

## BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Cynthia Juan

Cynthia Juan was born October 6, 1950 in Pāhala on the Big Island. She grew up along with her five siblings in Pāhala, where her father, George Silva, Jr., worked for Hawaiian Agricultural Company (later called Ka‘ū Agribusiness Company). She attended Pāhala Elementary School and graduated from Ka‘ū High School in 1968. She then studied business at Hawai‘i Community College in Hilo.

After graduating, she worked for Big Island Toyota as a clerk for a year. She then married and moved to Honoka‘a, where her husband, Norman Juan, worked for Pā‘auhau Sugar Company (ultimately called Hāmākua Sugar Company). She worked for a short time as an accounting clerk in Waimea, then stayed home to raise her three children.

After Hāmākua Sugar Company closed in 1994, Juan volunteered her services with the Hilo-Hāmākua Support Program, which was established to help displaced sugar workers. She is currently the secretary for Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church.

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Cynthia Juan (CJ)

Honoka'a, Hawai'i

March 6, 1997

BY: Holly Yamada (HY)

HY: This an interview with Cynthia Juan. It's March 6, 1997. We're at the Parish Center [for Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church] in Honoka'a, and the interviewer is Holly Yamada.

Okay. Let's start with when and where you were born.

CJ: I was born October 6, 1950 in Pāhala.

HY: In Pāhala. And you grew up in Pāhala?

CJ: All of my life, practically, in Pāhala. I left Pāhala when I was a senior in high school. After that summer, I went into Hilo, and attended college [Hilo Community College] in Hilo for two years and took up business education.

HY: And did you graduate?

CJ: I graduated with two years of college.

HY: So you have an AA [associate in arts degree]?

CJ: Yes.

HY: I see. Where in the birth order are you?

CJ: I am the eldest of six.

HY: And what did your father [George Silva, Jr.] do?

CJ: He worked in the plantation [Hawai'i Agricultural Company, which became Ka'ū Sugar Company, Inc. and ultimately became Ka'ū Agribusiness Company, Inc.], various jobs. I remember him most in the mill, and he worked in the boiling house where they boiled all of the sugar and made molasses out of them. And he used to let us go down to the mill at various times to go see the process and taste the sugar, of course. (Laughs) I remember him also in the garage area. He used to help out in the tire department, which is funny, because my husband [Norman Juan] ended up doing that in the plantation here in Hāmākua Sugar

[Co.], so there was a little connection there.

I remember him working very hard. Dad worked for the plantation many, many, many years and was quite devoted. He also worked at---I think he left the plantation when he was working at the experiment station. And he was especially proud, because he used to keep the place in immaculate condition. And that was Dad. Just hardworking and always conscientious and tried to do the best for the company.

HY: What's the experiment station?

CJ: The experiment station is---they have these stalks of cane that come from the fields, and they do experiments on them. They grow 'em in these little---I don't know what you call 'em---the seeds. The seedlings, they would plant those, and they would experiment with different types of cross seedlings to see what kind of the best variety of cane they could come up with.

HY: And what did your mom [Amy Silva, née Cordeiro] do?

CJ: My mom was a domestic engineer. (Chuckles) Raised all of us kids. Was pretty much the backbone of the household. Just raising us and making sure we got to school and got educated. Worked very hard in the house, of course, and pretty much just support for my dad and all of us.

HY: As a child did you work, like, doing household chores and that type thing?

CJ: Oh definitely, yes. I loved to---I remember the first big thing that I was allowed to do was to iron. And after a couple of months of that, the novelty wore off real fast. (Chuckles) I mean, in those days it was---you had to sprinkle the clothes, because it was starched. And so you had to sprinkle the clothes, and roll 'em all up, and then put 'em in the basket, and then get it ready for ironing. (Child cries.) Can I. . . .

HY: Oh okay, sure.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

CJ: And the first thing she had me do was to iron my father's handkerchiefs. He took a handkerchief to work every day. You know those western type of bandannas? That was his handkerchief. He had 'em in red, he had 'em in blue. And so I got to learn how to iron. Of course, I used to help washing the clothes, and those were the ringer types of washers that they had in those days. And I got my brother Clyde's hand caught in the roller one day. [CJ's oldest brother is Clyde Silva.] (Laughs) But there's this contraption on the side that you can zap and the roller springs apart, and he was fine, none the worse for it. To this day he says [CJ] intentionally did it, but.

(Laughter)

CJ: He knows better. (Laughs) You know, you learn to cook rice. We didn't have rice cookers way---I mean, you know, in the early years. And you learn how to cook [rice] on the stove, and while it was steaming you had this cover from a cracker can that you used to put under the pot, so that it would keep some of the heat away from the pot itself so that it wouldn't

burn while it was steaming. And the general things, washing dishes, and what have you, and taking care of the rest of the—pretty much watching my brothers and sisters after a while. It was just myself and my brother Clyde, for quite a few years. And then my grandparents convinced my parents that they needed some more children, and lo and behold, they ended up with four more. But I was pretty much a little mommy, too, in helping out with the rest of the kids.

HY: What about---what kind of neighborhood did you live in?

CJ: It was a plantation camp, and we had, well, as a little girl, we lived with my grandparents.

HY: Are these your maternal grandparents?

CJ: Maternal grandparents, and just for a couple of years, though. And then my parents got their own plantation home, and we moved there.

HY: This was with Ka'ū Sugar?

CJ: Ka'ū Sugar Company, yes. And, oh, that first house, I mean Grandma's house, which my brother Clyde inherited—was located where the shopping center in Pāhala is now. It was quite an experience watching those houses being raised up (chuckles) on this long-bed truck, and transported elsewhere. And I loved the area where my grandparents lived because in the . . .

HY: Is that—oh, I'm sorry.

CJ: . . . that's where—they had a huge yard. And toward the back of the yard is where my grandfather had his pigpens and what have you, his little animals, and it was surrounded by eucalyptus trees, and used to play in there, Robin Hood and (chuckles) whatever in there. And got to feed the pigs, and all of that. But I---that was in later years that I used to do that.

There was---my grandmother used to have these beautiful flower beds, and she loves snapdragons. And we learned as youngsters, that if you press a certain part of snapdragons, it will pop. And we used to love to do that. And she treasured her snapdragons, and we would (laughs) go through her snapdragons and practically ruin them all.

