

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Charles "Charlie" Santos, 69, musician, bandleader

Charles "Charlie" Santos, Portuguese, was born in the Punchbowl area of Honolulu, December 23, 1913. His father, Joseph, came from Madeira, Portugal at the age of 13 and worked as a mechanic for Oahu Railway. His mother, an Almeida, was from Maui.

Charlie, a self-taught alto saxophone player, received his first saxophone as a Christmas gift from his father when he was about 14. By the age of 15, he was playing professionally with grown men.

He attended Washington Junior High School and McKinley High School. He dropped out of high school to pursue his music career, playing for house parties, fraternal organizations, taxi-dance halls, and later, nightclubs.

Charlie participated in the annual Parade of Bands at the old Civic Auditorium. In addition, he often played in and arranged backup bands for visiting stars. He also spent 15 years in California, playing music in clubs up and down the coast, and was a bandleader himself for over 20 years.

Santos has been married nearly 50 years, has three children, lives in Kailua on Oahu and enjoys photography. He has compiled numerous scrapbooks detailing his life in photos and other memorabilia.

Tape No. 10-11-1-83

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Charlie Santos (CS)

June 27, 1983

Kailua, Oahu

BY: Gael Mustapha (GM)

GM: This is an interview with Charlie Santos in Kailua and the date is June 27, 1983. This is tape one with Mr. Santos. The interviewer is Gael Mustapha.

Okay, we're on now. I know I asked you a few questions to write down but I'd like to know a little bit about your family background. Can you tell me again, your father came from Portugal?

CS: Yeah, he came from Portugal when he was thirteen years old. And he was born over in Madeira. My mother was born on Maui. My dad was thirteen years older than my mother. My mother was his second wife. His first wife died.

GM: What did your father do?

CS: He was a master mechanic in for Oahu Railway. He drew a monthly salary. So the depression didn't hurt us. You know, he was a monthly man, you know. And at some days, he drew \$200, this was a long time ago which was a lot of money. You know today you have to have \$1000 or more to match that. And he was--he lost his left leg and he can still work. They pensioned him and he worked at home around the house with crutches or whatever. He lost his leg above the knee.

GM: And you were born in Punchbowl area?

CS: Yeah, uh huh. And let's see, my son was born in (tape unclear). All my kids were born up there, so let's see--my first daughter was between life and death in the first two weeks and I owe thanks to a nurse that took care of her on her own time. So I told the doctor, "Thanks, you did a great job." He said, "Don't thank me, you thank her. She worked on her own time." And that was marvelous, otherwise, she was dead.

Then my second daughter, she came through with flying colors. She owns apartment buildings in San Francisco area. She a go-getter, you know. Real go-getter. And she's got money to burn. She won't sell her apartment buildings. One is six stories and she's got some in Seattle and San Francisco and down San Diego and she's sold some, you know.

Uh, my son studied for radio broadcasting. And he got a first-class license. But try and crack it, try and get in here. You know, it's quite political. Really political.

Now before he was born, my wife was in terrible, terrible pain. And we'd go to the family doctor. Then the guy just says, "You're doing fine."

I said, "Hey, she couldn't hardly walk." You know, I had to help her. So I said, "Look, we gonna get out of here. We gonna get another doctor."

She says, "No, no."

The doctor says, "God will take care of it."

And I says, "Yeah, God help those who...."

So when we went to Dr. Bachman, he was German, immediately. This first doctor didn't take her weight, her blood, nothing, didn't measure her, not a damn thing. And so we took her to Dr. Bachman. Right away, he told us, "Get her blood type, weigh her, measure" and all this. And she was ready to give---two weeks before she gave birth, mind you. So they couldn't get her blood type, he said, "Take her down the blood bank." Maybe they'll get her---she had an odd type of blood, you know. So we got it. And that's what saved her life, see. And then, while carrying my son, she had a tumor this big.

GM: Oh, my goodness!

CS: You know, six months later when they take it out, it's this size, [bigger than an orange] see, bunch of jelly. They brought it to me. Terrible.

GM: Let's go back to when you were growing up. Now where---what was your birth order, were you the oldest or the youngest?

CS No, I was second in the family. I had a step-brother that was older than me but I call him brother, you know. I don't believe in that stuff--step-brother same father, you know. Half-brother and everything.

GM: And then when did you start taking music or how did...

CS: I was self-taught. My dad bought me a sax---he knew I wanted a saxophone so bad, he bought me a saxophone for one Christmas. That was a beautiful thing, it was silver and a gold bell and all that, the body was a satin finish and the keys were polished and oh, what I wanted.

GM: Why did you want one so badly?

CS Because I loved saxophone. I wanted to be a saxophone player, you see.

GM: But how did you get interested?

CS: Okay. I don't know, I hear records and I like the way they sound. So I got this horn and I stayed up all night, I couldn't sleep, you know, just looking at it.

(Laughter)

So I said, "Well, I'm gonna learn how to play this thing. So I played records over and over and over and over. Drove my mother crazy, you know. And tried to do what they doing until I find it. Over and over, Duke Ellington records and different people, you know. So I was self-taught. I learned real quick 'cause I wanted to do it.

GM: Now how old were you when you got your...

CS: I was about fourteen, around there. And I played professionally with grown-up men when I was fifteen. Can you believe that? I got it so fast, so quick, I played for---in those days, you played in clubs like Moose Lodge tonight and this one next night and this---and the pay those days were real good. If the guy says you gonna get five bucks---five dollars, you say let's go. Five bucks a night. (Laughs) And uh...

GM: Did you play in school for the...

CS: Yeah, I played in school. But I didn't learn it there. I already knew something about the horn, places and all that.

GM: But was it like a school band that you played with?

CS: Yeah, school band. And uh...

GM: That was at McKinley...

CS: No, no, no. This was Washington Junior High, yeah. So life went on, you know what I mean. I'm not blowing smoke. I'm considered the best saxophones ever to hit Hawaii and on the alto sax.

GM: What is the difference between an alto and what's the other?

CS: Tenor. An alto, tenor, baritone. An alto is one octave above a tenor sax. I had one of those little saxophones, small thing looks like a toy. And then comes alto, then tenor, and baritone and bass--contrabass. Contrabass about six feet tall.

GM: Oh, my goodness.

CS: It goes up like this and comes down so the mouthpiece fits your mouth. And also clarinets comes in there and B-flat sopranos. Although the fingering in clarinet is little more difficult. Now octaves change, your change---the saxophone use---just press an octave key and you play the same keys and there you are, you know, you are a higher range, that's all.

GM: So then you played---you also played the clarinet though?

CS: Yeah, I played that. And I played tenor and baritone but alto was a challenge, that's why I liked it. 'Cause it's a---you can get away with almost anything on tenor or baritone but alto, being a smaller horn, it was a challenge and I wanted a challenge. So I'd get along, picked it up, played pretty good.

GM: So you said that you dropped out of high school to play music professionally?

CS: Yeah, right.

GM: That was what?

CS: I was playing music professionally while I was in high school and then I just quit all together. (Laughs)

GM: So what was your first job playing professionally at fifteen?

CS: Oh, I guess was the Moose Lodge. Moose Lodge and the old Elks Club, things like that, Knights of Pythias or whatever that is. Those kind of places.

GM: And who was the leader of...

CS: Well, let's see. A guy named Red Souza. The guy that died of heart failure. He was the leader of us, see. Yeah, he was the leader, of the one-nighters. He played tenor, he played well.

GM: And then so you progressed from playing like the fraternal organizations then what came after that?

CS: Nightclubs.

GM: And how did you get on?

CS: Well, I was with McDiarmid, I was at the Royal uh...

GM: That's Don McDiarmid, right?

CS: Yeah, the Royal and...shee, Waialae Golf Club, Moana and what's that hotel right next the Moana connected to the Biltmore, that one was my own group. And uh...Princess Kaiulani. Then from there we went to Lau Yee Chai's. We stayed there for a while, that's where the guy on fire, the cigarettes in the pocket. That's when they had renovated it. It was beautiful, right now. And when in '30, let's see, around '38 or '39. And we left there to open the South Seas Club on Kalakaua and McCully.

GM: Okay, where did the taxi dance come in? You said you played...

CS: Oh, taxi dance-halls was way back, 1931, that started, till about 1934 or something like that.

GM: So that was like after the fraternal organizations but before the nightclubs?

CS: Yeah, yeah, that was a steady job of working salt mines, you know. Keep playing, you know.

GM: And can you describe or tell me the names of some of the taxi dance halls you played at?

