

## BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: DeSoto Brown

DeSoto [David] Brown, the youngest son of Zadoc White Brown and Helen Virginia Lowrey Brown was born January 23, 1954 in Honolulu. He grew up along with his siblings, Zadoc, Alan, Cynthia and Lawrence, in the Diamond Head area. He is the great-great-grandson of John Papa I'i and the great-grandson of Irene I'i Brown Holloway.

He was educated at Punahou School, Choate School, and Hawai'i Loa College where he studied Japanese. In 1961, he attended elementary school in Boston, Massachusetts, while his father was working toward a degree at Harvard Business School.

Throughout his childhood he spent time at family gatherings at the thirteen-acre property on Waipi'o Peninsula, owned by his uncle, George I'i Brown, Jr.

He has worked assembling department store displays and as a disc jockey. The author of three books on historical pop culture in Hawai'i, he began volunteering at Bishop Museum in 1981 and has been a full-time archivist with the museum since 1987. He currently lives in Kaimuki.

Tape Nos. 30-8-1-98 and 30-9-1-98

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

DeSoto Brown (DB)

Honolulu, O'ahu

November 2, 1998

BY: Holly Yamada (HY)

HY: This is November 2, 1998. This is an interview with DeSoto Brown. We're at the University [of Hawai'i] at Mānoa, and the interviewer is Holly Yamada.

Okay, let's start with when and where were you born?

DB: I was born January 23, 1954 in Honolulu, territory of Hawai'i.

HY: And can you tell me a little bit about where you grew up?

DB: I grew up at, my parents' home was at 3115 Noela Drive, which is where they still live, which is on the slopes of Diamond Head, above Kapi'olani Park. My parents had lived and bought that house in 1951, and so I was the youngest of five kids, and I was the only one who always lived in that house. The other four siblings who were older all had lived in their previous house, which was a small house in Kāhala. And so my whole childhood—actually, it was really the only place I ever lived until I moved out on my own when I was an adult. And since my parents still live there, and I visit my parents a lot, I'm still hanging around essentially the same house that I grew up in.

HY: And your father, while you were growing up, was he working with the Brown Fund [of Hawai'i].

DB: Yes, my father is Zadoc W. Brown, and he started the Brown Fund, which is a mutual fund, in 1951, which is also the same year they bought the house that I mentioned. And so he worked at Brown Fund throughout my childhood until he sold it to a Mainland company called the Franklin Fund. And that was in the late 1970s I believe. I can't remember for sure now when it was.

HY: Okay. And your mother, did she work at home?

DB: Yeah. My mother's name is Helen Virginia Lowrey Brown, and she was a housewife pretty much. She did volunteer work. That was a time when a lot of women didn't work outside the home—in the [19]50s and [19]60s, in my childhood. And my parents, financially, were well off enough that my mother didn't have to. So she did volunteer stuff and she worked at the Honolulu Academy of Arts as a volunteer in various projects.

One of the things that she did, I can remember, was when the Ward Estate, which is called Old Plantation, the original house, which is where the [Neal S.] Blaisdell Center is now, the City and County [of Honolulu] purchased it to turn it into the Blaisdell Center. But because a lot of people were very curious about what it looked like because you couldn't see it from the street because it was surrounded by a lot of foliage and a fence, so the Honolulu Academy of Arts did an open house of Old Plantation before it was demolished because it was this well-known nineteenth century home. And so my mother was one of the big people who worked on that.

She also, in the [19]50s, took classes at the University of Hawai'i, and one of the interesting things she did was study Hawaiian. And it's kind of interesting because my father is part Hawaiian, and so all my siblings are, too, but my mother is not. But she was interested in languages, and so she studied Hawaiian for, I think, two or three years. And at that time there was very little interest in Hawaiian language studies. Her teacher was Samuel Elbert who wrote the Hawaiian language dictionary, which is now standard, along with Mary Kawena Pukui. And she went to school and Hawaiian class with people like Kaupena Wong and Elspeth Sterling, who was an archaeologist who worked for Bishop Museum. And who else? Mahi Beamer. So that's kind of interesting that she was there when those people were first learning to speak Hawaiian. And Mahi, as an entertainer, certainly sang in Hawaiian a lot. And Kaupena is still known as a chanter. And so, to me, it's interesting to know that these people went to UH [University of Hawai'i] to learn Hawaiian, they didn't learn it as kids.

HY: Did your father also have an interest?

DB: Not quite as much because my father grew up in a situation where his Hawaiian-ness was really not a major part of his life. And it's partly because to go back in his ancestry, his father [George I'i Brown] didn't have a lot of Hawaiian influence in his upbringing. It was because my father's grandmother [Irene I'i Brown Holloway], the mother of his father and his great uncle [Francis I'i Brown], although she was pure Hawaiian, had been raised by *Haoles*. And so she didn't, although she could speak Hawaiian, and certainly she had a lot of Hawaiian activities, she being born in 18[69], nonetheless, their exposure to Hawaiian culture was therefore reduced.

And my father's father, my grandfather, George I'i Brown, was half Hawaiian, but his father [Charles Augustus Brown] being from Massachusetts, had a lot of *Haole* influence. I also mentioned that his mother, Irene I'i Brown Holloway, was raised by *Haoles*. [Albert Francis Judd, who was entrusted with her care after the death of her father, placed her in the home of the C.M. Hydes.] And so, when my grandfather married my grandmother, whose name was Julia White Brown, she was from Massachusetts, and they consequently, because my grandmother wanted to be with her family in Massachusetts, they would spend months back in Massachusetts. And so my father and his two brothers [George I'i Brown II and Kenneth Francis Brown] lived in Hawai'i about half the year and lived in Massachusetts about half the year. So they had a lot of Mainland influence, and they were not in Hawai'i a hundred percent of the time, and I think that influenced my father's connection to Hawaiian culture. Well, obviously it did, because he didn't have as much of it as he would have had he lived here [exclusively].

HY: Did he have at some point in his life later on, did he develop an interest in it? Sort of, you know, I know his brother . . .

DB: Right, not as much as Uncle Kenny [Kenneth Francis Brown]. Of the three boys, Uncle George was the oldest, and then my dad Zadoc, and then Uncle Kenny, who's the youngest. Uncle Kenny is the one who became the "born again Hawaiian," and he developed a really strong interest in Hawaiian spirituality and Hawaiian culture as he got older. My dad not so much. Although he certainly was aware of it. And Uncle George, again, not so much either.

And one of my coworkers at Bishop Museum, Pat [Patience] Bacon, who knew my grandmother Julia White Brown, because they worked together at the museum, my grandmother was a volunteer in the shop and Pat worked in the shop as a salesperson. And Pat is the adopted daughter of Mary Kawena Pukui, so Pat is immersed in Hawaiian culture. She's a very significant carrier of Hawaiian culture and knowledge. Pat used to say to my grandmother how unfortunate it was that Uncle George, as the oldest one, automatically received everything in the inheritance, which included all the Hawaiian artifacts that came from his grandmother Irene I'i. And there was no division between the three sons, it was just this New England tradition of everything goes to the oldest son. And Pat used to say to my grandmother this is unfortunate, because the Zadoc Brown family has an interest in Hawaiian culture, and they should've gotten some of these artifacts. And my grandmother, she being as strong-willed and her personality being the way it was, just dismissed that and said, "No, no that's the way we did it in New England. It's done."

So, I think my father had the interest, and my father was one of the early founding members, or one of the early board members of the Bishop Museum Association, which is sort of the membership arm of Bishop Museum. It's the membership, which hadn't existed up until that time—people who got mailings, people who were called on for financial support and so forth. So my dad was involved with that early on, from its time of inception, that was like 1955.

And another thing my grandmother did was my great-great grandfather, the father of Irene I'i, was John Papa I'i who was a very significant Hawaiian historian. His writings were published in Hawaiian-language newspapers in the nineteenth century. And in the [19]50s those writings were gathered together into a book which is called *Fragments of Hawaiian History*, and my grandmother, already being a volunteer at Bishop Museum—it was published by Bishop Museum—called upon her sons to assist in the paying for the publishing of that book when it was first published. And my dad wrote the forward for the first edition, come to think of it.

Anyway, because of this Bishop Museum involvement, my oldest brother [Zadoc White Brown, Jr.] worked as a volunteer at the museum, my brother Lawrence [Newbold Brown] and I also worked there. The first time that happened was when I was fifteen, which was in 1969. And subsequently, my sister worked at Bishop Museum, too, in the [19]70s. So I sort of then followed into that. There had been this family connection, and I subsequently ended up being a volunteer in the photo collection starting in 1981. And then in 1987 I became a full-time employee there. So it's kind of a family connection to Bishop Museum that led me to be an employee there today, which I am now.

HY: Maybe you can talk a little bit about the family home, the family compound, just to describe it for me.

DB: Okay, which one?

HY: The one at Noela Drive.