But I remember when we were living my parents' home, we had a lot of Japanese neighbors. And typical Japanese Camp, in fact, almost everybody in Pāhala had 'em, you know, with the *furo* where we used to take a bath, and everything. I remember helping . . .

HY: It was a community *furo*?

CJ: No, no, we had our individual . . .

HY: Had your own?

CJ: Yeah, we had individual ones. And I remember helping my dad to put the firewood into that little section where you have to burn the firewood and make the—heat up the water. So I remember the *furo*, it was. . . . We were surrounded by Japanese people that were the nicest, nicest people, and learned to speak little bit Japanese. I don't remember much these days, but.



My mom always reminds me of how I used to sit on the back fence, and I got wise to the fact that these Japanese ladies used to go down to the store every day. And so they would come up, and I'd be on that fence, and we talk, and I'd always end up asking them, "So what did you buy today?" (Laughs) And so they would tell me. I say, "Oh, that's good." And we got to be so close that every time they went to the store, they would come back, and I would get a little candy bar, or whatever—loved rock candy—or what they used to call, well, they have it now, it's the puffed rice, the colored ones, we used to call that "puffa rice." And they would bring me all kinds of little goodies. So I was pretty much spoiled by my neighbors, and . . .

HY: What was it---was it called Japanese Camp?

CJ: Yeah, it was called Japanese Camp at that time.

HY: And what was the one where your maternal grandparents lived?

CJ: Can't remember what the name of that—I think that was Spanish, either was Spanish or Portuguese Camp.

HY: Okay.

CJ: But pretty much. . . . I had a good friend that used to live across the street from us that I used to play with as a youngster, and then she moved away. She was a Japanese girl, too. Never kept contact with her, though. We used to be able to go to the—as entertainment—the big thing for us was to go to the theater. But we didn't have much money, so we couldn't go as many times as we wanted to. We would go, maybe, once a month. In fact, (chuckles) what we used to do was, my mom would put these little notes in a hat. And when times were really hard, maybe, well, she would put these two little slips of paper in a hat, one that said "yes," one that said, "no." And we took turns picking out that, and if the note said, "yes," we were able to go to the movies, and if it said, "no," we couldn't go to the movies. So I remember one time, my brother switched papers on her, and he took out the "no" and he put another "yes" in there so we . . .

(Laughter)

CJ: But we had---my dad fixed up an old Model T. that my mother's brother had owned, and he had gone away to the Korean War. And my dad—and it was, I mean, just totaled out. But my dad fixed it up. And it was beautiful. We used to take that car and go down to the theater. Going to the theater was fine. When we got little bit older, and we had to [go] around in that car, we didn't want him dropping us off at school. (Laughs) Because our friends would make fun of us about an old jalopy. But when I think about it, I wish I had the jalopy today. Oh, my goodness. And dad took so much pride in fixing up that car. And my uncle came back from the Korean War, and didn't take one month and he had wrecked up the whole car. My father was devastated. But Dad, to this day, still loves to work on cars, and fix it up, and paint 'em.

But it was pretty much plantation lifestyle. Everybody got along with each other, shared whatever we had. Neighbor had chickens, and we had goats, 'cause as a youngster, the only milk I could drink was goat's milk, 'cause I was allergic to everything else. And they love

goat's milk, and so we would trade off.

I don't know. Anything else you want to ask me?

HY: I assume you went to Pāhala Elementary [School] . . .

CJ: I went to Pāhala Elementary and Ka'ū High [School].

HY: Ka'ū High. What year did you graduate in?

CJ: Nineteen sixty-eight.

HY: [Nineteen] sixty-eight. Okay. And you said that everybody pretty much got along, all the different . . .

CJ: Nationalities.

HY: . . . all the different nationalities.

CJ: Yeah, yeah. There was a clubhouse in Pāhala, and that was the site of all the parties, and we got invited to all of these parties. Dad would always help. No matter what they would call upon him to do, he'd be there to help. Mom was more reserved. She was set, and she takes care of the household, she takes care of the kids, and whatever. Dad was always outgoing and always community minded. And I think he kind of instilled that in the kids, because I do all kinds of community work, and so does my brother Clyde and the rest of the kids. And Dad was always called upon because he used to clean yards for people. He used to clean yard for the manager way before, I don't know, two or three managers he would take care of their yard. And to this day, he still does that. He takes care of the cemetery and the area around the church, and what have you. So he has various yards in Pāhala that he still cleans. And they always call upon him because they know he does a good job.

HY: Did the church play a big role in your childhood?

CJ: Very much so. It was instilled in us from a very, very young age. We grew up always having to go to church every single weekend, and make sure that we got our sacraments taken care of up till this day. We got involved pretty much with the church. There were little clubs that the church had youth organizations, and we would be involved with that. I remember there was time when I even thought of becoming a nun as a teenager. Because we had a young nun that taught us.

HY: This was in the public schools?

CJ: No.

HY: Or this is at your church?

CJ: This was at church, yeah, for religious education. And I just adored her. She was so sweet, and so for a while there I was figuring, okay, maybe this is what I want to do. But things changed, and I changed my mind, I guess, when we saw cute boys in school.

(Laughter)

CJ: I guess a nun I'm not gonna be now.

(Laughter)

CJ: We were taught from a young age that education was very, very important. Especially since my mom—I can't remember what grade she finished at in Kona, but being that she had to leave school to help the family out, because they had a pig farm, and they grew macadamia nuts and Kona coffee. So she had to help out the family. And so because of that, she made certain that we got the best education that we could get, and that we did well. I was—I loved reading. Used to read every night, still do. Can't sleep without reading a book. Love speech. Used to enter all kinds of speech tournaments in high school. And that followed me in college. I remember we had a state tournament that I got to go to on Kaua'i, and came out first in my division. And so pretty much, Mom made sure that we did our studies and did the best that we could. She didn't want it to get to the point where that was all that we did and that we had to excel. But all she asked is that we did the best that we could. And knowing what she had to go through, not having as much education as she wanted, kind of made us think and be sure that we did the best that we could.

HY: Now, so you think mostly the emphasis on education was from your mom?

CJ: Yeah.