CS: Yeah, Reno Casino, there was one on Liliha Street. There was a terrible looking bar and that was terrible...Reno Casino and let's see....

GM: And how many hours a night or how many nights a week?

CS: They make you work five hours a night. And you work six nights a week. And when the fleet comes in, you worked day and night...

GM: Had the dancing in the daytime too?

CS: Then you drop dead, you know.

GM: (Laughs)

CS: The guy there wanted money so bad, them owners, you know.

GM: Who hired you, the dance hall owner or an orchestra or a band leader?

CS: Well, in one place, the band leader hired me. We were good friends. And another couple of places, the owner hired me. So they were my groups but the other one was my friend's group.

GM: What kind of music did you play at the taxi dance hall?

CS: Everything, everything. We played jazz, ballads, Mexican rhythms, Congas, Mambos, boleros, we played everything.

GM: And who mostly came to the taxi dance halls?

CS: Men. (Laughs)

GM: No, I know that, but I mean what kind of men?

CS: Well, all kinds. Filipinos, white people, Navy people, Army people, you know, just a mixture of all kind of men.

GM: That was a big form of recreation in those days?

CS: Yeah, that was it. That was it, they want to hold a girl in their arms, and that was it. Ten cents a dance and the girls usually die dancing, you know, ten cents a dance. Now they ring a bell, it's half a dollar a dance. So these guys gotta come with money.

GM: They still have taxi dance halls?

CS: Oh yeah.

GM: Oh, I didn't know that.

CS: Wait a minute, maybe not. I think there's one going yet, I'm not sure. I think Reno joined the other, if it's out---that's it, they're all over. And one of the owners used to go around, walk around the hall and see a piece of money and kick it around. They pick up sometimes twenty dollars. You go around all the dancers, he's got, all around and pick up twenty dollar bill, a dollar bill here, five---you know these guys take out their money and lose it. Just keep on dancing.

GM: Can you describe one of the taxi dance halls, like how many people, men a night would come or was it just one big dance floor?

CS: Well, it all depends. Saturday night was always a big night. During the week, it was pretty good. And pay day night, like the 15th and the 1st of the month, you had a good crowd. And some people get paid bimonthly. On Saturday night was always a big night at taxi dancing.

GM: Did you get any breaks in your five-hour period or?

CS: About five minutes, you go to make the thing, you know. Then you come right back.

(Laughter)

You go to the john.

GM: Did they have the musician's union back in those days at that time?

CS: No, no. I don't think so. I joined the union 1938, I think it was. And I'm a life member now. I've been in there over twenty-five years, so I got a gold card, I don't pay any more dues. I was in the board for four years, then I couldn't stand it and I just quit. All this dilly dallyin' and cliques, you know. So I was nominated again, I said, "Forget it, I decline. I don't want no more." Don George was the president. You don't know him. He was an organist at the Princess Theatre, you don't even remember the Princess Theatre.

GM: I've heard of it. (Laughs)

CS: Okay. And then after that I think Don McDiarmid was president, then some others and now Buddy Peterson, I. V. Peterson is president.

GM: So let's go back to the taxi dance halls, like where was the Casino Ballroom?

CS: Casino Ballroom was on Hotel Street, close to River Street. But it was a nice place, inside was nice and the front was nice. Casino---was Casino you asked about? Casino was on Beretania Street.

GM: So was it Reno that was near River?

CS: Wait a minute, Reno was on Beretania Street also, what's the matter with me? It was close to River. And Casino was on Beretania and Nuuanu on the corner. That's the guy that kick money around.

GM: So then, that was up to about 1934, you played there you said at the taxi dances?

CS: Taxi dance halls, yeah.

GM: And then you went to the night clubs?

CS: One nighters, you know.

GM: Yeah, with like McDiarmid, did you play with other groups, too or?

CS: Oh, let's see. Well, I did a TV pilot with Alfred Apaka and the band leader came from the Mainland. Frank Duvall. He's a very brilliant guy. He says, look, at rehearsal, he says, "You four saxophones give me your parts, I'm going to change it. Take five."

I told the guy, "You're not going to do it. No way, five minutes." Sixteen measures and he's off. So he takes a measure, zoop with sax, my part. He just like you writing your name. [so fast] So he turns it over. In five minutes he was done. And he changed the figuration and harmony, everything. He played not one clinker, not one thing wrong. He was a genius, you know. Frank Duvall, I never forget him.

GM: But that was later 'cause TV came much later so going back again to...

CS: Yeah. Okay, you go back to one nighters. Like I said, we did Moose Lodge, Elks--the old Elks--Knights of Pythias and some other place. Sometime we play house parties, weddings, in houses, you know, stuff like that or birthday parties.

GM: And what about now at the Royal Hawaiian when you were in the Monarch Room there?

CS: No, we were out in the garden, in the back of the bandstand, face the beach, you know where the beach

went right over the wall there. We played in the garden. And you meet so many people there like Alice Faye. She was so nice about---and her husband was a stuck-up guy, eh. He look at us, he was nothing of a man. And Cary Grant, you know that kind people they nice, so nice. I'm open, I'm not afraid of meeting them people because heck, I got a profession too. And then the bigger they are, the better they are, I found out. We played quite a long run there.

GM: You remember the years?

CS: We played the Monarch Room too, but mostly out in the...

GM: In the garden?

CS: Yeah.

GM: Do you remember the years?

CS: 19---it was about '37, I guess. 'Cause we went---'38 we went to Lau Yee Chai's. It was about 1937, maybe into '38.

GM: Can you tell me what Waikiki was like then?

CS: Waikiki was Hawaiian. Today it's a concrete jungle, it's terrible. They ruined Waikiki completely. It was beautiful, I mean like the Royal Hawaiian garden was wide open, you could see all beautiful palm trees and beautiful lawn around. And you could see the Royal Hawaiian Hotel, the pink building. And it was something else and you'd go out there by streetcar, too. And Waikiki was swamp land. You know where Ala Wai Boulevard? It was all swamp land! That was swamps.

GM: When you were playing then at the Royal Hawaiian, was the Ala Wai Canal already built, I can't remember that.

CS: Yeah, it was there because the streetcars used to go over the bridge over the Ala Wai Canal. I never saw that but beyond it, I saw on Ala Wai Boulevard, the other side. And on both sides was just swamp land! That's all it was. But then when you get on the deep Waikiki, it was beautiful. You see all these homes. The only place today that's real, real, real Hawaiian is Molokai. That's really Hawaiian. I went over there and boy, it's got that Hawaiian flavor, you know.

GM: What other hotels were in Waikiki at that time?

CS: Well, the Royal was built in 1927, it was there. Moana was older than that, I don't know when it was...shee, and there was right next to this old---like connected to Moana. That's about it. That's about it in Waikiki, that's all I can think of.

GM: Were there other stores or...

CS: Yeah, there were stores. The stores up there is so old today, they must have been there, you know. Little stores. Oh, across the street from the Royal and that place were little bungalows. You know, bungalows. People rent that and stay in bungalows. And that's about it. There was nothing else.

GM: And most of the people that went to the hotels at that time, were they---what kind of people?

CS: Well, see when you go to the Royal, you gotta expect to spend money. Like today, it'll kill you, but them days you still had to spend some money with drinks a little expensive compared to a bar or something. And I have no idea what they cost but when the movie stars were there, you gotta expect them to spend money. They lived there and everything.

GM: And so did you play music for like dancing and at dinner time?

CS: Yeah, dancing, dancing.

GM: And do you remember what kind of music you played there?

CS: All kinds again. We had (laughs)---there were four bosses in that place and drove McDiarmid crazy. See we play something and the guy around me say, "Why don't you play a waltz?" So we play a waltz. Another guy come up, "Play a rumba." And he---one time he just threw his baton says, "Heck the (laughs).... Four bosses now, see. Some guy---there was an admiral that lived there permanently. He was going to take over too, see. So he just sound crazy. "Play some jazz or play Hawaiian tune." Shee.

GM: What is your favorite to play?

CS: I have no favorite, I like jazz the most. I'm a jazz saxophonist, see. Of course I play ballads, I love ballads, real good ballads, you know. We could play---it doesn't matter really. Jazz is the top favorite and I like Latin numbers, too.

GM: You remember the names of any specially popular tunes back then?

