them the taro. And they were getting mostly from us.
- VL: How about times when there was excess, surplus taro?
- SK: Yeah, we had that trouble too. Where we had too much taro and the factory couldn't take all the taro and the taro was getting rotten. Like, in my case, when I have too much taro and also the other growers that I buy [from], I usually leave mine the last. I try to harvest the taro from my other growers and by time I harvest my taro, the taro was getting rotten. But as much as possible, I try to harvest the taro from the ones that I buy [from].
- VL: So your own taro would be lost then? You couldn't use it.
- SK: Yeah. Well, we could use some but quite a bit of the taro was spoiled so we have to cut it and then use it.
- VL: Now in those times, would the price of taro come down?
- SK: Yeah. When there was excess of taro, the price dropped few cents. Maybe, I'd say, 50 cents like that. And when taro was really short, then price used to come up. Demand and supply.
- VL: Did you ever have farmers tell you they want a higher price for each bag?
- SK: Well, at that time the poi factories, the others, the competitors; when they were short, they offer higher price and usually the price doesn't jump too high. Just about 50 cents or so goes up. And if still shortage, and if we can get the taro, we offer another 50 cents and try to get taro.
- VL: So the factories have always operated as competitors? Were there ever times when the factories cooperated to set prices?
- SK: No, they never did get together. They set their own price.
- VL: Did you ever have farmers give you taro that wasn't quite so good?
- SK: Yeah, there were a lot of times where the taro wasn't of the best grade. Especially when the taro is really short, some of them put in the rotten taro and not too good grade. So when we receive the taro we have to cut it off and that amount is wasted. There are quite a bit of times, you know.
- VL: As the dealer you would do that? You would cut off the rotten part?
- SK: No. After I started my factory, then whatever I buy from the other farmers before we put it in the cooker, we try to do away with the spoiled taro.
- VL: But as a dealer you would not do that.

SK: No, the ones that I ship outside, whatever comes up to Kukuihaele is the one that is shipped to the factories in Hilo.

VL: Did the factory ever complain to you that some was not so good?

SK: Yeah, there were times when they complained so I have to complain to the farmers too. But some of the farmers is really hard to talk to when you explain it to them, they tell you that, "Well, if you don't want the taro, just leave it. Somebody else would buy it." That's how some of them used to be. Not every one but certain ones. But since we really need the taro, well, we couldn't do much about it.

VL: How about the dealers? You knew each other, the dealers in Waipio?

SK: Yeah, more or less know.

VL: Was there competition among the dealers for certain farmers' crops?

SK: Well, not really. Like the taro I ship to Honolulu, like the Honolulu Poi, they have their own growers so they usually ship their own taro. Whatever excess they have, some of them sell it to the outside dealers. And I have my own growers also.

VL: About how many did you have?

SK: I have about four or five steady ones that supply me and sometimes I get it from the other growers. Or since they have the excess taro that they willing to sell it to me.

VL: And how did you become a poi processor yourself?

SK: Since, as I said, there were times when there were too much taro, the excess taro which the Hilo Poi factory couldn't take, then I decided I'd make my own factory and use the excess taro for my own shop. At the beginning, I had in mind of just supplying the local stores like Kukuihaele and maybe Honokaa and Waimea, and later on expand it to the other areas. Then the demand start getting, start increasing so I went into Kona. At that time, there was a poi factory in Kona. He wanted to give up processing poi so he asked me if I wanted to get his customers, the stores that he was distributing. Then I told him, "Yeah, I wanted to."

VL: You knew him from before?

SK: Yeah, because he used to get his supply from Waipio.

YY: Who was this in Kona?

SK: His name is Mr. Sugai and he had his own poi factory in Kona. And eventually he gave up. And then I took over.

YY: So you took over Sugai's accounts after you had started your own factory?

- SK: Uh huh. I started delivering poi in Kona about two years after I started, about two years. And then from Kona, then I also went to Kohala and then I also shipped some poi to Food Fair, to Hilo.
- VL: When you first started Ono-Ono Poi, how did you begin, financing like that?
- SK: I made a few loans from the bank. And at that time, I used some of the old materials and bought few new lumbers and other materials. Wasn't much of investment.
- VL: Who designed it, the building?
- SK: That was, the building was exactly like the one that the Hilo Poi had. Because Hilo Poi was the first building. Then, when I started I copied the same type of building. And then later on, well, made some improvements.
- YY: How about all your equipment?
- SK: I bought those equipment. Some was second hand.
- VL: From Hilo?
- SK: From Hilo. At that time, we used to do lots of manual labor. Then was taking too much long, the working hours and workers were getting tired too. So, gradually I bought machines like the packaging machines and the peeler, potato peeler.
- VL: Can you explain in the beginning, all the hand work that was done?
- SK: As soon as the taro was cooked, then we peeled the skin with the hand.
- VL: Did you use knife?
- SK: No, the taro was hot so it easily peels off with the hand.

And then we have two pans in the shop. One for after we peel the skin, then we put it in one pan. Then the other pan is to give the finishing job, scrape the dark spots. And then after the taro is cleaned then it's put into another tray and from there it goes to the grinder. From the grinder, then it runs into the straining machine; we have a strainer in there. Then the poi is strained. After that, we put it into another pan. And this pan holds about 450 pounds of poi and the workers mix that to give a even texture on the poi. Then this poi is put into a bucket. I think you saw the huge bucket that we have in the shop.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

VL: So the poi goes into the big bucket.

SK: It goes into the big bucket, then the bucket is hoisted right above the funnel, the packaging machine. Then we pull the lever, the opening, there's a small opening in the center [bottom] of this bucket. And just pull this door, this so-called door, and then the poi drops right into the funnel. And then from the funnel, the poi pumps out into this package. Two ladies working side by side, they hold the package right underneath this, this place.

YY: Like a spout?

SK: Yeah, spout. And then the poi drops into the package and it's ready for tying.

VL: Now, from the beginning, you had that pump?

SK: No, at the beginning, we used to scoop it in the hand and weigh each bag. But since the ladies were so used to doing that, when they scoop it in the hand, it more or less comes accurate.

VL: What size were you making at that time?

SK: At that time, we used to package 25 cents and 50 cents and the dollar size. Three different size.

VL: How many pounds were those?

SK: At that time, the dollar size used to weigh about 4 pounds, 4½ pounds. (Laughs)

VL: This was about 1960?

SK: That was about, yeah, just about that time.

VL: And the 50 cent one?

SK: Fifty cents one usually used to be half of that. And then the 25 cents was half of that 50 cents.

VL: So they knew just by their hands, feeling, how much the weight was?

SK: Yeah, right. After doing that for several months; in fact, I got the packaging machine about maybe two years after we started. Then, for two years, the ladies been doing with the hand so they were pretty accurate in scooping the poi and putting it into the package. Well, still then we have to weigh each package because you cannot under-weight the poundage. If it's over, it's all right but if you make it less, then might get complaints from the customers.

VL: So at that time, how much taro were you processing?

SK: At the beginning, I wasn't processing too much because the poi, my brand was still new and I wasn't processing too much. Maybe about thousand pounds of taro.

VL: A week?

SK: Oh, at that time I was making poi four times a week. Twice for this Hamakua section and then twice for Kona. Then, eventually, since there was too much waste, I cut down my trip to twice. So right now, I'm just making two times a week.

VL: So that 1,000 pounds was 1,000 pounds a....

SK: A thousand pounds at one time; so, just about thousand pounds, that would be 10 bags of taro so we used to grind about 10 bags.

VL: Four times a week so 40 bags a week.

SK: Yeah. Then gradually, since too much return. The poi is on consignment so whatever couldn't sell, we have to take it back and it's been wasted. Then later on I cut it down to twice a week.

VL: When you did the 1,000 pounds a day, how many workers did you have in the factory?

SK: When I started, I think, myself....I had only two workers, two other ladies. Just three workers.

VL: Yourself and two other ladies?

SK: Two other ladies.

VL: So how long would it take them?

SK: Oh, at that time, we used to work sometimes nine hours, ten hours; everything was done by hand. And sometimes when something goes wrong, then we used to work longer hours. And at that time, we used to make the poi in the morning. The first time when we started, I think we started making poi from about 2 o'clock in the morning. And then, after making the poi, then I went to deliver the poi. That time, my delivery was just in Hamakua; I wasn't over here. Later on I started Kona.