HY: More so from your mother?

CJ: More so from Mom than Dad. Yeah.

HY: Who was the disciplinarian in your family?

CJ: Mom, pretty much Mom. But it was funny, well, Mom sometimes could talk till she was blue in the face, and there were times we wouldn't listen. But if Dad came and talked to us, I'd be in tears in a minute. He had just a way about him—he was soft, and I don't know what it was. Just a few words from him and I was in tears. And that was it. I don't know why. I just do not know why to this day he affected us like that then. I don't know if it's because we didn't want to disappoint him or anything like that, but just a few words and that was it.

HY: You mentioned that you actually lived with your maternal grandparents for a short time.

CJ: Very short time. Maybe until I was two or three years old.

HY: Did you also have close interaction with your paternal grandparents?

CJ: Oh yes. We would go down weekends, and we used to love going down there because there was a huge garden, and they had a huge front yard, and they had a real big, big banyan tree. No, that wasn't banyan tree, or maybe it was, I'm not sure what kind of a tree it was. But there—being so close to the mill area in Pāhala, they got all of the black soot that came out of that smoke stack, and that yard was just covered with that. And my mom always told us, when we would go down there, "Clean, clean." Because she's not going take her kids down

there to the mother-in-law (chuckles) with them all dirty. We never left clean, (laughs) but she wanted to stay clean. "Stay on the porch, play on the porch." Uh uh [no]. It's in the yard and everything—black. Oh my goodness, what we looked like when we went home. But they had this old car that was—somebody had abandoned. And we used to pretend that we were driving, you know. Wherever we wanted to go we went in that car. Never moved, of course. And we used to go in the garden and Grandpa always had strawberries, so we get to eat strawberries. And he had---and we always wanted to see if the carrots were ready. And they weren't (laughs) and we pulled 'em right out of the ground and stuck 'em back in, then they wouldn't grow. (Laughs) He always wondered what was happening to his carrots. And he had lots of green onions, and we used to go trim 'em (chuckles) and eat it like that. He had lots of ducks, and chickens and rabbits, and he used to raise pigs as well. And we would go help him feed the animals. And sometimes we would forget the gate, and the ducks and whatever would be running all over that yard, and then we had to go catch 'em, which wasn't a treat because they bit.

HY: Were they---did he [CJ's paternal grandfather] work in the mill, too? For the plantation?

CJ: He worked for the plantation many years, too.

HY: So this pig farm was . . .

CJ: It was just a side thing that he used to do to bring in extra money. And I remember---and Grandma Silva used to make the best Portuguese bean soup, and the best Portuguese bread. And she used to always call us down when she was baking bread, and we'd go down. We'd have our little cup of cocoa. She always had the bread just coming out of the oven. And ho! That was delicious. There was this thing where they had this container that they always had, you know that *ebi*? That dried shrimp? We used to love that. And one day we got into that, and we ate till we got sick. (Laughs) If only the *ebi* today costs as much as it did way back then, it would be fine, but it's so expensive now. And they used to get it so cheap. We used to help Grandpa because he would give us quarters, then we could run off to the store, 'cause we loved to pick up seeds, and that kind of thing. But, yes, we grew up with both sets of grandparents. We miss them now, we really miss them.

And Grandma was one that would crochet a lot, and that's how I learned to crochet, was sitting on the porch with Grandma. I learned from her. The one thing I remember, too, about their house is they had a very, very old grandfather clock. And I used to love to just sit there and watch the pendulum move back and forth, and listen to the chimes.

I remember even my great-grandmother, because I was—she passed away when I was almost getting out of my teens. So that's my great-grandmother on my mother's side. And we used to go to Kona often, and I loved going there. Huge, huge house. Even she had a real big kitchen. They had a lanai almost right around their house. Two-story home. It's still there in Kona, and we go to visit the other relatives that are there now. But even she made the best stew. That grandma made the best stew. Everything was just by taste or, you know, you just grab [the ingredients] and throw in. No such thing as measuring or what have you. She used to have what they call a little safe. This was like a little hutch that they used to put their baked goods in. That was on the outside. They had a screened area, screened porch. She had that safe, and we could always go in there and get cookies or—and she always used to make cakes. And the thing wouldn't, I mean, it wouldn't deteriorate. I mean [today], we got all

kind preservatives and everything. But everything would stay fresh in that little hutch that she had there, and she called that the safe.

HY: This is [the] Cordeiro [family]?

CJ: Cordeiro, yeah. And her sister lives right here in Honoka'a, I mean, her daughter lives here in Honoka'a—that was my grandfather's sister—just a few doors away from here. Just few of them left now. Few of them left.

HY: And they were coffee farmers?

CJ: Coffee farmers, and they had a pig farm.

HY: This is for commercial purposes?

CJ: Yeah. And they had---my great-grandfather used to drive the school bus, too. My grandfather learned from an early age how to take care of bodies, you know when they die and whatever. They used to transport the bodies to the mortuary, and that kind of thing. And up until the time he died, he used to help out Dodo Mortuary in Pāhala, and did that kind of thing. I remember him also being—he used to drive a truck that would go into Hilo and pick up the new immigrants that came from various countries. And he used to be the one to transport them over to the plantation in Pāhala. He drove that truck. And I remember him telling the story of—I can't remember what year the tidal wave had happened, but he happened to be in Hilo that day. Just barely escaped with his life.

HY: The '46 one?

CJ: Could be.

HY: Was this after the war? Well, of course, you weren't here.

CJ: I'm not sure. I can't remember.

HY: Oh that's okay.

CJ: Yeah. So that's the kind of thing that Grandpa used to do. I remember that. You know, I can't even remember what Grandpa Silva used to do in the plantation.

HY: But he worked for Ka'ū Sugar.

CJ: Yes, he did work for Ka'ū Sugar.

HY: You mentioned that you thought about being a nun for a while.

CJ: Mm hmm [yes].

HY: And then you had a change of heart. (Chuckles)

CJ: Yeah, yeah.

HY: And at that point did you decide you wanted to go to business school, or was there something else that made you go in that direction?