CS: Mmmm, (laughs). Well, Don wrote some and Hilo Hattie that time and Hawaiian, Hawaiian kind, pure Hawaiian. I like it very much, "Beyond the Reef." I don't know, I can't say, you see. I like the up-jazz tunes we played, but I just don't recall, you know, a particular name that I like. With this, things like "Star Dust" that was a ballad. Everybody loves that you know. We played quite a bit of jazz in the hotel. Mostly Hawaiian music, naturally, which I didn't care too much for.

GM: Do you read music?

CS: Yeah.

GM: You taught yourself to read?

CS: No, at first when I learned by records. I didn't read then. I was just a punk kid. Before everything was fake, nobody read music, I mean the bands I played with. So then, I wanna get in the Royal. So I practice hard and hard for a whole month, sweating, practicing. And I was able to read. So I just got in the Royal. Several friends of mine says, "Don, get this guy." So we go out and we rehearse, the three of us, you know. And yet, I went and played first sax, of all things. We were awfully good, you know. Usually you gonna play third sax or second tenor or whatever. But I played lead. I was always a lead sax man, always, you know. No matter what....

GM: Did you have to audition for McDiarmid or how did you go about getting a job in those days?

CS: Well, there's a place called--we used to rehearse in a place, actually the greenhouse with all the plants, with a stage there.

GM: Where was that?

CS: Um, about across the street from the Royal, around there, yeah, around there. And we used to rehearse in the greenhouse, was nice and cool, you know, in there. And they put a stage up there. And so he says okay. So he says come down, you know, audition. I played a couple numbers and he said, "You're hired." Just like that.

GM: And do you remember what kind of pay you got during that period?

CS: Probably about sixty dollars a week, fifty-five, sixty dollars a week, you know. 'Cause you work in the dumps, you got less, you know, you have five bucks a night, you lucky. So then we worked all those places I tell you, the Royal Hawaiian, the Moana, and the other one.

GM: When did you get like to Club Avalon or Kewalo?

CS: Well, Club Avalon was before that. That was one nighters. No, no, no, it was one nighters then the guy opened for six nights. Six nights, that was before, all that. You know Waialae Golf Club was beautiful. They had a roof that opened up. On a nice beautiful night they open it, they press a button, the thing opens up. And that's where Harry Owens got the inspiration to write "Dancing Under the Stars."

GM: Oh, I see.

CS: And it opens you can see all the stars, if you have moonlight and when it rains they pressed that button quick, you know. They had to close up, close the roof up. It was nice, real nice there.

GM: And when you got like gigs, how long would they usually be for or like you said, you played at the Royal for several years?

CS: No, not several years, was about little over a year, I'd say, then we went to Lau Yee Chai, South Seas, Kewalo Inn, the other one....

GM: Pearl City Tavern?

CS: No, Pearl City Tavern was my group. And also at Roy's nightclub or something. And I had a group at the Grove. I worked for Ray Andrade but it was my group. We did a show--show and dancing, you know.

GM: Oh, when did you start putting together your own groups rather than playing for somebody else and why?

CS: I was band leader for about twenty years. Before 1940, I had my own group. Start in small groups. Paul Anka now, I backed him up twice. So the second time he came down, he demanded an eighteen-piece band so I had to hire a little more musicians. The first band I worked with, my band was about nine guys in the band. But he demanded that I produce eighteen men. And I handpicked the guys. Oh, what a band that was. I love to play in sections, reed section and the brass and it's great, you know.

So we came through and he was kind of cheap. The last show we played for him, he'd buy us two bottle of Ten High. (Laughs) That isn't very good booze. So we drank it up, eighteen guys, you know. So we drank few more drinks and I didn't like it. When he first came down, he said, "Okay, men are we ready?"

I said, "Of course, we've been waiting for you." You know he was about sixteen. And the next time he came down, he was about eighteen. And he was a little better. You know he didn't come out with that big stuff. So the last show we played, I says, "We going to blow this guy off the stage."

(Laughter)

We did, I say, "Blow." Played so loud the drummer go bang, bang, bang.

(Laughter)

We was Schofield Barracks, you know. He'll never forget that. (Laughs) We played in shows at Civic Auditorium, Schofield Barracks in the islands, you know, through the islands. And then the nicest guy I worked with was Fabian. He was so modest, you know, he says "I can't sing". He says, I know I'm a lousy singer, I can't sing."

I says, "You're all right, don't worry about it. You'll do fine." And he brings two managers with him. And they come up and try bossing around. I say, "Get the hell off the stand." Twice I tell them, "Get off the stand, you want me to rehearse your boy or you want me to kill him. We can kill him with rotten music."

They never bother me again. And he says, "Don't mind them, don't mind them. It's okay." So we played a good show for him. My picture was in a movie magazine with him, the cover. And the stage was full of leis. He was so well-liked, and here there were leis up to here [eyes]. It was just flowers all over the stage, leis. You couldn't see the stage. Beautiful guy and Jimmy Clanton, all those kids were nice, you know.

GM: What year was this?

CS: Uh, this was the '40s and '50s. I'd work--I got my regular job but I did a show too, you see, at Civic Auditorium and Schofield, all that places.

GM: What about during the war years [World War II], where were you?

CS: The war years, I stayed one place 'cause I got a permit to drive my car and they fix your headlights with a visor over it and I had a blue light. That's all I could see, but I could hardly see where I was going. So they can't see upstairs, the Japanese. Then I had a permanent pass any time of the day or night. Some people just got day or night pass. At any hour I used to take off in my car, go for a ride or something. I'd go work like that at Roy's Nightclub or something. I'd go to work and then back home in my car. That was kind of spooky, you know.

GM: How did you happen....?

CS: Then afterwards they uh, let you have little more lights. They took off that blue one, you could see right through, the little better headlight, you know.

GM: Do you remember where you were when it all started, December 7th?

CS: I was in bed when it all started, seven o'clock in the morning. I worked that Saturday night till late. And that's why even now, I'm a late sleeper. I'm used to the night life. I can't get to bed. My wife goes to bed nine, ten o'clock. I was up to two o'clock this morning.

GM: Where were you working the night of Pearl Harbor?

CS: Pearl Harbor, I was working at Roy's Nightclub, I was there. And I was in bed and all this voom [CS makes a sound like a jet plane]. I told my wife, "What the hell, they must be in maneuvers." So uh, turn on the radio, says the Japs are attacking Pearl Harbor, sneak attack. I said "Oh, this is it." And they flew right over my house. Right up there. I saw them coming in, you know. They came in waves.

GM: Where were you living then?

CS: I was living in Pauoa, Hiilawe Street. I have a five-bedroom house and the house in back was two-bedroom. And uh--I sold all that. I'm sorry I did. I could have made a lot of money for it. I sold it way back in '66. Today's cold, yeah. But anyway, that's another story.

GM: How did you meet your wife?

CS: Well, her family and my family were friends for years. I knew her when she was about four years old, you know,

no above five. I was four. I met then, already I want.... So I said, "I'm gonna have to marry this little girl."

(Laughter)

So, then they were on a picnic at Kailua once. And I came down Kailua. Took me about two hours over to Kailua from Honolulu. With those tin lizzies, you know, and all that. So her mother say, "Come here Charlie. Have a drink." She's giving me a shot of whiskey, I was just a young kid. (Laughs) I drank it, what the heck. So then---then we kept in touch like, you know. My wife was so pretty, I said I gotta marry this girl. So we got married. She dragged me down to the License Bureau. Can you believe that?

GM: (Laughs)

CS: That's a fact! She said, "You're gonna marry me!"

I said, "Can't we wait a while?"

She said, "Well, you're twenty years old now, you're of age. Your parents can't say anything."

So we got married. We got married by a judge. You know people get married in a church, they divorce. We got married by a judge, we still together almost fifty years. And I'm young.

GM: (Laughs)

CS: I am young! I feel very young. I don't think old. I'm twenty-one. My wife is old.

GM: (Laughs)

CS: She's a year older than I am, almost, almost a year.

GM: Were you raised in the Catholic Church?

CS: Yeah.

GM: And were you involved in, like the Holy Ghost festivals?

CS: Yeah, yeah.

GM: Can you tell me a little about that or....?

CS: No, I attended the Holy Ghost but I didn't do anything.

GM: You didn't play music at that...

CS: No, no. My son was an altar boy for about four or five years. You know, I was very proud of that. And my wife goes to church every Sunday, my son more so. If he misses church, he goes crazy, so used to that. So they go to church and I stay home. I pray to God at home. You know I think of God constantly. I've seen people go to church and come out and can't wait to light a cigarette or go home and booze or go home and make love, or what have you. They come out and light a cigarette before they get out of the door. So I said that's hypocritical. I told my wife, that's hypocritical. I can't see that. You know, they go to church and confess their sins and in ten minutes they come out sinning right away, you know, booze and all that. Now my wife doesn't smoke. We quit smoking a long time ago. My children, none of them ever smoked. We smoked, but we quit.