So anyway, as soon as everything was finished, then I delivered the poi. I used to deliver the poi late afternoon and was kind of too much for me too because working so many hours in the shop and after that going out deliver, not enough sleep. Then, we changed the time again. We changed several times. Now, we start making poi in the morning, about 7 o'clock, and then finish about maybe 3:00, 3:30 or so. Then give me time to rest and the next day do the delivering.

VL: So in the beginning, your two workers, did you have to have insurance or something for them?

SK: Well, Workmen's Compensation insurance; that is required by the law.

VL: And what were they paid at that time?

SK: At that time, the minimum wage was....one dollar an hour? I think was one dollar an hour. And then gradually went up.

VL: What would you do if one of the ladies was sick?

SK: Then sometimes my wife used to stand by and help in the shop also. And then, when times got real busy, then I asked some other ladies to help in the shop.

VL: So when you bought the Kona accounts [did you buy] equipment too?

SK: Yeah, I bought his machine, the grinder.

VL: And you used his instead of the one you had been using?

SK: Well, I used mine for quite a while. Then he had some stainless steel parts so I replaced the parts and use the stainless steel parts for the grinder.

VL: With all of his accounts, did you expand, then?

SK: Yeah, gradually. Went into more stores....

YY: And all this time, were you selling on consignment basis?

SK: Right. On consignment.

YY: Even today?

SK: Even today. But today, more people eating poi so we hardly have any returns. But if there are any returns, then we use it as a sour poi and some people, they like the sour poi. So, we hardly have anything coming back.

VL: Is that so, that more people are eating poi today?

SK: I think so. Well, long ago, mostly the Hawaiians used to eat the poi. But gradually the different nationalities eating. (Laughs) And there are lots of parties going on and people try it. The first time, well, they don't care much. After trying for several times, then they like their poi.

VL: So when you had your own poi shop, were you still the dealer for Hilo?

SK: Yeah. I was processing my own poi and then same time, the Hilo Poi Factory was still in operation so I used to supply them the taro.

VL: Were the two of you ever in competition for taro?

SK: Yeah.

(Laughter)

VL: How did you work that out?

SK: Well, somehow I got it straightened out.

(Visitor arrives, interview stops)

VL: I was going to ask you when Hilo Poi went out, when they were pau?

SK: You mean when they quit?

VL: Well, actually when you stopped being a dealer for them.

SK: Oh, after Mrs. Higashi sold the business to somebody else; about two years ago. And then this person did the business till about last year and then he closed up. Eventually, I couldn't supply him the amount of taro he wanted and he couldn't get the taro from elsewhere so he gradually closed up.

VL: Why is it that you couldn't supply him with the taro?

SK: Well, we didn't have enough. The farmers couldn't raise the amount of taro that I wanted. Well, with all this disease and some field being neglected so taro was getting short.

VL: And you yourself needed for your own poi shop.

SK: Yeah, and I needed also for my own shop. One of the big reasons right now is that we're having that taro rot and that really discourage the farmers. If you have a field where you produce about 100 bags of taro, you'll get only about maybe 50 bags or 40 bags. So, that amount going to be short. Not only one farmer but several farmers have the same problems too, so have a shortage on the taro.

VL: Do you have a shortage now? For your poi?

SK: Right now, slightly.

VL: Have you gone to other places outside Waipio for taro, then?

SK: So far, not. Most of, in fact all of the taro from Waipio. Well, few years back I used to get some from Kona, the dry land taro. They asked me if I wanted dry land taro so just for a few bags, I buy their taro.

YY: How is that taro in comparison to wet land?

SK: Dry land taro is really solid. But they also have taro that's not good. And then it's much more harder to clean the taro because the skin sticks to the meat. Although, the dry land taro produced more poi because it's much more solid.

YY: How about the taste?

SK: The taste, people that been eating the wet land poi prefer the wet land. They don't like the dry land taro too much. I mean the poi; if made into poi. So what we do is we mix the dry land and the wet land taro.

Then you cannot tell the difference.

VL: What kind of wet land taro is the best for poi? What are the characteristics?

SK: Well, as far as the taste, the taste doesn't make too much difference with the different variety. To me, you know. But lots of people want the poi to look attractive so they go for the color. And we have that type of taro, the lehua taro that gives attractive color to the poi; it's much more darker and looks really appetizing. And people like that. (Chuckle) Whereas if we use the white taro, then the poi gets kind of whitish like.

YY: That's apii?

SK: That is apii. And people think the poi is not fresh, then they don't buy it as much as the ones that has color. The ones with the color looks much more fresher.

VL: By the color, you mean the reddish color or grayish color?

SK: Yeah, that's right. The reddish, the lehua taro, has a kind of dark purplish like color and then the white, the apii, is sort of grayish. And as the poi gets older, then the color gets much more lighter, it gets really, get whitish. And it stays in the store for about five, six days. Then it really gets white and people think we add flour in to the poi.

(Laughs)

VL: How about in terms of solidity? What is good for the best poi?

SK: You mean the taro or the poi? Well, there's a regulation that the consistency must be so many percent solid, not less than so much, so many percent.

VL: What is that percent?

SK: I think right now is about 28 percent solid. That's the standard.

VL: How do you measure that?

SK: Well, the Board of Health comes out once a month and they take a sample test and they notify us, whether it's above or below. And if it's ready-mixed poi, then the solidness gets less. I think on the ready-mixed, should be not less than 22 percent solid. Although my label has "strained poi" but it's usually standard percentage, about 28 percent, sometimes it goes to 30 percent solid.

VL: Yours is not ready mixed?

SK: Well, the label says it's ready mixed. Because sometimes, it might go below the standard so to be on the safe side, I have it printed "ready-mixed". If you don't have that label "Ready-Mixed" and it goes below

[the solidity percentage for strained poi], then the people going to complain.

VL: Actually, by solidity, I meant the corm.

SK: The taro?

VL: Yeah.

SK: Oh, oh, oh. You mean the type of taro; which is much more solid?

VL: Yeah, and is it best to have real solid taro for poi?

SK: Oh yeah. If you have solid taro, then you can produce more poi, you can add more water to it. But, as I said, the standard, the regulation is 28 percent solid. If you make the poi too solid, when it's delivered to the store, after a few days, the poi gets hard. And when the people buy the poi, if they don't mix it right, it's going to get lumpy. Then you have complaints again.

VL: How about the difference between the poi made from the mother and the poi made from the keiki?

SK: Well, the one from the baby is much more solid, although you have more waste on the one from the baby. Whereas, the big ones, you have less waste.

VL: So when you get taro from the farmers, what do you prefer, in terms of mother or keiki?

SK: Well, when they harvest the taro, it's all mixed, the keikis and the mother taro is all put in the bag and then sent to the factory. There are some selected ones that we ship it, we sell it to the stores.

VL: Just raw?

SK: Yeah, raw. The raw taro.

VL: So can we go through the process that you do on a day that you process poi?

SK: Oh, from Monday?

VL: From steaming.

SK: Oh, steaming?

VL: Oh, okay, you can start with Monday. Go through the week and the days.

SK: Yeah, Monday I usually cook the taro in the morning, for about maybe four hours. And then the taro is left in the cooker to be steamed. And then Tuesday....