CJ: I think I went into business school because that was the most affordable for us. I mean, there were all of these kids behind me that I know wanted to go to school as well. I had to go out and get a scholarship in order to go to school, and I did that. They paid full tuition and everything. This was with the East Kiwanis Club. They had sponsored me that first year, and then I had done well, so had reapplied, and they paid for the second year. If it wasn't for that I wouldn't have been able to go to school. Of course, I had saved up because I used to babysit for lot of the supervisors' children from when I was sophomore up until I was a senior, just to bring in extra income, and whatever. Pretty much trying to help out my parents as much as possible. So that's why I decided to go into business school which was—I could attain because I had the scholarship, and found that I liked it.

But still, there was something in me that has always wanted to write. It's funny how things come about, because—let's see, this a year that I'm here now, so little over a year, well, in fact, this would make it two years ago, two-and-a-half years ago that they started the Hilo-Hāmākua Support Program after the plantation had closed down here in Honoka'a. And this was through the [Catholic Diocese] office of [Hawai'i Island] Social Ministry. They had gotten funding from the state. And there was a call for a newsletter to be produced as a communication vehicle for all of the dislocated sugar workers throughout the Hāmākua Coast. I became editor of that, and used to be able to write a lot and got things published. I found such delight in that. Such delight. I am now trying to write a book about plantation life. But it's gonna take me a while because I'm so busy with other things, too. When I get an inspiration, I sit down and I jot down my notes and whatever. So hopefully that will pan out and I'll get a book together.

HY: Is this newsletter still going?

CJ: No, after---the state funds had run out. So that segment of the Hilo-Hāmākua Support Program, that contract had ended. And within a week of my leaving that position, I found a position here [at the Parish Center]. They had asked if I would come on here.

HY: So this was, I guess, in '95 that you did that job?

CJ: [Nineteen] ninety-five, well, I was already volunteering with their program prior to that. I used to help them when they had first started the newsletter, and would write for that. I would volunteer down at, what they would call the resource center when it was located below Brantley Center. They had turned a house into an office there, and they had employment service, and that kinds of services that would be of assistance to the dislocated workers and their families. I used to volunteer my time there to help out, help with the QUEST [state's public health program for lower income people] sign up, and all that kind of stuff. Prior to that, I had just been a housewife. But I used to be involved in all kinds of—as, well, all-around community volunteer, so to speak. You know, Boy Scouts [of America] when my boy was into that, and used to help out at the school. Whatever community events came around, I would help out with.

HY: After you graduated from—was it UH Hilo? That you went to after you graduated from . . .



CJ: Well, that was the community college that I . . .

HY: Oh, okay.

CJ: After I graduated from there I worked for Hilo Toyota [Big Island Toyota] for over a year [as an office clerk], then I came—after that year I moved out here to Honoka‘a. This is when I was getting married. My husband had come back from the Vietnam War. We had been engaged—we were engaged right before he left for the Vietnam War. And when he came back we decided we were gonna get married. So I had moved out here, and I worked up in Waimea for a construction company [as an accounting clerk], Mainland-based construction company [Morrison/Knudsen Construction].

HY: Was this while you were in school?

CJ: No, this was after I was through with school. I had spent my time in Hilo. . . . After I graduated from high school, after that summer was over then I moved into Hilo and stayed with my mom’s sister. And that’s where I stayed when I went to college. And then after I graduated then I worked for Hilo Toyota for a year, and then I came out here. Worked in Waimea for a while, and then I got pregnant to my son, and my son was born premature and needed a lot of care. So my husband wanted me to stay home and take care of him, which I did. And there was always this fear that something would happen when he’s at school, and both of us not around. So he just wanted me to stay home. So I would just be a community volunteer, do volunteer work wherever, until I got into the—with the Social Ministry.

HY: Was there an adjustment when you moved to Hilo and stayed. . . .

CJ: It was exciting. It was exciting because completely different atmosphere. I was very homesick. You’re pretty much sheltered in a plantation camp. It was a hard adjustment being away from the family ’cause we were so close. I mean, we weren’t wealthy or anything, and there were times when we didn’t know how ends were gonna meet or anything like that, and we all pitched in to help out. But the difference in Hilo was that there’s so many places to go, so many things to do. But still, in going to school I made sure that I did my very, very best to prove to my parents that I could be on my own and accomplish what I wanted to. Make them proud of me. It helped living with my aunt because there was still family around. But still you missed home. I used to go home when they could come to Hilo to pick me up. Then I would go home and spend the weekend. By that time I had already met my husband because I met him when I was a junior in high school.

HY: So is he from Pāhala?

CJ: He’s from right close to here in Honoka‘a, Pā‘auhau. Born and raised in Pā‘auhau. It was funny because my girlfriend, my best friend in high school, was dating his best friend. So they just asked if I would be interested in talking to someone from out here, and I said, “Oh sure.” Met as a junior in high school, and we’ve been together ever since. So after---while I was in college he was off to the Vietnam War. That was pretty hard, not knowing whether he was gonna come home or anything like that. So I more or less stayed at home, made sure I did all of my schoolwork and whatever, helped out my aunt in the household and just waited for him to come home.

HY: Did he have an adjustment to make when he came back?

CJ: I remember him coming home for rest and [recreation] R and R. And we had gone out nightclubbing. We had just come out of the hotel, and a car backfired. He just instantaneously went to the ground.

Before he left, I had given him a St. Christopher medal, because, I mean, we're so into our faith. I gave him a St. Christopher medal on a chain, and he brought that back with him. One particular time, he was—he had to be point man. That's the person that goes ahead of the rest of the troops and scouts for snipers. All of a sudden, he felt the medal fall, coming off from the chain, so he bent down to pick it up. And a bullet went right above his head. If it wasn't for him reaching for the medal, he would have died, probably, from that bullet. He treasures that medal and brought it home with him. The thing that I looked forward to were letters whenever he could write, which was very, very seldom. But I wrote. Every single day I wrote to him. When you don't hear from them for two, three weeks at a time, then you start panicking and wondering and hoping that the fear that you have in you is not true. But he came home. He was very dedicated to the [U.S.] Army. He just retired this year, February, after thirty-one years of service with the National Guard. Because he got—he was drafted while he was in the National Guard. So he's kept up his service. It didn't really—I found a change in him when he came home, but the adjustment when he came back, maybe about a year, it was hard for him. He's just happy that when he came back, the plantation just automatically put him back to work.