DB: Okay. That house was built in 1948 and it was designed by [Vladimir] Ossipoff, who was an architect who just recently died and was considered important in the history of architecture in Hawai'i. And it was built for a guy named Edward Greaney, and he and his wife and daughter had lived there for not too many, just like two or three years, and he died suddenly. So my parents, in 1950 or '51 went to a wedding reception at the house next door to this house, and my dad really liked this house. And my mother says that he called somebody at Hawaiian Trust, which had something to do with Mrs. Greaney, the widow, the survivor of the guy who had died. And somehow a deal was worked out where my father bought the house and my mother initially didn't like it because she said it was too big, and it was going to be too much trouble to take care of, and people were going to come out and visit from the Mainland and expect to stay there. And so she was initially opposed to it, but then when she moved in she really liked it, and of course is extremely attached to it now, as is everybody in the family.

It's on the slopes of Diamond Head, the view looks down over Kapi'olani Park—actually, out towards the Wai'anae Range, and then to the right, the Ko'olaus [Ko'olau Range] and the city. And for me growing up, growing up when I did, I really saw Honolulu grow very explosively during those years because the view from the house, when I was a really little kid, there were only a few sort of buildings that really stood out at all, and they weren't very tall. The buildings in Waikīkī, the tallest buildings in Waikīkī, say in the late [19]50s, which is like my earliest memories, were only ten stories. There was the Biltmore Hotel, there was Princess Ka'iulani [Hotel], Rosalei Apartments, and Hawaiian Village Hotel, and that was about it. Of course, I'm telling you these names that I know now as an adult, because I've sort of studied this. I didn't know what they were when I was a little kid.

Anyway, the tallest things that you used to see from the house were the TV and radio transmission towers which had blinking red lights on the top. And they were way taller. I mean, they were hundreds of feet taller. They were way taller than any building at that time. And then during the [19]60s, when Waikīkī was built up tremendously, we saw these high rises, and into the 1970s, like popping up. And that was when the joke began, that the construction crane was the Hawai'i state bird.

So that's my memory of that view. And the house was kind of up at the top of the property, set back into this excavation, which was done into, really, the rock of Diamond Head, to flatten this property out so it was buildable. And then in the front of the house is a really large retaining wall which holds back a front yard. Below that is a much bigger lower yard. And when I was a small kid, the lower yard didn't have anything in it except just a big expanse of grass and then some large trees. Subsequently, my parents built first a pool, and then a tennis court, and then a smaller house in this lower part of the property. The property is a little less than an acre in size. So it went from . . .

HY: Hold on just a second.

DB: Yeah.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

HY: That makes them sound cooler than they are actually.

DB: Yeah, right.

(Laughter)

DB: Okay, anyway, where were we?

HY: So, describing the lower yard, they built a . . .

DB: Yeah, so there's a swimming pool, and then a tennis court, and then a smaller house built on this lower property. So that was between 1959 and 1965. And so this was a source of excitement for me as a little kid to watch this construction happen and be able to sort of play around this and be told, "Don't step on nails," and stuff like that. And the street is a dead end street so it's quiet and there's not a lot of traffic and there are no street lights so it's kind of dark. Even though it's right next to Waikīkī, it doesn't seem like it's too connected to any of that. And because the houses on that street are quite large, there are not a lot of people living there.

And throughout my childhood, all of the neighbors were older people, older than my parents. So there weren't any kids right in the neighborhood. The only people my age that I ever saw were the grandchildren of the woman who lived next door. And they used to come over some times on the weekends. When I was at home I didn't interact with a lot of neighborhood kids because there really weren't any around. And so I had siblings, as I said, I had four older siblings, and when everybody was home we were doing a lot of stuff, but my siblings and I all went to boarding schools, and so from the time when I was three years old, my older siblings frequently weren't home.

My oldest brother, Zadoc Jr., got sent to—he and my brother Alan and my brother Lawrence and I, along with my father, all went to a school in Connecticut called Choate [School], which is a boys' boarding school. And Zadoc was sent to Choate, he went to Choate in 1957 and that's when I was three, and right after that [Zadoc] went to college. And then my brother Alan went to Choate in 1959 and then my sister Cynthia [Brown Quisenberry] who's in the middle of this group of kids, went to boarding school, she went to a place called Miss Porter's School, which is in Farmington, Connecticut. And then Lawrence went to Choate in 1966, which is two years before I went.

So subsequently, gradually, as I got older, there were sort of fewer and fewer people around. During the school year, my siblings increasingly weren't home. They did all come home for vacations, they came home for Christmas vacation and spring vacation and of course summer. But there would be these long stretches where gradually there were fewer people around. So by the time I was eleven, twelve, during the school year I was the only person at home with my parents in the big house. So it gradually got less and less populated.

HY: Who was living in the small house then?

DB: Actually, nobody did. Nobody lived there. It wasn't really built to have permanent people living in it. When Zadoc got married, which was in 1965, he and my sister-in-law lived there for a time until they moved out, which, I don't know, maybe a year or so until they moved out on their own. Subsequently, later on in the [19]70s Lawrence moved from the big house down to live in the smaller house. And so he was sort of living there permanently. (I lived in this house from 1976 to 1980.)

All my siblings moved to the neighbor islands. They all wanted to get away from Honolulu because they thought it was too expensive, and it was too urban, and too much traffic, and so on. And I objected strenuously to the idea of going to a neighbor island, so I was the only one who lived here and stayed here, because I didn't want to move away. But Zadoc lived in Kāhala with his first wife until he moved to Maui in [1974]. Alan and his wife moved to Maui in, I think, '71 or '72. Cynthia moved to Maui after she got married in 1975. Lawrence moved to the Big Island, he built a house in Hāwī, and that was in about 1978 or [197]9. He was still working on building his house when he died, which was in 1980. I lived at home until I moved into a house that I bought in Kapahulu in, let's see—I moved in 1980 also.

So in between time, my brother Zadoc and his wife lived there, and then my brother Lawrence lived in the smaller house. And in between time, sometimes when people came, they would stay in the house. But basically it was just there for guest purposes or if somebody wanted to live there. And I remember my grandmother commenting when it was being built, saying things like, "I can't imagine, I don't know why they're doing this. Who's ever going to live in here? They're going to have to rent it out." Well, it never got rented out.

HY: So the thinking was that it was going to be a guest house?

DB: Kind of, yeah, yeah. And just there for. . . . Yeah, pretty much a guest house. And if somebody did need to live in it, it would be possible for somebody to live there. And as it is right now, my niece, who is Alan's daughter, older daughter (Brynly Lowrey Brown), is going to UH [University of Hawai'i] and so she is living there now. Which is nice because now my parents aren't there all by themselves completely.

HY: Now, I think your brother mentioned that you had domestic help?

DB: Mm hmm [yes].

HY: And do you recall other people living there?

DB: Oh yeah. First of all, there was a yardman, who was a Japanese guy named Chogi Zukeran. I always remember him as being really elderly. And he was there 'till about, I don't know, in the 1970s. No, no, no, I'm sorry, [19]60s. And then subsequently there would be like different guys who would work maybe for a year or two and then we'd get a different person. So there was a yardman who came every day, full time, to do the various yard work.

And the driveway, which is sort of—because the house is on a hill, the driveway is kind of at the lowest level next to the big house, and right in the middle of the driveway there was a banyan tree. And it was this really nice looking tree, but it dropped thousands of leaves every single day, and Chogi, when he would arrive first thing in the morning, I mean really early, would rake the leaves. That was this major job, every single day, to rake all the leaves from this one tree. And he started at like predawn doing that, and that was the first thing he did. I always remember as a kid hearing the rake on the driveway in the really early morning.

When I was really little we had two live-in maids. And they did the cooking as well as the cleaning of the house. And they also took care of the kids when my parents were out, which meant my parents could go out to parties at night and not have to get a baby-sitter.

My parents had, sometimes, had quasi-formal dinners. If my grandmother came, or if my mother's parents came and were visiting from California, or if somebody sort of significant came to dinner, we had a sit-down dinner where we had food the maids would serve to us at our plates. And they would, you know, come in, change the plates, take the things away, bring the new ones. And they would be almost---I mean, there would actually be courses, too. Because there would be like soup and then they would take that away, and then there would be something and they would take that away. And then at the end of the meal we would have finger bowls. Now finger bowls were an anachronism even then, but my mother was very focused on teaching proper etiquette, and so she always wanted to have her kids know how to do these things in case we ever were in a situation where we had to use finger bowls. Of course, in my adult life I have never in my life encountered (HY chuckles) a finger bowl. Because as I say, even in the [19]50s this was on its way out. But anyway, so we all learned what you did with the different utensils and how you served yourself. And, oh yeah, I just remembered this, there was a bell, it was a silver bell that was on the table at my mother's end of the table. And she would ring it when everybody was finished to let the maids know to come in and change the plates or serve another course. And as I say, even in the [19]50s this was just not only incredibly unusual, but really old fashioned. I mean, I can't imagine very many people were even vaguely considering that type of thing going on.

So most nights it wasn't like that. But if my parents were going out and we---well, let me back up a little bit. In my family there was sort of a division between my two oldest brothers and then the three younger kids. So Zadoc and Alan, there was a difference in age between Alan and Cynthia of about five years. So that tended---and also because they were boys and they were therefore given more sort of autonomy than maybe girls would have been [given], in that time certainly. The two older boys sort of got to do a whole bunch of different stuff than the three younger kids. The three younger kids---Cynthia, Lawrence and me---being closer together in age, kind of were clumped together versus what the other two did.

