

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Donald Lee

Donald Lee was born June 2, 1950 in Denver, Colorado. His father, who was Hawaiian-Korean, met Donald Lee's mother on the Mainland while attending military school. Returning to the islands, the family lived in various places in central O'ahu, and settled in Waikīkī when he was three years old. He attended public schools on O'ahu and graduated in 1968 from Kaimukī High School.

While serving in the U.S. Navy, he was sent to Vietnam. After his discharge, Lee returned to O'ahu and worked various jobs relating to the construction industry. In 1987, he moved to the Big Island to work for Guillot Design & Construction, Inc. In 1989, he began working for Hāmākua Sugar Company but was laid off when the company shut down in 1994.

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Melanie Lee

Melanie Martinez Lee was born August 19, 1968 in Honoka'a. The family moved to Laupāhoehoe when she was a young girl. Her father, Augustine Martinez, worked for the sugar plantation. She attended Laupāhoehoe High and Elementary School.

While living in Pepe'ekeo, she met Donald Lee, an employee of Hāmākua Sugar Company. They were married in 1989 and lived in plantation homes owned by the sugar company.

She and her husband and their four children live in Laupāhoehoe in a home they purchased from the sugar company after it shut down in 1994.

Tape No. 26-29-1-97

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Donald Lee (DL) and Melanie Lee (ML)

February 24, 1997

Laupāhoehoe, Hawai'i

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Donald and Melanie Lee for the Hāmākua, Ka'ū families oral history project on February 24, 1997 and we're at their home in Laupāhoehoe, Hawai'i. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, let's start. Melanie, why don't you start by having you tell me when and where you were born.

ML: I was born in Honoka'a in '68 and we moved to Laupāhoehoe when I was about five. And I still live here yet. (Laughs)

WN: Okay. And then what was your father [Augustine Martinez] doing first in Honoka'a—Laupāhoehoe?

ML: He was a tractor operator for Hāmākua Sugar [Company]. And he used to, like, dig up the ground, fertilize the cane, and stuff like that.

WN: And your mother [Elizabeth Lopez Martinez]?

ML: My mom was a homemaker. She stayed home and took care of me and my brother.

WN: Okay. So there were two of you?

ML: Right.

WN: So he was first working in Honoka'a, then he switched to Laupāhoehoe?

ML: We used to live in Haina, then from Haina we went to 'O'ōkala. We moved to 'O'ōkala. Then the last place we moved to was Laupāhoehoe [Sugar Company]. And he still was working at the tractor operator all that time.

WN: Donald, what about you? When and where were you born?

DL: I was born Denver, Colorado. My father [Harold Lee] was going through air force academy school. He had to quit school when he was third grade in order to help support his brothers

and sisters 'cause he's the oldest, you know.

And then I grew up like in 'Aiea [O'ahu] before all the big housing and stuff, when there used be the taro patch, you know, watercress. And then from there we went to Waipi'o Gentry and Wahiaiwā. They moved to Waikīkī behind the dry cleaners, Kūhiō Cleaners. And that's where I grew until I joined the service, did 4½ years in the service.

WN: How old were you when you moved to Waikīkī?

DL: Three years old. And they still had the old trolley tracks in the road. And all they did was just covered it over. Instead of digging it up, they just covered it over.

I grew up there. You could catch 'ō'io, big *moana*, you know, like four-pound *moanas*, we used to catch. A couple times, *uluas*.

WN: What kind work was your father doing?

DL: He was in the [U.S.] Air Force.

WN: Oh, he was in the air force, oh okay. So in essence, like he commuted to Hickam or something from Waikīkī?

DL: Yeah. When we were young about five years old, he used to play the field, eh, with extra women. So my mother divorced him. So we lived in Waikīkī. She had a two-bedroom house that she used to use [as] a office like, because she was a seamstress. So she would sew to make money and stuff like that. She was always busy sewing and sometimes sewed until about eleven-thirty [11:30] at night. So, that's how we got supported.

And after my brother and I got old enough, we would go around the neighborhood, ask the guys what [kind of fish] they would want, and we would go catch 'em and trade for money.

WN: Like what? Catching what?

DL: Oh, eels. Couple people like different eels, like the moray, the white eel. The Japanese people would want the *moana*, the *kūmūs*, the *weke*. We had the guys that we would go to and give 'em the fish and they would give us money. So, we never asked our mother for money much.

WN: What kind fishing you folks did?

DL: Spearing and pole. You know, shore fishing and stuff. Mostly spearing. When we would catch the *moi* or 'ō'io, [we] would keep that. Or like if we caught a lot of *menpachi* and the *kūmū*, we keep them, too. *Menpachi*, and the 'ō'io, and the *moi*, we would keep. Nobody would get.

(Laughter)

DL: Nobody will get 'em.

WN: Well, you caught 'em, right? I mean. (Laughs)

DL: Yeah. And I'd say, like the *menpachi* were all like about three-quarter [pound] to a pound. That's when the water was clean. And we can stay out about two or three [o'clock] in the morning, then come home, get up, go school.

WN: And where you went to school?

DL: I went to Thomas Jefferson Elementary [School]. And then Washington Intermediate [School], and then Kaimukī High School. I graduated in 1968. And then went into the [military] service November 7, 1968. And I did 4½ years.

WN: What branch did you go?

DL: [U.S.] Navy. Then I spent a few years in the Mainland, then came home. Worked for Dillingham [Corporation] shipyard for a bit.

WN: This is in Honolulu, huh?

DL: Yeah. Then worked for the [U.S.] Coast Guard on Sand Island, civil service. International Harvesters in Māpunapuna.

(Child cries. Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

DL: And then I came here [Big Island], worked for the construction company named Guillot [Design &] Construction, [Inc.]. And then, after that, worked for the Hyatt [Regency Waikoloa]. And then I started working for Hāmākua Sugar [Company] in '89. Worked as a welder, a fabricator for the mill, and stuff like that.

WN: Okay. So we got you all the way to Hāmākua. Now, Melanie, tell me what schools you went to?

ML: Laupāhoehoe [High and Elementary School], the only one. (Laughs)

WN: Was always over here?

ML: Yeah. I went to school [beginning] in '73, I think, and I was already [living] in Laupāhoehoe when I started going to school.

My dad worked for the Hāmākua Sugar [Company]. But when he was younger, the story that he told us was, at that time when he was growing up, he finished school in the ninth grade so he could work to help his mom support twelve kids. So he started with the plantation as a poison gang.

WN: Spray poison, yeah. Had the backpack, you mean?

ML: Yeah. So, then from then on, I guess he worked himself up to be tractor operator until he passed away in '91. He had, what you call that? Cancer of his liver, and stuff, so.

WN: How many years did he work? Did he ever tell you?

ML: I think was. . . .

DL: Something like nineteen years?

ML: Yeah, that's what I was going say, about nineteen years he worked for the plantation. So, I mean, we used to---not this house, there's like maybe couple of rows down from where I live right now, we used to live down there. When we used to *pau* school, we used to wait for him walk down the road, you know. And just grab his lunch can and stuff. Then eat whatever was leftover after he *wen pau* work and stuff like that. Yeah.

WN: So tell me what this camp was like when you were growing up.

ML: Well, very, very nice people. I mean, you knew everybody. It was a better place to live than inside the cities and stuff. My mom guys couldn't afford a lot of things, so we just got what we could get and stuff like that. But it was a nice place. I grew up here all my life and I'm still here. (Laughs)

WN: That's good. I mean, like who were your neighbors?