- VL: Wait, wait. Do you cook it all at once, all that you're going to process on Tuesday?
- SK: Yeah, we cook it all.
- VL: All on Monday.
- SK: All on Monday.
- VL: And now how many bags?
- SK: Right now, we cook about twenty bags at one time.
- VL: They all fit in that wooden steamer?
- SK: Right, into that cooker. Well, I could cook a few bags more but since it's a little short right now, I'm just cooking about 20 bags. Then on Tuesday, we process the poi.
- VL: (Laughs) Wait, on Monday, don't you get the bags ready, the plastic bags?
- SK: Oh no, everything is done on that day. On Tuesday.
- VL: Oh. Sorry.
- SK: And then on Tuesday, well I have some bags, some cases kept at home and some in the shop and on Tuesday then we process the poi. And then, on Wednesday, I go out to deliver to Kona.
- VL: And Robert [Revilla, poi shop employee] goes with you, yeah?
- SK: Yeah, he goes with me. It's almost a day job. And then Thursdays, we process poi again. And then Friday go out to deliver to Honokaa, to Waimea and to Kohala. And Saturday I do my farm work. If need to be harvested, then do some harvesting. Sunday, I get ready for the next week. Sunday we put the taro all into the cooker, get it ready. And then Monday again, just cook the taro.
- VL: When do you get the taro from the farmers?
- SK: Usually the taro is up by Saturdays and Sundays. And sometimes the farmers cannot get it out during the weekend, then they bring it up Monday.
- VL: They bring their own up?
- SK: Yeah, the ones that I buy from the farmers. They have their own trucks so they haul their own to the shop.
- VL: Does Ted [Kaaekuahiwi] pick up taro for you?
- SK: Yeah, he hauls my taro; the ones who don't have any jeep and the ones that I buy [from]. And for my own farm, well, I haul my own.

VL: Uhm, I have so many questions popping in my mind. I don't know where to start.

YY: Did you want to go into the process of making poi on Tuesdays and Thursdays?

VL: Yeah. You started to talk about that briefly before; the peeling and so on. Can you go through the process after it's steamed? Now you have the potato peeler.

SK: Potato peeler, yeah. We do a just rough job. Maybe run it in the peeler about 20 seconds and then well, the peeling is maybe 25 pounds at one time.

VL: And you add water?

SK: Into the peeler? Yeah. Because if you don't add water, it's going to eat too much of the taro. So the main thing is to get the skin off, just do the rough job. And then we put it into another pan. There the workers scrape the black spots.

VL: The purpose is to get all the black spots off?

SK: Uh huh, to get it cleaned because if you don't get it clean then it will show into the poi. Although I have a strainer, but still it runs, some of the black spots run through the strainer and comes into the poi.

VL: Do you ever check your workers' work to see that it's clean?

SK: Well, not exactly. They more or less know how clean it should be. And the taro seems to be clean so I don't bother.

VL: Did you train all your workers yourself?

SK: Well, some of them did before they started working in the factories, they made their own poi at home so they have the experience in cleaning. And then some of them, before they started in my shop, they used to work for another factory in Honokaa. There used to be a poi factory in Honokaa before and they were hired by that factory. So after that shop closed and several years later, I picked the same workers. And they just know how to go about.

YY: Then after the taro is cleanly peeled, what happens to it?

SK: Then we put the taro into a trough. Right at the mouth of the trough I have my grinder and we just shove the taro into the grinder and then grind the taro and make it into poi.

VL: About how much can the grinder handle at one time?

SK: Oh, quite a bit of poi comes out. You mean in one minute? Or....

VL: Well, I guess you continuously put it in.

SK: Yeah, just continue, right. As the taro is grinded up, we just keep on putting the taro into this hole, this place, the place where the grinder is located and have it grinded up.

YY: That's a pretty dangerous job, huh, sometimes?

SK: Yeah.

YY: Can you talk about your experience?

SK: Oh. After the work was done during the cleaning up, I stuck my finger into the strainer, the straining machine and the motor was running. I dipped my finger too far in then it just chopped it off. At that time, it didn't hurt because we've been working in the cold water. Then gradually started to hurt. But the first few minutes, didn't hurt too much.

YY: Do you usually run that machine? Or do you have another worker sometimes do it?

SK: I do most of the grinding. And sometimes, when I'm too busy, Gladys Toko, one of the workers, does the grinding. Because she knows how to do the job.

VL: Did that kind of accident ever happen to any of your other workers?

SK: No. Just me.

(Laughter)

(Interruption)

SK: Yeah, the doctor told me, "Why didn't you bring the other piece back." Then he could have put it back together. But I didn't think about it.

VL: You threw it away.

SK: I threw it away.

(Laughter)

VL: When was that?

SK: That was, I think, about 1965, maybe about 1965, 1966; somewhere around that time.

VL: Is that something, the grinding and the straining, that you have to do by hand, you have to push the taro in by hand?

SK: Yeah. You have to. Well, in the grinder, I have a piece of plate and there's a small opening, just enough for the taro to go into. So the grinder is pretty safe. But the strainer, if we don't be careful, then it's dangerous.

VL: But normally with the strainer, you don't have to put your hand in unless you're cleaning.

SK: Yeah, usually during the.... So when we clean, I'd be sure that I don't stick my finger too far in.

VL: So then from the grinder, it goes into the strainer.

SK: Goes into the strainer.

VL: How fine is this?

SK: It's really fine. I don't know what the gauge of that mesh. Must be about 1/64 of an inch. I think. Oh, I forgot. Anyway, this strainer has lots of holes, so many thousands of holes and then the poi just comes out through the holes. And if the poi gets kind of rough from the grinder, then it goes through the strainer and there's a place where the bigger spot that can't go through the strainer accumulates. And once in a while we have to take off the cover to clean the rubbish.

VL: Then from the strainer....

SK: Then right underneath this strainer there's a pan about, this pan holds about maybe 75 pounds of poi or maybe less. Then after the pan is more or less filled, we put it into another pan.

VL: You have that plastic sheet in the pan.

SK: Uh huh. That's a cloth. If we don't use that, the poi sticks to the pan and it's hard to dump it out. So we wet the cloth and after it's filled, we dump it into the other pan and it just slides off easily. And then we fill this other pan, this long, rectangular shaped pan. About 450 pounds of that. And the workers, two of the workers mix it to get the right texture. We put in about four or five or maybe more of these [smaller] pans, the one underneath the strainer. It goes into this other [large] rectangular pan and is different, you see. The texture is different. So after it's filled, then they make it evenly....makes it evenly. And then it's dumped into the bucket.

VL: Is there someday going to be a way.... I noticed that they did this by hand, they threw it in [from the large rectangular pan into the bucket]. Someday, will that be mechanized?

SK: Well, I thought of it long time ago. But since the shop is too small to have more equipment, I just let it be because it doesn't take too much time to do it.

And then after the poi is dumped into this bucket, this bucket is raised right above the filler, that's the packaging machine.

VL: What did you call it?

SK: It's called the packaging machine.

(Laughter)

VL: And then I noticed that you had hooks and chains on the bucket.

SK: On the side, yeah. That is for safety because we don't know when the....it won't happen, but just to be on the safe side, we hook this bucket. It's hooked from the ceiling for safety.

VL: Did the bucket ever fall?

SK: No. (Laughs) And then the poi drops right into the funnel and then from there it's packaged.

VL: You make only one size now?

SK: We still make two size. The dollar size and the 50 cents size. At one time we used to make three size but now the 25 cent size is so small (Laughs) that we did away with it and just make 50 cent and dollar size. Although some factories make just one size, just the dollar size. They don't make the 50 cent size.

VL: When did you buy that machine that puts the tie on?

SK: It's been about, maybe 12 years ago, 10 to 12 years ago. (It ties about 23 to 25 bags per minute.)

VL: How was it tied before that?

SK: Before that, we used to tie it by our hands (about 12 per minute).

VL: With what?

SK: This thing that we tie, we call it the twist-em. It's a long strip, about 12 inches long, and we cut it into four pieces, these small pieces. (Telephone rings) Excuse me.

END OF INTERVIEW

[Written addition #1, by SK: These small pieces of ties are tied to each poi bag. We use two sets of color. Blue on Tuesdays and red on Thursdays. By looking at the color of the ties the customers buying poi would know the difference between the fresh and sour poi. After each batch is completed the poi bags are placed on shelves to be cooled and ready for deliver next morning.]

[Written addition #2, by SK: About two years after my parents moved to Hilo, my older brother Eijiro returned home after several years in the Mainland, graduating from University of Boulder, Colorado in business and working a while there. He also worked a while at Times Super Market in Honolulu. He and my father started the first supermarket in Hilo (Food Fair). There were many general stores in Hilo, but no supermarket. That was about 1950.]