So when my parents went out to dinner, say for example, and I'm talking about in the [19]50s now and we would be taken care of by the maids, we'd get to watch TV while we had dinner. So that was kind of different than normal nights because we didn't just get to watch TV during dinner, because that wasn't very, you know, that wasn't as nice a dinner. So that's one of my memories as a little kid, on certain nights we got to sit in front of the TV and watch and eat dinner and watch cartoons or something before we were put to bed. We were put to bed really early. We went to bed at like 7:00 [P.M.] or something.

Anyway, so then the two maids did that stuff. And those two first maids who were there in my really young childhood then moved away to California. And then after that we sort of had a succession.

In 1960 and '61 we moved to Boston for one year, one school year, because my dad went to Harvard Business School. And that was the year Zadoc graduated from Choate [School] and Alan was also at Choate. So my parents thought, well, we'll all live on the Mainland so that the kids can see what it's like and my dad wanted to go to school. Then when we came back we had two more maids, and then after that there was just a single live-in maid until about the middle to late [19]70s. And then after that we didn't have a live-in maid anymore, there was just a cleaning lady who came every so often.

So actually, when we came back from Boston we had two live-in maids and a cleaning lady,

and then we had one live-in maid and a cleaning lady, and then no more live-in maid and a cleaning lady. And now, my parents have just, very occasionally, a cleaning lady. So it's really, you know the servant situation has diminished tremendously because nobody can afford to do that anymore. And it's also a little strange to have somebody living in the house all the time, I mean that isn't family. Because I know my mother is more comfortable not having to deal with that anymore, because then you gotta pay them and you don't have as much privacy.

HY: So they lived in the main house?

DB: Right, right. The main house was built, in fact, with maids' quarters in it, because that's the way big houses were built in those days, and even some not so big houses. Because certainly before World War II lots of even sort of middle class *Haole* people and army officers and stuff all had live-in maids. It was really considered really normal for a long time until it gradually just died out.

HY: So the yardman was somebody that just came—he didn't live on . . .

DB: No, no, no, he didn't live there.

HY: And you mentioned the formal dinners, this was an exception to the normal dinner time. Did you usually eat with your family except when your parents were out?

DB: Yeah, usually the whole family ate together. On normal nights, the maid or maids would prepare the dinner in the kitchen and we'd go in to the kitchen and serve ourselves, take our plates to the dinner table, and then we would actually go back and forth between the kitchen. But the formalish dinners—I mean, when I say they were formal, they were kind of formal in the way they were structured, but we didn't dress up for them, which the word formal might imply. Because we little kids, when we were little, since we got put to bed right after that, we would already have had a bath and be in our pajamas. You eat dinner and then, boom, go to bed. And later on, when I wasn't so little, we still just wore really casual stuff all around the house. And so people might be serving us, but we still weren't sitting there in formal clothes.

We always ate together unless, as I said, something exceptional was happening. And I recall my parents being really social when I was little, I recall them going out a lot. And they probably did, I actually have no idea how often they did it, but it seemed to me, as a little kid, that they did it a lot.

HY: What about the type of food that you would normally eat?

DB: Well, my parents are not gourmet people at all, and I'm certainly not. I don't think my siblings are very much. Nobody's into anything too spectacular in the way of food. So it was always really plain, really bland, which is the way I still like to eat. And like basic meat, had to have rice every single night with shoyu, and then some vegetable, and that was it. And then if somebody else was, as I said, if it was quasi-formal and there was soup, sometimes when we first sat down for a dinner like that there might be a glass of tomato juice on the place plate, then that would be taken away. Then maybe some kind of soup, yeah, we did used to have soup, it would be beef consommé. I can remember, now that I'm thinking about it, I can remember the bowls, what the bowls looked like. And we were taught you had to tilt the bowl away from you to get the last bit of soup out, you didn't tilt it towards you. And another plate

would be brought and then food would be brought to you to serve yourself. Which as I said would be some kind of meat, and then rice, and then some kind of vegetable. And then when that was all *pau* and got taken away then the finger bowls (chuckles) were brought, which is ludicrous to think about now, and then some kind of dessert. You'd serve yourself some kind of dessert, and then that was it.

HY: So these menus that your mother would decide on, she was familiar with from her upbringing?

DB: Well, not really. Well, not tremendously so. I don't know how much of an influence that would've been. See, my parents grew up both of them living in that kind of situation, they both had people serving them when they were kids. And I know my mother's upbringing was very—the menus were planned really strictly, and on certain nights you had certain things. Like Sunday nights you have this, and on Monday nights you have that. Well, we didn't have anything as strict as that.

I don't know where that came from, it just sort of evolved into this sort of bland, basic thing. I suspect my mother didn't even say what she wanted necessarily, because it was always so much the same thing. My mother never liked to have to go to the store, so she always would buy a bunch of stuff and put it in the freezer. So it probably would be up to the maid as to choose what kind of meat was going to be served that night, and vegetable. And there'd be stuff she could just select from. So my mother didn't have to say tonight let's have this, because we really didn't make a big deal about what we were going to have.

HY: Did you ever eat Hawaiian foods growing up?

DB: No, we didn't. Because my dad never really had. And the other important thing about my dad is, in terms of diet, he's deadly allergic to any seafood, so he could not eat any fish. And so as a result that would cut way into any kind of Hawaiian food, and probably couldn't eat *limu* either I would imagine. So he didn't ever have any of it. But I'm sure his mother, well, no, his mother would have had some stuff some time, actually.

HY: You know, you had all these servants when you were growing up, were you expected to do any kind of chores? Or did you have any responsibilities that you recall?

DB: Initially, not too many. But we had to clean up after ourselves to a degree. We didn't have any specific chores that I can remember, although when my brother Lawrence and I got a little older, and I'm going to say from about the time I was maybe nine, my dad didn't give us an allowance. So if we wanted to earn money for anything, we had to do something to earn it. And so as a result we would just do make-work things to say, "Look, I did this," and maybe we would get paid something. Or we would volunteer to do something so we would get paid. And my parents were very supportive of us doing these things where we would just say, "Let's clean up this corner of the yard and plant some different stuff." We just did these things for fun, kind of. But we never really got assigned stuff to do, that I can remember.

HY: What about recreational things? What did you do? I know you said there weren't too many kids around there.

DB: Right, no, that's true. The thing is well . . .

HY: How did you entertain yourself?

DB: Well, the house was, as I say, big, and so we had, for example, we had a fort. Along the left-hand side of the property, the *makai* side, actually, was a really big *hau* tree that had been planted I think by the woman who lived on that side. And she subsequently, in about 1957 she kind of rebuilt her house, remodeled her house, and she built a driveway along that side of the property, and she put a big wall on her side of the *hau* tree. And so when that happened, it was kind of closed off from her and it was this really sort of private thing. And the *hau* tree is really wonderful for kids to play in because it's really tangled up and full of big branches. So we built a fort. I guess Alan must have been the instigator of that because he would have been old enough and Zadoc might have been away at school then.

So we got wood from various places and nailed up these things so that we had different platforms to climb around and sit on. And [we] put up various types of coverings from time to time, like old bedspreads or something. And that to me, at that time, because I was little, seemed like this immense thing to climb around in. So that was a major attraction. That was really cool. That was very fun.

What else did we do? My brother Lawrence built a kind of a vehicle that he built out of a wooden crate. And he took wheels off of a metal wagon and put them on that. So you could kind of steer because it had the wagon steering bar. So we would go around the driveway on that and go down the driveway to some extent. We had bicycles, we would ride our bikes in the driveway and around on the street. I didn't get a new bike. See, I had a lot of hand-me-downs because I had older brothers. So I had somebody else's bike from before me.

And what else did we do? As I say, we would do these things on weekends sometimes where we would just sort of think of a kind of a project to do. You know like, I'm trying to think of something specific, something like we turned one room into the haunted house at Halloween or something like that, because there was enough space in the house to do that.

When we went to the movies, we never went to the movies at night. Because, as I said, we got put to bed really early. So when we went to the movies it was during the afternoon. And usually we would go as a family, with both parents, or maybe just one parent. And then later on when I got to be older I got to go to the movies either with my brother or sister, or then by myself. And they would be movies that were close to home, pretty much. We'd go to Waikīkī Theatre or Kūhiō Theatre, or we'd go to Kaimukī [Theatre] or the Queen Theatre. And sometimes we went downtown to the Hawai'i [Theater] or the Princess [Theatre]. And my dad's office was across the street from the Hawai'i Theater in the early [19]60s. And so sometimes we would go down there because he could park easily across the street at his building, and then we could go to the Hawai'i without having to look for parking, which made it more convenient.

We went to my grandmother's house at Diamond Head. My grandmother lived around at what's called Ka'alāwai, which is a place name that isn't used very much anymore. But it's below Diamond Head and it's on the Waikīkī side of Black Point. And she had a really huge piece of property and this big old creaky house. And we went there on the weekends a lot. On Sundays we would take picnic lunch over and we would go swimming and run around. That was always fun.

And then my dad liked boats. And so we had different boats and they would be anchored, during my lifetime, he had them at different places before that, but there was a place in Kāne'ohe that was called The Anchorage that was a small commercial boat place, and he would have one or the other boat there. So on weekends in the [19]60s we would drive over there and take the boat out around in Kāne'ohe Bay.