ML: Well, we had only one neighbor above of us, and he was Vicky [Victor] Jardine. Until they had a landslide by where my mom—because they was maybe six houses down on the road, we was the last house. And we lived right next to the cliff. And had a landslide, so they didn't wanted nobody to live [in the danger zone] just in case have some more, so my mom moved to the house that I'm at right now. But before my mom guys got this house, they were living down by the Jardines, and I went on my own.

Then I went to Honolulu for maybe five months, then I came back. And then that's when I met Don. I was living in Pepe'ekeo, 'cause I had my older son and I didn't want my dad guys to support me, which is my problem, right? So, I moved to Pepe'ekeo for maybe about three or four years. No.

DL: About a year.

ML: Yeah, I lived there about a year before I met Don. Then so I met Don in Pepe'ekeo, and then he found a job at Hāmākua [Sugar Company]. Then he had to travel like every day to go to work or catch ride, you know, hitchhike and stuff like that. So then we had a house in Haina side. It was a bachelors' quarters. There was a family living there already, but they put us there since it's so close to where he worked. Then they told us that we had to move out of there. So they gave us an abandoned house in Pā'auhau. The thing is a very terrible house. I mean, there was hardly any windows and the house was terrible.

WN: What year you folks got married?

ML: In '89.

WN: [Nineteen] eighty-nine? Oh, okay.

ML: So, from there, when me and Don got married, they [Hāmākua Sugar Company] told my mom guys that they had to move. This house was open, so they moved my mom guys to this

house. Then when my dad passed away, my mom couldn't live in the house no more. Because my mom wasn't working for the plantation.

WN: Oh, I see.

ML: See, my dad died, she had to go. So, what happened was, me and my mom traded house. She would take my house in Pā'auhau, and I would trade her for this one since was only her. Then she decided she didn't want it, she wanted to move to Hilo. So she gave that house up and, luckily, we got this house.

WN: You've been here since. . . .

ML: I've been here since '92.

WN: [Nineteen] ninety-two?

ML: Yeah. I've been here since '92. Back to the same camp that I grew up in.

(Laughter)

WN: So, what year did you graduate from Laupāhoehoe [High and Elementary School]?

ML: [Nineteen] eighty-six.

WN: [Nineteen] eighty-six? Okay. Then from '86, what did you do?

ML: I went to work for Mrs. Fields [Cookies] in Kona. I stayed with my cousin there. And then I applied for a hotel job at Mauna Lani [Resort] as a kitchen utility to wash pots and stuff. I stayed in Kawaihae with my aunty until I met my oldest son's dad. We moved up to Honolulu and I stayed there for about five months, then I came back here. 'Cause we had problems and so forth, so I came back with my—I still was pregnant with my son. And I moved back with my dad guys until I gave birth, until my son was maybe like three months old or something. That's when I went on my own in Pepe'ekeo, where I met him [Donald] about a year later.

WN: I see. So you had a previous marriage?

ML: No. It was only boyfriend-girlfriend.

WN: Okay. So you had one child from another relationship . . .

ML: Yeah.

WN: Okay. And then [Donald], did you tell me how you ever got here? How did you get over here?

DL: A friend of mine, he said he had a house to build. So, I packed up all my stuff and moved over here. That was supposed to only be like for a year. Ha, ha. (WN chuckles.) Nine years later or ten years—yeah, ten years. I'm still here.

WN: So you been here ten years?

DL: Yeah. So that's how I came here 'cause of one guy, he told me he had a job for me. 'Cause where I was living, I was living on a banana and papaya farm. Somehow, he got Hawaiian Homestead land, three hundred and some-odd acres. He's converted it into a banana and papaya [farm]. He has like the *Pākē* bananas, the Bluefields, and the solo and strawberry papayas. That's his main crops. And he's slowly increasing his productivity on that, so I worked for him as a welder.

'Cause all these years, I've been a welder since the military. I learned to how weld, to repair boats that were shot up because of beach landings in Vietnam. So that's how I learned how to weld (chuckles) and stuff, patching the bullet holes. And sometimes the rockets wouldn't go off, and so they would go right through the hull of the ship or the boat, the landing crafts.

WN: How long were you in the service?

DL: Four-and-a-half years. I did 3½ years in the Vietnamese waters. I did the Apollo 14 pickup. And then, during that time, I was also the captain's coxswain and stuff. Someone who is an E-6 and up normally is what they call the gig driver for the captain or the admiral or the fleet admiral. And the fleet admirals didn't like the idea of me being a seaman, an E-3, driving them around. But I was really qualified for it. And they were amazed. Also, too, I became the gig driver because I knew how to work with fiberglass because, you know, living in Hawai'i you repair surfboards. You gotta fix 'em, (chuckles) yeah, and all. So, that's another reason why I was a gig driver.

Also, too, the captain liked fresh fish. So if we'd go to different ports, he'd know that I drop him off on the pier, I'd back off, go someplace with like twenty, thirty-foot water. I would dive in, go get some stuff that I would want to eat, too, you know. *Tako*, stuff like that. So, that's why the captain liked me.

Plus, I found out that most of my officers that were in charge of me had married local girls. And one of my captains was in Pearl Harbor in World War [II] when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. [So] the ties, that, and stuff. One chief liked *li hing mui*, so. . . . (WN laughs.) Yeah, you know, that's what he likes so get him *li hing mui*. I would ask a friend of mine to send two, three pounds of *li hing mui*. The different chiefs that I met and knew when I was in the service all liked different things. You know, one liked *li hing mui*, the other one liked different stuff.

And one chief taught me how to do a lot of trading. Like when you reach different ports, you know, this guy likes that. So you get this, and then when you go back on board ship, to get out of duty, or when you in trouble, you say, "Here, I got this." Yeah, they forget about it. But I never dealt with black market. Everything was strictly legal. But you know how, what do they say? The gopher, right? The guy who go get it. (WN chuckles.) So that's what I used to do. I get the odd things that [they] wouldn't get, you know what I mean? So that's how I did it.

WN: So, where's your family now?

DL: My brother lives in Kāne'ohe, and my mother, too. My father lives—if he's still alive—lives

in Maui.

WN: That's interesting because, you know, I see you folks, your lives. (To DL) Your life is moving around to lot of different places, experiencing different places. (To ML) Your life is pretty stable, this point right here. You live in the same neighborhood that you grew up in, huh?

ML: Right.

WN: So, you know, I think it's interesting how you two got together.

DL: She used to live upstairs.

ML: He used to live below me.

DL: And then we started talking.

WN: You were both on your own at that time?

ML: Yeah. He was living with his friend downstairs.

WN: Where were you working when you were at Pepe'ekeo?

ML: I wasn't.

WN: Oh, you weren't working?

ML: No, I wasn't working.

WN: Okay. So, you (DL) started working Hāmākua Sugar [Company] from '89. And then, when you folks got married, what did you (ML) do?

ML: I was at home.

WN: Taking care of your children, yeah, okay.

ML: Yeah.

WN: So, how did you get the job?

DL: Applied. My boss, my supervisor, he got angry with me because I applied as an apprentice. But my ability to weld, it was a journeyman's rate, quality of weld. Because in the military, you cannot have any, what they call rubbish, you know, porous welds. It can't be all bubbly and stuff like that. So he always used to get mad at me. He'd push me harder than some of the other guys because of my ability and stuff like that. But he was a good boss to work for. So, he put me on the job.