Tape No. 4-34-2-78 and 4-35-2-78

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Mr. Seiko Kaneshiro (SK)

May 29, 1978

Kukuihaele, Big Island

BY: Vivien Lee (VL) and Yukie Yoshinaga (YY)

VL: This is an interview with Seiko Kaneshiro, May 29, 1978, in Kukuihaele.

I didn't ask you your mother's and father's name.

SK: My mother's name is Shira Kaneshiro. And my father's name was Naozo Kaneshiro.

VL: What was your mother's maiden name?

SK: Her maiden name was Oshiro, I think. She came from the city of Itoman, Okinawa.

VL: Now, I think you said that your father was about 16 or 17 when he came to Hawaii.

SK: No. He came to Hawaii at the age of 18. He worked for several years before he got married.

VL: Do you know what he did in Japan?

SK: Well, I don't know what kind of job he did before he came. But he went to school in Okinawa. And, maybe, I don't know what grade. Must be eighth or ninth grade, you know, Japanese School. And then worked few years before he came to Hawaii.

VL: Was he from a farming area? Or was he a city person?

SK: Well, right outside of the city. Gee, that part, I really don't know. That's right, he came from a farming family.

VL: Did he ever tell you why he came to Hawaii?

SK: Not really, but I guess there were lot of people coming to Hawaii. So, I guess they got interested in coming too. That's why he came

together. And, the first place where they landed was in Oahu. He stayed there, oh, maybe few months. And then came to....first place, where was it? Gee, I forgot. Anyway, he came to Kukuihaele and worked in the plantation. Did some field work. And then later on, he worked at the Kukuihaele Plantation Store.

VL: What was his job there?

SK: Oh, store clerk. And doing deliveries (as a salesman and a delivery boy, finding lots of interest in business. He learned the business from Mr. Fujioka, another employee, an old timer. Mr. Fujioka saw that my dad had great potential as a businessman and taught him all the tricks about running a business and store. The relationship between them grew so close, like a father and son. My dad felt he could not repay Mr. Fujioka for indebtedness materially. The advice and kindness. Without Mr. Fujioka's unselfish help my dad wouldn't be successful today.) At that time, there were lots of Spanish people working in the plantation. So he learned Spanish and spoke pretty good Spanish. Later on, he got into some kind of disagreement with the manager and he quit and started his own store.

VL: Do you know what kind of disagreement?

SK: I don't know. Anyway, he quit working and then started his small store right here [next door to where SK presently lives].

VL: And that was in 1923?

SK: That was about nineteen-twenty....no, 1919. Anyway, before I was born, the store was here already. It must have been about 1919, 1920, somewhere around that.

VL: Do you know if he built this building?

SK: Well, he hired contractors to build this store. Well, the original store was a small store and later on, as the business was getting good, he started to expand.

YY: Was the family house right behind it? Or where was it?

SK: Yeah. When my dad built the store, he built the family home right in the back. Well, at that time, the house was really small. And as, you know, family grew, then he made some extension. Several times.

VL: At that time, were there any other stores in Kukuihaele besides the plantation and your father's?

SK: I think there were. Right next, the Hino store. There was another store, the Chinese. Well, that was a hotel in fact. And there was another store right close by. It was called the Mizuno Store.

There were several other stores, bakery also, and some other business firms right in here. This small village of Kukuihaele.

VL: And with so many stores, each one still had good business?

SK: Yeah. Because there were lots of people living in Kukuihaele at that time. There was a camp down the [sugar] mill. And along side we call that the Camp Four, Camp 104. And there were houses all the way down, going towards the mill. And there was another camp, called Camp Eight, that's about two miles from here. Well, those camps are not there anymore. And, oh, there were lots of people living in Kukuihaele, and also in Waipio at that time. So, you know, the stores were surviving pretty good.

VL: Did your father have a name for this store?

SK: It was N. Kaneshiro Store. Because his name is Naozo, it was called N. Kaneshiro Store. And on Sundays, I remember going up to the camp, (toward the mountain) about a mile and a half from here. They called it the Puerto Rican Camp. There were mostly Puerto Ricans living up in that camp. And, on Sundays, I went with my father and did some delivering and sell things up the camp because it was pretty hard for them to come down. So we loaded our truck and sold things up that camp.

VL: What kind of things did the store sell?

SK: Oh, general merchandise. Food items and clothing. Dry goods, candies, all those things.

VL: Did you have fresh produce too?

SK: No, we didn't sell fresh produce. Mostly canned goods and candies. There were lots of children up there so they really liked candies.

VL: And where would you folks get the merchandise from?

SK: We got it from Hilo. I don't know how my dad got his merchandise from Hilo. That was long time ago, so I don't remember.

VL: Do you know if he had to go Hilo to get it and bring it back?

SK: I think....oh, during that time, there were wholesalers came out and delivered the goods. And during those days, the road was not like today. Not paved and it was the gravel road. So it was pretty rough for the wholesalers to deliver their things out this way.

VL: Excuse me, where's that music coming from?

(Taping stops, then resumes)

VL: How about the arrangements for payment? Say, for example, when you delivered, how would they pay you?

SK: Well, most of the people up there were plantation workers and they got their pay at the end of the month. So usually, right after that, those people come down and paid their accounts. And some of them, well, waited until we went out to deliver, when they have the cash, they paid at that time.

VL: Did you ever have people that ran up large debts and couldn't pay?

SK: Well, most of them seemed to be honest. If they couldn't pay their bills all at that time, they paid little at a time and gradually clear up the account.

VL: The plantation allowed you to go up to plantation camps? They didn't restrict you from going up?

SK: No. No, there were no restrictions. So, usually....well, not every Sunday but, let's see, every other Sunday. That's when we went out to deliver.

VL: Now, did your store sell anything that the other stores didn't sell?

SK: Most of the stores sold about the same things. Yeah. The general things.

VL: How about the prices, comparing all the stores?

SK: I guess the price was just about the same thing too. All of the stores. Well, there were some small stores that didn't go out doing delivery. But we had our own Ford truck. Oh, at that time, they used to call it the Model-T truck. And we used to go out and do delivery. Yeah.

VL: Did you folks have some kind of refrigeration in the store?

SK: Not at the beginning. Gee, when I was, well the time that when I remember, well, we had this old ice box, and ice was used. Put the ice inside the ice box and kept the things cold. Then, after several years, we got our own power plant. And eventually got the refrigerators.

VL: Your own power plant, you mean a generator?

SK: Generator, yeah. Because electricity didn't come in till about 1930's, maybe in the 1930's. That's when it came to Kukuihaele. So before that, my dad had his own generator and then supplied electricity to some of the neighboring homes and stores.

VL: When you had the ice box, where did you get the ice from?

SK: I think there was an ice plant in Waimea. Up Kamuela. Besides that, I think the other ice plant was in Hilo.

VL: And did they deliver the ice?

SK: I don't know whether they delivered or my father went to pick it up.

VL: Do you know if Waipio people came up to shop at your store?

SK: Yeah. Quite a bit of people from Waipio came up. They rode their horses and came up do their shopping. And during those days, you know, it was hard to handle the merchandise. After they bought their groceries, they put it all in their sack. And then load the sack on the horse or mules and then took it back home.

VL: Did you ever make deliveries into Waipio?

SK: No. Most of them came up and bought their own groceries and took it back on their animals. We never used to go down to deliver.

YY: Going back to your father's power plant, was he the only one with a generator? Before electricity came over here.

SK: Yeah. As far as I remember, he was the only. Oh, there was another family that had their own power plant too. But he had his own trucking business and he had his own power plant for his home.

YY: This other man?

SK: Yeah. My dad used to supply power for several families and stores, right along in this neighborhood.

YY: Did he wire it, then, the houses?

SK: Yeah. Actually, I don't know who wired it but I know they were getting the power from our generator.

YY: Did he charge them so much?

SK: I guess he charged so much, but I don't know how much he charged. At that time, we started the generator just before dark. Let's say, about 5:00 or 5:30 [PM], and then turn off the power about 10:00 during the evening.

YY: So the electricity was primarily used for lighting.

SK: Right.

YY: Was any other kind of appliance run off it, say in your store?

SK: No. It's more for lighting in the store. Other kind appliance, I don't think so.

YY: How about radio?

SK: Radio, oh, at that time, I think we used to have battery radio. And, well, after years later, then we got regular just a electric.