GM: Well, especially in playing music, I would imagine, did you smoke very much during the...

CS: Well, when I---oh, yes! Because you light a cigarette, put it in the ash tray, by the time you look at it, it's gone. You know, you keep looking at it. You keep putting cigarettes in the ash tray. So I---I was going to work one night when I told my wife, "The heck with this." I always took two packs of cigarettes to work then, boy (laughs), the hell with this, I quit. That's it, I'm quitting. And I went to work and I told the guys and they all blowing smoke in my face. I said, "Go ahead, my mind's made up, I don't care." As long as--didn't bother me, just a little. I had a will and that was it. So I quit smoking for six-and-a-half years then. And I said, "I wonder how it is to smoke again." I took one drag and nearly fell over. Honest to God. Hit me right in the head. So I said, "This is it!"

GM: What about--did you ever hold any other kind of job besides playing music?

CS: Well, when I was very young, I worked at the Love's Bakery. And it was a killing job. Everything from the ovens came to me. I had to break the crackers and straighten them. So hot, you had to use gloves. And they had, what do you call? Christmas mix, like animal cookies. And they came in steel trays and you have a rack way up high and you have to put them up there, you know. Well, that was something else. Christmas mix, came in steel trays, you only had four big boxes. You

take them and dump 'em in the boxes, you know, all together. So the boxes were filled up. And I got burnt so many times, the box would fill up and I'm supposed to pick an elevator to bring down the boxes, and send me new boxes. I waited and waited and rack after rack came. We had to make gloves out of flour sacks. It was so hot, you know, for me to hold them. And so I says, "This is it!" I took off my gloves, went to my car and walked out and I say, "I can't have any of this!"

Then I worked Pearl Harbor for about two-and-a-half years.

GM: What did you do there?

CS: I went Pearl Harbor four days after the war broke out. I saw a mess. Was a mess. Ah, terrible. Ships on--on a dry dock, ships are all, like curled up, you know. Like the Arizona was down and the Oklahoma was over on its side. It was a terrible mess.

GM: So what did you do then?

CS: I was a painter, I was in maintenance, maintenance. Take care of painting everything, mostly painting. And I got out of there in about two-and-a-half years or so. So they sent me to the medical, the med, you know, the Navy. And he puts me on a table and he goes like [pushes in his stomach], "Does this hurt?" Oh, I wanted to kill him. You know, it's my belly and he goes, "Eh, does this hurt?"

So, I say, "You damn right it does, you know."

(Laughter)

So I got a medical discharge. Maybe he caused my aneurysm, who knows. He really hit me hard. So I got a medical discharge and my status was good. That's how it was....

GM: Oh, were you actually in the service then, or you...

CS: No, I wasn't in the service.

GM: You just worked at Pearl Harbor?

CS: Yeah, they needed me real bad.

(Laughter)

And also, I played music lots of the time, when I was there. In the band.

GM: So, well how do you feel looking back over the years, towards, I mean--when did you retire from being a musician?

CS: Well, I don't consider myself retired.

GM: Right.

CS: Don't say I'm retired now, okay, I'll say I'm retired. And [until] about 1968 or '69, I worked a club in the Mainland for eight years. I stayed in that club for eight years. And they were a nice group there.

GM: What club, where?

CS: The Shamrock. Guess what nationality?

GM: Irish.

CS: Are you Irish?

GM: Yes, uh huh.

CS: I love the Irish.

GM: But what city...?

CS: I was recommended see, by another musician that worked there. So they came over to the club I was working at with another guy. And I sat there and he said well, "Come down. Go to work here."

I said, "Fine." One night I went home with eighty-something dollars. Just putting in my pocket. That's quite a lot in my pockets, twenties and you know, eighty and forty, fifty, sixty dollars every night. And I had a good friend that was--he was a rich guy and he'd throw money--he'd burn the money and throw 'em in my saxophone and I get it out quick. I made a lot of money in tips and I made pretty good salary there. It was just uh three or four nights, that's about it.

GM: And what city was this in or...?

CS: I beg your pardon.

GM: What city?

CS: This was in Costa Mesa.

GM: Oh, I see. In California, then. And for eight years?

CS: Yeah, Costa Mesa.

GM: What years was that?

CS: Oh, I got out of that. That must have been around 1960, little after that. Now I retired in, 1969, come to think of it. 'Cause I was there and then I worked there and I retired.

GM: And came back to Hawaii?

CS: Well, no. When we went to the Mainland, I told my wife, "I'm gonna go to the Mainland for six months, that's it, I'm coming home." I stayed fifteen years.

GM: Oh, my goodness! So when did you go the Mainland then?

CS: When?

GM: Yes.

CS: In 1960. See, I remember, went 1945, my daughters were little kids then [first trip for a visit] and 1960 we went up there. And we stayed for fifteen years that time.

GM: You stayed, when you went in sixties, then you stayed till 1975?

CS: Yeah, my wife came home but I stayed another year. I had some very nice tenants.

GM: And you went up there to play music, that's the main thing that you went for?

CS: No, not initially, I just went up there to take a vacation and to stay about six months and come home. And the first time I went, [1945] my doctor told me to take a rest, go away, you know. So I stayed four months. I spent \$3,000.00. We just went nightclubs all over the place, you know. And we did a switch, the guy that lived there was coming to Hawaii. So we took his house and he took my house.

GM: I see.

CS: You know, no get involved. Then when I came back, they stayed at my house for another month with me. And while we were up there, his wife was in the house for a month. So I lost out in the deal. They were nice. Let's see, where were we?

GM: So you went up for six months vacation, but then what? You started playing music and you decided to stay?

CS: Yeah, I stayed fifteen years, I played lot of clubs too. But that was the longest I play in one club. That's a long time for a musician. You know usually you stay a year, six months, or two years. So I made a lot of friends there. Like I said, they used to call me out. I'd introduce myself and I ask what would you like to hear. Then we start talking, he become my friend. And the people used to come in. I swear, they always used to come in, and say, "Uh, Charlie, I came here to hear you." And he'd come up to the piano bar and sit right next to me and real--I uh--I love to make friends with people, being a musician. And when I was at the Oasis Club, I used to go around to people ask them, "Would you like to hear your name on the radio?" Some of them would say no. Because they weren't with their spouse, you know what I mean?

GM: (Laughs)

CS: So we didn't do it. With the people that were there, oh they'd love to hear their names, you know they'd probably call up their family, "Hey, listen for my name." I did the announcing and all that.

GM: What radio station was this?

CS: Uh (pause), I think it was KHON.

GM: This was an evening show or...?

CS: Was a half-hour show on the air. And there were big people in because they hear it and they come in. And I tell them, "Come in and have some fun," you know.

GM: But it was broadcast from the Oasis?

CS: Yeah, that was remote. And movie people would come there. They had the uh--what's her name--so and so. I don't think you remember her. She come in there, she was so drunk that night. She was so loaded. So what the hell, she said, "Hello, honey."

I said, "What do you want to hear something?"

She said, "Anything you do is fine." (Laughs)

GM: Over the years, how did you deal with, I'm sure, you know, sometimes you would have drunks that were really?

CS: Well, I like the club where there was a sailor in the front row. And we played loud music. Was a strip show. And he's sitting right there at the table and he's out cold. And I go right next to him, I'm blowing my horn in his ear, and he won't wake up. So I got on the mike and [CS whistles], "Now hear this" and he woke up.

(Laughter)

You know how they do in the Navy, right? [reveille] That was funny, you know what I mean? (Laughs) And I never had trouble with drunks. I got along all right. Some guys would steal my drinks. You know, one guy stole a drink one night. I had to hit him in the mouth. (Laughs) He was all....

(Laughter)

Couple of drinks. We're standing here at the piano bar and pretty soon I looked and it was gone, you know. So, then I said I better watch this guy. So another come on, I had drinks on the house. And my friend used to come and he'd buy one of them mixers. You know that container they mix the drinks in?

GM: Yeah.

CS: With vodka and screwdriver. And I drink all that and I drink some more. I was a heavy drinker. And my friend came in and I was sitting and he said, "Hi Charlie." And he knocks this whole thing over me."

GM: Oh my!

CS: How miserable I was. Sticky and wet, and cold and I stayed all night like that. I should have gone home and change, but that was quite a distance from there to home. (Laughs)

GM: But tell me, what your feeling is about having been a musician.