I had to do a roller, a gear roller, for the table, what we used to call the table. It was where the trucks used to come up on one position inside the mill. And the crane would come along,

lift it up, and dump all the material, all the cane, inside the table. And then these big sprockets would turn the chains, and then it would fall into the carrier to take it in for cleaning and all that.

And when he seen my weld, he had me go and do what they call a break test for him. Get two pieces of scrap and he put it underneath the table and he had me weld it kind of like in an awkward position and all to see if I could weld. And then, when he broke it, he seen how my weld was. When you break it and if it pulls the material from the other plate, it's a real good weld. My weld was really deep and all. So from then on, sometimes on critical jobs, he would put me on it. We did a bridge for the Hāmākua Sugar [Company] so the cane trucks could go over. And they would haul about seventy, sometimes eighty tons on the thing. So you have a fleet of trucks hauling that over and stuff like that. He was really happy with my welds.

WN: And you got journeyman's rate?

DL: No.

WN: Oh, you didn't?

DL: No, they lost a lot of my paperwork from my apprenticeship program. I had the hours, but I just didn't finish up with all my paperwork. Because when you're in a transition of closing, so many people were handling my paperwork that they had lost some of my paperwork.

And that's where my boss was upset that I didn't come in to talk to him and to show him what I can do as far as welding and all. Because he would have hired me in as what they call a grade nine level as a journeyman because of my abilities to weld. And I knew more than just one phase of welding. I could do the oxygen acetylene weld, arc welding, wire fee welding. I also knew aluminum welding and hiliarc, which is something like gas, but you got to use argon or helium to shield your weld.

WN: Hiliarc, you call it?

DL: Hiliarc, yeah. So, I know six different ways. All except for underwater welding. It's the only one I really don't know how to do yet. But I know the basics of it. But I'm not a certified diver. You have to be a certified diver, you know. The deeper you go, the more you make.

WN: So, Melanie, how did you feel about when he got the job with the sugar company?

ML: All right. I mean, wasn't anything big about it. The only thing I thought, yeah, since he working for 'em maybe we can get one house, you know, instead of paying like two hundred-something dollar rent. When we move in, you only pay a certain amount. It's not even fifty dollars, I think, was.

DL: Yeah.

ML: And water, you just pay a dollar at that time. So I was thinking about rent-wise and stuff like that. I was glad about that.

- WN: So, when you moved in here, there was no rent? You didn't have to pay any rent 'cause you were working plantation?
- DL: No, we had to.
- ML: We had to pay. We would pay like maybe thirty-five dollars or something like that.
- WN: To the plantation?
- ML: Yeah.
- DL: Yeah. Thirty-five fifty [\$35.50] a month.
- ML: Instead of---saved me two hundred dollars, yeah?
- WN: Well, how much [rent] were you paying [in] Pepe'ekeo?
- ML: About two, three hundred dollars a month.
- WN: Oh, really?
- DL: It would change.
- ML: Since it was a low-income housing, they would go towards your pay. So if he makes a lot, they'll take out a lot—I mean, they'll bring the rent higher. So I told him try go apply for houses, even though there was a list for people also waiting. But luckily he did. They gave us the house at Haina from the bachelors' quarters. Then from there we moved to Pā'auhau, and then luckily we got this one.
- WN: So the bachelors' quarters, was the rent similar to what . . .
- ML: Everybody pays, well---there's so many rooms in this place, so we was paying a certain amount. Probably about the same.
- WN: So was good because you were having family, getting a family going.
- ML: Right. At that time I lived in the bachelors' quarters, I had three kids.
- WN: That was what year, about?
- ML: [Nineteen] ninety or '91 that I moved there. And then in '92, no, '91, we moved in Pā'auhau. I stayed there for about a year, I guess. And then we moved to where I'm staying now in '92, '93.
- WN: You've been here [Laupāhoehoe] about five years now.
- ML: Where, here?
- WN: Yeah.

ML: Here, yeah, going make five years. In June makes five years, yeah.

WN: So as a kid growing up on the plantation, what did you folks do to have good fun?

ML: We used to go down to the [Laupāhoehoe] Point, 'cause the point is right down the road. We used to go there every time. Used to have a whole lot of kids before then; now it's mostly older people live here. And there's like maybe one, two, three, well, four houses that has kids in 'em. The rest is all older people. We used to go down to the road, go play with the horses. We used to come up, go down to the gulches and play with the water, which we used to get scolded for. Because they don't know if mountain is raining, and if the mountain rains, the water just come down [i.e., flash flood], yeah, and stuff. So we used to go other friends' house, go play, and stuff like that.

The house that I'm living in now, used to have an old man that used to live in this house. And used to have fishpond. He made his own fishpond. We used to . . .

WN: Where at?

ML: Like right outside. Yeah, but we *wen* cover 'em with dirt now. He had small, little fishes. We used to come, 'cause my mom used to raise fishes, right? We used to come with our own [net], swipe 'em out of his, *da kine* without him knowing, you know. Bad things like that. (WN chuckles.) And then he start yelling, "Leave my fishes alone," and stuff like that.

Yeah, my mom used to make *pasteles*. And we used to go down by the point side, get the banana patch, we go pick banana leaves, burn the leaves and stuff, for make extra money and stuff like that.

WN: So where was the town, Laupāhoehoe town? You know, where they had the stores and everything? Was it over here, or is it down . . .

ML: More down that side, I think.

WN: Toward the point?

ML: No, past the horseshoe turns. It still has the---Sakado Store has stood up there . . .

WN: Right, right. I'm related to that family, you know.

ML: Oh yeah? Wow.

WN: Sakado, yeah, the man's sister is my aunty.

ML: Oh, wow.

DL: Couple times I've gone in there, and she's sound asleep. (Chuckles) And the store open, and she's all crashed out. (WN chuckles.) And all of them were like, "Oh, wow, where's . . ." You know, because most anybody would have taken advantage, you know. And the cash register's there and just push the—and get what you want. But turn around, there she is sleeping. "Oh, Mrs. Sakado." (WN chuckles.) And she look around, it's like wow. And so I

tell her, “Hey, you know, if you tired, you should close the store. You know, go take a nap or something.”

She goes, “Ah, no, no, no.”

I said, “Well, it’s dangerous, you know.” But she’s really a nice lady, Mrs. Sakado. They went to [Las] Vegas for their wedding anniversary just recently. They’ve been married I think sixty years or something like that.

WN: Yeah, yeah.

DL: Terrific.

WN: That’s all right.

DL: The father, her husband, is still trucking around. But she’s pretty cool.

WN: Well, people were saying before time, down at the point area, you know, that’s where the town . . .

ML: Oh, had a school down there before.

WN: Yeah, before the [1946] tidal wave [which destroyed Laupāhoehoe School].

ML: Before the---right.

WN: That’s right, the [Laupāhoehoe] School was down there before.

ML: Yeah.

WN: So when you (ML) went school, it was always . . .

DL: Laupāhoehoe.

ML: Laupāhoehoe side.

WN: And so, okay, you went school. Okay, now, so you started work on the plantation. Now when did you first start to realize that the plantation was going to close?

