

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: John Hirota

John Hirota was born and raised in Hale‘iwa with his family of four sisters (two older and two younger). He spent most of his days with the boys in the neighborhood playing American sports and hanging out on the beach. He learned how to cook from the friends he spent his days with. He learned to fish from his grandfathers on both sides of his family until he was accepted into Kamehameha boarding school for boys in Honolulu in the seventh grade. While attending Kamehameha, John participated in the school glee club and traveled to the mainland for a tour. He recalls fun memories involving weekend excursions to the movie theaters, the pool hall, and bakery. John describes the expectations on him were to just graduate high school, but one teacher got him to apply to the University of Redlands, and to his surprise, he was accepted along with four other students. After earning his business degree, he traveled more with the United States Army. After returning from Europe, he met his wife, settled down, and started his 30-year career with the sugar plantation. The lessons John hopes to pass on to his grandchildren, and anyone listening to him, is to enjoy the country, respect your neighbors and elders, and enjoy your life.



ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

John Hirota (JH)

Queen Lili‘uokalani Church, Hale‘iwa, O‘ahu

February 29, 2020

BY: Emily Ricker (ER), Hannah Fee (HF), Devin Murphy (DM), Yi Yu Lai (YL), Keola Silva (KS)

Formal Interview Part 1:

ER: Alright! (laughs) So thanks so much for meeting with us Uncle John. Just as a reminder, for the record, my name’s Emily and I’m here with Fee and Devin and Yi-Yu.

HF: They’re recording.

ER: Yeah they’re recording for this first half. It’s February 29th, we’re at Lili‘uokalani Church in Waialua, and just like last time if there are any questions you’re uncomfortable with. . .

JH: Mhm, kay.

ER: Just veer us away. Totally under no obligation. So do we have your consent to record?

JH: Yes, you do.

ER: Great, thank you so much. (laughs)

HF: Yeah so we were just gonna get going, kind of jumping into your. . . . I mean starting from the beginning more or less um. . . . like, what—what kind of things do you remember doing or enjoying for fun, sort of, as a kid in Waialua?

JH: Well I was born and raised right here in Hale‘iwa, I was delivered at Waialua Plantation Hospital—Waialua Sugar Company Hospital in Waialua, but the Waialua and Hale‘iwa towns are sort of merged and it’s kind of known as the North Shore now. But, uh, growing up there was, you know, small shops along the way in Hale‘iwa along with this church—the church was one of the original mainstays in the town. It was, uh, it started off in uh, 1932 I think or—no not 19’—1832, because it’s 188 years old, yeah. And it’s, this is the, uh, this church site was—wasn’t the original church site. The original church site was closer to the harbor or the bay, uh, Waialua Bay, and then it moved up to this area in back of me (gestures backwards) the graveyard site was another site, where thousands of Hawaiians attended services ‘cause the chief in the area—Chief La‘anui, Gideon La‘anui—mandated that the, his subjects attend church yeah, this church that was

built. It was founded by John and Ursula Emerson in 1832. But uh, so I was born and raised in the church here along with my grandmother—well I can recall my grandmother coming here, and my mom, and all myself and my children and grandchildren attend services here. . .

HF: Nice!

JH: . . .so it's been around awhile.

HF: Yeah!

ER: (laughs) Um, I remember in your pre-interview you mentioned being the middle of five kids, right? Two sisters on either side?

JH: Yes, yes.

ER: Did you spend a lot of time, sort of when you were growing up did you spend time. . .

JH: Well. . .

ER: . . .playing with them?

JH: I did up to a certain age, but then you know I—we had a lot of neighborhood kids, guys in the area where I lived so we'd, we'd, you know, spend—we'd hang around together and uh do things together. We did, since we're right next to the ocean we did a lot of skin-diving, uh fishing, uh that kind of activities together. We also, you know, played a lot of cowboy and Indians and things along those lines. But uh, what kinda amazed me about growing up is, I kind of hung around. . . . well there's a mixture of ethnic groups and what amazed me was the Filipino boys that I hung around with, they were very mature for their age in that they had—they could cook, you know cook rice. You know back in those days uh, we didn't have any rice cookers—automatic rice cookers, but they could cook rice on the stove, they could, you know, slaughter a chicken and cook the chicken, they knew how to clean and gut fish and fry the fish, and you know, we were in elementary school and I was thinking “wow these guys are amazing, you know, they're so self-sufficient.” But uh, you know, so we hung around together. I mean, there's other—Portuguese, Portuguese boys, Hawaiian boys—so we, we—during the summers we kinda lived on the beach, uh, it was so laid back, the community, and it was so peaceful and, uh, not hardly any crimes. So uh, our parents just allowed us to just stay on the beach for the whole summer yeah. We just kinda hung out on the beach, went fishing, diving, caught octopus or *tako*, fish, brought uh can goods, went home during the day and brought can goods from the cupboards and cooked rice on the beach. And, so I remember all those days, it was good days, yeah.

HF: Wow, that sounds amazing!. . .

(laughter)

ER: . . .Yeah, it does sound amazing!

HF: So did they. . . .is that kind of what inspired you to start cooking, a little bit?

JH: Yeah, yeah, it did. It did kind of inspire me 'cause I was kinda impressed with, you know, the—and there's a lot of teasing and joshing, you know, and saying, "Oh how come you don't even know how to cook rice?" or "You don't know how to fry a fish?" or whatever, or "cook a dish?" Yeah, yeah it was simple dishes like corned beef and onions or corned beef and cabbage but uh yeah. So I, I rarely—although I was in between, uh you know, sisters, I, I kinda rarely hung out with them. They kinda did their own thing and I kinda just stuck with the guys in the neighborhood.

ER: Yeah, that's wild to me that, yeah, you sort of lived out on the beach. . .

JH: . . . Yeah, yeah. . .

ER: . . . for some stretches of time in the summer, that's really fun. Do you—would you say your parents were relatively lenient then, in general?

JH: Well, well they were lenient, but mostly they were more practical in that, they—you know, both of them had to work, so they were gone during the day and they were—we kind of—it was more self-sufficient or self-reliant, we just kind of took care of ourselves, yeah. And uh, you know, I had older sisters, two older sisters, but they rarely um, you know, looked over me, I mean I was with the guys most of the time so. . . . But it was, you know. . . . Then we were on the beach so we got into water activities and that's where way back when, you know, uh surfing wasn't very popular but it just started yeah, it started to come around, so. We hung around on the beach and we—the older guys that would surf and we used to pick up their boards and, you know, return 'em to them and then borrow their boards later, but, had older guys too that—uh surfers—that lived on the beach too, so we kinda emulated them yeah. They had one area and we were closer to our resident side.

ER: So do you feel like you were there for the beginning of the—of surf. . . .

JH: Uh, I-I guess. Well the beginning maybe uh. . . . beginning, yeah 'cause this was in early '50s yeah, so I mean I think surfing started prior to that, but it wasn't out here as prevalent as maybe in some other spots, but the reputation as far as the waves grew, you know, better surf was out here on the North Shore so that's how the sport kind of developed out here.

HF: So did surfers—what were the, was the lifestyle of the surfer, like, much different than, sort of like your parents' lifestyle at that point, or. . . .?

JH: Oh yeah, it was. Well the surfers were more free-flowing, yeah. I mean they just wanted to surf and drink beer and hang out on the beach, yeah. While my parents were more, you know, trying to put food on the table and keep a roof over our heads, so they were busy working, you know.

ER: And where were they working, again?

JH: My mom worked at the pineapple cannery in Honolulu so they had to commute, yeah. So it was a long commute, 'cause they didn't have the freeways then, yeah. So we commute—she commuted, yeah with other workers. And then my dad worked at, uh,

worked at several jobs but uh his last one was with—up at Schofield as a uh, one of the engineers, uh maintena—uh, equipment engineers, I mean—he drove equipment, heavy equipment.

HF: So were you, was your mom getting around on the, via the train?

JH: No, no, um just cars back then yeah. This early-early, early '50s. 'Cause I know she had a '50, 1953 Chevy that she transported a lot of, uh other parents that needed to work yeah. She always had a car full of uh, coworkers that, you know. . . .

HF: Did most people carpool?

JH: Yeah, didn't have the bus system then, so they just carpooled yeah. Going to work, yeah.

HF: Nice!

ER: And you mentioned your grandparents had a store. . . .