We'd go to different beaches, we'd go to the sand bar and things like that on Saturday or Sunday. And I liked to read so I read a lot. And we could watch TV too, although that was sort of frowned upon. It was not okay to watch lots and lots of TV during the day. And actually, during the weekends as a kid, there was a real lack of stuff on TV anyway. There were only three TV stations, four TV stations, they weren't on during the entire day. And during the weekends you could turn on the TV and all there would be would be "Filipino Fiesta," which would go on for two hours and you'd just watch people speaking Tagalog and doing bamboo dance.

And then later on when we had the swimming pool, certainly when it was warmer during the summer we would swim. On the weekends we'd go swimming for hours. You go swimming in the morning, and then you'd have lunch, then sit around for a little while, and then late afternoon go swimming again. Jump in, jump out. We'd just devise all kinds of stuff to do in the swimming pool. We had a slide too, which was actually my slide because I was given it, but everybody used it. And we put the slide so you could slide in the swimming pool. Great deal of fun, you could do that for hours mindlessly and have a great time.

And because, as I said, the property was big, there were always little corners to go into and just do something, build some little thing or something like that. We had a dog too, so you could play with the dog.

HY: You went to Punahou [School] before you went to Choate?

DB: Yeah.

HY: Did you have favorite subjects?

DB: At Punahou?

HY: Mm hmm.

DB: Well, my strongest point was always reading and writing. Math was always very poor, still is. So doing book reports, I mean, it's not like I really liked it that much, but that was a strong point. I don't think I was very enthusiastic about school in general. I always found it bizarre how other kids sometimes would talk about how they were excited to go back to school in the fall. I always thought, "What is your problem? Why do you want to go to school?"

HY: Were there teachers or other students there that influenced you?

DB: Oh, hmm.

HY: You were there till eighth grade?

DB: Through eighth grade. I went to Punahou from kindergarten. I started in kindergarten. First grade was when we lived in Boston for that one year. Then second grade through eighth grade. Then I went to Choate ninth and tenth grade. Halfway through [eleventh] grade I said I refused to go back. I came home for Christmas vacation because I couldn't stand boarding school. And I went to Punahou for the rest of my tenth, no, excuse me, my eleventh grade year, that's what it was. And that was in 1971. And then in my senior year at Punahou I dropped out of school. And so I never finished high school. But that fall, when I would've gone to college, I was able to get into Hawai'i Loa College, because I had taken SATs [Stanford Achievement Test]. And so I started college just as normal. So I finished college, but I don't have a high school diploma. So I have a college diploma, but not a high school diploma.

HY: I think we're going to run out of tape on this side unless I . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

HY: Okay, so I guess we should talk about, you spent time at your paternal grandmother's, and also I assume you spent time in Waipi'o . . .

DB: Right.

HY: . . . at your Uncle George's.

DB: Right, right.

HY: Maybe you can talk about what kind of activities you did there.

DB: Okay Waipi'o, let's see, well we didn't go there that much. In my childhood, Waipi'o seemed to be a long way away. And so that was one reason why we didn't go there that much. My older brothers, Zadoc and Alan, went there more frequently. Because they were friends, they were closer to Georgie, George Brown III, Uncle George's oldest (child). And so those guys, those three guys did a lot more together than say, as I mentioned earlier, the three younger kids, Cynthia, Lawrence and me.

When we went to Waipi'o, first of all there was a pool and there was this old little junkie wooden changing house that you would go into to change clothes before or after swimming. There was a tennis court, I never played tennis so I never did any of that. And my impression of Waipi'o was how big it was. Well first of all, the house seemed to be---Aunt Judy [Julia Jones Brown] was really very into taking care of her house and taking care of her garden. Sort of a domestic orientation to her, and she liked it to look really nice. And so the house, to me, it was kind of spread out, it was sort of separate structures. And it looked really---glamorous isn't the word I'm looking for, but it was sort of---it kind of was like you'd see it in a book or magazine. Not overly perfect, but kind of sophisticated I guess. It looked more special than somebody's regular house. And the grounds were, in my memory, huge, too.

So when we went there, and after we went swimming and had lunch and everything, sometimes I would just walk around and look at stuff because it was so cool to walk around in this place and there were all these trees and it was really well taken care of. The grass was all mowed and there were these hills and you could run around on the hills, maybe roll down the hills, slide down the hill. I thought it was kind of cool in retrospect, thinking back, my cousins could go sliding on the hills probably with cardboard. 'Cause we used to sometimes do that in the neighbor's yard next to our house, even though we weren't supposed to.

Let's see, what else was there? I vaguely can remember that when you drove in, next to the driveway there were kennels for dogs. And again, this was like a whole separate other structure way removed from the house. And they also had some kind of aviary, or they had some kind of large bird cage where they had multiple parakeets. I remember that, which then influenced us to have a big parakeet bird cage, too. Although (ours) was not a separate [structure], I mean it was like a commercially purchased cage that was in the structure that was outside in our back, sort of courtyard area. And I think the George Browns gave us some parakeets which we put in that cage. That was a smaller version of what they had.

And the times when we went there tended to be big family gatherings or big summer gatherings when, for example, the older kids were home from boarding school. Or later on, see up until about 1970 we always had Thanksgiving and Christmas at my grandmother's house at Diamond Head. So at that time Uncle George would come with his family, Uncle Kenny would come with his family, and then our family. And we would go over, and of course my grandmother being from Massachusetts, it had to be very New Englandish. So we had our Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner in the middle of the day. And anyway, so those were the times that the family got together, mainly.

Well then, when my grandmother became too old to do that, we started going to Waipi'o to have Thanksgiving and, or primarily Christmas. I don't think we did Thanksgiving after a while. And that was kind of fun, except my grandmother always argued with her sons constantly. She was very strong-willed and eccentric. So, earlier on when we had had these holiday gatherings, they had always been the scene of a number of disagreements. They weren't violent, but it was just sort of this constant series of people speaking to each other in that way. When we started going to Waipi'o for that, it wasn't really like that very much anymore, because if my grandmother came, she was so old by then that she wasn't really as much of a threat as she had been.

And it was actually quite pleasant to do that, it was a nice setting. And they had built, I had mentioned earlier, next to the pool there had been this really junkie little wooden place to change clothes. But subsequently, in the [19]60s, they had built this really nice pool house that was right next to the pool, opened right onto the pool. And it had a living room and a kitchen and it had really nice changing rooms, one for men, one for women. I mean it looked like it was a hotel it was so nice. And so that was really pleasant to use. And we would have our Thanksgiving or Christmases in there. It was really a nice, nice setting, which I remember very favorably. Again, as I had mentioned earlier about the house, it was so sort of sophisticated looking that it was kind of difficult to believe that somebody lived in it. I mean our house was really nice too, but it didn't seem as glossy as that place did. I mean, that place looked like it was out of a magazine.

HY: Well what kind of activities would you do there other than this, you know, swimming and

whatnot? I noticed there was a coconut grove . . .

DB: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

HY: . . . that they had used actually for, I guess to some extent, commercial purposes, not on a big scale.

DB: See, I don't remember that. I mean, I don't remember that they did that. I can remember going around with my cousins and kind of being shown stuff. Because when we were little, "Well, let's go over there." We'll show you this, we'll show you that. We'll go down here to where the marsh is, or we'll go over to. . . . It was just sort of quasi, as I mentioned earlier, just walking around and exploring the place was kind of interesting for me as a small child and up till, I don't know, maybe I was ten or so. Just because there was so much of it, and it was really varied.

HY: Were you told some of the history of that place?

DB: Not really as a little kid. I probably was, but I didn't retain it. I didn't really remember it. I'm sure I was told that there was a family connection to it. But truly, I don't remember that. Because again, we're talking about, well up till—probably last time I went there was maybe in the [19]70s I guess. When I got older, my cousin Debbie [Brown], who is younger than I am, sometimes I went out to Waipi'o to visit her, and once or twice I took some of my friends out there to visit her as well, just because it was a really nice place to visit. So as an adult, after I could drive myself out there, sometimes I would go visit for that purpose. But at that point, even so, even then, I don't remember hearing a lot of significant stories about anything.

HY: You mentioned your paternal grandmother and her propensity to—she was a character, I guess.

DB: Mm hmm.

HY: [How] would you characterize your relationship with her?

DB: Well, my relationship with her, as I said, she was very strong-willed, she was eccentric, and my relationship with her was fine. I was not intimidated by her, I was amused by her. But some of my cousins, and I think certainly her daughters-in-law, were very put upon by her. I know some of my cousins were scared of her, because she could be very sharp-tongued, she was very willful, she ordered you around, she could get angry, and she could be sort of illogical and tell you, "Don't do that." And I always found that amusing and kind of intriguing and sort of fun that she was like that, but I wasn't put off by it really that much.

When we went to her house at Diamond Head, it was, I'm trying to think what that was like, for the most part that was pleasant. And as I mentioned, the Thanksgivings and Christmases were always full of arguments, but I always found that kind of amusing as I said. And we would frequently go over there. My brothers would go surfing at Diamond Head. And later on, when I was surfing for a short time, I used to do it too.