VL: Did you listen to the radio?

SK: At that time?

VL: Yeah, when you were a youngster?

SK: Yeah, we used to listen. Well, during that time, I remember KGU and KGMB. And there used to be the Clara Inter Show. She's the Hilo Hattie. And she had her own show. It was sponsored by the Maxwell House Coffee, something like that. And she had her own show every once a week. And we used to listen to her program.

VL: Was that music?

SK: Yeah. It's music, Hawaiian music.

VL: Was that live music, coming from the studio? Or record?

SK: Well, I don't know whether that was a record. No, I think it was live. Whether they had it taped and then played it over the radio, I don't know. But I know they had the regular program. She was known as Clara Inter at that time. Now, well, she's known as Hilo Hattie.

VL: Do you remember any other programs?

SK: I know my sister folks, one of my sisters, she listened to the wrestling. They used to announce it over the radio. Wrestling. Well, at that time, I knew there were wrestlers named Higami, (Lord Blears, Jim Lordos,) and Oki Shikina. Those wrestlers are retired already.

VL: This is sumo?

SK: No, the regular American wrestling. And there were wrestlers named Man Mountain Dean, and Al Karrosick. That was long time ago.

And, any of the other programs? There used to be Hawaii Calls too. What was his name now? He used to be the emcee for that Hawaii Calls.

YY: Apaka?

SK: Webley Edwards.

VL: Oh.

SK: Yeah. And I know, on Sundays there was the Royal Hawaiian Band. You know, one hour or so. I forgot some of the other programs.

VL: Did you have chores to do around the store?

SK: When I was small, yeah. I helped in the store stacking up canned goods. And, sometimes, when my parents were busy, well, I help by watching the store. You know, customers come in and wanted to buy some things. Serve them.

VL: About how old were you then?

SK: I was about, let's see, maybe about 8, 10 years old. About that age.

VL: And you handled all the money or the books?

SK: No.

VL: I mean when you were alone in the store?

SK: Well, as far as the money, people come to buy and you give the change. Well, when I'm alone that means when my father is in the back doing some things. Or they having lunch. Somebody has to be in the store to watch so that's when I used to help. Well, even my sisters and my other brothers too. Whoever was available used to help watch the store.

VL: The people that came in, would they all speak English?

SK: No. Like some of these, the old people from Waipio, the Hawaiians, they don't know English. Well, they spoke broken English. And some of them spoke mostly Hawaiian. So, sometimes we don't know what they saying. So they point at certain things, then you know that they want that thing.

VL: Did you understand any Hawaiian?

SK: As I grew older, I picked up little. Here and there, Hawaiian language. Well, my father had lots of customers, Hawaiians and Filipinos and Puerto Ricans. Spanish. So, when we used to deliver up to that Puerto Rican camp, he didn't have much problem in understanding the Puerto Ricans because, I guess, maybe Spanish and Puerto Rican, the language is kind of, not same but there's some similarity. So he didn't have much difficult time in understanding and conversing with those people.

VL: Speaking of language, can you tell us about going to Japanese School? You started in the first grade?

SK: Yeah, we started from first grade. Our language school, the teachers were husband and wife. The wife used to teach from first grade to fourth grade. And the husband taught from fifth grade to about the eighth or ninth grade. We learned our basic from her. Well, the names are Mr. and Mrs. Okumoto. We call them Okumoto sensei. They are still living. They are living in Honolulu right now. And we used to have classes right after finishing the elementary school. At that time, English school was from 8 to about 1 [o'clock]. So right after that, about one hour, we have classes in Japanese. Every day.

VL: School was only till 1 [o'clock]?

SK: Till 1 o'clock. And after English school was over, we walked to, because the Japanese School was, you know where the Kukuihaele Social Hall is? That's where the Japanese School was. So as soon as English school was over, the students that go to Japanese School line along side the road and went to Japanese School.

VL: Were there any non-Japanese going to Japanese School?

SK: At that time, well, I remember three non-Japanese students were attending. I know, one of the girls finished eighth grade in Japanese language.

VL: And she was what?

SK: She was Hawaiian-Chinese. And the other two were also Hawaiian-Chinese.

YY: Who were they?

SK: One of the girls, what was her name now? Her name, before she got married, she was Anna Sam Lia. You know the old man Sam? His daughter.

YY: Oh, she lives in Honolulu now.

SK: Yeah. She's Mrs. Baroga. She went to eighth or ninth grade. And she was really good in Japanese. But I don't know whether she still remembers her Japanese or not.

And, there was another one. Oh, he went just about maybe one or two years, then gave up. There also was another one, Olepau, Fred's brother. He went till about fourth or fifth grade.

VL: You were telling us one time about the good deeds and the bad deeds.

SK: Oh yeah. (Laughs) Well, if you do something good, the teacher had a chart on the wall. And if you did something good, good deed, or he hear that somebody tells him of this certain person did a good deed, he stamps a red mark on the chart.

And if you have a black mark, that's something that you did wrong. You know, you didn't behave well. So, this chart is posted on a wall. And during the graduation time, the parents come and first thing they went to see how their son or daughter behaved. They look at the chart and see how many red marks or black marks they had.

YY: What was your chart like?

SK: Well, had pretty good. (Laughs) Red marks. By doing that, I guess it keep the children out of mischief too. They don't want to see their black marks on that chart. And, at the end of the year, students that have lots of good deeds, red marks on the chart, the teacher gave some kind of prize or reward. And, I remember, I got once something like that.

VL: Now, you went to Japanese School until the war [WWII] closed the school?

SK: Yeah. Right after the war was declared, all the language schools had to be closed down.

VL: Did your teachers say anything at the time that it was closed? Did they give you reasons or, how did they explain it to you?

SK: I guess....like our Japanese School teacher, I guess he didn't expect war between the two countries. And he always used to say there were good relations between the two countries. But, at that time, maybe when things was getting kind of bad, he used to encourage us. Always look after your country. Although our parents were from Japan, but we supposed to be faithful to our United States. Because we were born here and we were raised in this country, we are obligated to our country. Serve our country first. Then, later on, well I guess just before...was it after the war was declared, he was sent to the camp.

VL: On Oahu, or....

SK: No, to the Mainland.

YY: Did he ever come back over here?

SK: Let me see now. No. After that, he....I guess, after the war he was back for few months. Then, later, the children, some of them went to college, school. So eventually, he moved out to Honolulu.

VL: During the war, were there soldiers in Kukuihaele?

SK: Yeah. There were quite a bit of soldiers stationed right in Kukuihaele. There were some at the [Waipio] lookout, stationed at....you know where Kelly Loo has his house? That place, it was a big house and the soldiers used to station there. And there were some right down here.

VL: Where is that?

SK: Where Mrs. Takamoto lives. During the wartime, there was a big building and the soldiers used to station at that place. (It burned down during the wartime. Mr. Paul Christensen lived there at one time.)

VL: Past the social hall?

SK: No. It's right this [Waipio] side of this social hall. It's just about, no, maybe about 1,000 feet away from here. That's where the soldiers used to station.

VL: Did you have much contact with the soldiers?

SK: I was still young. But I remember there were lots of them used to come down from Kamuela during the weekend pass. I mean, they had the pass and they came down because there was a bar right here. And, you know, during that time the bars were really occupied. So whatever bars that was open, they used to fill them up.

YY: What was the name of this bar?

SK: It was run by a person named Willy. So I think it was Willy's Bar. And, oh, there were lots of soldiers used to come down during their pass. The bus from here used to go up and pick up the soldiers and bring them down.

VL: Was there ever any kind of problem between the soldiers and the local people?

SK: No. They seemed to be all right. Some of the local boys used to get together with the soldiers and they were all right. Yeah.

VL: But your father was never interned, was he?

SK: No. Well, after the war started, he couldn't run the store. Because, since he was an alien, he couldn't keep on doing business in the store. He concentrated on his farm down Waipio. But before the war started, he had few acres of taro land in Waipio. And, after the war started, he concentrated more of his time in Waipio. And my oldest brother eventually took over the store.

VL: I want to ask you a little more about taro later. But before that, when you were a young man, or teenager, what did you do for recreation?