CS: No regrets, I loved it. Every minute of it, every minute of it. I might just make up my mind and go back to it again.

GM: Do you still practice?

CS: I don't practice. I never practice in my life. As far as jazz and variations, I did on the job. You get from that guy and this guy gets from this guy and I get, see. I won't copy any solo from a record. I can

get ideas from them, see. And you get ideas and you do your own variations within the chords, you know, you have a chord. That's how I did it.

GM: But how do you get so that it all comes together in the group?

CS: Well, just so you within the chord, whatever chord you're playing. Whatever chord you play, you figure your horn into that chord and onto the next chord, you know what's coming up. Because you know what you're playing, this is your music now. This is after I read music. Was three of us and once in a while a drummer would come and sit in. And a guitar man, he had a guitar with four necks. He made one with three, and two, three, then four. That was a thing to see, you know. He had a six-string base, he had a twelve-string guitar, a regular guitar and a Spanish guitar, the whole thing. The people would come in and look that. He work for Rickenbocker and also for, what was the name of that company? Work for Gibson or something like that. So he knew the trade. He built it in his garage.

GM: How many horns have you had over the years or...?

CS: You mean myself?

GM: Do you still have your first one that you got?

CS: No, I'm sorry I sold that. My father gave me that and till this day, I regret that day. You know, I'm sorry. I should have kept it. Just hang it up on the wall or something. I had, oh I guess, about eight or nine horns. Now, I have one, two, three, four, four horns, including clarinet. And I had a B-flat, small B-flat soprano. I bought--this one I have--I bought in 1952. It's a Selmer. This is the finest horn in the world, made in France. See, all their keys are power hammered.

END OF SIDE ONE

## SIDE TWO

CS: [Talking about various horns, quality] They just bend on him. The pads wouldn't work right. So he just kept it. I says, "You gonna be sorry you buy a cheap horn like that." He sure was. He went crazy with it.

GM: What does a good horn cost these days?

CS: Well, you might not believe this. I bought my horn for \$300. This was back in '52 or something like that. And I had horns before that, come to think of it. Selmers. I owned about three Selmers, you know as the years go by. And today a horn like mine, an alto, will run you over \$1,500. The Selmer, now I'm talking about. The tenor runs about \$2,000, baritone probably \$2,500. And they're not plated, they just burnished brass and they lacquer it. I had my horn done by a guy that worked in the Selmer factory. And to this day, it's about oh, fifteen years ago. That thing was great, just great. He knew the thing. He was an old man and he did a great job on that horn.

GM: What did one cost way back, say after you---when you bought your second one or something, what did it cost then?

CS: My second one?

GM: Not the one your dad gave you but...?

CS: No, well the one my dad gave me in them days, cost you probably \$150. And it was silver plated gold bellum. It was a Buscher.

GM: That was a lot of money in those days?

CS: Yes, it was a Buscher, it was a Buscher made.

GM: How did you deserve such a nice present?

CS: Well, I was a nice guy.

(Laughter)

I was very good to my parents. And after that horn, I went into Selmers already, see. So I had about three Selmer altos, see, including this one. But they were little more than \$200. Then when I bought mine, I got a discount you know. Harry's Music Shop, I knew him very well. He owned the place so he says, "Hey, come on. You're a musician." So he said, "Three hundred."

I say, "You got it." Usually starts 350, 360 dollars something. So I got it for 300. And to this day, I won't play any kind of horn but Selmers. They almost play by themselves. Such a great horn, you know, no effort. You put in hardly any effort to it. And you got a great tone, the intonation is very good. They uh, like I said, they made it in France. France has the best brass in the world for musical instruments or what have you. So they pretty up about that.

GM: How did you learn things like that over time, playing different ones or talking with other musicians or...?

CS: No, I always played alto. I played tenor and baritone but alto was number one in clarinet.

GM: No, but I meant---you said France has the best brass in the world...?

CS: Well, I read about it and it said, you know. And it's a known fact, their brass is the best in the world, you know whatever it is. Something's got some chemical in it or whatever. All the horns, even trumpets, trombones and there's one called LaBrunk, one called Besson, I think. They make very good horns too, saxophones, clarinets, and French.

(Telephone rings. Taping stops, then resumes).

GM: Okay, what did your family think of you playing music?

CS: Well, I guess my wife didn't like it at first. She said, "I don't want you playing music in front of all those people.

You know I says, "When you married me, I was a musician. That's it, a musician." Once in a while she'd squawk, you know. But not anymore for a long time.

GM: Would she go?

CS: My family was kind of more or less proud of me, their son playing music. I loved my parents very much, they loved me too, I know they do because I was real good to them. They liked it, they liked me doing that. My wife Marjorie didn't care for it too much. I said, "Look when we got married, I was a musician, you know that. I'm gonna be a musician."

GM: Did your parents ever go to hear you play at different places?

CS: No, I'm not sure. I suppose so, maybe once or twice, I'm not sure. But my brothers, sisters, they would come out once in a while. My wife would come out to check on me (laughs) or whatever.

GM: Well, that's another thing. Now you often hear that musicians are always, you know, women are always after them. Did you have that problem too?

CS: That's true. I never chased a girl in my life, never. I swear to God.

GM: They all chased you?

CS: That's true, that's very true. So did my wife chase me, I'll put that in there.

GM: (Laughs)

CS: I remember at the dance hall, and she saw me, she come by, "Charlie." That was it, you know. I never chased a woman in my life. Can you turn that off for me, I want to tell you something.

(Taping stops, then resumes).

GM: I know nowadays they call 'em like groupies, you know that follow after bands. Did you have certain women hangers-on that some of the men in the bands married?

CS: Some of them got married, and sometimes they got married, they're not around anymore, you know, the wedding bells are breaking up the old gang of mine, you know and that thing. And they got married, some of them die. It's kind of hard to replace a man after you've been with them in a group for so long. If one guy goes out, there's a big hole in there, you together. You gotta replace someone now, see. I don't care how good the guy is, but it's just different. It's kind of uh....

GM: Personality, music, everything.

CS: Yeah. It's a hang-up because he doesn't know our style of playing until maybe a couple of weeks then maybe we're jiving again. Getting in there. A drummer is, if he's a good drummer, he's a good drummer. You don't have to worry about him making music, you know.

GM: When you had your own band, how did you go about hiring people or how did you put the band together?

CS: Well, I knew the musicians that were capable of putting out some good stuff. So I'd call them first, see. I know the piano man, drummers all that. I knew their capacities already, so I'd hitch on those first, right. Then there's less headaches, then if I have to I already know, the guy's not so good, but you know, I says, "Listen, don't play too much." (Laughs) Then he gets fine, that's how he comes along. But I just handpick 'em.

GM: As the band leader then, did you take care of like paying them, too? And how did you get the leads to the jobs or where you were going to play?

CS: Well, like I said I worked at all around the place at like La Hula Rhumba for instance, this ten-piece band. This warrant officer came up there, and asked me to come down and work for him. His name is Tujor, T-U-J-O-R. And so I went work there, that's where I made \$125 a night, \$250 a week, two nights. And I paid the guys way over scale. I could have paid each guy \$16 a night.

GM: How much?

CS: I could have paid each guy \$16 a night, that's all.

GM: Sixteen?

CS: Sixteen, one six. That's scale, and was scale at that time. And I would make a mint of money because I had ten men, nine men. See, I paid them \$37.50 a night. So I paid them \$75.00 a week. A week for two nights' work. And guys that were working in town, were making that much or less for six, five or six nights. So they wouldn't ever leave me. I respect every musician I had. And they liked me 'cause I was one of them all, you know. One of those things. I was one of them. We got rehearsal, I said, "Anybody got idea, what shall we do here?" And they all give me ideas, their own ideas, so we put them together, and say let's try this, let's try that. When it's cut and dry, then we do it like that.

GM: Have you ever done any composing yourself or writing music?

CS: I wrote a song when I was about twelve years old.

(Laughter)

I don't even remember what it was, was a little love song. My friend and myself, we just little kids, when we wrote it. I don't remember, the title or how it goes. But today he's an alcoholic so bad. I've seen him on the street. Breaks my heart. He was such a nice kid. He had two people in his family blind, a brother and sister. And he had played good guitar and he had a sense of humor, very nice kid. And now I see him over here, maybe he's dead, I don't know. I saw him about two months ago. He's dirty and raggedy. He went in a liquor store, come out with a bottle of wine

or something, barefooted and sheesh! I looked at him and say....I didn't know him at first. I don't know how he got that way. And he was all shaking, you know. Oh, what a mess! I didn't want to talk to him. I might embarrass him or something, you know what I mean. He probably don't remember me, I don't know. But that's what he's doing. And his family were very, very poor people.