So we would go over and drop over, just on the weekends, with no warning or anything. And if she was home it was fine, and if she wasn't home she never locked her house so we could

go in the house anyway. And she always had Diamond Head (brand) orange soda in her refrigerator, which was always a treat because we really didn't drink soda at home. So that was kind of cool. She had this [19]50s refrigerator that you could open it by stepping on a little plate right below the door. And I always thought that was really kind of, you know, incredibly intriguing and wonderful.

Her house had a variety of strange mismatched furniture and stuff. And I remember there was this table that had a bunch of framed family photographs on it, and there was a picture of somebody that I didn't know who it was. It was a man, it was a young man. And I always thought that this was some relative of hers who lived in Massachusetts. And it wasn't until I was an adult that somebody finally told me it was a picture of Marlon Brando when he first started out in the early [19]50s as a movie star. And she just bought it at some place like [S.H.] Kress or Woolworth. (HY laughs.) And it was just in the frame, you really bought the frame and the movie star picture was in it so that you would buy it, but she liked the picture of him because she thought he was good-looking, so she bought this little plastic frame with a picture of Marlon Brando and put it with her family pictures. And I just didn't know who he was, because I just didn't recognize him.

I didn't, again, my older siblings did more with her than I did, because my mother didn't really get along with her that much. And my mother didn't approve of all the things that she wanted to do. And so my mother didn't let us do as much with my grandmother as some of my cousins did. And so (my grandmother) sometimes would take us to the movies. With me she didn't do that much. Like Cynthia got to go out to lunch with her a lot. She would take, my grandmother would take, my sister Cynthia and maybe one or two of my cousins, cousin Julia or Franny or Laura, to lunch in Waikīki or something.

Or then she would take people to the movies sometimes. And one of the things I remembered was there was this—in the [19]50s there was a movie, a Frank Sinatra movie called *The Man With The Golden Arm*, in which Frank Sinatra played a heroin addict. And that was considered a really adult theme and not suitable for kids. So of course my mother didn't want any of her kids to see this movie. And my grandmother, either upon hearing that or for some reason, took my oldest brothers to see the movie. And that was the kind of thing she would do, just to be willful.

And so my mother disapproved of that, so she didn't let us do as much with my grandmother. But anyway, I didn't do as much because I was younger. Sometimes, I remember, once or twice she came to pick us up and Lawrence and I just went over to her house in the morning for Sunday. And when we went over there on Sundays we would always walk along the beach. So we just walked along and found things in the sand and stuff.

For the most part, I remember her favorably, although as I said, I'm sure to a lot of people, she was intimidating and she could be really cruel too, I'm sure. And I'm sure she was that way to others. But for me it was always just kind of fun that I had a crazy grandmother. I'm trying to think of the stories I remember of her. She used to ride—well first of all she bought a motorcycle when she was like in her sixties, which was unheard of, I mean, it would be unusual now, but in 1950, or whatever it was, it was really out of the ordinary. Particularly because being a wealthy woman, and being sort of known around town, it was pretty eccentric for somebody to do that. But of course she kind of reveled in that.

And then later on, when she wasn't riding her motorcycle, she would ride a bicycle. And one day she got stopped by a policeman for something about her bike. She wasn't registered or something. And she got furious, threw the bicycle to the ground, and walked home. And then she called, I think Uncle George, and said, "Go get my bike and bring it home to me."

I'm trying to remember some of the other stuff. Anyway, that was the type of person that she was. And we would intentionally, sometimes, get her riled up so she would react. When we went over at Thanksgiving or Christmas, it was always a big deal as to who was going to be (seated) where. There was a big table for the adults and there was a little table for the kids. So before the meal was served, some of us would intentionally go in the dining room to look at the place cards to see where we were supposed to be seated. And she would always get furious and come in and tell us, "Get out of here, you're not supposed to be in here yet," and would slap you on the back of the shoulder or the arm. And I just thought that was funny. But my cousin Laura, no, my cousin Franny, I know would find stuff like that unsettling, and she was nervous around my grandmother.

**HY:** What about your maternal grandparents? Did you have a relationship with them?

**DB:** My mother's parents [Alan and Mary Louise Lowrey] lived in San Francisco, [California]. Her father actually came from here [Hawai'i]. But during World War I he had joined the navy and he had gone to the Mainland, to Florida, for his training, and then he met my grandmother on the Mainland. I think she lived in New York at that time. So after they got married they ended up living in San Francisco. My grandmother had lived there for a time when she was a teenager. And all of my grandfather's family was still here, his father and his two brothers, and then all of his nieces and nephews. So they used to come out here and visit. And my two grandfathers actually had known each other growing up. So the two families knew each other, that's how my parents got together. So anyway, my grandfather's roots were here. And they would come and visit maybe every, I don't know if they came every year, maybe every other year or so.

And then sometimes we would go and visit them, too. And so we didn't see them that much because they were not here. They were a lot more, I mean they were fun people, but they were sort of more conservative and more proper. If we went to visit them in California, in San Francisco, they lived in an apartment. And it was a really big apartment so there was a lot of room, but as a kid we always had to be constrained because we couldn't run around, we couldn't make too much noise because it would bother the other people, the people who lived below. So we couldn't make noise there. And we had to dress up and we had to wear shoes. And I always hated wearing shoes, and I still don't like wearing shoes. So going to the Mainland and having to wear these clunky, lace-up shoes I always disliked. And I couldn't wear casual clothes when we were in their apartment because it just wasn't done.

And they always had, it seems to me eating dinner there was more frequently like the formal thing that we would sometimes do, but it was more formal than that 'cause we had to get dressed up and the maid would come and serve. My grandmother, my mother's mother was pretty strict in certain ways. And one of the things was, "Here's your dinner, you eat it." And you don't get to complain that you don't like it. So that was always the source of some trauma to me, like what am I going to have to eat for dinner that I don't like.

And it was a more formal, sort of a stuffy place to go and stay in their apartment. They also had a house, was referred to as a ranch, actually it was a ranch. It was outside San Francisco

and it was in fact a ranch. My grandfather tried to do various ranching things to make it function as a ranch and pay for itself, none of which were ever successful. He tried cattle and he tried sheep and stuff like that. Anyway, that place was less formal, but it was nice.

And there were these big lakes that you could go rowing around on and so forth. That house had a swimming pool, but before it had a swimming pool you had to go swimming in one of the lakes. And if we went there in the summer, which is when we would go, it could be really, really hot. And you'd want to go swimming, but you'd have to swim in this really icky, murky lake that you couldn't see anything in. The bottom was really muddy and there was all this stuff growing in it. And I didn't like swimming in that thing because you didn't know what was in it, you couldn't see it, it was mushy. But then when they had a pool it was nice.

From then I always remember having to be on better behavior. Again, you couldn't make as much noise, it was just more formal, it was just. . . . And part of it was, too, that being in San Francisco it was physically colder there. It wasn't warm like here, so you couldn't be quite as casual. And you had to dress up more because it was actually chilly all the time. And I remember in their apartment, you could go out, you could actually go out on, there was a, not a *lānai* to speak of, there was a sort of a exterior portion, but it was always freezing cold. You'd open these doors and go out on this windswept, freezing thing and look at the view, which was nice, but you couldn't just open the doors and windows like here. So that combines to make me think of it as a more formal, closed, stuffy scenario.

HY: What was the connection between the two grandfathers? What was it business related?

DB: No, no, they just were the same age and they both grew up in Honolulu, so they both knew each other just socially, and probably from school. I think my dad's father was a little older than my mother's father. But they just had been part of the same group of friends when they were young. And so that's why they knew each other.

HY: Going back to your transition from Hawai'i to boarding school, what was it that—you mentioned that you hated it.

DB: I hated it tremendously. I didn't like being away from Hawai'i. I couldn't stand the weather. The weather on the East Coast, the weather in Connecticut really, actually depressed me, because of the short days during the winter and the coldness and the snow. You know, during the school year, as soon as you get there the leaves start to fall off, and then the bulk of the time you're there everything looks dead. That really affected me. That was one of my main traumas, that I wasn't here where it was warm and beautiful.

HY: What about culturally?

DB: Culturally it was a little bit weird. It was very *Haole*, which was a little bit strange because there was nobody Asian, there was nobody of color to speak of. That was kind of weird. And it was much more sort of oriented towards Europe. You know, European culture was more held in esteem in what you learned and what was discussed, and they didn't even know, I mean, the western part of the U.S. was kind of out in the boondocks, and anything further than that was just, "What?" So that was---I mean physically the distance really made a difference in what people thought of where you came from.

Academically it was quite rigorous, and that was difficult for me too in some respects. I mean, some of what was expected, I still, to this day, can hardly believe that fourteen year olds were expected to do what you were expected to do. The fact that you were there all the time, locked up in this place, I mean not physically locked up, but you were under control. Of course you couldn't just go wandering off or go places when you felt like it, because they had to keep track of you. You couldn't get away from everybody. I mean, when you go to school during the day then you go home afterwards, if there's somebody weird at school you don't like, or if there's somebody kind of nuts, you don't have to see them all the time. Well when you're living in the place, if there are nutty kids, which there were some of, I mean some people came from difficult homes or they were a little bit twisted mentally, you couldn't get away from them. They were around all the time.