SK: Recreation. Let me see now. During that time, well we used to go out and play those bean bags and did lot of games. The things that we used were made by our hands. Like games like, I don't know if you ever heard of it, peewee, and bean bags. And those were all things that we made. And, like hide-and-seek, those games.

VL: How about when you were a little older? Young man.

SK: As I grew older, there used to be some baseball teams in Kukuihaele and we used to go and watch the baseball boys play. And later on, we got involved and we start playing baseball. Made our own team and then went to Honokaa. Well, there was a Hamakua League at that time so Kukuihaele joined that baseball league and played against teams from Honokaa and Paauiilo and Waimea. And, I know, one year we took the Hamakua League championship. That was way back in, I guess about 1949. 1949 I think. And we traveled quite a bit too. Went to Lanai and played baseball. You know, Home-to-Home series in Lanai.

VL: How about dances?

SK: Dances, I didn't care too much about dancing. Well, after I graduated, once in a while they used to have public dances. And we used to go. But, most of the time, just watch.

VL: How come?

SK: Well, we weren't that good. Well, we danced too but not very much.

VL: Did you ever go into Waipio, other than to farm? For recreation.

SK: I didn't care much for fishing or hunting. Most of the time go down work in the farm.

VL: Where was your father's land?

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

SK: Oh, his location was about the lower section, somewhere's close to Nelson Chun's land. And eventually he expanded to the upper area.

VL: How did he acquire that land?

SK: From Bishop Estate. Well, at that time, there weren't too manythere were lots of open areas so he got the lease from Bishop Estate.

VL: There was no one farming it before him?

SK: Well, there was few areas where another person was farming. And he used to sell his taro to my dad. And later on, he wanted to expand his area so my dad financed him and in return, he got the taro from this person. Well, he got ill and died and later on my father got hold of those taro land.

VL: So your father was sort of like a dealer before he was a taro farmer?

SK: Yeah. Well, he had just a small area and he also was a dealer. He used to buy the taro from the farmers and then sell the taro to the poi factories.

VL: That was his main job, more than growing taro was?

SK: Yeah. Because he just had small portion. Then, he used to buy quite a bit of taro from the others and then supply the factories in Hilo. Well, Hilo and some to Honolulu.

VL: The taro that he was farming himself, when did he start that?

SK: When he was running the store, he had somebody taking care the taro land for him down Waipio. I mean he hired to take care the land down Waipio. And, eventually, I guess they couldn't keep up. So after he left the store [WWII], he did more of that, spent more of the time down Waipio. And he did by himself and, well, I helped him also, do the farm work.

VL: How much land did he have in taro?

SK: That time, maybe about three acres or so.

VL: What variety were you growing then?

SK: During that time, there were the red type and the white. There were two types of white taro and the regular common red taro.

VL: What were the two kinds of white?

SK: Well, we know them as the apii and the uaua. And the red one is the lehua. And there were some other varieties but I forgot the names. Anyway, that three variety was the most popular variety grown in Waipio.

VL: So, at the time when your father went to Hilo--was about 1950, we figured out--and you took over running the taro patch, did you make changes in how you grew the taro?

SK: Well, the practice was just about same. Later on, we tried to improve whatever we can. Like buying equipment, farm equipment, after harvesting, to till the soil and do leveling jobs. Because

takes too much time to do everything by hand. So with machineries, you can do more jobs.

VL: How about changes in the variety that you grew?

SK: At that time, most of the type was the apii. Because the uaua takes too long to harvest. I mean, like the apii, we used to harvest in 16 months; 15, 16, maybe 17 months. But the uaua, if you don't have a market, then that type of taro would be the best, uaua. Because they don't spoil too fast and they can last. Even if you leave it up to about two years, the taro is still usable. Then, after that, well, it gradually spoils and you can't use it. But if you have a good market, then apii is the best.

And lehua, the type of lehua that we used to have before, if you don't take care, regulate the water right, the taro gets light. It spoils easily. So eventually, I just did away with that lehua. And later on, as I got some different type of lehua from Kauai. Somebody gave me just three stalks. And from that three stalk, I multiplied it and then now, we have almost every farmer in Waipio has that type of lehua.

YY: This is the one that they call "Seiko Special"?

SK: Yeah.

VL: Did you go to Kauai for the purpose of getting huli?

SK: No. Somebody from Hilo, he was a horticulturist. He was employed by, was it C. Brewer or Castle and Cooke? I think C. Brewer. His name is Gordon Shigeura. He wanted some information on wet land taro. And at that time, the Kauai, the plantation...what was the name of the plantation? Oh, Kilauea Plantation. That's the subsidiary of this C. Brewer. And they were interested in raising dry land taro. So he wanted some information on taro so I gave him information.

Then I told him if he could get some good varieties from Kauai. So he brought home three. And from that three, I multiplied. Seemed to be good. The color was nice and the taro was big. So I decided to multiply that. And from that, I increased it and then got several acres of that. Yeah.

VL: Do you still have to regulate the water as carefully as with the other kind of lehua?

SK: Yeah. The beginning part is, you have to take extra care because they don't survive too well at the beginning. But once they start rooting and they start growing, then it's easy to take care.

VL: Why would you want to grow lehua over apii, if apii is easier?

SK: Well, today, the poi eaters look for the color. And when they see

the color is dark, they think the poi is fresh. And it looks attractive, more appetizing. And people go for it so....

VL: But in the past, they didn't go for the darker red?

SK: Well, certain people in certain area. Like people in Kona, they go for the color. Because, I guess the poi factories in Kona have been raising the red type of taro for so long. And if you try to sell them the white type, the color is not attractive as the red one and when they see, they think it's sour poi. Although it's fresh. So eventually, I did away with the white one and plant all the Special.

VL: But is that only Kona people? I'm wondering, like, did people all of a sudden change and decide they wanted red poi, instead of white?

SK: No. Like locally, I've been using quite a bit of white taro. But when I use the red one, that red type of poi, red type of taro when I make into poi, sells much faster. Well, if the red ones are all out then people start picking up the other type of poi, the white.

VL: So this is something you observed over the years? That they prefer the red?

SK: Uh huh. They prefer the red. Although tasting is about the same. It doesn't make much difference. I mean, to me, it's same, it's poi. But the red one looks much more appetizing.

VL: So is that why you got the lehua from Kauai?

SK: Yeah. That's why I started to increase that red type.

YY: How many years did it take before you had enough huli so that you could give out to different farmers? Say, starting from three [huli].

SK: Well, I always use my seed. But I gave out few of the huli and it was up to them to multiply their production.

VL: I think we're done with that. I wanted to ask about if you remember that co-op that Ginji Araki started, back in the 1950's.

SK: Yeah. I wasn't a member so I didn't pay too much attention to it. They had several members and the co-op used to ship their taro to Honolulu.

VL: That time, you were a dealer for Hilo Poi?

SK: Yeah.

VL: Did their co-op affect your business in any way?

- SK: No. Hardly, because they had their own market and they didn't interfere with my market. And whatever taro they had, their market could handle it. So, in fact, there were lots of times where they couldn't meet the demands. But I didn't, as I say, I didn't pay too much attention to their co-op.
- VL: Were there any farmers that had been selling to you, that began selling through the co-op?
- SK: Yeah. There were few, I know, farmers that we depended upon. They eventually joined the co-op and sold their taro to the co-op.
- VL: How did you feel about that?
- SK: Well, at first was kind of bitter. But eventually got used to it. And, you know, forgot about it. Well, I ran short of taro too. So I concentrated more on my farm.
- VL: Did that cause you to expand acreage on your own farm?
- SK: Yeah. That got some effect on that. So, just from my farm wasn't enough. There was some independent growers. They didn't join the co-op and I used to get their supply from them. And there were times when I was, I had over supply. The poi shops couldn't take all my supply. And I still had growers that I buy from. And I couldn't just let their taro get rot, so I used to leave my taro alone. So my taro got rotten and eventually, I decided I'd build my own factory and use whatever excess taro for my shop.
- VL: Couldn't you have sold your excess taro to Honolulu Poi or Kalihi or Waiahole?
- SK: Well, they had their own growers too. Like Kalihi and Waiahole and Honolulu Poi. And instead of selling to them, I decided I make my own. Then I could make more income using my own supply. And during that time, the taro price was very low. Well, I decided I'd make my own factory.
- VL: This was about 1960, yeah?
- SK: That was about 1960, yeah. 1960, 1961.
- VL: Okay....lots of questions....
- SK: Your tape is on?
- VL: Yeah. Okay, coming up to the present day, who are your suppliers now?
- SK: Well, I have quite a bit farmers supplying me, although they supplying others--I don't want to mention names--but they supplying

the others. And they also supplying me. Not much, but some of the farmers selling few bags at a time. Because they have their own market too, and price-wise too [i.e., SK offers a better price and so some farmers will sell him a few bags, even though they have their regular buyers].