GM: How have you noticed how music has changed over the years or has it really changed?

CS: Well, number one, rock-and-roll is not music. So, it's noise. You like rock-and-roll? You young people. Rock-and-roll is--there's some good rock. If not too wild--some rock I like. Very few, very little of it. But that screaming and hollering and you can't understand one word they're saying half the time, 'cause the band is so loud or whether or not the band is loud, they're rolling when they're singing. And one-tenth of the words is all "Baby, baby, baby."

(Laughter)

Well, one-hundredth or one-ninety-ninths, I should say. So I don't dig that. That's not music. Music is to me is uh--I like to hear symphony sometime. Not too much, but I listen to it. I like jazz, number one. I like popular music before rock-and-roll came in. And some big people still playing that type of music yet. The top-notch people. Can you imagine playing the guitar and not knowing how to play three chords and making a million dollars? Can you imagine that? They got Elvis [Presley] there, hear tell, he got the cheapest guitar you can buy. You know, all these kids, these rock-and-roll, they're millionaires after that. Not knowing music. See, because I've worked with a guy that played one chord, he didn't know chords at all. He just holds his hand there, goes out there and just strum the guitar all over the floor. And he'd do this to fool the people. Bo Diddly was his name.

(Laughter)

Not holding the chord, just go, "Oooh." No chords at all, just open strings.

(Laughter)

And he got very, very popular. I don't know how. You know who digs today most that kind of music is

fourteen, fifteen-year-old people, kids. And older than that but the meat of the attendance, young kids.

GM: What do you think about the resurgence or renaissance of like the big band sound? You know it was evidently very popular back when you were playing and now it's getting so popular again, right?

CS: I did a jazz concert with Benny Goodman. It was in 1960. Artie Shaw, Glenn Miller, beautiful bands. Count Basie, Duke Ellington, all those bands were just.... And this Count Basie is still going. Duke Ellington died of course. Benny Goodman is still going. Artie Shaw quit. Jimmy Lunsford, I don't think you know him, a long, long time ago. Kurt Bradford [interviewer's father-in-law] worked with him. And Jimmy Lunsford was one of the politest men I ever met in my life, was black. So polite. I don't know if I told you this before or not, if a guy in the band said "Damn," he said, "Don't use that kind of language. It's not nice." And he came over and we talked to him, so polite and real beautiful guy. And he died pretty young. Trummy Young worked with him, too. So Trummy Young, but yet great, great band. The rhythm section was out of this world. He had a special type of rhythm, I don't know. And just moved so smoothly, great, great band. This was way back.

GM: How did you get your jobs as backup for some of the people that you played at the old stadium [Civic Auditorium]?

CS: I think the union office called me. I'm not sure, they ask if I want to play some shows, I say, "Sure."

GM: And who are some of the people that you backed up and when was this...?

CS: Well, on the rock shows and things like that, were like Paul Anka, Fabian, uh, Jimmy Clanton, and Magoon Baker. She was heavy and sang so good and the guys plays guitars and I showed you those pictures. He plays the blues all the time. When I--worked his show, there was a heavy wind storm. Hardly anybody came in, it was a shame. He only worked one night. You know for one night, he charge them \$3,000. They lost money, and they knock down that room it was so badly, knock down a hollow tile wall. The windows in there all the time went bang, bang, bang. (Laughs) It was a terrible night. Oh, Chuck Berry.

GM: Oh yeah.

CS: Many others I've backed up, many others. The pictures, you know. And uh, one was Dean, was still going after that--Dean or something like that. Dean was a very nice kid. The other guys, you know. I can't mention them all. I got another scrap book with a lot of things about that. I backed up a lot of those kids. We really worked hard to make them sound good. A band can hurt a vocalist. If you don't rehearse it right, you know. I'm a stickler for rehearsing. When I was, for instance, at the Warrant Officers Club, when I rehearse if one word is wrong, I said, "Well, let's go over that measure again. Let's go over that measure again." I'd take it from the top. No, there's not one clinker and the guys get it down in the phrasing and everything, the dynamics. I'm more of a perfectionist. I wanna hear it right or I don't want to do it.

When I wen do that pilot for Alfred Apaka under Frank Duvall, well, they got fiddles and everything--violins. And I don't know, I'm up the front row, the fiddles are up there [above and behind him]. And he says, "Second fiddle, change so-and-so note and so-and-so measure to an E-flat instead of an E." Guys imagine, eh, I mean I'll tell you how can he hear? With all that group, he says, "Change that note to an E or whatever, you understand, and measure sixteen or seventeen, the second note...." You know, I'll be darned. I look at that guy and say he must be crazy, so he's a genius. I loved him.

GM: Have you ever played at the Blaisdell [Center], the new arena there, backup or is that after your time?

CS: No, no.

GM: I mean after you had sort of retired?

CS: Are you teasing me? (Laughs)

GM: Well, I can't remember the date that...?

CS: No, I never played there. I played the old one, lots of service, you know. Civic Auditorium on King Street. Now they got a bank up there.

GM: Okay, can you tell me when you were at Pearl City Tavern or how that happened and what it was like going out towards Pearl City?

CS: Well, it was quite a drive, but I enjoyed going to it because I knew we were going to have fun. It was a fun job. And I had five pieces there, a group of five, had

trumpet, sax, piano, bass, and drums, yeah. And we did all our rehearsing shows. I liked it there because there's something happening all the time. You play a solo and you play jazz and you play, people dancing. They pull the stage out and it goes under the bandstand. And they pull this thing out and they actually can dance, even dance and some people fall off.

(Laughter)

Yeah, really. They do, they fall off, it's about that high [twelve inches] off the floor. I enjoyed that job very much. That was about 19--around 1950, I think. About 1950, '51.

GM: So that was before--no freeway to go out there?

CS: No, no. Then he hire an all girl band from the Mainland. And I think they were all lesbians. (Laughs) So they were so rotten. He says, "They're rotten." I'm not saying. So he says, "Come back again."

I says, More money."

He said, "Okay." So I went back. He says, "contract."

I says, "Fine. Our contract was up, go ahead," and I went down to hear them and, my God, it's terrible. He said, "It was terrible." I don't say anybody is terrible, they weren't very up there. I think they were all lesbians, everybody was talking, they're lesbians. And so he let them go and I went back for more money. I stayed there for quite a while then I went to the Oasis Cafe, nice club. I stayed there two-and-a-half--I played Japanese shows then. Japanese girls dancing up there, reading Japanese music. (Laughs) There was one girl she was exceptionally beautiful. She was just white and just beautiful now, beautiful body and everything. They were all nice but she--she stood out. And they all loved me. Coming from Japan, I put on a pair of sunglasses. One says, "Oh, Hollywood, eh, Hollywood."

(Laughter)

You know you wear dark glasses, oh God. Those were the ones I taught English and they taught me some Japanese.

GM: I see. Where abouts was the--that's the old Oasis right? Or is it still...?

CS: No same place, but they enlarged it. It's on Waialae and over where Kapahulu meets Waialae. It's right there.

GM: I remember when I made twenty-one, that's why. Some friends....

CS: You went up there. I saw you. I saw you following around with three guys. When--what year was that?

GM: Uh, must have been about 1960 or '61, I think. So I guess you were gone to the Mainland?

CS: I missed you, yeah. Sometimes. Why not? Live, you know, live it up.

GM: So when you played on the Mainland, were you always in the Costa Mesa area or did...?

CS: No, I lived in Santa Ana first and I went to Westminster then I went to Berkeley. Berkeley I managed some sixteen apartments for these Spanish people. I did all right. And that's it, Santa Ana, Westminster, Berkeley, then Honolulu, come back home.

GM: And then why did you decide to come back home to Kailua?

CS: Well, to begin with, my wife had come home a year before me. And I stayed and there were too many good looking women there, I was afraid of myself.

(Laughter)

That's true. Some beautiful young girls, just beautiful, all, you know. So I says, "I gotta go home." And my wife would call me, and call me, I say, "I'm coming home." I called New Year's Eve. I must have spent a hundred dollars calling and she was at my brother's house. I was half shot.