My brothers didn't have that problem, particularly Zadoc, but the other ones just kind of, I mean they didn't like it, but they just went along with it and did okay. I was really depressed. I really hated it. And that's why I just finally got to where I said I wouldn't go back, because I disliked it so much.

HY: Now, boarding school has been sort of a tradition in your family . . .

DB: Yeah.

HY: . . . was that ever discussed prior to your going, whether you wanted to go?

DB: It was discussed very slightly. I remember being asked sort of, "Do you want to go?" and saying no, but it wasn't really an option not to go. Both my parents had gone to boarding school, all four of my siblings had gone before me, my cousins all went, on both sides of the family. It's just what was done, and so there really wasn't any question that I wasn't going to go. And my parents considered it to be the best education and considered it overall to be a really good experience because you really were, as I said, it was academically really top grade. And also to get out of the house you had to be on your own, you had to be more independent and responsible. All of those things seemed like really positive things, and so that's why they thought that would be really good for everybody.

And there were a lot of people who went to boarding school—I don't mean just my siblings—but there were many people who just thought, "Hey, this is swell. I'm really having a good time, I'm learning a lot," and so forth. But then there's a [group] of people like me who just couldn't stand it.

HY: Did it change or affect the way you thought about Hawai'i, other than that you felt homesick?

DB: Not that much, I don't think. It didn't really, it wasn't like this illuminating experience to get away from an isolated area and be exposed to other stuff. Because we already had been to the Mainland a number of times as a kid. As I said, I'd lived in Boston when I was six and we had traveled to the Mainland regularly to go to California and then also to go to the East Coast, too. So it wasn't like it was this totally new experience that opened my eyes to a new world, because I already had been exposed to it.

No, I don't think it affected my perception of Hawai'i. It really made me dislike the East Coast for a long time, which I don't feel that way anymore. But for quite a few years after

that, just the idea of going back there really was unappealing to me. And now I've gotten over that.

HY: So you convinced your parents, then, to let you . . .

DB: Yes.

HY: . . . continue your school at Punahou.

DB: Yes, right, right.

HY: Who was the disciplinarian in your family?

DB: I think both my parents were. My father more so than my mother. My father being stricter, probably, in certain respects. But they both were, they both were. Because I can remember being spoken to by both of them for various things. So I wouldn't say there was one necessarily, dramatically more than the other.

HY: You came back to Punahou, and at that point you said you liked English and writing . . .

DB: Mm hmm.

HY: . . . was there people there at that time then that had any kind of influence on your interests?

DB: No. You know, the interests that I developed that really became what my life is about, and my current avocation, which is probably gonna be what I'll do for my whole life, has been focused on, for lack of a better way to put it, on twentieth century history. It's what really interested me. And pop culture in the form of movies, and TV, and radio, and records, and that kind of stuff. The study of it's been very interesting to me. I wasn't really schooled in it. Probably the most significant thing that happened to me at Choate, the most significant influence for me at Choate, was not anything that anybody taught me. And this will sound stupid, but it actually was very important to me. It was that the library at Choate had a full run of *Life* magazines, from 1936. And I could go into the library and look at them.

And already at the age of fourteen, which is how old I was when I went there, I was already interested in, and had been for quite some years, the history of what had happened before I was born. I kind of was intrigued by, well what was it like? What was daily life like when I wasn't around? What did they do? What did they have? What were their clothes? What were their cars? You know, that kind of thing.

And being able to look at these magazines, not only the picture stories and just the hard history of what was going on, like World War II and political things, which I also picked up, (but) the ads and the human interest stories, the lighter stuff. I really absorbed a tremendous amount from looking at those magazines, that grounded me a great deal in understanding not only American history during the twentieth century, but this sort of pop culture thing that I mentioned, too, like what movies were popular and when did TV start. And looking at this raw material for that, if you will, taught me a tremendous amount. I just absorbed it because my interest was there and because I really wanted to do this, and also because I was depressed a lot of the time. They kind of were an escape because I could go look at them and not think

about, "Oh, I hate being here," but, "This is interesting."

So going through those magazines over a period of 2½ years made a very big difference and continued to really nurture this interest I already had. And made me, in turn, want to read other things on this twentieth century history that I was interested in. And so in libraries I would go and read books about World War II and read books about the depression and read books about movies. And it made a very, very big impact on my life.

HY: Was that an interest that was nurtured at all like at home or . . .

DB: Not by any individual, not by any person, no, no. Because it wasn't really anything anybody could've nurtured. I mean, even if I had said to someone, "I wanna learn about this (history)," I don't think anybody would have been able to steer me towards anything. I mean, what would you tell some fourteen year old [who says], "I wanna study about—well, I don't know." (HY chuckles.)

And at that time, too, there weren't a lot of books on the subject. There are lots of books now in which people have either academically or in a very lightweight manner, have covered these sort of pop culture things. So now I can go to a library and study a lot of that stuff. But in 1968, in the [19]60s, people had only done a very small amount of it. There was a book that was very influential which I encountered at that time, which was published about that time, which was a history of America, probably—what the heck was it called? I can't remember. But I think it was from 1930 up to '41. In other words, it was primarily a history of the 1930s, up to the start of World War II. A great big, thick thing, but not academic, written more for a broader audience, and that covered not just the politics or the history, which is primarily what would've been studied, considered worth studying, but instead also covered, as I mentioned, what movies were popular, what TV shows, I mean not TV shows but radio shows. And I was always really interested. Well, when did radio start? What did radio sound like? When did TV start? I mean, if you turned on the TV in 1950, what was (on) it? And nobody (could) really tell me that stuff. I mean, my parents didn't really remember it. And there weren't any books or anything. So that's why when I said I would go to these *Life* magazines, that's what they would cover, that's what they would write about. And that's how I learned it, from that primary source.

HY: Who were some of your classmates that you were close to?

DB: Where, anywhere?

HY: Well, I guess when you came back here then. Or were you close to . . .

DB: I wasn't close to many people when I was in high school. When I came back here to go to Punahou, I wasn't close to anybody. So it wasn't, you know, as I said, a lot of this stuff was sort of a solitary pursuit. I was by myself a lot, particularly as I got into my teenage years, sort of studying that stuff. That's what I liked to do the most, that's what I really wanted to do.

And also collecting. About this time in my early teens, and certainly very actively by the time I came back to go to Punahou, about the age of sixteen or seventeen, I started collecting things. I was first interested in any twentieth century thing. And when I say things, I'm talking

about not traditionally valuable stuff, but pop culture stuff, magazines, records. Ephemera is a term which covers a good deal of that material, meaning things which are not intended to last a long time, just created for one particular short term use, and then they're thrown away. And that was when that type of stuff, that pop culture stuff, began to receive more attention and more people began to collect it.

So I began, as I was getting interested in it, there were magazines or books that I could uncover that really assisted me. And so a lot of my attention went into, and still to this day, goes into that type of collecting. By the time I was in my late teens, I decided to focus on that type of ephemera, but exclusively from Hawai'i, as opposed to just general stuff. And so to this time I am still collecting that type of thing. And that's when I started doing it. So that received a lot of my attention.

HY: Your expectation, your family's expectations that you would go to boarding school, was there also an expectation about what kind of field you might go into?

DB: No, no. I was never steered towards anything, pushed towards anything, it was just whatever interest I would have would be okay. And the fact that I got into a job and a career in which I could make use of this interest in history is very fortunate, and my parents were really pleased that I like my job and that I have this thing that I like. So they never said, "We don't want you to do that." I was never turned away from any of those types of things.

HY: Now your brother had mentioned that your dad had run for office at one point. Do you have any memory of that?

DB: What did he do? See, this is either before I was born or before I was conscious of anything. I think, I should know this, I can't remember, just because you're asking me I'm sort of drawing a blank. I think he ran for being a delegate for the constitutional convention in 1950. I think that's what it was. I'm pretty sure that's what it was, which he did not succeed at. Uncle Kenny, later ran for office. He was either . . .

HY: He was in the senate.

DB: He was in the senate, he was in the state senate [1968-72]. He also ran for lieutenant governor [1966]. And Governor Burns endorsed him, so we all sort of thought, "Oh boy, he's going to make it," because Governor Burns was the governor, but he didn't make it.

HY: Now your family is kind of traditionally strong Republicans, do you recall any, I guess discussion about his change in politics.

DB: Well see, Uncle Kenny going from Republican to Democrat caused my grandmother, my grandmother was up in arms about that, and very riled up about that. And just, how dare he, you know, he can't do this. I don't think my father or other uncle, Uncle George, were particularly, I mean they probably just sort of laughed about it and said well, whatever. I don't think they got upset, I think my grandmother certainly got upset.

HY: You were pretty young.

DB: Yeah, but I can remember it being discussed. I think I was about twelve when that happened,

so it was considered a big deal. It was clear that he was making a major change, a major conscious change to do something dramatically different.

HY: So other than your grandmother, it was generally something . . .