JH: Yeah, on my dad's side we had a store on Pa'ala'a Road, which is close to McDonald's. And uh, he had a small-small general store that sold, uh, basic necessities: bread, rice, and things. But he also—he worked for the sugar company, so uh, in one of the years that they went on strike—I don't know if it was 1927—he got, he was uh, let go because of the strike activities, so then he started his own store. And then he, being Oriental from Japan and knowing the Asian sugar workers, their uh, boot sizes were always smaller than what the company had, so he-he started, um, importing boots or getting boots from elsewhere that fit the Asian workers. And so they, uh, he supplied a lot of the boots and basic safety, uh-uh, equipment for sugar workers.

ER: Thank you so much.

JH: Yeah, and then on the side he had a. . . . Most of the stores, small stores also peddled uh, food yeah, vegetables, fish and vegetables and meat, and went home to home, house to house, and a lot of 'em, um, raised hogs at home, they had pigs, so when they went home to home they also picked up their garbage and their leftover waste, just to feed the animals yeah. So there was—they were very industrious yeah.

HF: Did you spend a lot of time at your grandparents' store, with your grandparents?

JH: Yeah, when I uh, actually my grandfather died, he had a heart attack so my-my grandmother was in the store every day, and uh, she hardly spoke English, so you know it was kind of difficult uh, you know, talking with her because she spoke Japanese mostly, so, then she decided she was gonna send us to Japanese school, but the Japanese school was, uh. . . . Well that was the norm yeah for the Japanese, uh, children to go to Japanese school along with regular elementary school, but that, that was a chore yeah 'cause it's after school, after regular school, a-and so I did that for a year I think and dropped out yeah. . .

(laughter)

JH: . . .No but, everybody, well, the-the, I guess the trend back then was to kinda learn English and acclimate yourself to, you know, to being, you know, a U.S. citizen. So, they kinda suppressed the, you know, the language school somewhat, along with even the Hawaiians yeah, speaking Hawaiians, because my grandmother on my mother's side spoke Hawaiian yeah, that was kinda suppressed yeah, back then. But they kinda maintained their language between siblings yeah, they could speak but we, we didn't get to learn or we knew a few words but, uh, not a whole lot yeah.

HF: Was the decision to quit Japanese school, was that your choice, or were your parents okay with that?

JH: Yeah, well. . .

HF: (laughs)

JH: . . . against the protest of my grandmother and maybe my dad, but you know, but we just, I just, it was too much yeah, I mean, then you know, uh, American sports came on the scene, you know, basketball and baseball and, you know, surfing and whatever, so after school, uh— to go to school af-after regular school was a little too much, yeah.

HF/ER: Yeah. (laughs)

JH: I mean it was a lot. And then, you know, the other ethnic groups didn't go to— the Filipino boys they didn't go to Filipino school or anything and, you know, Portuguese guys and Hawaiian guys, those guys I hung around with so uh, I just said forget about Japanese school! . . .

(laughter)

ER: . . .Um, you talked a bit about how you, how you, learned to surf in that context.

JH: Yeah.

ER: But last time we talked about fishing.

JH: Yeah.

ER: Do—I'm curious to hear more about who taught you fishing and when you learned that. . .

JH: Well uh, my-my dad was a fisherman but on the other side, on my mom's side, her-her dad was a fisherman, and he was actually a, uh, one of the few uh, I'm gonna say a commercial fisherman in the area, that was his full-time job, yeah, he just, he just fished. And he had uh, uh, actually he had a lot of fishing, uh, equipment and nets, and he employed uh Filipino divers to work for him, so he had, actually, he had a fishing village or a camp, where workers-Filipino workers, divers, and Hawaiians and other ethnic groups, but mostly Filipinos I remember, and they-they were located uh close to Long Bridge, which is, uh, a bridge right on the ocean on the other side of Hale'iwa, and he had about forty, forty employee—well it wasn't employees they were just people that wanted to fish and stayed with him and lived in the camp with him, and with the family. . .

ER: Mm hmm.

JH: . . . and uh, so that's how I kinda picked up fishing, we did a lot of, uh, uh, well I didn't do a lot, I was young yeah, so but my mom was the cook for the crew, so when— before she started working at the cannery she was supposedly the cook for the crew but I remember she always complained to me because uh, her share was always. . . she only had a half a share, where every—all the, all the workers had a full share, and of course the uh owner had more shares than the others, but being the cook she only had a half a share for cooking yeah, and so I used to go tag along with her and, she'd you know bring the big pots of rice and whatever stew and—for the workers that. . . . they were down the beach and if they surrounded a big area, they—it was called uh, um purse, purse net fishing I guess, I don't know what you call it, it's real deep nets that, when the schools of fish came into the bay they'd surround the whole bay yeah and then pull it up, yeah, the hukilau they have it in these Hawaiian songs, the hukilau, that means you pull the nets in yeah, with the fish in the net, just move it in. So the Filipino divers would be diving and lifting up the lid on the bottom so that it wouldn't run over the coral reef you know, the net would get stuck so. . . . and you'd have a lot of divers in there, lifting the nets up and the guys on shore would be pulling the nets in, yeah. So, you know, they uh, caught tons of fish yeah, tons of uh. . . . Mostly akule, uh, big-eyed scad I think it's called, akule, it's very popular fish yeah, it still, it still comes in in schools nowadays too, but not only that, bone-‘ō‘io-bonefish, kala [surgeonfish], all the different reef fishes that he caught yeah. .

ER: Wow.

JH: . . .pāpio. . . .

ER: Do you have a favorite memory of fishing?

JH: Yeah, well I um—But my dad was a different type of fishing he didn't—that was mostly netting and diving, so I kinda did that for a while. And then my dad, he was more of the traditional Japanese. . . . he had a *sampan*, one of these old uh, Japanese, um fishing vessels, and it was a—it had a high bow and a flat bottom, so he'd go out, um—they did a lot of bottom fishing, you know, out in the ocean. They'd go out to certain spots and, and catch deep-sea fish yeah, 'ōpakapaka [blue snapper], *onaga* [koa'e; a type of snapper], that type of fish, uku [a deep-sea snapper], different type of fishing yeah. And then they'd do, uh night fishing too, catching 'ōpelu [mackerel scad] or akule [big-eyed scad]. So, so they, and he did a lot of crabbing, and he used to fish for lobsters also, so that was fun. But I learned how to do a lot of—there's this kind of popular crab here, it's really expensive it's called Kona crab, it's a red type of crab, I forget the, the name of it, anyway the scientific name, but we call it Kona crab, and uh, I learned to do that with him yeah, he did that a lot so, I learned to do that, so I'm kind of continuing that, that tradi—that type of fishing. I have a boat, and go out, catch crab. But yeah there's Kona crab, there's white crab, there's different type of fishing with traps and lobster nets that we'd lay nets and then lobster would get tangled, but there's hardly any lobsters today but that's the type of fishing we did, along with scuba diving.

ER: Oh cool, nice.

HF: How old were you when you started fishing with your dad?

JH: Oh, real, real young yeah. In maybe 4th, 5th grade I guess, you know just to go out, get sick a lot you know on the boat. . .

(laughter)

JH: . . .seasick, but finally. . . . the thing about seasickness, I mean, till you go out often enough, you know and one day it just clicks on that, *eh*, you're not sick anymore, yeah, and then you cannot get sick after that yeah. . .

(laughter)

HF: . . .I didn't know it worked like that.

JH: Yeah.

HF: Cool! (laughs) Do you have a favorite memory, like with your, with your dad specifically?

JH: Uh, well, you know we used to catch bags and bags of. . .

(laughter)

JH: . . .burlap bags of crab and stuff yeah, and it was real plentiful. Uh. . . .

HF: Is that sort of the, the quality time that you got with your dad. . .

JH: Yeah.

HF: . . . growing up and everything?

JH: Yeah.

HF: Nice. Did he spend a lot of time—what did your dad do for work actually?

JH: Actually he was an equipment operator, yeah. . .

HF: Right, right.

JH: . . . at Schofield, so and then, you know, he, at nights he—just to supplement his income, because he went bottom fishing you know for akule and then, he'd catch maybe, I don't know, maybe 50, 60 pounds a night. Fish was plentiful then yeah, and then, and then someone else would peddle it for him during the day yeah, or my mom would bag it, sell it to neighbors, or friends, relatives. So he did that and then, uh, but, earlier my-my-my grandfather—well he passed away too, see he was uh—it was kinda unfortunate because uh, he took his fish into the auction in Honolulu yeah, I mean just tons of fish he took up. But one time he was up there, and I guess, you know, gonna have a few drinks after a hard day, so he came back but he got in a car accident so he passed away. So, my uncles and my grandmother kept up the business, for awhile anyway, then it kinda, without my, my grandfather, it kind of faded, you know. Everybody started. . . . you know, it was hard

maintaining the workers and the camps, and so-and then my uncle started going out and looking for work, you know, regular jobs yeah. 'Cause it was—fishing is a hit and miss yeah. There's, you know. . .