HY: He was working at the Hāmākua Sugar Company prior to leaving?

CJ: It was then Pā'auhau Sugar Company [until 1972, then became Honoka'a Sugar Company. At the time of closing it was called Hāmākua Sugar Company]. And yeah, when he came back they put him back to work. So that helped him. He tells me today, if it weren't for him going back to work and putting his mind on something else, he doesn't know what would have happened. There are some nights that he'll get up, you know, just bolts out of bed. Then he settles down. And I ask him, "What's wrong?"

He said, "I don't know, just a funny feeling I had," and he just bolts up. And he says, "It's probably still reaction from way back when."

But he has---he befriended a little boy in Vietnam. This boy would come to their camps wherever they were, because he didn't have any parents, his parents were killed. And he had—the boy—had a little dog, and he even wanted to bring the dog home with him when he came back from Vietnam. The boy died, so that was what was left from that boy, and he took care of the dog. But that bothered him. Because he hadn't seen the boy for a couple of days. They used to have this, what they call, I think, *ajimamas* that used to come around with rice, or saimin, or that kind of thing, and they would buy from them. And the *ajimama* told him that the boy had died, they had found the boy. The boy had died. And that bothered him. And for many letters after that had happened, he used to write home and say how much he missed the boy. But he kept the dog with him. He wanted (chuckles) to bring the dog home, but he just ended up giving it to one of his buddies that was still left behind. When he came home, he was quiet a lot, and very pensive. But getting back into the routine of work helped. And I could see the difference. The plantation life was very beneficial to him in that respect.



HY: He was raised an orphan, then?

CJ: The boy?

HY: No, your . . .

CJ: No, this was the boy in Vietnam.

HY: Oh, you're talking about the boy. Oh, I'm sorry. Okay.

CJ: No, my husband comes from a family of nine children. My father-in-law is an immigrant from the Philippine Islands. He came here to work on the plantation. My mother-in-law is twenty years younger than my father-in-law. And my father-in-law is—let's see—next month will be eighty-seven. So Norman is the eldest of nine. So he grew up in plantation.

HY: He [CJ's father-in-law] worked sugar?

CJ: Yeah, his parents lived right below where we do. You know, we live in a plantation house right in Pā'auhau. So I moved, really, from one plantation to the next. But I guess that's why I feel like it's hit twice when the plantations closed. Having to go through it with my husband the first time, and then to go through it with the rest of my family in Pāhala when Ka'ū Sugar closed was pretty hard. I couldn't be there for the closure of Ka'ū Sugar. I was here for Hāmākua Sugar's closing. And we watched as the trucks went by, and whatever. It was really hard. But, well. . . .

HY: Let me just---we're at the end of this tape, and I'll flip it over.

CJ: Oh, sure.

END OF SIDE ONE

## SIDE TWO

HY: Okay. So you were talking about your husband's family, longtime sugar family.

CJ: Longtime, very longtime sugar family. All of the boys worked for the plantation, except for one son that had gone away to the [U.S.] Navy. That's the son right after—that's Norman's brother that was born right after him. He stayed away. He lives on the Mainland and has been, since he graduated from high school and had gone into the navy. But the rest of them were all plantation workers. Up until the time the plantation almost closed, another brother moved on and went to a concrete company in Waimea, and the other brother had to leave—well, he was on what they call IA, industrial accident. He had hurt his back. But all of them grew up in the plantation camp, all of them worked for the plantation. During summers they used to work at the plantation, truck drivers. My husband himself worked with irrigation for a time. He worked in the mill as a security guard for a time. He worked on the service truck that would go out to the fields and service all of the equipment. The last position he had was in the tire department. He was a crew chief for them, and he took care—he had four or

five men under him, and they took care of all of the tires for the entire—all of the traveling equipment, anyway. And always true blue to the plantation, always true blue.

When they heard initially about the plantation possibly closing, the first thing he told me was, “No way.” And people were already starting to plan to look for employment at the hotel [Hilton Waikoloa Village]. He says, “You’ll never find me at the hotel. No way I want to go down there. This is the lifestyle I know. It’s about all I can do.”

I said, “Well, you’re going to have to learn to apply your skills elsewhere.” And now, true blue to the hotel. (Laughs) Ended up at the hotel.

But he’s one that loves the ocean, and every chance he gets he’ll go to the beach, because he grew up like that. My father-in-law folks used to down to the beach a lot, and that’s how they used to supplement their income, was to go down and pick up fish, and that kind of thing. Used to sell the fish for the household use because there were nine children, and so they had to get some kind of food into the house.

My father-in-law worked as a cane truck driver for many, many years, up until he had an accident with the cane truck, and broke quite a few ribs. And after that accident, he worked with cultivation, I believe. And when the boys went to work for the plantation, the only thing he asked of them, “Don’t drive a cane truck,” because of the fear that he had of what had happened to him. He didn’t want that to happen to his boys. But only one boy chanced it and went as a cane truck driver. Funny, while he was in the plantation, it was fine. Then he went off to work for the concrete company and recently he had a bad accident with the concrete truck in Kona. And so he’s kind of laid up right now.

I remember one evening, before the—this was about the last time that they were harvesting the cane field that is right close to our home. And we all decided that we were going out there, and we were gonna watch the last time that they were harvesting that field. And there was my father-in-law, there was my husband, and there was my son, and they were all standing together. I was further in the back with the two girls. And something just struck me as three generations here, and we’re seeing this—it’s as if they were burning up our lives. (CJ is tearful.) We knew we weren’t going to be able to hear the cane trucks coming down and hear the loader beeping its horn, you know, when it’s time for the cane trucks to move on. We won’t see that anymore. We miss it. Even my girls, small as they are, miss seeing that. The proudest day was when my Brandee—they had a project at school where they made a mural out of tiles. Each child made a portion of the tile that went into the mural. We didn’t know this was going on at school. She came home one day and she says, “Mommy, I’m saying good-bye.”

And I said, “To who, me?”

And she says, “No, I’m saying good-bye to Hāmākua Sugar.”

And I said, “And how are you doing that?” And she explained what they were doing.

And (CJ is tearful) she started crying and she says, “But Mommy, where Daddy going work?” Small as she was, she was worried about it.