VL: Do you have some farmers that you are their main market?

SK: Yeah. I have few farmers that supply only to me. They don't supply the other factories or the other dealers.

VL: Is that something that you request them not to do?

SK: Well, not really. Since I've been buying their taro right along, so they in turn supply me right along.

VL: Have you had farmers that were supplying you, and then they hear another market has better price...

SK: Yeah, I've had that problem before. One farmer was supplying me, then the agents or the dealer from the other factory offer better price. Then they stop supplying me and supply the other person. I've had that problem. So after that, farmers that I think I cannot trust, I usually let them sign some kind of agreement that they sell to me certain patches or so many bags at a certain price. Otherwise, I'll get stuck and then I'll be short of taro.

VL: Is this common or rare, for this to happen?

SK: It's not very common.

VL: Have there been changes over the years in the quality of taro that you've been receiving at the poi shop?

SK: Yeah. Lately, the past few years, the quality has been not too good. Right now we have the disease, and then most of the farmers are part-time farmers. And the only time they come to check their field is during the weekends. So the regulation of the water is not as it's supposed to be. Well, not all the farmers, but I guess there's some neglections on that part. So the quality of the taro is not there.

VL: In what way is it not quality?

SK: Well, you get some so-called the loliloli. If the water is not regulated right, then you have that loliloli. Well, it's more on the regulation on the.... And then, what you call, the maintenance, upkeep of the field. The field is just overgrown with grass, then you don't have the quantity and the quality.

VL: How about in the size of the corm? Has that been changing over the years too?

- SK: Nowadays, people are harvesting earlier. Harvesting faster than before. So the taro is not that big as used to be. And even the baby taro, it's not as big as what used to be.
- VL: And why do they harvest earlier?
- SK: One reason why is because of the disease. The longer you leave in the field, the taro is going to get rot faster. So before the taro gets completely---before they get completely loss on the taros, it's harvested.
- VL: Do you accept corms that have been cut?
- SK: Yeah. As long if the rotted part is cut off. But still then, we find rotten taro in there, in the bags, too. Some of the taro looks nice but inside, you have these so-called guava seed. Just by looking at it you cannot tell whether it has seed or not.
- YY: If you receive a whole shipment that's pretty bad, do you return it to the farmer?
- SK: No. We just use it. Although, we won't get as much pound of poi when if you have good taro. It's a loss on the manufacturers.
- VL: Do you let them know, though, that the taro wasn't very good?
- SK: Yeah. Well, if just once or twice, we just let it go. But if it continues, then we let them know that the taro is not too good. And if the taro gets real bad, then....well, we usually mix....let's say, if this person he has a patch that's been really bad. The taro is not too good. Then instead of he pulling his regular quota, let's say 10 bags, we tell him to pull maybe four bags. Then, with the taro that I buy from the other farmers, where they have better quality, we mix it up. And then in that way it's all right. Because if you use just the bad taro, then the taro's going to get soft and you won't get good poi. But if you mix it with the good ones, then it's all right.
- VL: Now days, with the rot, what is your rate or percentage of poi to taro?
- SK: Oh, we really have a low percentage. When the taro is brought up to the shop, you have those part of the rot on the taro, and you have this so-called guava seed. Sometimes you cannot tell while you pulling. Or, after you cook it and while trimming it, you see the spoiling or the so-called guava seed. And that portion is thrown away. So that's wasted. So the percentage drops quite a bit.
- VL: Is it below 50 percent?

- SK: Yeah, maybe 50, sometimes 55 percent. If the taro gets real bad, like loliloli taro, sometimes you have several farmers bringing those not too good taro, so the percentage drops quite a bit. Maybe sometimes 45 percent. Now normally, we having right now, just about 60 percent, 62 percent.
- VL: That's pretty good isn't it?
- SK: Could be better.
- VL: I notice that most of the farmers don't scale the bags. They don't weigh the bags. Do you weigh it when it comes up, before you cook it?
- SK: No, usually we don't weigh it. Well, the standard weight is 100 pounds. But quite a bit of the bags don't weigh 100 pounds. Well, we tell farmers to try and make 100 pounds.
- VL: How do you know it doesn't weigh 100 pounds?
- SK: Well, just by lifting we can tell. And if I think this taro doesn't have 100, I have a scale outside the shop. And I weigh it on the scale. Because usually the taro is harvested Friday or Saturday and it's brought up Saturday afternoon, or sometimes Sunday. And there's some shrinkage too. So, to get 100 pounds is pretty hard. Well, some weigh over 100 pounds. Certain farmers I know make their bags heavy.
- VL: And then, do you pay them extra if it's over 100?
- SK: Well, no, we normally pay the regular price. But sometimes it goes below 100 pounds. But some farmers try to make it right on the nose, so by time reach up the shop, guess drop to about 95, 96 pounds.
- VL: In the past, say, when you first started taking over from your father, would you be able to say who in Waipio grew the best taro?
- SK: Yeah. More or less I knew what person grew what kind of taro. When my dad used to buy, we knew already what person used to have what kind of taro.
- VL: Did someone have consistently good taro?
- SK: Yeah.
- VL: Who was that?
- SK: Like Harrison's [Kanekoa] father used to raise good taro. And there was Mock Chew, the father, Sam Mock Chew's father. He used to raise good taro too. And there were some other old time Hawaiians that used to raise. That was just when I more or less took over.

VL: Yeah. Who were those old time Hawaiians?

SK: Like Harrison's father is not living any more. Like Mock Chew's [father] not living. And there was some other, like there was Henry Young used to raise good taro. And his mother, she raised good taro too. Well, they were supplying my dad at that time.

VL: How about today?

SK: Today, there are some farmers that raise pretty good taro. I don't want to use their name. I know one particular farmer, his taro is pretty good and his weight is always....he's consistent on his weight too.

VL: Do you remember the Waipio Taro Growers Association, the one a few years ago, that Merrill Toledo was president?

SK: Oh yeah. He was the president.

VL: Were you a member?

SK: Yeah, I was a member of that association. As far as problems, the association used to get in touch with Takashi Domingo. At that time, he wasn't Councilman, but he was kind of a hustler for the community. We asked him to act as an advisor. He was a member of the Development Council, so he helped out on the problems that we used to have.

VL: Did you think it was a good, it was a successful organization?

SK: Yeah, as far as Taro Association, I think it's a good organization. But the way how it was handled by the head of this organization wasn't, I'd say, some members didn't get along too well. So eventually, people start pulling out.

VL: What could have been done to make it continue to keep it successful?

SK: One problem we had was members didn't like to take responsibility. Everybody tried to depend on certain people to do this and that. So I guess, eventually, the ones that used to hustle felt kind of frustrated or eventually sort of fade away. If everybody got together and try to do their own, their part, then maybe it would have been all right. But anyway....well, I think we better not talk too much on it

YY: Wasn't the president elected every year?

SK: Was supposed to be. But nobody wants to be elected president. Nobody wants to take all the....

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 4-35-2-78; SIDE ONE

VL: Now, today, you have how many acres in taro?

SK: About 10 acres. But all of those field are not planted with taro. Quite a bit of field is neglected. So I just bought a tractor and was thinking of starting opening up all these idle patches. And especially, right now, taro is shortage so I have to concetrate more on my own production.

VL: So how many [acres] now do you have actually in taro?

SK: You see, I have quite a bit of sharecrop holders too. And the one that I actually keep is about maybe two, maybe three acres.

VL: And then it would be about seven or eight sharecrop?