HF: Did your. . .

JH: . . . Good days. . .

HF: . . . So did your uncles. . . .

JH: . . . and bad days.

HF: Did they work in the store also? Did you have. . . .?

JH: Uh yeah, my, on my dad's side, my uncle worked in the store, yeah. My two uncles, well they worked elsewhere but they also came back. My grandmother stayed in the store most of the time. And on the other side, on my, my mom's side, my uncles were into fishing too and then they kind of faded away, yeah, and then they. . . . But my grandfather had died, and then my grandmother kinda. . . . Uh, I know, the, they, she had an offer for his nets, he had a lot of deep-sea nets and stuff, but back then, this was, *gee*-you know, early '50s, uh, people wanted to buy it and they offered her \$30,000, way back when, was, you know, \$30,000 was a lot of money.

ER/HF: Yeah, wow.

JH: But she, she was so sentimental that she said, "No, no. . . ." and actually in the end, all of the nets, I ended up throwing away yeah, and it was just ruined, yeah, after, you know 30 years of not being used yeah, just rotted in the net house yeah, so I kinda, have to, threw them out.

HF: So, were, let's see, were your uncles fishing? Nobody was using the nets I guess. . . .

JH: Uh, they were using it for a while after my grandfather passed away but then I guess they didn't really have the know-how like him, or, or the leadership, or supervisory skills or whatever.

HF: Yeah.

JH: Uh, so and, you know, being younger and I guess more siblings—yeah, more rivalry yeah, my grandfather was the patriarch. But they just, my uncles, tried to handle it and. . . . my mom grumbling on the side that she was only getting half a share, you know so (laughs), it didn't work out, yeah. . .

ER: (laughs)

JH: . . . after a while. . .

ER: That's funny.

JH: . . . yeah, and they had different, you know uh, different, I guess, laws came about as far as fishing rights, and they—see my grandfather had this, what they call *konohiki* rights.

He had rights to several uh, spots yeah, fishing spots along the coastline. So he-he, actually—I guess he paid someone for the rights, I think. I don't know if it was Kamehameha Schools or Bishop Estate. So he paid for the rights yeah, so he could—I guess because it's their land along the beach so they allowed him on it, exclusively, so he could fish there yeah. So he had, he had kinda this area kinda sewed up yeah.

HF: So was a lot of the land in Waialua, at that point, owned by private. . .

JH: Yeah. . . .

HF: . . .people?

JH: By big land owners yeah. Kamehameha schools, big missionary families, Castle and Cooke.

HF: Ahhh, yeah, yeah, makes sense.

JH: Yeah.

ER: This is sort of taking a little bit of a different direction. . . .

JH: Yeah.

ER: But I'm curious, when you were a young child, do you remember what you envisioned for your future? Like what you wanted to be, what you wanted to do?

JH: Actually, we had, uh, I mean, I'm thinking about it, you know, I didn't really, uh, really have too much expectations other than just tryna stay alive and uh, you know have food on the table, just basic needs yeah. We didn't, we didn't think too far about, you know, going to school or college. I mean college was, you know, an afterthought really, I mean, uh, just graduating from high s—if you got through high school, well, back then I guess, you got through elementary school you were fine yeah, but high school you know was a must after a while, after, my parents, so they—you had to graduate from high school, yeah, that was a, you know, a must. Other than that, you know, just whatever you wanted to do. . . . Uh, the parents really had very, uh—I mean they were busy working so they really didn't have a lot of foresight as far as pushing you to go to college or, uh, being a doctor or what, you know. Not having that type of background themselves and being in a rural community, I was just—whatever you could find afterward, after high school, you know. And mostly, everything kinda, uh veered toward the sugar company yeah, or the pineapple company up in Wahiawā. Those were the large employers and, other than the small shop owners along there yeah.

ER: But you did go to college, right?

JH: Yeah, fortunately I did get into Kamehameha. . .

ER: Mmm (acknowledges).

JH: . . . after elementary school, after St. Michael's. And then, you know, they were kinda, you know, pushing Hawaiians to get degrees and, you know, a-and encouraged

Hawaiians through scholarships and stuff so, and then they do that today, so I was fortunate to get into that track and then, I decided to go to school and I got, you know, some financial scholarships 'cause really the school I went to, University of Redlands, uh, is a small liberal arts school, but very expensive, it's a private school, yeah. And if I wanted to do it on my own I probably, you know, with my parent's income and stuff, we probably couldn't. . .

ER: Mmm (acknowledges).

JH: . . .you know, afford it.

ER: Yeah, yeah.

JH: Yeah. But Kamehameha Schools stepped in and gave me a school—part scholarship and things like that so I had a chance to go to school and. . . .

HF: Did you enjoy school? Was school. . . .

JH: Yeah I enjoyed school. I uh, maybe we enjoyed it too much. . .

(laughter)

JH: . . .But uh, yeah, it's uh, there's uh, we drink a lot of beer and things and stuff. . .

(laughter)

JH: . . .but you know, depends on who you hang around with, but, I mean, yeah. . . .

HF: Was that in your high school?

JH: Huh?

HF: Were you drinking in high school as well?

JH: Oh high school too yeah, high school, high school too. A little you know, I uh, I'm on tape so, cannot say anything, yeah. . .

(laughter)

JH: . . .Yeah, you going give away my secrets but. . .

(laughter)

JH: . . .Yeah, you know, high school, I mean, you know, the school, the best thing about the school, that, I don't know if we sidetracking here but, best thing about Kamehameha Schools where we boarded, 'cause we were uh, the schools uh, allowed boarding, it was a boarding school for rural O'ahu students and outside island students and, I think I mentioned this before, that was the best thing about being, well it was an all-boys school, all-girls school so, we-we just stayed—it was a military school, back then. So uh, and being at home with four sisters, I figured, *chee*, I'd just hang around with the guys, I was kinda used to hanging out with the guys in the neighborhood so when I went to school

there we, we boarded, we bunked together, you know, it was two guys per room, and uh, you know they just uh. . . . and each—we had companies, yeah, like the regular army guys, the A company, B companies, and they had *pshh* maybe 50, 60 guys in the company. And uh, so we—we all hung together and we had—we went to breakfast and lunch and dinner together and did our chores together and did, occasionally we, they'd allow us to have passes and go to Honolulu, yeah, I mean on weekends you know, just go out for the Saturday morning, so it was different. You know, different from being out here, yeah. I mean, there—up there had bus transportation. Didn't have buses out here for, we'd go down and pick a movie theater and whatever, pool halls and bowling alleys and so, we—I enjoyed my stay up there. And then I met a lot of different guys from different islands, as I say, and we got to be close, so when I go to different islands I can, uh, look them up, yeah. So we're still friends, yeah. We're still really good friends. I mean we lived together from seventh grade till graduating, so-so six years, so you know, we got to know each other really well.

ER: Do you have a favorite weekend story when you were allowed to go into Honolulu? Is there one that sticks out in your mind?

JH: Well, um, I know when we were—our seventh and eighth grade year, we, since we were the younger guys in the group, we all had to wear uniforms. We had to wear khaki pants and white shirts and stuff. But we'd always, you know—and the upperclassmen, or the guys in high school, they could wear aloha shirts and shorts and whatever. Well I dunno if shorts, I know aloha shirts. So we'd, we'd go down and we'd always sneak in, have an aloha shirt in our paper bags, and sneak in and go downtown and then change clothes all the time, you know, this—act like we're upperclassmen, because uh, you know, in white shirts and khaki pants we stood out, and black shoes, stood out like, oh these guys are—you know—younger guys from Kamehameha. Yeah, but we all uh, we did—we had a regular routine, yeah we went downtown we had—they gave us—well we could have a dollar fifty cents, I guess, a week, so we normally didn't go out every week. We went out every other week 'cause we could double up that, you know, dollar fifty cents to three dollars so we had enough to get a movie, uh, if we looked old enough we could get in the pool rooms down there, you know. They had those big-big pool halls, B & H pool room, and uh, and then the last thing we did was get a, you know, a meal at the restaurant, Hibiscus Cafe, and then we'd wait for other Kamehameha School guys to come by 'cause we wanted, uh, to come up to the school was a dollar fifty yeah, from downtown to up to the school, so we had to wait for five guys who could pay, yeah, you know, thirty cents a piece yeah. We always kept thirty cents left for just catch um, catch a taxi up the school. So we waited for five guys ah, five guys. Lot of times we had six guys, taxi guy was saying, "Oh no, I cannot take six," oh and we begged him yeah, "We can squeeze in, we're small!" . . .