DL: When they started telling us that they have to shut down because of bankruptcy procedures and all. And I’ve talked to other people, and they said wasn’t really bankruptcy procedure as it was a political event or deal. Some people say the closing of the plantation was because of political pressure it was getting from the state. That the Morgan family actually used to go take money out of their own private banking accounts and pay some of the bills and some of our wages in order to keep the mill running. But old man [Francis S.] Morgan didn’t listen to some of the guys that been working since they were ten years old in the plantation what to do. He hired all these college people in order to maintain the thing. And what had happened was the guys said, “I can save you money.” So they fired so many people and closed the ‘O‘ōkala [sugar] mill [in 1987]. But if he had maintained what some of the old-timers used to say,

[that] you can close one mill [‘O‘ōkala] for three months, repair one, and have the other mill [Haina] running. And then reverse it—three months, close the other mill next year and all. But Morgan listened to all these big college and financial wizards, which ran him, too, to being bankrupt, you know.

And so that’s what I found out just this year, ’cause I was talking to one of the secretaries that used to be in the office, that it wasn’t financial. It was political pressure they were getting to shut the mill down. Why, I have no idea. You know, if we were still working, there would have been over fifteen hundred jobs. And stores wouldn’t have closed, and companies wouldn’t have gone broke. And, too, the big White man in the Mainland made this North Atlantic Free Trade Act. It destroyed Hawai‘i’s industry of sugar. Because now Mexico can come in and sell it. Indonesia can come in and sell it at a rock-bottom price. Because what we would make [in wages] in one week, they would pay three, four guys for a month, you know. I made \$600 a week, but they pay three or four guys that a month, you know. And so it’s a lot cheaper to go to a different country. But they don’t realize that when they go to a different country [for sugar], they destroy their own. And now they trying to figure out how come we’re so far in debt. Because if you keep giving everybody you see a dollar, eventually you’ll be broke. And that’s what America has done. And that’s what the state of Hawai‘i has done. You know, close things when it’s on a financial downhill. If anything, they should have pushed it to where we would have been able to sell it [sugar] at a price. And now C & H Sugar itself, that has been in the business for, what, 150 years, has gotta be closing, because they can artificially make sugar now. And so . . .

WN: Plus they have corn sweeteners and sugar beet, yeah? Lot of competition all over.

DL: Yeah, but the sugar beet mill in the Mainland blew up. The sugar’s explosive, yeah? If compacted in an area, sugar is really explosive and catches on fire. Sugar will burn at a higher degree than oil.

WN: So how did you feel when they announced that they were going to close?

DL: Close? Really upset, but no can do nothing. I went out for apply all over, hotels and all, in different places, different businesses. And you can’t afford, you know. Some guys say, “Oh, join the iron workers [union],” but it takes \$750. One guy told me, “Seven hundred and fifty dollars, cash up front. Then we’ll put you in.” And being unemployed, I’d rather spend the \$750 to feed my family than to try get a job, you know, and stuff like that. But maybe I talked to the wrong guy on a grumpy day or something, but that’s what it’s come down to. And now they want to legalize gambling. But they say the pros and cons, but it’s. . . .

WN: What kind of assistance have you folks been getting since the layoff?

ML: I went to college for cooking [classes], and I graduated in ’95. And now I have—I mean, during that time when he lost his job, we went on the welfare. And I’m still having welfare assistance. Now I’m working at Hilo Hawaiian [Hotel] as a baker. So now I [just] found out that my hours have been dropped to sixteen hours a week. And I’m having a hard time, just what it is now.

WN: What was it before?

ML: I was getting, like maybe, thirty-five hours a week. Now it's dropped down 'cause there's not hardly, I guess, any business. The bakery's not doing so good. So now I'm getting cut down on my hours. The labor costs is too high, so they can't keep us going as much as they used to. So I planning on going to the Mainland and look for a job. He tried all over in Hilo, he tried everywhere, and he couldn't get in for some reason. I don't know.

WN: So you folks are both going to move to the Mainland?

ML: Well, I want to go first, to see what I can get, and I'm gonna try and find a place and stuff. If I do get a job in the Mainland, I want to stay up there for about year, save up money and stuff, and send these guys [i.e., the rest of the family] up. 'Cause [according to a signed agreement], we supposed to keep this house for five years. We can't rent it out and we can't sell it. But I cannot live here if I cannot afford to pay my bills. I mean, I'm in the hole like twenty-something grand [i.e., thousand dollars], and I don't know how I'm going to get out of it.

DL: Yeah, between me and her, what we owe out in debt, we could buy a Mercedes-Benz, you know. And people [creditors] say, "Give us money."

I say, "Well, you show me how."

ML: You know, get collectors calling us, and I say "I'm sorry, but I'm trying. I can't do it." And I'm so stressed out where I'm crying now, and I don't know where I'm going to get the money from. Yesterday, Friday, I found out that they *wen* drop me down to sixteen hours a week now. It's like, how am I gonna do it? So I made my income tax and stuff. With my income tax [return refund], I'm going to go up to the Mainland—my mom is up there right now. And I told her that I'm going to go up for a week and give my notice to my job that I'm going to go up in April. Going stay up there for a week. I lied to 'em, because if I tell 'em I'm gonna [try to] find another job, they going just tell me, "No." So I told her [ML's boss] I'm gonna help my mom move, which she is moving, but I'm going up there actually to see if I can get a job.

WN: What part of the Mainland?

ML: California, Anaheim. So I'm going to stay there one week, and if I do get a job, when I come home and they call me, I'm going to give them my two-weeks' notice and just tell them I have another job waiting for me.

WN: Are the prospects of you (ML) getting re-employed better than you, Donald?

DL: Yeah, because, you know . . .

ML: I went to school. A month [before] I graduated in May, they [Hilo Hawaiian Hotel] called the school to see if they have anyone that is interested in working. So that's how I got the job. If I never get the job, then I don't know if I would be able to get one, honestly. But since I was going to school, and they called the school to get people to work for them, is how I got it.

DL: They called the school before you *wen* graduated.

- ML: Yeah, that's what I said. Before I graduated.
- DL: And then, like McDonald's, they don't need a certified welder, or they don't need a welder flipping burgers.
- ML: And plus, too, most of the time they cannot hire you 'cause you was getting more pay and they paying less, you know.
- WN: What were you making at the Hāmākua Sugar?
- DL: About \$9.15 an hour. You know, I say I won't work for under ten [dollars an hour] nowadays. Because just for travel time, insurance, and expenses and all, I gotta have about ten bucks just to try to stay even. But you know, like everybody else, they're getting minimum wage, you know. Two, three people work in one household, yeah, it's no problem. But when you have four children, all my money would have to go to the baby-sitter for four children. That comes out to a minimum of about twelve hundred [dollars] a month that would have to be paid for the baby-sitter. And that's one of our paychecks.
- WN: So right now, you're watching the kids.
- DL: Yeah. It's an economical thing for us, because how can we afford that? And if I do work in Kona, well then maybe on the way home one day when I'm tired, I wreck, 'cause that's how a lot of the guys have had their accidents. Her cousin has been in an accident three or four times. Wreck his car and all. And luckily, he's come out of it with just a few scratches and bruises. But one of these days, he may not make it. So there's something, too.
- WN: (To ML) Is that an option for you? To go to Kona to work? Have you tried that?
- ML: No, but if I do, how am I gonna get there? I mean, right now, I have my mom's car. My car is down. If it wasn't for my mom's car, I don't know how I would get to work [in Hilo]. 'Cause they make me work like 2:30 in the afternoon to 10:30 at night. As far as getting there and coming home, I have no way of—unless I hitchhike, you know. But that is one scary thought to do anyway. So I told him that we need to—this is the opportunity to where I might have to go to the Mainland. They have more opportunities up there than down here right now. And my mom, she called me up, she told me there's a lot of jobs opening up there. But I'm thinking if I do move up there, and then he comes, I think you (DL) have a faster chance of getting a job than staying down here.
- DL: Yeah, because I could go into L.A. [Los Angeles] harbor and apply again.
- ML: And, plus, the only thing I'm worried about, I don't want to lose this house. If it doesn't work up there [Mainland], I want to be able to come back here.
- WN: So you have to wait five years?
- ML: Yeah.
- WN: So how many years so far now?