(Laughter)

So, it was all right. I mean, my wife came home actually from there four times. Because she came back to take care of her mother and her step-father. And they had other family and none of them wanted to do it. They have a son here and he wouldn't--my wife had to come from the Mainland here to take care--of her mother, sick and her step-father sick. But she stayed two, three weeks and go back. The first thing, you know, "Come to Honolulu, I'm sick." Three times she

came to take care of her parents. The step-father, you know parents.... And then--and twice I think after that she came back and I was there alone. She took a lot of chances doing that. Well, maybe I don't know.

(Laughter)

I only know she came home.

(Laughter)

GM: So are any of your children musicians or musically inclined?

CS: No. None. Not really. My son was learning guitar. He was learning rock and I shouldn't have done that. I told him don't learn that junk. And he was doing well, just few lessons. And to me, I did a wrong thing, a very wrong thing. Our kids should play the instrument they want, how he wants to do it. Don't ever deny 'em that. I was so--he loves rock-and-roll now, see. He's thirty-two. No, no almost thirty-two. And he'd rock and rock and rock and rock-and-roll. Now he's beginning to appreciate a little jazz. I try to make him used to that. He said, "I don't like that too much."

(Laughter)

But some people he likes, certain people. The greatest singer I think that ever lived was Nat King Cole, yes the guy had soul coming out.... Frank Sinatra is great, great, great but this guy [Cole] had something. I loved the guy, yeah. I met him and he was so nice and he had a brother that couldn't blow his nose. Played lousy piano, lousy singer and he thought he was so great, Eddie Cole, his brother. And Nat was so proud, he brought him to a party with him at Lau Yee Chai. We had a big party as a matter of fact. And he was the most wonderful guy. Singing or talking or whatever, polite and very, very modest, with all that greatness in him, you know. He died too young.

GM: Yeah.

CS: Forty-seven, I think, he just died too early. When he died, I cried, I swear.

GM: But I think a lot of people did, just even his voice was so terrific.

CS: I have his records. Once in a while, I play it. Just gets to me, you know, see [tears starting in CS's eyes].

GM: (Laughs) If you had any words of wisdom, say for young people coming up today that wanted to be musicians, what kind of things would you...?

CS: Okay. Practice hard and a lot, long hours if you can. If you can't, do it one hour a day. Don't smoke pot or drink, forget that. Because lot of musicians think if they smoke pot and drink that they playing better. But I heard guys that they were drunk and they're good musicians. They all messed up. They don't know what they're doing. And don't--never mind all this stuff, needles and all that. I knew a kid, he was a nice kid. He start doing that, he went to pieces, this saxophone player--young kid. He went to pieces. And finally I got him out of it myself. I put him in the corner, I says, "Eh, you crazy or what?" And he'd do it right on the job. He go in the back room, surprise you see needles all over the place. The kid is so nice, nice kid. I loved him. Cute little boy. But--then he got out of it, he's probably smoking pot or something. I've been in another job where they were smoking pot. I said, "Forget it. I don't want. I don't need it."

GM: Why is there, do you think a need for that kind of stimulation or whatever?

CS: They think that they're high up here and they doing better. They think they're playing better stuff. But they're not. Absolutely not.

Now, um, I was going to say something. Oh, I played in the Cessna in Okole Maluna, a nightclub. And they all, the guys there smoking. One guy takes me out to his car and says, "Let's take a ride." Say what they call it, bush, tea, pot, what have you, weed. They say, "You want some bush? Say, come on out to the car."

"No, I don't want." They took me out, you know, to get some marijuana. And he said he had in his car. I said, "Let's go back, forget it." And he was married. He married a white girl--Filipino boy. He married a white girl and then she was an entertainer. And he became a judo expert. He had a school in the Mainland. I think he's back here now. We're good friends, really good friends. I said, "I don't need." I didn't do it. And they were all high.

GM: Was there much of that going on, even say, when you were younger and playing?

CS: Oh, yeah! Way back in 1931, when I was at the Reno Ballroom. A guy come in there and start smoking that stuff, the trumpet player, and here he played with great big bands on the Mainland. I mean beautiful bands. You know he was a fine trumpet player. Starts smoking that stuff, start offering it to us and he got high. He go so high. One night he had a beautiful, expensive trumpet, a Bach trumpet, B-A-C-H. He put it on the floor and stomped on it, you know, he's so high. He said, [about himself] "I was rotten." He played the greatest solo I've heard in my life from him. His work, he played so great and so well. He throws it on the ground, stomps on it. And the guy picks it up. I wished I picked it up and took it home, put it in chains, hung it on the wall. It was no good anymore. The first thing he did, was broke off the mouthpiece by the neck and threw it down and stomped on it. What a souvenir that would have been. And he was always high, always. Them days you can buy the stuff cheap, you know. Couple of bucks or whatever. He was either high or drunk, or both. And he was a nice person, very nice. He was related to some rich people over here. He was Portuguese. They wouldn't associate with him.

GM: You had mentioned that you played with the Puerto Rican Band for a while. How did that happen?

CS: Mmmm, the drummer, Angel Souza was his name. This guy quit or something and Angel Souza told them to hire me. Something like that. And then they hired me. It was fun. (Laughs) Only Puerto Rican because I got to sing in Puerto Rican, you know, anything. Then all of them polillo le molloles [used in conjunction with striking sticks, such as with percussion instruments] and all that stuff by now, I forget the rest, that's all I remember. That means light the match or cigarettes or something like that.

GM: I'm not sure.

CS: [CS speaks in Spanish.]

(Laughter)

And they play maracas and all that stuff. They have on their crazy hats.

GM: Where did you play with them? With the Puerto Rican band?

CS: Elks Club. The old Elks Club, yeah, that's one. Couple of them died. It's about four or five brothers,

it was a family. And there was a guy that joined them that just sang. Was a great big guy you know. And that was Paul Byrd. He weighed like a ton! Oh, my God, that guy was heavy. (Laughs) My Auntie and several other people went--he was so big and heavy, he must have weighed about 250 pounds. He was a big guy. But not much fat. He was tall and husky, like me. [Charlie Santos is tall but slight and somewhat frail of build.]

(Laughter)

So I enjoyed that. I had fun on the job with them people.

GM: It sounds like you pretty much enjoyed playing music and everything you've done.

CS: Right, right. I enjoyed that job because it was fun being with them guys, they were all nice. They were nice to me, I was nice to them, it worked out like that. I don't know whether Rick wen quit. You know he wasn't fired. He was a good sax man. He probably quit and then this guy asked him to hire me. So I got in, it was easy. Just learn the Puerto Rican tunes and uh--we played all kinds, not only that what they call it Borinque. Borinque style, eh. And I had fun.

GM: What about um, there used to be a place called Ayala's Ballroom, did you ever play there?

CS: Ayala's Ballroom, no I don't think so. I played the old Elks Club and then the new one.

GM: Where abouts is that located?

CS: The old Elk's Club I forgot where they was now. It was a shack--I--who knows? Not much of a place, but the new one, I played there before and when they renovated it, I think they tore it down and rebuilt, now it's nice beautiful out there.

GM: That's all at the end of Waikiki?

CS: Yes.

GM: Used to be somebody's old estate, I think.

CS: No, no, you're thinking of--I worked there too--where they had the Barefoot Bar, Queen's Surf.

GM: Queen's Surf, right.

CS: No, that was Chris Holme's property. President Roosevelt slept there when he came over here. And I went and saw his bedroom and everything. They showed us his bedroom. So Elks Club, they were nice too. They were nice people. And eleven o'clock, as the bells toll, you wonder what the heck's going on here. You don't play music, everybody is silent. One guy's giving a spiel there and that's it. And we go on again, we go to the bar and get a couple of drinks. Half of the time, they'd buy it for us. I'd have so many drinks bought for me. Half of the time, they'd buy it for us. I'd have so many drinks bought for me. You know people buy the drink. And if you take a drink, here's the problem. If you take a drink from this guy and another guy says, "I'll buy you a drink."

I said, "No I don't want to." They hurt, they really hurt. So you got to drink it. Say, "Okay, I'll have a drink." And you're supposed to be at the Piano Bar. In case they come in, like the mixing glass. This guy was six foot nine, a friend of mine. He was young and big, solid as a rock and his name is Jim something. And he'd come in there and buy me those mixing glasses, six ounce of vodka and orange juice. You know, mixing glass here. And I'd drink that and they'd fix some more and drink some. Well, I never messed up with that. No, I guess the orange juice did as you know.

GM: But how do you handle?

CS: I used to do whiskey and milk. Sounds crazy but I drank that sometime.