(laughter)

JH: . . .So six guys

ER: That's Awesome!

JH: Yeah!

HF: Did you get to. . . .

JH: Paid dollar fifty, we never tipped him. . .

(laughter)

JH: . . . Yeah just, we—everybody had thirty cents yeah, ‘thirty cents’, ‘thirty cents’ too. But that was fun, that was fun. I’ll admit, that’s what we did yeah on the weekends. Other than going down to Waikīkī every once in a while. When we got older we went down to Waikīkī.

HF: Would you surf over there? Or. . . .

JH: No, no, I wasn’t a real good surfer really. I just uh, well when we was younger I just kinda—we picked up the board for the older guys and they let us paddle out and everything, but really I never really got into it you know. Yeah, was just kinda hung out on the beach. The boards didn’t have leashes back then so boards would come all the way down and wash up on shore, so we’d turn the boards around and paddle out to the older guys and push their boards back to them. And then, at the end when they were tired, they brought their boards in and just said oh you can borrow my board but, yeah, but always, like. . .

ER: What was it like. . .

JH: . . . I loved the tradition.

ER: . . . What was it like transitioning from Kamehameha to [University of] Redlands? Was that a big difference culturally or socially?

JH: Oh yeah, it was, yeah. It was ‘cause we never really went anywhere other than high school. I mean, the big thing was getting into Honolulu back then, yeah. So now going to the mainland, uh for schooling yeah. And then the schools kinda encouraged guys to, you know, kinda branch out and go to school on the mainland, yeah, versus staying here in the University of Hawai‘i. And I was kinda planning after a while to just stay here, yeah, ‘cause being born and raised here I figured I’d stay here. I had a counselor up there who kinda forced me to. . . . It was kinda a funny story, he told me to put in the application, yeah, for Redlands. I said, “Ahh no, Jesus Christ the SAT scores are too high for me and the GPA was too high.” So I figured, ah I said, “Ok, let me have one, I’ll fill out the application.” He said “Well, you’re gonna bring it back to me now!” I say “Ohh no, no don’t worry about that I’ll just mail it, yeah.” But they had a forty-dollar fee yeah, application fee. So I’m thinking, “Oh no this price—forty dollars wasted on this application.” But anyway, I took it back. He forced me, this guy, uh, Bob Soa I think was his name, forced me to bring it back to him and I guess I he, he had some connections or whatever, and he knew he could help me, I guess. Anyway he took my—he said “give me the forty dollars,” you know, “write the check to the school.” So, he mailed it in and I guess he—I don’t know if he sent lots of recommendations or, or he talked to some other people. So I was surprised that I, you know, *gee* I got admitted, yeah. So, but, so had different guys, and all saying “Where you going to school?”, “where you going to

school?” And so couple guys said, “Hey!” So, five of us went up there at one time. Five of the, from my class, uh ‘65. And uh. . . .

ER: Was that the basis of your social group then?

JH: Yeah, at first yeah ‘cause we kinda you know being from Hawai‘i we kinda just hung around together yeah and we lived with each for a while, but uh—and we kinda went off in different directions, yeah. Uh, we—when in our freshmen year we jus’, kinda hung together and tried to stay together, but then after a while we moved and went their own way, yeah, different. . . .

HF: I’m curious what your reaction was when you found out you got in, was it real, was it. . .

JH: Oohh. . .

HF: . . .happy or was it kinda like, “oh”?

JH: Oh well I was kind of, I was kinda apprehensive, yeah. I’m thinking, oh no now I’m going to the mainland, *phew*—I had, I gotta buy clothes, I gotta buy a suit. You know, I mean, figured mainland guys had a suit and tie, and yeah, I didn’t have that kinda stuff yeah. I mean, we wore ties and stuff in high school so I knew how to tie a tie. And then we had long sleeve khaki shirts but, you know, now we had to buy a coat you know. . . .

HF: Yeah, did you have any. . . .

JH: Nice dress shoes or what, you know. So when I got in I guess, you know, family and relatives and stuff were happy ‘cause I was one of the first guys to go to school and go to college, yeah. They, they kinda helped me along, they bought me a suit. . .

HF: Nice!

JH: . . .then shoes, and so I got to go that way.

HF: Mm, yeah. Did you have a lot of expectations for, like going to the mainland for the first time? That must have been a big, sorta, shock.

JH: Uhh no, no. . . . Um, I did, you know, at one time. . . . ‘cause I was—I was in a glee club with the school.

HF: Wow!

JH: So uhh. . .

HF: Did you sing? Do you sing?

JH: Yes. . . .

HF: Nice!

JH: Not very well but, I mean, I guess I was part of a group so, you know, you kinda blend in, yeah.

HF: That's so cool!

JH: But anyway, uh, in '64, that was another good thing about going to that school in '64, 1964, my junior year, we took a trip. Um, we went to the New York World's Fair.

HF: Oh my gosh!

JH: Yeah in New York. . .

HF: I think my dad was there!

JH: . . .in 1964. And. . .

HF: Sorry.

JH: . . .uh, we were part of this, uh glee club. Kamehameha, school for boys glee club. And uh, this—our choral teacher, Bob Springer—you know he was from the mainland, and he was a pretty good, uh, a choral director, and so he taught us a lot of different songs. So we were—and, I guess, I don't know how they would say it, Hawaiians they have natural singing abilities so. . . . and at the school we went to there's an annual song contest every year so we had all that kind of training, you know, to sing songs the classes compete against each other. So uh, I was in the choral group anyway, this glee club, and we went to the mainland, but I mean, it was horrible 'cause, I mean it was like a ten-hour flight you know. From here it was all props [propeller planes] then. Ten, twelve-hour flight to California.

HF: Oh wow.

JH: And then we flew over to—I don't know where we stopped. Anyway, we flew over to New York then we—Washington DC—and then we, the school, bought a brand-new bus from Michigan and drove it down there and had a bus driver sent up there too. So we came back—we traveled across the United States on the school bus. A brand-new bus.

ER: Woah! You went across the continent?

JH: Yeah, so from New York. . .

ER: Woah. (laughs)

JH: . . . we were in New York, Washington DC, then we drove back down through all of the states, yeah.

ER: Are you kidding?!

JH: Not all the states, uh Oklahoma and Arizona and, I don't know, Illinois (laughs). Most of the time we were on the bus so it was—we were sleeping or playing cards. But we stopped, we stopped in the different cities and had concerts, yeah. We—it was kind of pre-arranged way. We stopped at different universities or-or communities and then we, we performed there. Mostly for food I guess. I mean. . .

(laughter)

- JH: . . . they fed us after the concert hosted us and then we moved to a . . . We traveled and moved.
- HF: Wow, that's amazing.
- JH: Yeah.
- HF: Do you have, do you have, like, a-a favorite, let's see, show or like experience on that, on that trip?
- JH: Uh, no.
- HF: (inaudible)
- JH: We were, we were—yeah different places. I mean it was good. I mean it was good for us guys, getting you know. . .
- HF: Yeah.
- JH: . . .seeing the United States, I mean, the states. (ponders) We were at the state—yeah we were, '59. Anyway we-we stopped. And then came back to California and it, and then we. . . . That was um my junior year in high school. So I had some experience. Yeah, I mean, we were very fortunate. The guys, the forty guys that went on that trip, I mean, we still kinda, you know, count our blessings, yeah. We saw a lot of different places.
- HF: Yeah, that's pretty amazing!
- ER: So you've done a lot of traveling then right? Because after. . .
- JH: Yeah.
- ER: . . .as I understand it, after college you went to the military. . .
- JH: Yeah.
- ER: . . .and then traveled all around Europe. . .
- JH: Right.
- ER: . . .afterwards right?
- JH: Right. Yeah.
- ER: Wow.
- JH: So I figured, well I'll come back here and I'll get it all out of my system, I guess. . .
- (laughter)
- JH: . . .and come back and just stay home. . . .
- ER: And you've done that?

JH: Yeah I've done it!

ER: (laughs)

JH: I haven't been to the orient side though, you know. I haven't been to Japan. . .

ER: Mmmm (acknowledges).

JH: . . .and that side but I'll do that one of these days. Well I. . .

ER: Yeah!

JH: . . .I kinda want to go to Australia. . .

HF: Oh okay.

ER: Yeah, alright!

JH: . . .and New Zealand and see that side too.

HF: That would be really neat.