ML: [Nineteen] ninety-four. . . . I have like, 2½ more years to go.

WN: But if you go up, he's going to stay here.

ML: Right.

WN: Oh, I see. Ooh, boy.

ML: It's gonna be hard. I know, as far as the relationship and my kids-wise and stuff, it's gonna be hard.

DL: Just like if I went Down Under, you know. What they call Down Under is like go work Kwajalein, the Marquesas Islands and stuff like that. Yeah, that's great pay, but like, her, too, she would be home here with the kids. But, too, the money is no longer tax-free. You have to pay on your taxes.

WN: How old are your kids now?

ML: My oldest one, he's . . .

DL: Nine.

ML: Nine. My girl is seven, [the next one is] six, and my youngest one will be three in April. And then also I have my cousin that is living with me. She's seventeen. So I just got her in September. So that is hard, too, because she doesn't want to go to the Mainland, because she has a relationship here, you know. So that's kind of hard. And I told her when she reaches eighteen, that she let me know what she wants to do; if she wants to come with us, if I do move up there or whatever. And she can decide to stay here.

WN: How important is family to you folks?

ML: Very important. I mean, that's the reason why I cry so much, because I can't get the things my kids want. I cannot get them new beds or dressers and stuff like that, because money is tight right now. It's very---I want to get my kids all what they want, 'cause when I was growing up, I couldn't get what I wanted, because it was hard for my dad guys, even though there was [only] two of us [children]. And now it's more harder for me, because I have four of 'em, plus it's hard time to find a job, yeah? So my family is very important to me, which I don't want to lose.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: I would imagine things would be a lot different if you were single.

ML: Yeah.

WN: Living by yourself.

ML: If I was single, I don't have to worry about kids or moving anywhere I wanted. If I wanted to move, I would move right now, kind of stuff, you know. But if you have a family, you have to think money-wise and how would they feel. Since my kids are young, it wouldn't affect them as much [as] if they were older, 'cause they going figure that they have their friends down here. They don't want to leave their friends, and stuff. But now they're young, it's easier.

WN: Right.

ML: If I need to make a drastic move, it's easy 'cause they're younger. Kids, at this age, always makes friends fast, you know. Yeah.

WN: Seventeen-year-old is a little harder.

ML: A little harder.

WN: Yeah.

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

WN: So, you know, you said earlier that you're on welfare, I would guess food stamps.

ML: Right.

WN: Yeah. What else do you folks turn to for help? I mean, family, friends?

DL: No.

ML: We can't even do that, 'cause they the one having hard time, too. It's not like it's somewhere where I can, "Oh, can I borrow this?" 'Cause if I do borrow, I'm going to have to pay back, which I know I'm not going to be able to. We went to his uncle to buy this house, which was \$1100, and we having a hard time of paying him back. That's why I don't want to go back---I mean, we can go back to his uncle, but I don't think his uncle would [lend] us any more, 'cause we having a hard time paying [back] just \$1100, you know. So I have nowhere to turn to, or anyone to turn to.

And my kids, we found out couple of years ago that they have lead poisoning.

DL: From the paint.

ML: From the paint, from the house and stuff.

WN: Really?

ML: And they want us to [re]paint our house. They want us to fix the house, paint 'em. With what? We don't have anything. You know, they say we can go to some places to ask them for paint, if they would mind donating paint. They're not gonna---they're gonna lose money.

Maybe they might if I have a paper saying if they can—maybe they ask 'em, yeah. There was one place in Hilo that did it once for us. But it wasn't enough. Then we only did my kids' room, which was more important, 'cause they sleep in there. And they say, "Oh, did you guys do your parlor, do the whole. . . ."

I say, "We cannot do the whole house. With what money? With what paint?"

WN: If the plantation were still operating, would they be responsible for painting this house?

DL: Well, I could buy the paint for cheaper price, you know.

ML: I mean, there's holes in my walls right now. It's termite eaten. In my door, somebody can peep through my door.

DL: That was done by this little guy [DL's son] with a screwdriver. And he just, one time, just did that. I was working, I turn around and see him. It's like, "Wow, what a hole!" And I always thought everything was pretty solid. (Laughs)

ML: If the plantation was still going, we would have called up, tell, "Okay, we need this repair on my house," and stuff. They would come, maybe, in about a week or two. They would get a door or they will fix it up for us. But now, since there's no plantation, I mean, you can see right through the floor in some places of my house. So to buy wood and stuff, it takes a lot of money to fix up a house. And I just don't have it.

WN: So besides that \$1100 that you owe your uncle, what kind of other expenses or . . .

ML: I had a school loan. That one I have to pay back. With interest and stuff, it's like \$11,000. He [DL] has associates that he has to pay [back]. Before I met him, before we got married, he has debt yet. That is like six grand [\$6,000]. And plus I have my telephone bill, which went up. And then electric, you know, gas. My [gas] tank now, to make hot water, to fill it up, it costs about two hundred dollars, and they would like to . . .

WN: How long does one tank last you?

ML: About a month and a half. It's just like every other month, I'm filling up my tank, and every other month, it's two hundred dollars. And one time (laughs), they came and they shut it off, because I was \$127 late. So I told them if they could wait until Friday, I'll give them the whole money, even though going to cut into one other expense. I'd rather have the hot water on than to pay the other bill. Because they not going to be able to bathe cold water. We had to bathe cold water for three days, and it was hard on them, 'cause they not gonna take a bath, 'cause they freeze. My light [electricity] is not too bad. But the gas is like two hundred dollars every other month. This month I gotta call 'em already for the fill up. And I don't know how I'm gonna pay that. So it's very hard. I think if he was still working the plantation and I got this job, I think we could have made a go. But now it's only one person working and they cutting my hours now. It's very hard.

WN: The final harvest, I mean that parade that they had through Honoka'a town, did you folks go?

ML: No, we didn't go.

DL: No, I was working. I was working on that day, too.

WN: Where, down at the mill?

DL: Down at the mill. That was one of my days I had to work.

WN: How did you feel when they were . . .

DL: When the last truck came in? Kind of sad, you know, and all. Because you know that it's down. And so it's like, "Wow." And some of the guys, they've already—they have their businesses, some had businesses [i.e., jobs] already. My boss [from the plantation], Arakaki [Mechanical] steel works over here (DL snaps fingers) picked him up just like that. He was always talking to 'em. One of the big bosses used to work at that mill, too, that worked for Arakaki. And the guy works out of the house. Now, my boss travels all over. He goes down to Guam. But he was the one who told me go to ironworkers' [union]. Then he could pull me in to go work at Arakaki, which they start you off at \$12.50 an hour. But when they get slow, they lay off the guys on the bottom, yeah? Now, they got one of the [contracts] to build one of the telescopes on Mauna Kea. But that would be good, you know. I would go up there, four days work. You work twelve hours a day up there, weather permitting, now.

WN: You just stay over there?