DB: I don't think anybody was upset, I think it was sort of, I think my father and other uncle maybe kind of laughed about it a little bit, but I think they respected him for what he wanted to do. And since that time, because he's become less and less conservative and traditional. As I said, he's gotten into more spiritual things. My father probably views that somewhat indulgently, and just kind of says, "Well, if that's the type of thing he likes to do." But nobody was angered by it other than my grandmother.

HY: But, did any of you campaign?

DB: No. We weren't expected to. I would've been too young anyway. His siblings didn't do anything. My aunt certainly did do stuff, I'm sure. Because she would have to as a politician's wife, Aunt Joan. But I don't think anybody else in the family got involved in any of that. I can't really remember.

HY: Going back to your schooling, you didn't finish Punahou, then you went to Hawai'i Loa, what did you study there?

DB: I mainly studied Japanese. Japanese was my major, and that was because I'd always wanted to learn Japanese from when I was a little kid. Hearing Japanese programs on the radio or on TV, I just wanted to learn it because it seemed intriguing. And seeing Japanese TV shows particularly, as a child. So that was my major, and the funny thing was that after I really did kind of learn it, it kind of lost its intrigue. I became less interested in it I guess because it wasn't exotic anymore. I mean, when it became kind of normal, then it wasn't as interesting. And I never kept up with it. And I can't speak it, which is kind of too bad that I didn't [retain that ability]. Had I been inspired to do so, certainly in the [19]70s I could have gotten any number of jobs using it in Waikiki or somewhere else in the local economy. But it just after a while didn't interest me anymore.

HY: So you continued your interest in . . .

DB: Yeah.

HY: . . . collecting.

DB: Right. That was where I continued to go. And again, that wasn't something you could study in school, and it wasn't really something that I had a lot of outlets for in an academic setting. I pursued it just because it was my own personal interest. And subsequently, after becoming an adult, I wrote about it. So I have made use of it, not only in my job at Bishop Museum, but on my own I have written books and articles about these subjects that interest me. So that was something that I don't really know how it came about, and it wasn't because anybody suggested it to me, it was just an interest that came out of me, intrinsically, spontaneously, whatever.

HY: I think I read somewhere that you were a disc jockey for a while . . .

DB: Yes.

HY: . . . is that right?

DB: That's right.

HY: Maybe you could talk about . . .

DB: Well, because in the course of my collecting I used to collect old records. When I was a little kid, I used to listen to my parents' old records. My parents had kept a bunch of old records. And these were 78s, and 78s are the first type of mass marketed, really wide-spread recordings that were available for people starting around the turn of the century. And the 78s were the standard type of record up to about the late [19]50s. So when my parents were young people they had collected these records. So I found it really amusing and interesting because again, it was this sort of, "Well, what did it used to be like in the old days listening to these records?"

Sometimes some of them were really good, some of them I really liked, some of them sounded really strange, some of them sounded funny, some of them sounded stupid. So I liked listening to these, and as I got old enough to do so, I used to go to The Salvation Army and Goodwill and buy 78s and listen to them. I mean they were really cheap, so even if I didn't know what they were, if the title sounded intriguing I could buy them. So I collected Hawaiian records along with American pop records.

And my brother-in-law had a friend in 1975 who was a disc jockey at KCCN, and so one night we went down to KCCN and I took a bunch of 78s and played them with this guy. So he said, "Why don't you come back?" So I started doing that regularly every week.

And then a new program director said, "No, you can't do that anymore."

But then a year or two later somebody else came in, I had met somebody else who became a DJ [disc jockey] there and she called me and said, "I want you to do this regularly." So I used to go on KCCN—I can't remember, I had different schedules—at least once a week, sometimes twice a week, and I would take a bunch of records down there and play for an hour-long show old Hawaiian records which would be from as early as maybe the teens [i.e., 1910-19] up through the 1950s.

And then I went from KCCN, I met Ron Jacobs, who's a DJ, and he was going to be the program director of an FM [frequency modulation] station—I'm trying to remember what it was. It was KQMQ. They changed the format, they put this on the air with a whole new lineup of people, and he hired me to do my show there on the weekends. And again, it was just an hour long. And I prerecorded it. So for a while it was just played on Sunday mornings. But then also I did it on Saturday morning too.

So for a while I was doing two shows. And actually it took quite a bit of my time to choose the records, decide what the format was going to be, go down there and make a tape. It took hours to go into the studio and tape this darn show, which they would then play at different times depending on different schedules.

So I did that, in all, I started in 1975 and I did that up to about 1979. You know, it wasn't

like an everyday thing, but it was a fair amount of work to do it. And it was fun playing the records, it was fun collecting the records, because I was using all my own records of course. And it was fun to be able to think of a theme I wanted. I mean, if I wanted to do a theme, I would think, okay, well this week, what should I focus on? What kind of historical connection can I salute this week? Should it be something about World War II? I would think of things to kind of build a theme around for the show, and that was fun.

HY: I think we're going to run out of tape.

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 30-9-1-98; SIDE ONE

HY: Okay, so you were a DJ up through '79.

DB: Yeah, 1975 to '79.

HY: And you weren't yet at Bishop Museum now, right?

DB: No, no.

HY: Were you working elsewhere?

DB: Yeah, I worked from 1979. . . . I was going to school too. And from 1979 to 1986, I worked on and off part-time at two different stores doing display. And actually they were groups of stores essentially. I worked as the assistant to just one person, and then when she moved to this other store and got more staff I worked with them as well. The first store was called Lanai Sportswear, and they had three locations that we did displays for. And then the second store was Andrade's and we had, I don't know, from three to four different stores that we would do on this regular basis.

And so I worked sort of part-time there. And during those years also is when I was writing. Because starting from 1978, I worked on and off 'till 1982 on my first book which was called *Hawai'i Recalls*, which was focusing on the stuff that I've been talking about—Hawai'i as presented through pop culture, and promotion and advertising. And I worked on *Hawai'i Recalls* with two partners, but I was really the primary person who did the research and structured the book, and I also worked on the layout, too. So that was something I was doing on and off during those years. That was published in 1982.

And then I worked on my second book which was called *Aloha Waikiki* for, let's see, when was that published, '85, I think. So then on and off for maybe two years I was working on that. That was a photo history of Waikiki. And I did that entirely on my own. I did all the research, I found all the photographs, I did all the writing, I did all the layout. And then my third book was called *Hawai'i Goes to War*, and that's a photo history of the civilian side of World War II in Hawai'i. And I started that in 1986 and that got finished for good and published in 1989.

So during those years when I was working part-time at display, I was also doing on and off, really intense work on the books that I was writing then too, which can be incredibly consuming, and can just take up a tremendous amount of time when you're doing those things. It's like writing the biggest book report you ever did for school. It's that and worse and more. But I liked doing it because the subjects really interested me. So that's what I was doing during that time.

I started volunteering at Bishop Museum when I had time in 1981. And that was because, as I mentioned earlier, my sister had worked in the museum in the [19]70s, and she'd gotten to know this woman (Lynn Davis) who pretty much ran the photo collection. So I used to go in when I had time and just look at old photos, because that's what I liked. And eventually they got a collection called The Hata Collection, which was done by a guy named Lawrence Hata, who had a photo studio, and he had a photo developing studio and then a photo camera store in Waikīkī. And he had died and his wife had given all these thirty-five millimeter proof sheets to Bishop Museum, just hundreds and hundreds of these pictures, mostly of Waikīkī, but a lot of everyday stuff that's dated from the [19]50s and [19]60s.

And I was really intrigued by the collection, so somebody said, "Well, if you really like this and you want to look at it, why don't you do the processing of it?" So I worked on that for a number of years, on and off, at the museum. And because I already knew the people there, and because I knew how things functioned, a position became available in 1987, which they offered to me, and I took it. So I've been employed full-time at Bishop Museum since 1987, and that's now going into my eleventh year.

HY: And you're considered an archivist, is that right?

DB: Yeah, I am. When I started it was just the photo collection, because that's all there was, and then as a volunteer. And then when I started working full-time it became what was called the visual collections because they added to it the art collection and the film collection. And I was hired to deal just with what's called moving images, which is film and videotape. So for my first two years I focused exclusively on that, because they'd never had anybody really work on those two collections. It was just sort of a bunch of stuff had accumulated without any plan for it. Subsequently, the department became the archives when we took on other collections from other departments of the museum. And so eventually my title became archivist.

And I didn't go to school to study any of that. What I've learned about being an archivist I learned on the job, and particularly for dealing with moving images. At that time there was nowhere to go to school. There are on the Mainland now places where you can take moving image archiving courses and classes. There was an organization I still belong to called the Association of Moving Image Archivists. And everybody who'd been in it, same thing, they just all learned on the job, so it wasn't as crucial that I didn't have a specific degree in that field because there was no way to do that.

HY: Oh, I know what I wanted to ask you. Your uncle had mentioned that you were researching a theory—I don't know if it's something you want to talk about here—about having to do with your great-grandmother. He was thinking that you were speculating why the marriage between her and Charles Augustus Brown didn't work out, and having to do with her feelings about sovereignty and whatnot.