ER: If you went to, um, like, Asia, where would you go and what would you wanna do?

JH: I probably. . .

ER: Would you wanna research family history?

JH: . . .probably to—in Japan, do Japan and kinda see where my-my ancestors, or my grandparents came from, yeah.

ER: Uh-huh, that would be really. . . .

JH: And my wife's Japanese also. So so. . .

HF: *Ohh* ok.

JH: . . .she has relatives in Japan also. . .

ER: Yeah, yeah.

HF: Okay, yeah.

JH: . . .I mean, family in Japan, although she's a local, Japanese born.

ER: Right, wow.

HF: So we have about five minutes left just for our section.

JH: Yeah.

HF: We're gonna switch over, take a little break, but maybe we can talk a little bit about your wife, to kind of, at least open that, open that up a little bit.

ER: Yeah, can we continue that?

JH: Oh, shouldn't she have her own. . .

(laughter)

JH: . . .This is for me, yeah?

HF: Absolutely!

ER: She should have!

(laughter)

JH: *Nah, nah, nah!* My wife was—you met her earlier, yeah? She gave uh. . .

ALL: Yeah, yeah.

JH: . . .I think, you guys did a tour of the church?. . . So she's a choral director for the church.
..

(laughter)

JH: . . .and a high school teacher.

HF: So you met her. . . .?

JH: I met her at Waialua High School. I was—I came back [from Europe] and I was going for a teaching certificate and I. . .

HF: Mmhmm. (acknowledges)

JH: . . .student—taught up there and then I met her. Yeah.

HF: Wow, right. . . .

JH: I may have met her earlier you know, (inaudible), but there was just about that time.

HF: Mmm.

JH: In the '70s yeah?

HF: Okay.

JH: Early '70, mid '70s.

HF: So, were you guys, did you guys become friends, or. . .

JH: Yeah. . .

HF: . . .or did you just start dating? Or. . .

JH: . . .we came friends first, yeah.

HF: . . .or did you get married right away?

JH: No, no. I just dated her and then—she was from Wahiawā, which is right up the road.

ER: Okay.

JH: And then her—she had two brothers that did a lot of fishing so we know there was some kind of connection, you know. . . .

HF: Could you (inaudible)

JH: . . .and then I—they got to know me and we were always talking about fishing and things like that so we had some common ground, so. . . .

HF: Nice.

JH: And, so yeah, it just-just started dating and she was down here.

HF: How long do you think you were dating before you got married?

JH: Ah a couple years. We got married in ‘75, wait (ponders) ‘75 or ‘76 I dunno. . .

(laughter)

JH: . . .‘75! ‘75. Yeah.

HF: Alright!

JH: Ah so maybe three years, yeah. I forgot.

ER: Do you remember the first time you met her?

JH: Uhhh she had uh, I, you know, somebody asked me that before too. . .

(laughter)

JH: . . .I don’t even remember! It all was just. . . . We were—we met ‘cause we were mostly in a group yeah. I mean she had her bunch of teachers, school teachers, and we were just the local guys, hanging around the-the, uh, yeah, faculty housing. Like, you know. . .

KS: (laughs)

JH: . . .it was—all the schools had, had housing, teacher housing. “Teacher’s Cottages” they called them. Which I think was a good idea because, you know, they could retain a lot of the mainland teachers who, you know, when you coming over you, I mean if you gotta pay, you know, this kinda rent that they charge here, and on a teacher’s salary, you really cannot, you know, hang around too long, yeah. But that’s how my friend from the—he was from Kaua‘i, he was in the army with me, he became a teacher also and then he went to Kohala, you know, ‘cause the rural, outside island, rural schools have a need for teachers yeah, so he went there. He was from Kaua‘i. So for the last maybe forty years I’ve been going up there, yeah, seeing him, yeah.

HF: (inaudible)

JH: I mean he was the ag [agriculture] teacher and he, he did uh, he had a program and he put on a fundraiser every year, so I used to go see him, you know, every year and just join him there.

HF: Nice.

JH: So I kinda continued that by. . . . Ah he's out of school, he's done with school now but I mean, I go up for his grandkids parties and marriage.

HF: What was his name?

JH: David Fuertes. Filipino guy from Kaua'i. Good guy. You guys go to Kohala, he'll take care of you guys. . .

(laughter)

JH: . . .For real. He—that's how, he's a real, real, real nice guy. I mean, I'll just call him say, "Hey, a couple my friends coming up there." . . .

(laughter)

HF: I love that!

JH: . . .And he'll go, he'll go all-out. Good guy.

HF: Cool. And um, just for the record, could we get your wife's, your wife's name?

JH: Eileen, Eileen, Miyoko, Hirota, yeah. Okazaki was her maiden name.

HF: Mm, okay.

KS: How about, ok we'll stop right here.

ALL: (inaudible)

[End of Section]

[Formal Interview Part 2]

JH: . . .came over, along with other Japanese families. So that, that's kind of been recorded at the Japanese Chamber of Commerce. 'Cause as I mentioned, when my Uncle passed away and he had, he had kept the name, uh—a Japanese lady called me up and said, "Do you know your family background?" I said, "Oh yeah, sort of." She said, "Oh, my, my, my family, my relatives, were on the ship also, as one of the few passengers that came over." You know, Japanese passengers that came to Hawai'i.

DM: Do you know what year that was?

JH: Uhhh, *jeez*, that's, uh, I really don't know. 19'—in the early 1900s I think.

DM: And—you had talked last time about these campaigns where the representatives from the plantations would go out and recruit people.

JH: Right.

DM: Was he one of the first waves?

JH: Yeah, I was just gonna. . .

DM: (inaudible)

JH: . . . Yeah, he was one of the first waves, but he didn't end up really, uh working for, for the sugar companies. The sugar companies, when they started into the pineapple and sugar industry businesses, you know, maybe about 200 years ago, um, they needed workers, yeah. They needed agricultural workers because they had huge tracts of land to cultivate and it was mostly hand labor, they didn't have machines and stuff like they did midway through. So they went out and they had these different, uh, treaty, labor treaty contracts that they did with different companies—uh, countries really, like China and Japan, Philippines. So the Japanese came over. They were one of the earlier groups that came over and they had a contract drawn up between the, I guess the Emperor of Japan and the Kingdom of Hawai'i. And they were three-year contracts. They came over and you provide room and board and they had little work in Japan, so they tried to go out and get the farmers yeah, from various rural communities. And they came over—but they always thought, the Japanese had this tradition that they were going to return to Japan. That they were here to come to this paradise and make some money, but they were always going to return home. So they were really, they kinda, kept together, yeah, and they never intermarried or anything like that, versus other immigrant groups. But they came over and then they worked in the—for three years and then got off. A lot of them actually had to have brides come over from Japan, yeah, because they didn't want to intermarry. So they brought over picture brides, but that's another story, how they married. And they finally stayed, yeah, in Hawai'i, and that's part of my ancestry is—I'm part Japanese on both sides. My mom's side and my dad's side.

DM: And do you know, on your dad's side, how that half of the family. . .

JH: Yeah.

DM: . . . originally came over?

JH: His-his family, his, uh, dad came over, uhh, I forget the year now. He came over as a plantation worker. And he worked for the sugar company. But I think in 1927 they had uh, had a big strike and he was affected by the strike and I guess he was, I don't know, one of the leaders, or what, anyways, he was discharged from the company, to my knowledge, the best of my knowledge. So he just started his own, uh, community store, yeah, small mom and pop store in Hale'iwa. And he did, uh, he peddled vegetables and fish and whatever, just to make a go of it. But he uh, as I mentioned, he uh—being an Asian himself, he kinda—the plantation didn't carry the real small boot sizes, rubber boot sizes that, you know, Asians require because of their feet are smaller. So he stocked up

on that—so he had a thriving business in the equipment—boot business and I guess had tools that the farmers were used to. So they frequented his store, yeah.

DM: And this was during that period of time when each of the ethnic groups had their own camps in the plantations, right?

JH: Yeah, yeah, part of it was, and part of it is the sugar industry really um kind of keeping—this is from what I read—keeping each ethnic group at odds with each other so that they didn't, didn't get organized, yeah, or they were, you know, this organized. So they, and they paid 'em different hourly wages also, yeah—you know, I think they—hourly wages was like, well, monthly wages was I think about 10 to 12 dollars a month, yeah. But they had, the Filipinos—I guess it came on the pecking order—maybe the Chinese had a little higher wages than the Japanese, and the Japanese had higher wages than the Filipinos. But, so there was always a discord there. And that's when the event of the union coming into play, making everybody equal yeah. But they, they had different camps. They had in different areas and the better homes went to the first waves of immigrants that came in and it went down that way so as they moved into the different camps the last tier of immigrant workers came, they got the real older homes, yeah. But uh—one thing I-I had noticed, yeah, and yeah, I was in charge of the housing for the sugar company, where the sugar—the Portuguese families were very-very-very, I guess, they're very neat, and very uh particular about their, you know, their homes and stuff and they really kept their homes really super clean and really nice and painted. You know, I can say that 'cause I'm Portuguese myself. . .