GM: But in the course of the evening, if people buy you drinks all night, how do you manage to keep from getting tipsy?

CS: I managed real well. I managed. One time I (laughs) came out with--was a break, ten minutes now, break, all right. I got off the stand and this Japanese contractor called me to the bar. I didn't know him from Adam. So he says, "Have a drink." I say--and his order is Teacher's, very expensive whiskey, straight shot. "Have another."

"Okay."

"Have another."

I said, "No, gotta go back."

"Have another." He bought me seven drinks. He was that kind of a guy. "Come on, have one, give 'em one."

I went back to the stand like this [waves his hands indicating tipsy].

GM: (Laughs)

CS: That's how I got so loaded in ten minutes. I drank seven drinks. He kept saying, "Down it, down it. He was too nice of a guy, you know. I forgot his name. He was a contractor. They had all the monies, spend the money for all the people around here. Boy, I didn't know whether I was coming or going. That's the only time.

GM: Learned your lesson, huh?

CS: Yeah. No, I drink a lot on the places, but I wouldn't drink whiskey straight. Only if I drink whiskey, I'd chase it with something. I'd chase it with soda. I never drank whiskey with coke, seven-up, or ginger ale. You know why? The sugar makes you sick in that. I used either water or soda. Like...

GM: Tonic water?

CS: Seltzer water. Most of them I drink it with water. I like to pinpoint the thing, you see. And I'm fine. One day I went to work and I came home 10:30 next morning. My wife says, "Hi." Uh, what happened the bunch of guys from Hickam field came to the place and you buy your own. You bring your own booze, and we'd sell the mixes there. And they came in with a case of beer, I swear, a gallon of hooch, vodka, gin. Everything you can think of. They were boozing. So they send me up water glasses of whiskey, you know. And drinking them. All night I felt great so I drove them to Hickam Field, I drove them back. I made friends with these people. So the guys said, "Wait a while. I get another bottle."

(Laughter)

So the V.O. was very good whiskey and I--they brought a half a gallon bottle of V.O. They come in half gallon too. We sat in my car and drank till about ten o'clock that morning. Then he said, "Drive me back to the bar, then we're going to drink some more." And I drove, nothing happened. I must have been drunk. And then when we got there, there was little bit in the bottle

and they said, "Take it home" So I bring the bottle in and my wife say, "Hi."

And I says, "Hi, how are you?"

(Laughter)

A bottle of whiskey that size, the best, cost them \$2.10. In Japan they bring it over. And over here, what kills us is the tax. And I had a tenant once, he was a commander. And he used to bring booze home, he say, "You drink?"

I say, "Well, once in a while I would drink."

He said, "Here take this home."

I said, "I don't want no bottle." He said, "That cost me \$1.55 a fifth." God, can you imagine the tax you pay here? The taxes on booze. Why not?

GM: During the war years, when you folks played at various clubs so that the men would have or people there would have something to enjoy even though it was wartime...?

CS: Yeah, people would go to the nightclubs. It wouldn't be crowded like it was before that because a lot of people didn't have permits to drive out or whatever. I've picked up a couple of guys, you know, musicians and we'd go out. The other guys would come on their own. But it was a weird thing and the nightclub was so dim, dim, dim, dim. And we had to black out all the windows and doors now. All black out. So I put cardboard in every window. And it was daytime you air it out. But you can uh--but some people put a box-like over and they can leave their windows open and it's all painted black inside. And my house was like a rooming house. Everybody--when they got scared, they came to my house and sleep on the floor. And my brother-in-law came from uh--he lived at Damon Tract. It was right close to Pearl Harbor. They came over, you know, with their kids and was crazy. And then you gotta watch out. You know what they were doing, the guys who patrolling the roads, if they could see your light, they'd shoot it out. Bang! They shot out many lights. A block away from where I live, they had a cannon. One day that went off.

GM: Oh, my God!

CS: I was--it was a large cannon, boom. And lot of people claimed damages because their houses gave and everything you know. And when the thing went off, the whole place jumped. Crazy! Maybe they get drunk and shoot it off for nothing, they were no Japs up there. The thing was so loud, was frightening, you know.

GM: Well, sir any....

CS: And our great soldiers, would get drunk and fill up the streets and hitting their rifles against the telephone pole, you know, breaking it up, eh.

(Laughter)

GM: When you were in the nightclubs on the bases then, did--what kind of lights did you use to see to read your music?

CS: Very dim lights. We used lights on the stand. There were lights and you turn 'em on and off. There wasn't no bright light or anything. But I think that club was sort of blacked out itself. 'Cause the lighting was very, very dim. And you see a lot of lovers coming in and going in the corner, you know with dim lights.

(Laughter)

You could hardly see anybody.

GM: Which club was this?

CS: That was at Roy's something, uh I forgot the name of the club.

GM: Well, was it on the base or was it?

CS: No, no was on there.

GM: Oh, I see.

CS: On Ala Moana. Not far from where Kewalo Inn was.

GM: And when you were playing with McDiarmid was Claire [Clara] Inter already performing too with him?

CS: Who?

GM: Hilo Hattie.

CS: Oh, yeah. In fact, he wrote that song for her. ["Hilo Hattie Does the Hilo Hop"] And she made money for him

by doing that dance. They both got money. And now, she changed her name to Hilo Hattie, you know what I mean. She's smart. She was very funny. She was nice, she was very funny.

GM: Is there anything else that you'd like to add at this point or questions that I haven't asked you that maybe you'd want to talk about?

CS: Well, I think, for one thing, I think had a very good life. I enjoyed that. I enjoyed my life very much. Enjoyed what I was doing, you know. And I worked with a lot of people. I worked with even strippers. And they want to change their number, so they call me in the dressing room and some of these girls nothing, nothing on! And it just didn't phase me, maybe....

(Laughter)

So, and you know, when you work for them girls, the band leader can get anyone he wants. They just offer themselves. Because they want you to do a good job for them. And any one you saw in there and many many, more. I played for a lot of them in theatres and nightclubs, Pearl City Tavern. I mean it's funny. All of them were on the make for the band leaders which was me, you know. Maybe, I don't know.

(Laughter)

I wouldn't--they call me in the dressing room and there's a girl plumb naked and massage back and she say, "Massage my front," you know.

I said, "What the matter with you? You think I like this?"

"Damn right, I like it!"

(Laughter)

GM: But you managed to stay married all these fifty years.

CS: My wife didn't catch me.

(Laughter)

No, I'm just kidding. I managed to stay married all these years.

GM: Are you married fifty years yet?

CS: No, next April 16. But I'm not old. I don't feel old. Age is a feeling, you know, age up here [points to head]. If you feel old, you gonna be old when you young, see. I add something to this. I know a guy that was thirty years old in the nightclub. And he was husky, handsome, beautiful head. That guy was out of this world. Lot of beautiful women on the make for this guy. And he shy away from them. The guy was so bad, he could be a movie actor. He was so good-looking and well built. So one night, a pig came in. She looked like she just come from mud wrestling or something. He says, "Look at that, lend me twenty dollars."

And I says, "Sure, here. What are you going to do?"

"I'm gonna take her out."

"You want to take that out?"

He says, "Yes."

Next time, he came back he pay me my twenty dollars. And I say, "Eh, how you make out?"

He say, "Nothing happened." (Laughs) That guy have women after him by--in droves. You know as soon as they laid their eyes on the guy, they fall in love with him. You know, I don't understand. Maybe he was bashful or backward or whatever you want to call it, you know. He didn't--well, he didn't have to make out, they were making out, you know what I mean. They wanted him. But that was very funny. I says, "Jesus Christ, you want to borrow twenty dollars for that!"

(Laughter)

Now that's how it goes. I enjoyed my life. I enjoyed playing very much, 'cause I love music and I love the horn. I love the people I work with. If a guy's a rotten guy, I won't hire him, character or whatever. He might be a fine musician, but if he's a lousy character, I won't hire him at all. So, I'm proud that I worked with Benny Goodman, very proud. I worked on Frank Duvall, a genius you know. I worked with all these people like Trummy [Young] all that. Calvin Cabral and so many rock stars. I enjoyed it all. And that's it.

GM: Okay.

CS: I'd do it all over again.

GM: That's terrific, that's good to feel that way.

CS: Because I'm only twenty-one. I've been married fifty years almost, but I'm twenty-one. Remember that, I'm young.

GM: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW

# **FIVE LIFE HISTORIES**

**ETHNIC STUDIES ORAL  
HISTORY PROJECT**

**University of Hawaii-Manoa**

**June 1983**