DB: Yeah, I think that there were two things that happened to them. Charles Augustus Brown, well first of all, they were very different in age. She was born in 1870, he came here in 1877. And they got married in 1886, and she was seventeen years old. No, she was born 1869, excuse me. She was seventeen years old, he was something like thirty. And she inherited a great deal of land from her father, John Papa I'i. And she, as I said earlier, had been raised as a sort of foster child by two different *Haole* couples. So she was very Americanized, I mean she was cut off, to a degree, from Hawaiian culture.

Anyway, I came to speculate that perhaps part of the instigation of Charles Augustus Brown marrying her was that he wanted to get his hands on her land. And I don't know if he was that mercenary or not. But he did in fact turn the I'i Estate, which was a great thousands of acres of property, into this kind of corporation, and he made himself the head of it, and then he ran it. Well during the 1890s, Irene I'i, was Irene I'i Brown at that time, was a close friend of Queen Lili'uokalani, and remained so 'till the queen died. And I know this because of different writings that I've encountered.

And so in the meantime I also know from various other things that I've read, that Charles Augustus Brown was a supporter of the overthrow. And I have read a letter that he wrote, I don't know to who, saying in essence, "I've been a supporter of this political movement, and I've expected, because I was a supporter, to get some sort of role in the new government, and you haven't given me a role. Why is that?" And this probably was the provisional government, or maybe a little bit later could have been the Republic of Hawai'i.

During the 1890s also, Charles Augustus Brown had a relationship with another woman who had a child. And so traditionally, in the family, we always thought that it was this extramarital affair, which is what made them get divorced. And they were divorced by 1900. And in the 1890s it was unusual to get divorced. But as I read more of these things about what the two of them had done, I came to also conjecture that the difference in their politics might have led also to their breaking up. Because I know, obviously if you are a married couple and you're that dramatically opposed politically, particularly when one person is helping to overthrow someone the other person is closely associated with, that's obviously going to lead to some problems.

So I know from reading the queen's diaries, which are in Bishop Museum, which is just a project I worked on as part of my work, that the queen mentioned Irene fairly frequently as someone who she was with. And there was an entry in one of the queen's diaries to the effect that Irene's husband came and saw the queen and said, "I don't want her to come and see you anymore," this is before the overthrow, "so please excuse her from coming to see you."

And the queen said something to the effect of, "I think it's because he's jealous." In other words, that Irene was spending too much time with the queen. So, knowing that from the evidence that I've uncovered, has made me think that there was this political problem between the two of them. And I'm sure this was the case.

HY: Now the line that comes from Charles Augustus Brown, is this your Aunt Rose? Is this Rose?

DB: Right, right, right.

HY: Are you in contact at all with that end of the family?

DB: Well there's no more of them.

HY: Oh, she had no children?

DB: She had two sons but they're both dead.

HY: Oh, I see.

DB: Yeah, the child who was born from his other relationship was named Rose. When she got married she was Rose Davis. And actually, I don't know if she was called Rose Brown when she was a child or not. I don't think so. Anyway, when she got married, she had two sons, Charles K.L. Davis, who was a singer, and Francis Davis. So that's all there were, and they had no children so they are all dead now, so there is no connection.

But, I don't know how close---see, Aunt Rose would've been of the same generation as my grandfather George, and then Uncle Francis. And I don't know how---they interacted to a degree, but not too, too much. I know when Charles Augustus Brown died in the [19]30s, he did leave, I believe a third of his estate equally to each child. And we certainly interacted with Charles and Francis, because eventually in the late [19]60s Charles went and lived at my grandmother's house and kind of took care of her for a long time. She died in 1974 and he essentially was her part-time caretaker, in addition to being able to live at the house.

So we saw Charles a great deal in those years. Charles, we didn't see him that much before that time because he had lived on the Mainland. He had left Hawai'i in probably the middle [19]50s because he was an opera singer. And he had a very good voice, and he went to the Mainland to school, to train his voice, and then he had worked as a singer. And so it was kind of glamorous that he had done albums and he had done recordings, and so it was kind of cool that I had a relative who was a semi-star. But unfortunately Charles never took care of himself, and Charles didn't really pursue his career very actively. He was just more of a partier to a degree. And he didn't keep training his voice, and he didn't take care of himself, so gradually he—he would've had the capacity to have some career in opera, but he didn't pursue it.

And anyway, by the late [19]60s, after he'd been on the Mainland and he'd been an entertainer on the Mainland, he came back. And Charles just kind of—it's a crass way to put it, but he kind of sponged off of people. He was really nice, and people liked him to be around, but he kind of let Uncle Francis, who was very generous and wealthy, kind of put him up. And then when that kind of fell through, he ended up living at my grandmother's house. And there was certainly room for him, and certainly he put up with her and took care of her, which was a big help for us. And so that worked out really well. But he kind of never buckled down and earned his own money and took care of his own self. He kind of just went from person to person and just kind of got handouts, in a nasty way of putting it. But it's not like people disliked him for doing it, he was so witty and he was lots of fun that everybody kind of enjoyed him doing that.

HY: Did Irene I'i and her second husband, [Carl S.] Holloway, have children?

DB: No, they didn't. So the only kids, the only generation, the only sort of "next ones" were my grandfather George, and then Uncle Francis, and then Aunt Rose. And that was the full extent

of it. And Charles Augustus Brown was remarried and Irene I'i was remarried. Neither of them had any more children.

HY: Okay. I guess I wanted to ask you a little bit about Bishop Museum. There's been kind of a lot of changes in the past.

DB: Mm hmm.

HY: Well, I guess even since you've been there.

DB: Oh yeah, it's even before I was there, really.

HY: Yeah. Do you have any feelings about the change in politics or direction?

DB: Well, the museum keeps changing direction and things go in different ways depending on different politics and different whatever. Just like any institution or any corporation, after a while they'll start saying, "Well, we're not going to do this anymore, now we're going to go over to this." The museum has increasingly become financially strapped during the time that I've been there. When I started there was a lot more money. In the [19]80s, I mean of course there was a lot more money everywhere in Hawai'i in the [19]80s. And we had funds back in those days that enabled me to travel to the Mainland to professional conferences which were really important for my development. I'm really grateful that I was able to do that.

And that money has dried up. We've eventually had to have staff cuts. It's actually part of a larger, sort of nonprofit problem. Every nonprofit doesn't have enough money these days, and Bishop Museum is prominently among them. And there have also been, you know, as I mentioned earlier, there are different politics, there are different personalities. And so someone will come in and say, "Okay, we're really going to focus on this. We're going to go in this direction." And then after a few years, if they're out, then that kind of dries up, you don't do that anymore, and you do other stuff.

I have kind of a, not cynical, but more kind of going-along-with-it and whatever (feeling). I really feel personally that what I want to do is what I'm doing now, working with the collection, being able to handle the photographs, the film, help people do their research. That type of thing is what I really enjoy doing. That, to a degree, is cut off from a lot of the other stuff. So I don't have to deal with other stuff above me. I'm up front in saying that I don't want to get a position different from what I have, because I don't want to have to deal with politics, I want to be able to stay with what I'm doing. And I've been fortunate that I have been able to do that, and I haven't had to become more administrative, which I wouldn't want to do, I hope I don't have to do.

HY: Anything else?

DB: That's plenty.

HY: Anything else you want to say?

DB: I don't think so.

HY: Okay.

DB: That's a lot of stuff. (HY chuckles.)

HY: Okay, thank you so much.

DB: Okay, you're welcome.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

HY: Okay, I forgot to ask you about your interesting name.

DB: My interesting name, okay. My interesting name is not my real name. I don't usually tell people my real name, which there's nothing wrong with, but I just don't tell people. The name DeSoto—my real name is Brown, of course—DeSoto came about because, it's when I was a teenager. I already was interested in old stuff, and I knew that there had been a make of car called DeSoto, which had been made by Chrysler Corporation, and has a historical background, those (cars) were made from 1928 to 1961.

But by the time, in the early [19]70s, a DeSoto sounded like this funny, old-fashioned type of thing. If somebody talked about a DeSoto in a comedy routine or something, you knew it was supposed to be an old-fashioned scenario. So one day, in about 1972, there was a TV program on called "Emergency," and it was about two paramedics who rescued people. And their last names were Gage and DeSoto. I don't remember their first names. And one day in the TV Guide I saw this listing for the show "Emergency," and it said, "Gage and DeSoto commit a daring rescue," or something like that. And just in reading this thing in passing I thought, well, you know, that's interesting, what if those were first names? I don't know why I thought this, but I just thought, it would be interesting if that was somebody's first name. If you read this and didn't know what these guys' names were, what if you thought those were first names?

Then I thought, DeSoto is a very interesting first name. And I thought, I can call myself DeSoto Brown because it would be this nostalgic-sounding first name that would tie in with the nostalgic outmodedness of the DeSoto car. And I didn't consciously think this is a good decision for commercial reasons, or anything like that. It just had a nice sound to it. And I thought, I'm going to call myself DeSoto Brown. So I did.

HY: And your family . . .

DB: My family doesn't call me that . . .

HY: Oh, okay.

DB: . . . but everybody else calls me that. My family knows me by my real name, so they primarily refer to me by my real name. But everybody else calls me DeSoto.

HY: Okay. Anything else? Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW

# **I'i/Brown Family: Oral Histories**

**Center for Oral History  
Social Science Research Institute  
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa**

**March 1999**