And I said, “Don’t worry about it. Somehow, Dad will find a job because Dad is a good worker.”

And she said, “But how we going live?”

And I said, “Well, Mom’s working. Somehow, we’ll get through this. Don’t worry. We’ll pray real hard.” And even small as she was, they start thinking about those kind of things, and it affects them.

HY: How old was she?

CJ: Let me see, now. That was, what, ’94. Brandee is ten, so she was—this is three years now—so she was about seven. She was in the second grade.

HY: Is she the youngest daughter?

CJ: No, no.

HY: Oh, oldest daughter?

CJ: She’s the older one, yeah. And we got to the second graders, after they had their mural all put together, they invited the parents to come that worked for the plantation for the unveiling. And ever so proudly, she took her dad up and showed him what tile she had made there, and they gave them leis, and you know all that kind. And it was a beautiful celebration at the school, and the mural is still up there. We go to meetings at the school when they have open house, and to see that there still displayed—before it was painful—now it is beautiful. It’s a part of the past that we know will live on in the kids that will be going to the school for many years.

And we hope it’ll stay alive that—I don’t know, there’s a different feeling growing up in a plantation environment than outside. Because living in Hilo, I know the difference. And it’s something we don’t want to die, that particular lifestyle. So no matter how much change comes about, we still try to capture all the traditions, what we remember. We’ve talked to the kids a lot about plantation life, and Lord knows we have lots of pictures. I think we were fortunate enough that the kids will remember. I think they’re old enough to keep that alive. And we still—I mean, in the yard we have that big stalk of the cane plant that Norman cuts—on New Year’s Eve, he’s making it a point to cut a stalk from that tree. ’Cause you can’t keep it all that long. But the same stalk from that tree, and he replants again, and he keeps it growing. So this is something that he’s told the girls, “You know, if Mommy and Daddy not around, we want you to do it.” So he’s keeping a little part of his tradition, I mean the lifestyle of the plantation alive.

You know how you get caught up in your everyday life, and you don’t realize sometimes what is really right there in your own household? But when the plantation closed, it came down to tear down the mill ’cause they were gonna transport it—they were gonna take the mill apart and send it to the Philippine Islands to be rebuilt over there. Well, Norman found employment that way, by going down and tearing down the mill, he was one of those. And one day I went home—he had been working on it for a couple of weeks—I went home and I found, I suddenly realized that he was little too quiet. We were sitting on the porch, and then

I said, "Norman, what's wrong?"

And he just burst out crying. He says, "I'm tearing apart my life. It's hard, it's so hard. Someplace I have worked all of my life, and to think it's not gonna be there. It's not bad if the building is still there. You can still go and see it. But to actually be tearing is so, so hard."

After they had gotten through with this mill, then they had asked him to go over and do Hilo Coast [Processing Company], when they were tearing that one down. He said, "You know, that didn't really bother me over there, because I didn't work there." But he said, "Tearing down the [Hāmākua] mill, ho, that was too much."

We still have below, where we live, that irrigation shack and whatever. So we go down there sometimes. We take the kids and we sit down there, we have a little picnic, and he'll talk to them. He'll tell them, "Okay, this is irrigation shack. Daddy used to do this—" There were nights when we weren't married, that he would go on the graveyard shift as an irrigator. I learned all about that because I went with him couple of times, quite a few times, to watch how—it was an overhead irrigation system. And they used have what they called guns. It was this humongous thing with a spout at the end, and it would spin around pretty much like a sprinkler, but it's really big. And that's how they used to irrigate some of the fields, until they got—there were some [areas] that could not [be irrigated that way], so they did that under-the-ground or on-the-ground kind of drip irrigation, that's what it was. And I got to learn how he used to go through these tiny, little tow paths, they called it. And they had all these rows of pipes. When this particular section of the field is through being irrigated, then they had to attach that sprinkler system to the back of the truck and they take it to the next area, and then hook it up to the next line of pipes. The old ones, they used to have to unhook all of the pipes from there so that the next day, the people that would pick up—they had people that would pick up the pipes from that first section of the field and take it to the next one that they were going to be doing the following day, and lay the pipe there. So I got to learn a lot about the irrigation system, was through him. Just going graveyard shift. Nobody knew the boy—you know, you kind of sneak and you go with your boyfriend, or whatever. (Laughs) And that's how I learned part of his job. And I'm glad I did. It was so interesting because I never knew how they would water the fields. They had two men on the shifts at the same time. They would meet up, and they would have lunch and everything together.

I think that's what my husband misses a lot, is the—what they call the *kaukau* time. You know, they would sit down, and they would eat lunch and everybody would share whatever they had. They all bust 'em open and they'd all eat. So really, plantation life is a sharing of almost your entire life, you share with each other. And you get the good from everybody. It's hard sometimes to describe.

HY: Well, you said he had such loyalty to the plantation.

CJ: Yeah.

HY: When there was first rumors about, maybe it's not gonna last, and he didn't want to believe.

CJ: No.

HY: So, at one point did he start realizing that it was really gonna happen?

CJ: I guess he noticed it when they started selling equipment.

HY: And how soon or how close to the end did that happen?

CJ: Maybe about a year.

HY: So had they already told them they were closing?

CJ: Yeah, they had officially told them that it was gonna close, well, then they came up with the final harvest. They were given the option to leave to seek other employment or to stay on. And Norman was one of those diehards that stayed till the very last day. And I guess more so because he worried about a place to live. And as long as you work for the final harvest, it was sort of guaranteed that you could stay in the house itself. After the plantation closed, we didn't know what was gonna happen to the house, but at least we had a roof over our head. Because at that point, we weren't able to afford to go out and pay that outrageous rental prices that they had. Somehow, he and a few friends always thought that something was gonna happen to save the plantation. Always there was that glimmer of hope for them. And that's why I think it really bothered them on that last day. You know, they finally realize on that final day that it was final. No more already. Nobody is gonna come out, no knight in shining armor is gonna come out and save 'em. And then the prospect of not finding employment, that bothered [the workers]. My son in high school, as a junior in high school, said, "I'm going to work after school and weekends."

And we told him, "It's not necessary, Brandon." He insisted. So he went to a local grocery store here, KK Super-mart, and he worked as a stock clerk, until the time that. . . .