SK: Sharecrop I have about six acres. How many all together?

VL: Eight or nine.

SK: Yeah. Well, I think little over 10 acres. Maybe about 10 to 12 acres. I have some idle land so have to open up those fields.

VL: And then you have about three-quarters of an acre in prawns?

SK: Prawns, right, about three-quarter of an acre.

VL: How's the quality of the land, soil?

SK: As far as soil, it's nice, rich soil. The lower section have more soil than the upper section. The upper area, have more sand and rocks. But we have quite a bit of soil, too. Good for taro.

VL: How about the quality of the sunlight?

SK: Oh, the sunlight, I don't think it makes that much difference. As long as we keep trimming the trees and the shrubs alongside the taro field, then it's all right.

VL: And how about your water?

SK: As far as water for the taro field, we have enough water.

VL: You have your own water head?

SK: Yeah, we have our own water head. We take the water direct from the river for our taro field.

VL: How much time do you put into your taro patch itself?

SK: As far as time for my taro field, I just have Monday. Monday is usually my time. Tuesday is working in the shop almost all day, and Wednesday is out to delivery. And Thursday, making poi all day. And Friday is out to deliver again. So Saturday is a time that I have for my farm. And Sunday again is shipping date; we have to prepare, clean our taro to ship out. So it's either Monday or Saturday, Monday and Saturday. The time I do for my farm work.

VL: Is this time enough to....you talk about how important it is to watch the water. You have enough time on those two days?

SK: Well, during those weekdays, as soon as I finish work in the shop, I go down and take a look at the field and see that things are all right. Plus, if I think the work is slowed down, I hire some people to do some field work, weeding.

Planting? Usually I do the planting. More so, keeping up with the weeds.

VL: People that you hire, did you ever use the new young people down there?

SK: Yeah. This one particular couple seem seem to be good workers. So I hire them to do weeding.

VL: Your children, do they help with either the poi mill or the taro patch?

SK: Yeah, the boys, like now is summer. Then sometimes I ask when I'm short of hand, ask them to help in the shop. And they'll help me load the taro into the cooker for the next cooking. Right now it's summer vacation, so I get quite a bit of help from them. (Also help with my farm)

VL: Would you like to see them eventually carry on the taro and the poi mill?

SK: Well, one of my son has ag major; he's in the agriculture field. So, whether he wants to go in raising taro, I'm not too sure. But the price of taro is good right now so I guess he won't mind raising taro. But right now, he's still attending college so I guess whether he wants to go into taro business, that's up to him.

VL: Did you yourself ever think of quitting the taro business?

SK: Well, not right now. But eventually. But he's interested, well eventually let him, my son, take over.

VL: What do you think is the future of taro in Waipio?

SK: Right now, the way how things are going now, gee, looks pretty dim.

With all the disease and some of the farmers feel frustrated. But, if everybody try to follow what the University recommends, I think we might be able to kind of solve the problems. Right now, people just plant and with the disease, they harvest as much as they can and they just replant again. But if with what the Extension Service of the University of Hawaii recommended, might have a better....

VL: What did they recommend?

SK: It was a specialist from Kauai, Dr. de la Pena. He recommended using certain type of fertilizer and that would sort of help. He also recommended resting the field, let the field idle for several months, and then plant again. That would sort of delay the disease in the ground. But with the fertilizer he recommended, that would build up the resistance. (Also, our local County Agent, Mr. Richard Nakano is helping with recommendations for better results.)

VL: Have you tried those things?

SK: I've been using fertilizer right along. But I'm trying to use different type of fertilizer. I've been using Triple 14 [14-14-14] right along. But I'm trying to experiment now with 10-30-10, with the calcium silicate. That would develop the root system, would give the taro much more chance to resist against the disease.

VL: How is it working out so far?

SK: No, I haven't tried yet. But right now, since I got my new tractor, I'm going to try it out. After I get that field clean, I'm going to try and spread the fertilizer and then fill it in the soil. And I think that might help.

VL: What kind of losses were you having? Due to the rot.

SK: As far as my taro....I've been using fertilizer right along so wasn't too bad. But I know one field, my son wanted to raise taro so he planted the red type of, the common lehua, and we couldn't get as much as we wanted because of the disease. So we got just about, maybe about 40 percent of the crop. So I'm trying to see what kind result I'm going to have using this fertilizer 10-30-10 with the calcium silicate.

VL: What do you think is causing the rot?

SK: Actually, I really don't know. Because as far as the water, some farmers that have good taro use the same water as the people having the trouble with the disease. And, I guess, the soil being used up year after year. It need to be kind of built up. Maybe after using fertilizer, would not really control it, but would sort of help getting a better crop.

VL: Does the rot discourage or frustrate you?

SK: Sort of. Sort of discouraging. Because, as I said, one of my, the patch that we harvested....well, we harvested before the time. It takes about 13, 14 months to harvest, but we were harvesting about 12 months. And the taro is small and you have to do a lot of chopping. So that kind of discourage you.

VL: To the point of giving up, though?

SK: No, not to that point.

YY: Are you having guava seed and the soft rot?

SK: Yeah. Both. The ones that's soft rot, it has the guava seed in it too. But I think if we do the way how the University Extension tells us, would be better.

VL: How about the future of the valley, Waipio Valley; what do you think will happen?

SK: Gee, I really don't know.

VL: What would you like to happen?

SK: Well, right now, there are lots of people coming into Waipio. Mostly these transients. They like it the way how it is. I actually don't know. Anyway, as far as I'm concerned, as long we have taro growing down Waipio. Because there are not too many places where taro is grown. In Honolulu, hardly have any taro grower. Maybe just a few, here and there. And I think Waipio is about the best place to raise taro.

If the younger people won't get interest in raising taro, maybe eventually there won't be any more taro grown. The ones that raise are mostly the middle aged people and some of the older generation.

VL: Do you think the younger generation will raise taro?

SK: Well, if they go to college and get higher education, I doubt they want to come out and go into taro farming. Because most of the job down there right now, usually manual work. Hand labor.

VL: Do you have anything else you want to say about your life, or taro, or Waipio?

SK: I guess that's about....you were saying about the recreation, what was my recreation. As I said, we used to play baseball. And later on, after I quit playing baseball, I was interested in judo. When I was in the grade school, that was before the war, I used to learn. Just about one year. And then, after the war started, well, everything was just closed down.

Then, after playing baseball, they organized a judo club in Hono-kaa, so I start taking up judo. And was really, I took a lot of interest in that. We have island competitions and had tournaments every year. Big Island tournaments. And I remember one year, several of us represented this Big Island Judo Association and we went to the AAU Nationals in Honolulu. We didn't make too good showing. There were lots of boys from the Mainland that came. Well, there was some local, Honolulu boys that did pretty well. Anyway, I was active for about 10, 12 years.

VL: You're a Black Belt, right?

SK: Yeah. Two dan.

YY: Were you also an instructor eventually?

SK: Mr. Tetsuo Kohata was my Judo sensei when I first started and he taught whatever he knew. Then, after he retired, I sort of took over, helped the group. And I taught judo for quite a while. Then, there was another boy, Nadao Honda, he was in the service and he was also a Black Belt. Then he took over the class. Then later on I helped him with instructing judo. Then, about two years ago, I got sort of busy so I eventually gave up.

Yeah. My boys, since I was teaching judo, they also joined the club and they learned judo too.

YY: Did Adele [SK's daughter] also join?

SK: No. Adele, she joined the aikido club. She was attending Hilo College, they had the student class so she joined the class. After she graduated, she wanted to go to Japan. So she had to get a sponsor, so one of the instructors from Japan was in Hilo. He comes out, that's Maruyama sensei, he comes out every year, I guess for the summer, and teach at the University. He was her sponsor. So she went to Japan. Actually, she went over to learn how to speak Japanese. And she also joined the aikido club in Japan and she's been practicing ever since.

VL: What have been the happiest times in your life?

SK: The happiest times....gee, well....I really don't know. I can't....

END OF INTERVIEW

WAIPI'O: MĀNO WAI

AN ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

Volume II

ETHNIC STUDIES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

**ETHNIC STUDIES PROGRAM
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII, MANOA**

December 1978