DL: Yeah. They set you up, they give you the clothing, what you'll need and all because of that. And then you stay [at] what they call the base camp. It's where---I think it's like the eight-thousand-foot elevation, where they have their buildings down there, the tourist information area. Behind there, they have another building for the guys that work up in the observatory.

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

DL: You know, but like I say, that's \$750 I don't have to join the ironworkers' union.

WN: Did you join ILWU [International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union]?

DL: Well, you kind of have to, in order. . . . But even with them, there was no fee to join into the ILWU. You had to pass your probation at the sugar company, and then you automatically become a member. And the fee was \$9.75. And that gives you a life insurance policy in case you were killed at the mill. But it was only---funeral costs is like ten grand [\$10,000], right? Sometimes even more.

WN: What about, like, medical insurance?

DL: We had it with her company where she works.

ML: While he was working, no. But I had to—not had to—but I joined. . . . I forget the name.

DL: Travelers [Companies].

ML: Well, they have a Travelers [Companies] insurance. This is the guys that gave me one extra insurance, and I applied with them also.

WN: Hilo Hawaiian? Your job at Hilo Hawaiian [Hotel]?

ML: Yeah.

WN: You pay a certain amount.

ML: Yeah, I pay, like, thirty-something dollars a month, I think.

WN: That's for the whole family?

ML: Yep.

WN: Oh, that's good.

ML: Yeah, so. The way they do it is monthly basis. If you work twenty hours or more for four consecutive weeks, you get medical for the next month. But if you under twenty hours for only one week, you don't get medical.

WN: You're going to lose your medical.

ML: I going lose my medical for next month.

WN: Wow.

ML: Because this week, we already started, and the twenty-eighth is the last day [of February], so this week, only going make eight hours. They not including March 1, now. But this week, I just gonna hit eight [hours], so I'm gonna lose my medical for next month. But luckily I have welfare. Then they gonna cover for my expense. But if I didn't have it, how I gonna take my kids to the doctors and stuff? So they go by monthly basis. And over there [Hilo Hawaiian Hotel], doesn't have a union. They're non-union. So there's nowhere for me to run or to get help or anything.

WN: What has the closing meant to the community? Have you noticed changes since the closing to this community?

DL: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

ML: Put it this way: more bills came up, because they want us to make our own cesspools. I don't know how to explain, like . . .

DL: Before, you could dig your own cesspool, but now, they making it mandatory that we have to hire somebody who's a professional that digs cesspools. But I called up, and they said, "Well, considering where you live . . ." This is one guy. He suggests that I don't even put a cesspool in, because it may weaken the ground, because of the landslide.

WN: So how you folks dealing with the waste and everything now?

DL: Well, right now, the mayor grandfathered in the old cesspools, the system that we have now, to where it runs into the camp cesspool. There's two in this camp, one down in the bushes

down there, and one is on the other side.

ML: Where we used to live. Like, my dad's house was maybe like here. Right in the yard was the cesspool.

WN: That was for everybody [in the camp]?

ML: Well, for two rows [of homes]. Like these two rows would go for that one, the next two rows would go for the other one. So now, everybody has to have their own. I mean, if the plantation didn't close, we wouldn't be getting all this, "Fix your house, cut your trees," and all this kind hassles. They want to make this place to look [like] a suburban—how they call 'em? A suburban place.

WN: Yeah, yeah. You have to, what, join one [neighborhood homeowners'] association or something?

DL: Yeah, we had to become an association.

ML: Yeah, you know.

DL: All the camps had to. We conduct the businesses by ourselves, and things like this.

ML: I mean, they gave us---we had a grant for \$2500 or \$2200 or something like that.

DL: Twenty-two fifty [\$2250].

ML: So they told us, like, what do we want to fix? So we *wen* put---my roof is more important, 'cause if that leaks, the whole house is gonna get wet, right? So we fixed the roof, it cost \$1900. So that just left [us] only a couple of hundred dollars. We can't do anything to fix the house. The roof took all whatever we had. I mean, everybody is still nice. It's not like you're your own person, kind of stuff. But everybody's having problems right now, as far as financial-wise and stuff.

WN: Has that been affecting the children [of the community] at all? I mean, you notice any more crime, delinquency, or anything like that?

ML: No, not---maybe other camps and stuff, but here, no. 'Cause you know why? Our kids are not as old where to think of stealing and stuff like that right now. But if they were older and this [plantation closing] had happened—if they was fifteen, sixteen years old or something, then I think they would get a lot of problems in this camp. But most of the kids---the oldest kid here—well, my cousin right now is the oldest. But if she wasn't here, the oldest kid would be like sixteen. And the youngest is my baby and hers.

WN: How many houses right now?

DL: Eleven houses.

ML: One, two—I was counting—one, two, three. . . .

WN: (Chuckles) You knew exactly.

ML: Twelve.

DL: I go to the camp meetings all the time.

WN: Oh, I see. So, Melanie, try to think back, growing up in this community and now. Try compare the two. What has changed?

ML: I don't know.

WN: Has anything changed? You think it's the same as before?

ML: Well, before when I was growing up, we used to be able to go out and stuff like that. Now it's---I don't know how to explain 'em. (Laughs)

DL: There was a lot more parties. People used to get together more.

ML: Yeah.

DL: Like the different birthdays, people used to come together and have a big party and stuff like that.

ML: I mean, now it's like we're to ourselves. It's like we don't go out. 'Cause now, since I have my job, it's like I don't have time to go out. Usually, I go to my friend's house, *talk story* and stuff like that. Now I hardly do that.

WN: Your friend that lives here?

ML: No, she lives in Kapehu Camp. But as I grew up, it's like it's changing, yeah? Like you don't do the things that you used to do. And your friends grew up, they went on their own. It's just the only thing that I can think of right now that is different.

WN: Now are these families here old-time families that live here?

ML: Yeah. They're like---this house right behind of me, they were there since I was growing up. And the Jardines was there since I was growing up. And everybody---I don't think hardly anything *wen* change. As far as change I can see is financial-wise. That's the change. But everybody is nice to each other. It's not holding any gripe or anything. Our kids take care of their kids. And when they might have problems between kids. But when us was growing up, we watch one another's kids and stuff like that. And as far as their attitudes and stuff, hasn't changed. I think it's only financial-wise. It's harder, now, than it was before.

WN: I guess, too, because when you're having a hard time financially, you don't have time to socialize and things.

ML: Yeah, since I moved here, I don't go to my next—"Oh, how are you?" and stuff like that. I'm just to myself, kind of stuff. I mean, you say, "hi" and "bye" kind of things, you know. But other than that, I don't bother.

WN: You folks help each other out on certain things?

ML: Yeah, when they like have this clean-ups around and stuff like that, everybody go help. And then after we have dinner and stuff like that. Potluck and stuff.

DL: And we had a Christmas party, and they got all the young kids and took a picture and stuff, of how the kids are now and all. And as the years progress, they'll take another picture and stuff. And then like maybe ten, fifteen years down the road, the families will look at the pictures like, "Oh, this is how they looked like. This is what they did," and stuff.

We go around to clean the cesspool areas so that there's no grass or trees growing in it and things like that. And then they have to erect this fence because of the children, the state gave us the fencing, which is a six-foot high fencing.

ML: 'Cause, you know why, 'cause we have kids and stuff.

WN: Oh, right over here?

ML: Yeah, right outside, there's a fence. 'Cause the young kids, we don't want them passing so many feet here and stuff. And they cannot measure, "Oh, we cannot pass this marker," or whatever. So that's why the safety of the kids, too, they *wen* put in, or adults not to cross that—is hazardous, yeah?