Then when he was ready to become a senior, he said, "Well, Mom, I gotta concentrate on my studies. I've saved up enough that you don't have to worry about any of the expenses throughout my senior year."

And I said, "That's not the point, Brandon. That money is yours. You keep it. After you graduate and you need money, you will have that available. But we're gonna be okay. We'll get through this and it will be all right."

Even he worried a lot. He said, he always asked me, "Mom, Dad going be okay?"

And I said, "Yeah, I'm pretty sure he will."

And he said, "But, you know Mom, Dad went through a war. And this is like war all over again."

And I never thought of it that way. He used to have long talks with his dad about the plantation, and everything. Plantation lifestyle, I know, will live on in my son. He just loves it. He had an option of going to the Mainland last year and working for a steel corporation with one of his friends. He no like. He said, "No Ma. I like stay home." And he works now for Big Island Country Club [Estates] in the landscaping department, and he loves it. But I can see where the father's attitude of really hard working and loyal and everything is instilled

in him because he's that way, too. Every chance they tell him to go work he'll be there, weekends or whatever. I don't know, I'm just glad we grew up they way we did. We didn't have much, but what we had was very precious to us.

HY: Did you folks ever discuss the possibility or did you just sort of wait to see if . . .

CJ: No, we discussed it. My husband had said he's just gonna wait it out. He insisted that he wasn't gonna go out until—and look for something else—until the plantation closed, if it was going to. And so I said, “Okay, that's fine,” and we all agreed. I said, “Okay, we'll take our chances and see what happens.” We just prayed a lot, and he, like I said, found employment. But, of course, tearing down the mill tore him apart. Then he went into Hilo Coast and tore that one down. Then he was on unemployment [insurance benefits]. Let me see, (pause) he was on unemployment for a few months before he got the job to go tear down the mill. And then after he got through tearing down Hilo Coast, then he went back on unemployment, and within three to four months, I think it was, was when he got the call to go down to Hilton [Waikoloa Village]. So off he went. But he had applied, and applied, and applied. His first priority, well, first choice of a job would have been with tire repair because he loved the job. But not much out here offering that. He did get a call from Lex Brodie's Tire [Company] in Hilo, and he went for an interview on that. They were almost guaranteeing him the job, but he found out that the guy that he was gonna replace, they [the company] had called all kinds of hours of the night. And he would have to leave home [at] whatever hour and go all the way into Hilo. He said that would have been too rough because he was afraid of falling asleep coming home or going or whatever. So he decided not to take the job. And in the end, of course, he ended up at Hilton Waikoloa, and loves it, because he works in the waterways. And he's right there by the ocean. After work if he wants to go and catch fish, throw net, or whatever, it's right there. And the kids, of course, love the beach, too.

HY: And did you folks purchase the house, then? From . . .

CJ: Yeah, well, actually the land and the house is free. What we paid for was the conveyance costs. And I can tell you that because I work with Hāmākua—I'm on the board of directors with Hāmākua Housing Corporation. So that's . . .

HY: Now, is this a thousand dollar flat fee that . . .

CJ: About eleven hundred something [dollars].

HY: Eleven hundred?

CJ: Yeah, that we paid.

HY: And what did you folks do for things like medical insurance?

CJ: We went under QUEST. And for a while, we didn't pay anything until he went—when he was employed tearing down the two mills, he got medical for him, so then was just me and the kids. And being that he had a little bit of income, we paid just a small premium for our insurance coverage. And then afterwards, and I had started working so everybody had gone under my medical, so we were okay. And we had, while he was unemployed, we had the unemployment [insurance] that we made sure we stretched as much as we could.



- HY: What about the union [ILWU, International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union]? Did they make any kind of provisions?
- CJ: As far as?
- HY: Any kind of support.
- CJ: Well they had---at a point they had given them [the workers], they had allotted them a certain amount from the union dues that they had paid. They gave them a check for that. Plantation had given us—Hāmākua Sugar had also given us a check of the profits from the final harvest that the bankruptcy judge had said that they were supposed to give the workers. So that helped. But then, when you figure out the amount of unemployment that my husband received at the end of the year, we had to end up paying a heck of a lot of taxes. We paid over \$2,000 in taxes alone. Because they don't take out taxes like that there. And there was nothing that we could put aside to go toward those taxes throughout the year because we needed that income. So at the end, what did we have to do when he was—lucky thing he was working—we had to make a loan just to pay the taxes.
- HY: What about your involvement with the church? What kind of support did they provide, not necessarily financial, but emotional or services or . . .
- CJ: You pretty much rely on your faith, your prayer and whatever. And there's so many other parishioners here that were going through the same thing. You kind of just talk story and try to keep each other going. Hilo-Hāmākua Support Program was a big help in providing the resource center. And they brought out the employment service, the unemployment people, so that you could get your life kind of organized and you knew where to go to get help.
- HY: What other kind of resources did they. . . .
- CJ: Um, let me see.
- HY: Did they provide any kind of training or . . .
- CJ: There was a lot of training. Landscaping, they had that. They had cooking. They've had nurses aid, certified nurse's aid training. (Pause) Is that about it that they had?
- HY: Now, people that went to these programs, were they able to get employment?
- CJ: Yes, yes. The employment service would help them out and try to secure jobs for them. They would let them know where the jobs were. They even gave them training as far as filling out applications, going for an interview, that kind of thing. So it was pretty thorough. Pretty thorough. And the support program that I worked for would try to—there were places you could go if you ran out of food, you know, food pantries which are still alive today, like this . . .
- HY: How were they operated, the food pantries?
- CJ: There were different locations, we have one right here in our church, where you would just call in—the policy here is you just call in and we just ask you a few questions. You know,

address, how many in the family, the ages of the children, and what have you. And then there's criteria as to how much food that you give out.

HY: And who provides the food? Is it the parishioners?