(laughter)

JH: . . .But anyway, yeah.

YL: So you just mentioned that, because your, uh, your grandfather, uh, participated in the strike. . .

JH: Yes.

YL: . . .so, did you, did they, like, your parents, or your grandparents mention about it—like the experience, or their position in the strike?

JH: Yeah, I uh, this was way before, when they first started. So my dad then was really young, my dad was really young when they participated. So I think all he knew was—growing up—was the store, yeah. The store started after he was discharged from the, from the sugar company, so. And then he died at a younger age so my, my grandmother took over the store, my Japanese—on my dad's side. She, she handled the store, yeah. It was real simple store. When I came around and stuff, you know, it just had real basic goods. Just bread and I don't—it had, you know, some soda and water and stuff, but uh, real basic stuff, canned goods and the field equipment. But then slowly, as the years went by, it got less and less, and you know, and it finally was really down to just bread and, and canned goods, yeah.

YL: So they didn't, like, really talk about passing the plantation on?

JH: No, no, they didn't really. In fact, as I mentioned, I had a hard time communicating with my grandmother because she only spoke Japanese, yeah. So, and then my dad them, they got into different occupations they went—one uncle stayed at the store, and then he—later on he went on and worked for the city, city and county. Another one became a contractor. And then my dad worked at Schofield. So uh, but you know, daily, almost daily we'd go back to the—to there—to the store. And they had a home in back of the store. They really—traditional Japanese—they had outdoor bath facilities. The *furo* where they you know, daily did make fire and heat up the water and you know, wash themselves out and go in the *furo*, and that's like a bathtub, a wooden bathtub. Along those lines they were very traditional. And they had the various, uh, shrines in their homes, yeah. And ashes in the homes. And they put, daily put food up, and fruits. So they, they're, they kind of uh, all they, they keep up the Buddhist, I guess, tradition, yeah.

YL: Ok. So did, they mentioned that when you were in your childhood, and there were lots of like, mixtures of different ethnic groups?

JH: Yes.

YL: And this seems like, so, all of the kids, no matter where are they from, they all played together.

JH: Yup.

YL: How about the adults?

JH: Yup.

YL: And also like, have like this kind of phenomena that I picture of ethnic groups.

DM: We're talking maybe more about, like, the desegregation of the plantation groups.

JH: Yeah, yeah, yeah. . .

DM: (inaudible)

JH: . . .After a while, it was the, all the workers kind of caught on to what was happening, they were being played against each other, yeah,. But they all came together because at lunch time, you know, they all kind of sat together there out in the field in one area. They sat together and they shared their lunches, yeah. And the Japanese guys had their rice and whatever, their gong gong and whatever else, and the Filipino guys had their, you know, pork adobo, and the Portuguese I don't know what they had—mostly their chopsticks I think. . .

(laughter)

JH: . . .I just kidding! Anyway, they just, they hung together, they mixed foods, and then they got to know each other and then that's how the language kinda went about, Pidgin [slang language], just came about that way too because, you know, they used some Japanese words, and some Hawaiian words, and, like pau hana [finish work], you know, it's quitting time. You know, it's more Hawaiian, yeah, and *kaukau* tin [lunchbox], and

different words that they all, you know, kind of mixed and the Filipino guys, I mean, if they didn't know English they'd have to learn English and they started picking up, and it started the Pidgin English language really, along with English words. But they—they got together after a while, and then the Union really kind of solidified them also, yeah. But as I say, in the past, the Union had some, had a lot of merit, yeah. I mean, they kind of, evened out, you know, the discrimination and the different wages and they asked for benefits. But today, it's mostly a state or federal mandate that you have equal hours or overtime, medical, you know it's all mandated federally, yeah, or by states. So the Union has kind of lost its—well, I mean it didn't lose its—I guess its importance, you know, somewhat. But of course they represent you in labor disputes and contract negotiations. So that's the value of, you know, of the unions, yeah.

DM: Last time we had, kind of, started talking about it. But I'm wondering if we could go more in depth, sort of chronologically because we know you've worn many different hats when you were working for the plantation.

JH: Mmhmm. (agrees)

DM: If you could kind of walk us through, how you first got the job working for them, and then kind of how that changed—because you worked for them for 30 years. . .

JH: Yeah, for 30 years. Yeah.

DM: . . . Kind of through the different vantage point.

JH: Well I was supposed to be a teacher, yeah—a school teacher—in business, because I had a business degree from the University of Redlands. But then I came back, uh, I came back then I got my fifth-year teaching certificate and I was doing student-teaching and a friend of mine who worked—already started for the sugar company was gonna change positions in the company. So, he wanted—he was in the office and he was an industrial engineer—so he decided he wanted to go out into operations. So, I was friends with him—good friends with him—so, he mentioned that, “Hey you know, instead of waiting around for a teaching vacancy to open up, you know, there's one right now, maybe you could try it.” So I said, “Oh, ok maybe I'll just try this industrial engineering position.” And I said, “Well, I don't know too much about engineering.” But he said, “Oh this is industrial engineering, you get just, you do time studies, and, and work methods, performance evaluation, review technique, per-type-uh, reasoning.” So I just, I tried, you know, I went in and put in the application, and low and behold—because you know, I'm from here, a lot of the workers and office workers knew my mom and my dad, you know, a small community, so I think I had a leg up on that. But anyway, they were looking for someone, and I fit the bill so I got into the office and worked for them. So we worked with incentives, incentives and time studies and things like that. That's what an industrial engineer does. But it was kind of, uh, kind of tedious, and you're around people that don't really want you timing them on how they do certain tasks. So it was kind of an unpleasant job, an easy job, you know, you go in there and guys would slow down on you or, you know, or kind of ignore you, and you say “Hey, you can do that faster ah?” “No, this is the way I work”, you know, they say, “Nah.” So I just—it didn't fit, you know. So I decided, “Well, I'd get into something else,” so I got into the safety end of it. The safety

end of the sugar company 'cause safety was becoming a big thing now occupational safety—safety and health was becoming a big thing, you know, federally and on local, on a local level with the state. And, and sugar companies had a lot, a lot of moving machinery and—and you know, instances where—experiences where a lot of guys got hurt, yeah, different depths of injuries. And then, you know, high workers comp costs. So I decided well, I'd get into that. So I went back to school also, I had the GI Bill also, so I worked and then I went back to school at night for this um Occupational Safety and Health Degree.

DM: In Kahuku?

JH: No, this was at—this was in Honolulu Community College. So, I did that, so I got into that. But that, the safety—and I got into security and everything, but that was housed in the industrial relations department at the, the plantation had it broken down where you had the, head administration, then you had the field operations, you had the factory operations and then you had the industrial relations department that handled all the personnel, all the hiring—Human Resources today it's called. So no, they were relationship and stuff, so. So I got into that side of it from the administration side, I was, Industrial Engineering was on the administration side because we handled incentives and, and that type of work. So I did that, and I just moved up that way, yeah. Got into the personnel and then I got into contract negotiations and working with the union. And then I got in, that part of it was the housing and security and whatever, you know, the house medical side of it was under industrial relations. So anything that did—dealt with the personnel, I got to experience that.

DM: And that was your main job?

JH: Yeah.

DM: Throughout most of your career?

JH: So then I, yeah. That was the bulk of my experience, yeah. Twenty-something years.

YL: Do you have any, like, memorable stories about like, because you have lots of negotiating work—do you have any, like. . .

JH: Well. . .

YL: . . .any special memories about this?

JH: . . .I um, you know, after a while the sugar companies, you know, got into trouble, and Waialua got into trouble, you know. Waialua was one of the stronger sugar companies. You know, yield wise, because we were located in an ideal location and we had dammed up the Kaukonahua Stream, which became the Wahiawā Dam. So we had a good source, water source and we had available land—half was owned by the Castle and Cook, our parent company, and half was owned by the Kamehameha Schools and Bishop Estate. And they were very generous with us, if uh, as far as uh, having real reasonable land leases yeah, for big areas yeah. So we had actually mostly all of the mauka lands from Kamehameha highway through Hale'iwa, through Waimea Bay is all Kamehameha

Schools, they upper lands, and then on the other side going from Waialua going down to Mokolē'ia was all Castle and Cook. But uh, I forget now what. . . . It was a good experience, uh. . . . What did you ask me though? (laughs) I've forgotten. (laughs)

DM: You had mentioned last time you had some kind of funny stories about doing some union negotiations and. . .