DL: And if you go down below there . . .

ML: Ho, before, my father used to climb down the cliff with rope, you know, go down. Go fishing and stuff like that. But now it's—I don't think so it's safe.

DL: And the [U.S.] Army Corps of Engineers said if they want to do it their way, then they have to move the highway, condemn all these people's property, and rebuild a new highway. Because they go by every foot up, the road moves back one foot. And this cliff is 326½ feet [high]. So the road has to be---and they have a boundary set back, which is 100 feet. So they'd have to redo major highway reconstruction on there. And the federal government and state said, "No way." Because to rechange this highway, they'd have to condemn a lot of people's property. And if they condemn the people's property, they'd have to pay what the market value is, which is a lot of money.

WN: Few more questions. Your children, what do you want for your children?

DL: A better education than what I had. I know a lot of things, but I want them to know more than what I know. And I want them to be a better person than what I am, as far as in an education and things like that.

WN: What about you, Melanie?

ML: Yeah, we always tell them education is important. I told them I don't want them to grow up to be like me and live in a place like this. I want them to be able to make it and not suffer. I mean, I was going to school, but I'm not really educated. Or else I wouldn't be working for a hotel. I would maybe try to be as an executive or manager or something, than being just an

employee. I wanted them to be somebody important. Be a doctor or a lawyer or something.

WN: Would you want them to stay and live here?

ML: No.

WN: In this area, Hāmākua?

ML: No, no. I would rather them move on instead of staying here and suffer.

DL: Then again, we don't know. Maybe in ten years, the businesses will be good here. And maybe they will have enough sense to put a missile launcher here like the [Columbia] for the space shuttle. And now they said they found ice on the moon. So that could be a new colony up there. So if that happens, then they will have to have food products. And Hawai'i has a better chance of producing food, because all of these other guys is trying to make it go here, you know. And so it's like that kind of a trip.

WN: So would you like to see this area have more job opportunities?

ML: Yeah.

DL: Oh, yeah.

WN: And if there were these opportunities, then it would be maybe a better place for your kids to stay here. So jobs is very important.

ML: Yep.

DL: I've met a lot of guys from Hawai'i in the Mainland because there was no jobs here, even when I was young. When I was in the service, I used to meet lot of guys, they said, "No money, *brah*. Hawai'i is beautiful, but you no more money." And that was in the early [19]70s.

ML: And now it's going all downhill.

DL: And now it's the late [19]90s. And more worse now. They project how many people that are coming in and that are leaving, there are more people leaving than coming. And when they do come, they want to retire. But then they spend one, two years, they gotta go back and make more money in order just to survive, because of the problems that we have here. Especially with the money, the cost of food and stuff.

ML: Yeah, that's what I'm thinking now. I don't want my kids—this is their hometown, you know. They've been brought up in Hawai'i and stuff like that. But if they ever do get a job, I would rather that they leave and make something out of their lives than suffer without a job down here. I mean, kids are graduated. They are having a hard time to find jobs. My kids are only young now. If I can get them out of this situation and move them to another one where it might get better, I'd rather do that than to make them suffer while we're suffering.

WN: How important is it for you folks to stay here, to live here?

ML: I would love to stay here, honestly. I would love to stay here. But I know we can't do it. And I know we're not going to be able to make it. If there was some way a miracle or something where there's job opportunities, high pay and stuff like that, I would stay here in no time. Two shakes, I would come back, you know. But I can't see that happening.

WN: Donald, what about you?

DL: Same. And then now the guys watch the news about the Hāmākua tree planting [i.e., landowner Bishop Estate announced plans to use former Hāmākua Sugar Company lands for tree planting for a lumber and paper industry]. The guys don't want the tree planters, because they're spraying aerial pesticides and weed killers, and some of them are protesting about that. Because then they're burning it. And then they're saying, "Oh, I have bad asthma." But, you know, never mind about that. The guys want the---the Hāmākua tree thing, positions might be about a hundred people working, at first, for the first seven years. Then after that, they're talking about making a place where they take the trees and chip it up. So they're going to have a mill. But where they gonna have a mill? The old [sugar] mill was torn down, you know.

And there's another company that came in, they said, "Well, we can do this for Hāmākua." HELCO [Hawaii Electric Light Co., Ltd.] doesn't want to [anymore]. They'd take the old power plant that Hāmākua had, and make it another big, major power plant. But HELCO doesn't want to pay them the money to subsidize them, you know. Because HELCO has a monopoly on the state. The same as [GTE] Hawaiian Tel[ephone]. But now in Puna area and Pāhala, they have got an Alaskan corporation to come in and finally say, "You guys can't give these guys what they want. We can. So you guys are out of the picture. No more monopoly." And that's why now [GTE] Hawaiian Tel wants to make all these different things for people to stay, but no way. Hawai'i has been choked by the big corporations for so long. They don't want to give up any of their profits. And that's where it's the hardest part. You can't buck the guys who already had it.

WN: Who are the ones protesting things like the Hāmākua—the timber and so forth?

DL: Well, other guys that don't want it. They say because of the pesticides. They're saying it's for their health problem. But there again, if it's a health problem, but if you look at them, they're probably spraying the same poisons in their yard. So it's like, what are we going to do? They don't want to do it. Maybe they have another business [job] and stuff. But the thing is, it's just that they don't understand what's gonna be happening, they're looking at right now, not seven, eight years down the road to where there's more jobs.

And they want to legalize growing hemp. Well, hemp is marijuana. And the guy says 1 percent of marijuana, if it has the THC [delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol], then it's marijuana. Well, yeah, marijuana is marijuana. But George Washington brought marijuana into America so that they could get rope for ships. And besides ropes, now they find out that the seeds and the plant gives you a better quality cooking oil. And it's like, gee. Only now they're finding out. Countries like Mexico and South America, if a person has a problem sleeping, they would give 'em marijuana to sleep as a tea. They would make a tea out of it. "Drink this." In America, "Oh, here, take valiums." Get the guy hooked on drugs. Like during the prohibition time when it was against liquor, oh, you could go to the local drug store, buy marijuana, opium, heroin. And the cops would see you come walking out here, smoking a big old

[marijuana] stogie. They wouldn't bust you. But if you had a small pint of booze, you're straight to jail. And they torture you to find out—well, they could not torture—but question you until you tell 'em where you got the bottle of gin from. But yet you could walk out with ten pounds of marijuana or an ounce of heroin, and it'd be nothing. But then because the alcohol got passed, I believe, they had to revert to something to where they could still push the issue about the dangers of it, you know. So it's like they dropped one, and they created another one, because of just the monetary value, just having problems.

If they had had hemp growing, if they had thought about what would the conflict had been before they shut down these [sugar] mills, what would have been the impact of what had happened, I bet you ten to one, they would not have done it [closed the mill]. That they would have allowed the mills to continue on.

WN: Or subsidize the industry to continue.

DL: Yeah, you know. And sugarcane can make gasoline. Why didn't they go and ask like Texaco or Shell or 76 Union Oil? Why didn't they go and ask them? What about if you go and subsidize this one mill here? Or the two mills. Besides producing sugar, we could have still produced something where we wouldn't have to ship [in] bulk oil and gasoline, raw gas, here in order to have our refineries, when we could have refined it out of sugar. And we would even got more productivity out of it.