CJ: The parishioners, some from there, then we have through the Social Ministry, they have from the FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] grant, they get funded through that. Various agencies that they get help from. I found that emotional support that people needed, even just for—there were outreach workers that would go into the camps and would go to each household and find out what the situation was like, what help was needed, and then they would work along those lines. They pretty much had the outreach workers *talking story* [with the families]. They had ladies night out—we could just rap, and that kind of thing. We had some pretty close calls. One particular time I was in the office by myself working on the newsletter because we all worked together in two different offices, but space was limited, and funds were limited, so you stay within a certain range. And one particular time that I was there in the office by myself, and the call came through. And this was someone who had just taken pills, overdose of pills. And I knew the woman. She just called out for help. Another friend of mine that worked in the office had just come back and we had heard what was going on, had to contact the doctor to find out what we could do and we just sped off, and got her from where she lived off to Hilo [Medical Center] emergency room. I had to stay with her and go through all of these things where you see them trying to get rid of that dosage of medicine that she had taken. And so it really hits home. We really knew what the people were feeling, how they—because we ourselves were in the same situation, and it's difficult when you have all the rest of the people's problems that you worry about as well besides your own. It was difficult.

HY: Do you attribute her depression to the demise of the sugar, and . . .

CJ: Yes, yes. Her husband couldn't find employment, she was just tired of being on welfare, and problems just compounded. And she just couldn't take it anymore.

HY: Do you see a lot more of that type—that level—of desperation?

CJ: We heard about it almost every day. Because everybody would—the outreach workers would come back, and there were times where they just had to let out, too, you know, just vent out. And you hear what the people are going through, and you just feel for them. And you just thank God that but for His grace, this is where I would be. And we were just fortunate that we were employed, too. Because if we lost employment, we would be in the same boat, too. You especially feel for those families with a lot of kids. Some of them put up a brave front, but you know the suffering that's going on. And the kids that were affected, and even their schoolwork, school attendance, all that changed. We had people that would even go in the schools and have a little support program for those kids, and try to build up their morale and try to find. . . . There were youth programs that were put together. And they would go around and they [the students] would do community service, you know clean parks and all of that kind of thing. And the kids got so close together. Not only did they work, but they had times where they would be taken off to the beach or they even started musical group. Nice things came out of it. But it was rough. It was rough trying to do as much as you could with the limited amount of funds.



HY: You think the worst part is over for this community? Or is it still happening?

CJ: I think the worst is over. There are still some out there that are unemployed. We see, right in my own community, I see a drug problem amongst those that are unemployed. We worry about that. But majority of the people, I think, have found some kind of work. Of course, there are people that just have part-time jobs, then they take on two or three at a time.

It's funny how before, you felt so secure knowing that, no problems with the plantation. There's always gonna be a job. But now, since the plantation has closed, there's that fear, wherever you go, wherever you get employed, that it's gonna happen all over again, and you gonna end up the same way. My husband fears that. He says, "I like my job now. But I'm afraid of"—how did he put it?—"I'm afraid of liking it too much. Because I might get hurt again." But well, we pray that the hotel is alive and well for quite a while.

HY: What about the crime rate? Has that been affected?

CJ: I don't know too much about—I know that there were thefts that had been on the rise, but not too drastic of a change, I don't think. I haven't seen it, anyway. Of course, the problems in the school had escalated with teen pregnancy and what have you, but I don't know if it was because of the plantation [closing] or just a changing of the times. I'm not sure.

HY: What do you see for the future of this community?

CJ: I see, hopefully—well, I know there are a lot of agriculture ventures going on now. I see, though, maybe cottage industries, a building up, maybe of that. But pretty much, I think it'll be agriculture, somehow or other. 'Cause this is prime land for that. But I only hope that they'll take care of the little ones. Because we have some people out there that are very wealthy, that own a lot of land, and are still looking to get more. But I hope that there'll be enough out there that the dislocated worker will be able to get into and at least make a good business out of it.

HY: You think that—maybe you can just speak for yourself—that, did you have any resentment towards the company because it, in a sense, failed your community?

CJ: (Sighs)

HY: I know obviously you expressed some sadness and whatnot, but was there resentment as well?

CJ: I think the only thing I resent is them not letting us know way ahead of time. They must have known that this was coming. Then maybe it would have been an easier transition. We would have had more time with which to plan and put aside for. That's the only thing I resent. Other than that . . .

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

HY: Okay.

CJ: It had to come to an end. I think, also, if they had known that the plantation had been in trouble, why didn't they try to find more resources or whatever, or try and do a structural

change and try to see if they could make the plantation survive. I don't know. It's just---it happened too soon. And we weren't made aware of it in enough time.

HY: Do you think Honoka'a will retain a real---will survive as a very close-knit community?

CJ: I think it will, basically because the plantation camps are still intact. You know, because they've had to form their own community associations. And as long as those camp houses are still standing, I think it'll be okay. Because a lot of the---the majority of the people have stayed in the home that they were in while they were working for the plantation. I think if they didn't feel that it couldn't last, they would have moved out. But I think it will be all right. I do. In working with my own community association, I see the love still there for the plantation lifestyle. We have---the majority of the residents in Pā'auhau are senior citizens that have retired from the company, I mean, true blue. And they have known no other life. They have already put their children on their deeds. I think it'll be okay. I do. As long as those camps---the community associations---can be self-sufficient, it'll be all right.

HY: Maybe you can talk a little bit about what you do here, what your job is here.

CJ: I'm the secretary here at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church. I pretty much handle all of the office work that needs to be done for every aspect of Catholic parish life, from religious education program, to insurance, whatever it takes to run an office. I assist the pastor and his pastoral associate. It's busy. It's very busy. I enjoy my work, it's a way of giving back to the church what the church has done for me. I don't make all that much money, benefits are good, but I feel it was a godsend. Because within a week of my leaving my last job, and already I was worried about where the next---where we were gonna get some more money to make ends meet without my working. I prayed a lot, and the Lord answered my prayer. And here I am. I also wanted someplace close to home where I would still be in close contact with my children, if they got sick. I wanted to be around where they could come to me or I could go to them. So it's worked out well.

HY: Is there anything else you want to add?

CJ: Only a prayer that the plantation lifestyle will live on in my kids and their kids. Because I treasured it a lot.

HY: Okay. Thank you very much.

CJ: (Chuckles) Oh, you're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW

# **THE CLOSING OF SUGAR PLANTATIONS:**

**Interviews with Families  
of Hāmākua and Kaʻū, Hawaiʻi**

**Volume I**

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