JH: Oh yeah yeah.

DM: . . .the tactics you guys used.

JH: Oh, yeah yeah. The—well I kind of feel sorry for that, you know, but now, this, this is in the past and stuff, but I mean, you know. . . . The sugar companies, they were, they were sugar companies and they were owned by bigger companies, so they had a lot of resources in back of them. First is the union and the, and the working side, yeah. So, whenever we negotiated we, you know, uh—they were at a disadvantage because we kind of, we had, you know, paid lawyers on staff, you know. Kind of feeding us information, and we had the backing off all our financial records. So they'd always say, "Hey, know you guys made money this year so, you know, we deserve some of the money," but we'd say, "No, no we didn't make any money," you know. We could juggle the figures around and show that, you know, "No, after we paid for everything we really were breaking even," yeah. But anyway, the sugar—Waialua Sugar did lose money in the past, after a while, so we, we—one thing I was kind of proud of, was back in the '80s, or '90s, we—normally the union, they renegotiated as an industry and they never made exceptions, yeah. But for Waialua it was near and dear to them—well, luckily we had the union president, from Waialua, he worked from Waialua, yeah, and the, and the business agents and every. . . . so we had an inside track with, you know, and then, and we kinda, we communicated really well. Waialua communicated really well with Castle and Cook. Waialua Sugar communicated really well with the union. So we were uh, in fact, we were accused of being in bed with them, but you know, it's just, we had a good working relationship. So, when we negotiated—normally you have to negotiate industry wide, everybody's gotta be standard, but towards the end we started negotiating, you know, for Waialua only. Let's have this proposal for Waialua only, let's have this for Waialua only. And it, you know, it went through, yeah, and normally it never went through yeah—never—it was unheard of. But we did that, yeah, for Waialua. And it's through our working relationships with the personnel in the union that, that we got to get some good benefits or concessions from the union while we were, you know, losing towards the end. Towards the end we started having layoffs. We—the sugar company, we had—when we first started, oh I mean, we were, we had thousands of employees, yeah, 1,800 to 2,000 employees when we started off, but in the end we, oh, we were down to like 400, 300, and we started losing. 'Cause we were, you know, we were going out of business so we started downsizing and downsizing, and after a while you cannot recoup, yeah, so we finally closed in 1996.

DM: Can you talk a little bit about that kind of place, that the closure of the plantation and the larger—like the global economy of sugar like. . . .

JH: Yeah. In the—when I first started early on in the ‘70s, uh, they had the Sugar Act, sugar was a protected agricultural commodity, yeah.

DM: The Sugar Act?

JH: Yeah, and it ended, I think in 1974. So when the Sugar Act ended—so sugar, uh, sales went through the roof. Actually worldwide there was a shortage of sugar, worldwide. So, we went out in the world market and everything. So, oh, we had tremendous payouts, yeah. So we—we had so much money, you know. Companies didn’t know what to do so we conceded and we said okay, let’s-let’s give it back to some of the workers. So we gave the workers—each worker had around couple thousand dollars, yeah, a year. That’s, just to disperse that the profits, yeah, since it was going to be taxed anyway. But, we saw smart enough to give it in the form of a bonus instead of raising their rates, their wages, yeah, their hourly wages because we’d be stuck with the wages ‘cause fortunately we did that because in the end, you know, uh, sugar lost money and returns on sugar went down. So if we had higher wages, we’d go out faster. But, uh, yeah, it was good. And we improved a lot of our equipment. This one equipment back in those days which we thought was going to be a lifesaver for, for the sugar industry was called the toft harvester. This was built in Australia and we were the first company that experimented with it, our manager Bill Patie. He was—he wanted to revolutionize the sugar industry. And what happens in the sugar industry is we-we-we burned—it’s a two-years crop—we burned the cane, we had to get rid of all the leaves and we pushed it in rows, and we have a crane that harvests. This machine was supposed to cut the cane above the roots system. So we didn’t have to burn, which was becoming a problem—you know, as-as time went on—for the community, and our health. So this thing, this machine, had all big blades and it cut it above there. And then we wouldn’t have to—the savings—but we didn’t have to replant, its roots are still back in the ground and the cane would grow. Sugarcane is a grass family, so it just grows prolifically, with water. So we’re doing all of that. But unfortunately in Australia with the machine worked really well, didn’t work well here in Hawai‘i because we have a lot of rocks in our soil. And every—we pull for an hour, cut cane, and pull, rocks would get in the blade—that’s the blade—machine would be down half a day. We would be changing blades, and changing blades. Finally, the, you know, we kind of gave up on that idea. But uh, Waialua was, to me, was very revolutionary. I mean, as far as, you know, trying new things. We had a good water system with fertile land. But, again, getting back to the sugar industry, it was very, uh, it was very unique in that everybody shared all of their ideas. So when another company was interested in the toft, we’d tell ‘em, “Hey, just bring a crew over, you can—we’ll house you guys here, you know, you guys stay here and study the machine, do whatever, go out with our mechanics, everything. . . .” So, everything is shared, yeah. So, I could go, you know, on Maui, or Kaua‘i, not even announce myself, just say I’m from—I mean don’t call ‘em ahead, I just show up on their doorstep and they say, you know, “Hey, you guys have a new harvesting method or take a look at it, I’m from Waialua,” I jump in the truck and go. As opposed to the pineapple industry which is slightly different, they’re very secretive—although they negotiate as an industry—they had their secrets, yeah, they don’t share information.

- YL: You mentioned that Waialua is a revolutionized place to have these plantations. But, why, like, nowadays we can see—uh why the trend is like, the plantations were forced to close?
- JH: Yeah, we were forced to close just because, while our yields, you know, there's—there's a lot of—we had a lot of different—we have competition from outside, yeah, with cane sugar. Yeah, we produce cane sugar, but they produce cane sugar elsewhere, in Florida side and I think Texas. But made competition and not really from beet sugar, they produce sugar from beets, also. But the biggest competitor was this corn syrup. You can get sugar from corn, and corn is, can grow prolifically too, yeah. And, so, this high fructose corn syrup was our main competitor. And then sugar health wise got a bum rap a couple years ago way back when we were having problems about sugar being bad for your body, your system and everything. And then they kinda debunked that later on, but it was too late people were staying away from sugar, yeah. And, uh, the high fructose corn syrup just kinda took over the market. They were in the liquid form at first. So they didn't, well, they kinda took away a lot of our markets, was a lot of bakeries and Coca Cola. They melted down our sugar anyway, into liquid form to use so the liquid form was fine with them. And then they finally was able to granulate the high fructose corn syrup too. So it kind of took over the market so, slowly we started fading away. Once sugar company died or, uh, you know, closed then the burden of shipping the sugar to California was put on the rest of the companies and as they started to close, you know, few companies couldn't handle the costs of shipping and everything. And then we sold out our—we own the refinery in California: Crockett, California. And when we closed, we took out our interest in the refinery, and everything just went *kapoot*.
- DM: Is that the time you retired in 1996?
- JH: Yeah, in 1996, I retired, but I stayed on with Dole which is our parent company within a pineapple operations and kinda taking care of, we had a lot of land out here that needed to be maintained, and then we started new, uh new ventures, yeah, coffee, lychee, growing hay, cacao. We started trying to get into new operations, but the only thing that lasted was the coffee lasted. Cacao now is coming aboard. Lychee and hay, and whatever else we had, mangos. . . .
- DM: But none of those were very lucrative?
- JH: No, it wasn't lucrative enough for our returns. Well, fortunately for the guys that took it over, but it is more lucrative. Because see, when you start off a crop, normally it takes, you know five to seven years before you get any kind of return so you put in all of the investment, but it was so long in getting back any returns a parent company got, you know, it couldn't sustain us till we, you know, got profitable. Yeah, and then it was still iffy.
- DM: So, is much of that land in agricultural production now? Or has it gone. . . .
- JH: Yeah, it's um. . . . One big industry that came into play now is the seed, uh it was seed corn industry.
- DM: Yeah.

JH: So that, you know, they were on Moloka‘i at one time and they run into problems with Hawaiian homelands. So they all, they came back to O‘ahu and Kaua‘i and other sugar plantations on the outside islands. And were producing seed corn now, that takes up a lot of the lands. The rest of the land is those, still has, you know, they moved some pineapple down. They took some coffee down, also. Uh, both the coffee fields are still up.