But they didn't want to. They wanted to close the mills, because maybe they're thinking ten, fifteen years down the road, they can go and [develop] housings, or maybe make championship golf courses. When it's windy on this coast, I've seen birds try and fight the wind. They go and sit there in the tree until where they can fly. Then they fly to one other tree. And when they're flying, it's struggling for them. And I'd like to see a golfer—I don't care who he is. He can be this guy Tiger Woods or Arnold Palmer. He ain't hitting the ball far, you know.

WN: Couple more questions, okay. In twenty years, what do you envision for your family in twenty years? What are your goals for you and your family in twenty years?

DL: Well, they all graduate college. That's what I'd like them to do. Get a good education. Maybe be like a lawyer or a doctor. Somebody in profession---maybe an astronaut or a scientist.

WN: What about you folks?

DL: Me?

WN: You folks still young.

ML: I'm trying to see myself in a better situation than I am in now. You know, that's why I'm trying to do something about it, well, we trying to do something about it. Or twenty years, I'd like to see that I have money in my bank, you know, which I don't. (Laughs) Every month gotta go down to the nitty-gritties, you know?

DL: Oh yeah. Sometimes even bounce checks because we don't have it, you know. And that's where it's gonna go to pretty soon. And it's like . . .

ML: I feel like if I don't do something now, we won't be able to—we'll be living on—going be homeless, I guess. I mean, if you think of the worst, what I'm going through right now, very hard.

DL: Well, Hawai'i is our home, so we're not homeless, we're houseless. And then where I see somebody walking down the road with a Rolex and a fat wallet, he's going to be out and empty. Well, that is basically what is gonna go first, you know. They wondering why the crime rate is going up. Because where are the jobs? They say, "Oh, well, go get a job." Great.

ML: Where?

DL: Lot of the people in Hawai'i don't know how to read and write. Especially like the elderly people. They don't know how to read and write. Because it wasn't important in those days to know how to read and write. Because you could always get a job someplace. Plantations would always hire you, so long as you knew how to sign your name and agreed to the different things. When the unions all started, they were like—they had to go meet in somebody house. So many guys in one house. "You agreed to do this union?"

"Yeah."

"All right."

Then when they came out, they had all the union. They had all the guys that worked for the plantation say, "We're union now." And then the owners had nothing to say because they had done it illegally. What they call 'em? The black jacks is what they call the union guys that go behind the back of the employers to get the employees [union]ized. One guy from here, from Hāmākua, was down in the Philippines, visiting his family. He was almost killed because he was trying to get everybody there unionized, to make a union. He could not buy an airplane ticket out of Manila for himself. He had to sneak in and dress as a woman in order to fly back to Hawai'i.

WN: I guess the unfortunate thing is that to get union strength, you need jobs.

ML: Yep.

WN: People need to be employed before they can get together and protest pay and working conditions. And so that's why I think a very difficult thing is for you folks. You folks don't have that . . .

DL: No.

WN: . . . the job and that steady income.

DL: Well, you know, you look at what's happened in our politicians. Dwight Takamine, arrested for [alleged] abuse of wife. You know, governor goes to the Philippines. Expensive golf clubs. And it's not something that comes out of his pocket, it came out of our pocket. Oh, we're just \$200 million in debt. Yeah, I wonder why? If I could throw a party and not pay for it, I would, too.

WN: When we're finished with this, we're going to type it out and show it to you folks, and you guys can look it over and everything. And then after your approval, it'll go into the libraries, okay? Along with other stories similar to you folks' story and so forth. And so your children, your grandchildren are probably going to be looking at it. We're going to give you folks a copy of it. What kind of feeling do you want them to have after reading your story? We're doing a lot of this because—not for us, not for me, not for you, not for you. But we're doing it for them.

ML: The kids.

WN: Yeah, so, I don't know.

ML: I think if they read it, they're gonna know what we went through to get them where they are today. And when they reach their days, and realize at that time, was hard. And maybe for them, it might be harder than what we were going through. They might realize what we was trying to do for them and know what other people went through to get to where they are now for their family.

DL: It's like when I was a kid, my mother never told me what problems she was having with money. So I tell the children, our children now, that we're having problems with money. So I sit them down and I show 'em the bills, what we have. And I show 'em how much, I write down how much money she gets. And I say, "Okay, that bill, we deduct is so much." And the oldest boy, he understands. And also, that's why he's not really bugging anymore, because I sat down . . .

ML: Yesterday, he asked, "Oh, Ma, can I have fifty cents?"

"Sure," and I told him, "I don't have a lot of money to give you."

And she say, "Oh, Mommy, I like dollar."

I say, "I cannot give you a dollar. I can give you fifty cents," because I have to cut it between just enough for them, 'cause they go to school and they can buy a candy, or whatever, a juice or something.

And they tell, "Oh, Ma, I like one skateboard."

I said, "I would love to get you one, but I'm sorry. I cannot afford it right now."

"But you just got paid."

I said, "I know I just got paid. But I have to pay the bills first. If I don't pay the bills, we might not get light, we might not get phone." You know how bad it is? I'm sorry to say, but I cannot even buy my kids clothes. That's how bad it is. They going from hand-me-downs. And my oldest, my daughter right now, she's growing out of her clothes. My oldest son is growing out of his. But the other two boys get hand-me-downs. That's how bad it is. Oh, I get clothes from my friends. If her kids not using, they give 'em to me. The only time I can afford to buy them clothes, if from the tax return, I buy them school clothes and school supplies. That's how they get their new clothes. Other than that the whole year around, I

cannot buy clothes. That's how bad it is right now. I can't fix my car, 'cause I cannot afford to fix it. When I was working these thirty-something hours a week, it's like every other day, I had to put gas, 'cause I live so far from Hilo.

DL: And then to redo the Dodge Colt that I have outside, I cannot even buy the original rims for that car. They don't make 'em anymore. That car is actually classified as an antique.

WN: What year is that?

DL: A '79. Less than twenty years, it's already an antique because they can't get [parts for] it.

ML: I mean, it's terrible.

DL: I priced different places for the parts to redo the motor. Four hundred fifty dollars to redo my whole block and the transmission. That's like, "Oh, yeah, right."

I joke with the cops, and he says, "So what [kind of work] are you looking for?"

I say, "Oh, become a professional bank robber." And one cop took me serious. I said, "Yeah, I know. About nine out of ten get caught. But that one guy might be me that gets away with it."

And he goes, "Oh, that's silly."

And I say, "Well, yeah, I know. But so are you to believe that I'd become a bank robber." You know?

So it's like, wow, there's no ends to it. People think, "Oh, yeah, you got thousand dollars." Yeah, in your dreams.

ML: And then they're [saying], "Go get a job." Yeah, we can go [look for] a job. But there's a whole lot of other people that's applying for the same job.

DL: Five thousand people applied for WalMart in Hilo.

ML: Only two-hundred something people got hired.

DL: And out of the two-hundred something, they gonna eventually weed out the ones they don't want. So it's like, [if] you're a bit financial wizard that had been in management previously, you'll stay. But if you got an injured leg or something, or you're always sick, you're gone. Or unless you know somebody on the inside, who started WalMart, if you happen to be the cousin. But even then, if you're still one of the guys that gotta be cut, "Bye." So it's just that way. Not unless you make your own business. But even then, all the small businesses still close down, 'cause they can't afford to keep up with the guys that are the big times.

WN: Well, I wish you folks the best of luck, and to your family. And thank you very much.

ML: Thank you.

DL: No problem.

END OF INTERVIEW

THE CLOSING OF SUGAR PLANTATIONS:

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