YL: I‘m curious, I‘m just curious how about the other people. . . . like when people feel, uh, realize that the sugar plantation uh declined really quick, like what kind of. . . .

JH: Well, that was a, that was a problem. Yeah. ‘Cause they uh started up these task force and everything, yeah. And tried to introduce, you know, different type. Lot, you know, a lot of the sugar workers were agricultural people. Yeah, they had, I mean, that’s what we went out and recruited in Florida. They came from rural communities, you know, and different countries, yeah. So they were less skilled as far as, you know, they knew other work, you know, manual labor but not. . . . But one thing I found nowadays, you know, because we had so many different operations going on. And we did a lot of different type of work, like the electricians that we had, you know, they did residential, electrical work, they did pole climbing, they did power lines, they—they rewired factories and stuff was so they were well-versed. Yeah, so when they went out—the, especially the skilled people in the trades, they were very, very highly sought after, yeah? Hawaiian Electric wanted our electricians and our welders, you know, ‘cause they could. . . . The welders not only did, you know, production welding, they did fabrication, they did. . . . they, you know, they did different things, different types of things, all around things that you know, made them more valuable, even our equipment operators. A lot of the construction companies used to come and say, “If you got equipment operator that, you know, is—want to come out and work for us, you know, we’re willing to hire ‘em,” because they could operate the backhoe, the forklift, the crane, you know, they jumped on different, dozers and everything. So they were well-versed, instead of just on one piece of equipment. Yeah. So that part of taking care of the trades and equipment operators, administrative side was, you know, we had, like, accountants and engineers, so they, they could find work. But the labor side was a problem, yeah. Uh, and everybody didn’t want to end up farming ‘cause, you know, they didn’t understand the part about farming, you had to lease the land, you know, you got to go to get contracts, you gotta. . . . They could work the land, but they didn’t want the headaches of owning a farm, yeah, themselves. So that group kinda got lost somewhat. So they went out and worked elsewhere in different jobs like the hotel industry, service industry, stores, retail, if they could.

DM: That’s what we were hoping maybe to transition now, something to more current times, to talk about the changes that you have seen in Hale‘iwa and Waialua, since growing up here, how different it is now.

JH: Yeah.

DM: And how the tourist industry, that, did the tourist industry really pick up—after, in 1996, when the mill closed—as a way for the town to sort of find a different. . .

JH: Yeah, it did. . .

DM: . . .industry.

JH: . . .But it was kind of uh. . .

DM: Sorry, sorry [for interruption].

JH: Yeah, it was started rivaling the agricultural communities. Yeah, like sugar at one time was a key industry in Hawai‘i, sugar and pineapple, and stuff and-and, and tourism, yeah is just-just maybe third or fourth, but then the one big industry in Hawai‘i is the military industry yeah, ‘cause we’re fortunate to have some, that’s, war veterans in Congress, yeah, Daniel Inouye, Sparky Matsunaga. So they were real, strong elected officials that got a lot of military funding and, you know, funding for different areas to Hawai‘i, back to Hawai‘i, yeah. He kinda helped us, or both of them helped us in the agricultural industry, too. But, so the military has kind of picked up. So that, so a lot of—some of our workers went to work for the military and went to uh Pearl harbor and stuff. But the tourist industry was always kind of building, yeah. So, back then, you know, Hale‘iwa was just a sleepy town, but the bigger town was Waialua because we had the industry, we had the sugar company. Hale‘iwa, we consider just a pass through in getting to Kahuku, another sugar company out there. So it had just, the church was like, um the bigger dwell-uh buildings here, and then the rest was just small mom and pop shops, yeah, along the way. Nothing really, and then they had the harbor, um in its heyday, Hale‘iwa hotel was back there, yeah, and that was very, very lucrative, I mean, it was a real plush hotel, two-story hotel. But it was built by Ben Dillingham, in conjunction with his railway coming around from Honolulu come around Ka‘ena Point and end up in, I don’t know if, it went up to Kahuku. But, to take care of his other town guest or Honolulu guest he built a hotel out there. It was a really beautiful hotel from what I gather. But that didn’t last, you know, that railway went by the wayside and the hotel went by the wayside. Other than that, there was nothing in Hale‘iwa, other than, you know, its scenic beauty, yeah, it was a beautiful place for people from Honolulu to come out and take a vacation, and then then surfing and everything else then started building up and not only surfing but everything else tourism, trade started picking up. Then the town, Hale‘iwa town, kinda out shadowed, shadows Waialua now, yeah.

DM: What do you think from the stories that you hear from people who live here, what do you think the general opinion, or feeling, is about the way the town has changed? Like, there’s so much traffic now there’s so many tourists. Seems like almost. . . . (inaudible)

JH: Yeah, I’m kinda amused in that, you know, the people that came in and built the town now. They’re complaining about, (laughs) you know, this being, “There’s too much traffic now.”, “Our resources are being overtaxed.”, “Our beaches. . . .”, everything. I mean, people that came in like 50 years ago now, have come, now are now considering themselves, you know, kama‘āinas, so they’re complaining ‘bout the new guys coming in now, yeah, but I could thin a smile now because I’m thinkin’, *jeez!* Because we were complaining about them 50 years ago, but now they’re complaining about the next wave of improvements coming along, yeah. They’re saying, “Oh no, you know, we got to limit the surf contests here, we gotta, we gotta cut back on the traffic, is too much traffic, we shouldn’t have this much traffic we gotta—we don’t wanna allow too much development here. Because you know, we don’t wanna, we don’t want this to be over developed here.”

So, I don't know, this, I guess, is the times, (laughs) but I, yeah, I kinda have to smile about that. I'm amused somewhat.

YL: Since we're talking about the change here, um do you think that, like, your child, your children or your grandchildren's ways of living here is a little bit different?

JH: Yeah, that's a biggest complaint about, you know, the, ah yes, the old-time families here, that you know, their kids aren't able to, to purchase homes, yeah, the homes, uh housing is outta sight here, yeah. And if you weren't fortunate enough to buy a big piece of land that now you could subdivide and have your kids, your, after you have kids, they don't really have chance, competing, you know, with the cost of the homes, yeah, which you know, are between, you know, *psh* 800 [thousand] to a million dollars, they're just average size homes, where I come from, and that was a beauty of the plantation they, um, they provided housing, yeah, for their workers, and then they wanted to move out of camp housing. So they got, they is, they built, they built individual homes, you know, for the workers and sold it to them at a reasonable price because the land was free, yeah. And built that up. So, I'm in uh, original plantation subdivision that, you know, I bought for 30,000. But you know, prior to me, the guys you're buying for 10,000 and 15,000. The third increment was me, and it was, it was 30,000. But 30,000 today, and I mean, I'm sure the um I'm sure some real estate guys have come and appraised my home and they say, "Oh! this you can sell for a million over a million now!" Thinking, yeah, I made a couple more for extra bedrooms, but there's really no housing for the younger generation, yeah. And uh, the state is not moving fast enough in the city. So, uh—and then you have opposition from the community. People in—out here saying that "No, we don't want any development out here. We don't want housing projects." You know, the slogan is *Keep country country*. Yeah, and in fact, it's good for certain aspects, but then certain aspects you need to kinda take care of your, you know—your inheritance.

DM: We have like, maybe one or two more questions. . .

JH: We can continue because, you know, I was going to show you the camps and stuff and it requires us to go outside.

DM: . . .but I think because it's raining, we can wait a few seconds for the rain to die down because it sounds really bad, like the sound [recording]

JH: Yes. Oh yeah.

DM: Yeah, for sure. Maybe just one final question now, and we can go and do a little field trip later. But alright, we kind of wanted to ask you in closing, because we're doing this to sort of document your life history and certainly leave this as a legacy for your children and grandchildren. If there was some final sentiment you wanted to share for them when they're looking back at this years from now, some final wisdom you want to in part to them. . .

JH: (laughs) Uh, uh, I really don't know what to say, really uh—um I mean, just, just gonna—you know, live your life, I guess respecting others and, you know, growing up enjoying the country out here, you know, we had a lot of mutual respect for our, our neighbors. Yeah. So if they could kind of maintain that, that philosophy that, you know, spread out

to what you need to do in life, but I'm gonna respect your, your neighbors and your elders. Enjoy life, I guess. (laughs) Uh, it's about it. I think.

DM: Perfect. Beautiful.

ALL: (claps)

END OF INTERVIEW