

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII LIBRARY

AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE APRIL 1, 1946 TSUNAMI AT LAUPĀHOEHOE,  
HAWAII: A CASE STUDY IN THE EDUCATIVE VALUE OF CONSTRUCTING  
HISTORY FROM MEMORY AND NARRATIVE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN

EDUCATION

DECEMBER 2002

By

Warren S. Nishimoto

Dissertation Committee:

Eileen H. Tamura, Chairperson  
Gay Garland Reed  
Joanne E. Cooper  
Donna Grace  
Paul F. Hooper

© 2002, Warren S. Nishimoto

To Michi Kodama-Nishimoto

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am greatly indebted to many individuals, without whose help and support I could not have researched and written this study.

A heartfelt *mahalo* goes to the members of my dissertation committee, chair Eileen Tamura, Gay Garland Reed, Joanne Cooper, Donna Grace and Paul Hooper, who willingly gave a great deal of their time and expertise to help me make sense out of my often disjointed ideas.

In addition, I would like to acknowledge the following scholars at the University of Hawai'i who provided me with intellectual stimulation as both mentors and colleagues as I progressed in my doctoral studies: Linda Menton, Royal Fruehling, David Ericson, Allen Awaya, Yoshimitsu Takei, Edward Beauchamp, Ronald Heck, Craig Howes, Glen Grant, William Chapman, and Vicky Rosser.

My many colleagues, past and present, at the University of Hawai'i's Center for Oral History, especially Cynthia Oshiro, Holly Yamada, and Chad Taniguchi, deserve special mention for helping me deal with the many complicated twists and turns associated with oral history research and interviewing. Michael Hamnett, director of the Social Science Research Institute, was unwavering in his support.

I also would like to thank officials and present and former staff members of the Pacific Tsunami Museum in Hilo, particularly Jeanne Johnston, Walter Dudley, Donna Saiki, Robert "Steamy" Chow, and Susan Tissot, for conceiving and supporting the oral history project which forms the basis of this study.

My brother, C.T. Nishimoto, helped me organize my thoughts and forced me to think things out before plunging ahead. My parents, Yoshiko and Tsuyoshi Nishimoto, parents-in-law, Arthur and Hideko Kodama, aunt Chiyo Iida, friend and jogging partner Brent Watanabe, sons Ben and Scott Nishimoto, and four-legged companion, Tygerr, all deserve warm mention for providing me with the emotional tools with which to undertake and complete my doctoral studies.

And, most of all, I proudly acknowledge six individuals who played immense roles throughout my doctoral studies. Five of them, Marsue McShane, Herbert Nishimoto, Albert Stanley, Bunji Fujimoto, and Masuo Kino, were interviewees whose vast knowledge, generosity, and friendship I shall never forget.

The sixth and most significant is Michi Kodama-Nishimoto, scholar, mentor, colleague, motivator, critic and loving partner both at home and work. I dedicate this study to her.

## ABSTRACT

The tsunami of April 1, 1946 was the deadliest natural disaster in the history of modern Hawai'i. Of the 159 casualties in the islands, twenty-four died at Laupāhoehoe, a sugar plantation community on Hawai'i island.

This study presents and analyzes oral history narratives of five survivors and eyewitnesses. In one-to-one interviews, four students and one teacher of Laupāhoehoe School recalled their early life experiences, as well as what they saw and heard that morning in 1946; how and why they reacted to the unfolding drama the way they did; and how the events of that day affected them to the present.

The oral histories are examined through two lenses. First, as living historical documents, they reveal a human side of the tragedy, a side often overlooked by researchers pre-occupied with statistical and scientific explanations. Documenting people's life experiences and values, the oral histories provide us with knowledge and understanding of tsunamis from humanistic as well as scientific perspectives.

Second, as case studies, the interview narratives reflect oral history's role in an emerging trend in social science research, in which the *process* of gathering data is almost as closely analyzed as the data itself. This study examines *memory*, or how and why we recall life experiences; *narrative*, or how and why we tell stories about what we remember; and *history*, or how and why we preserve these stories for present and future generations. Oral history involves an interviewee/narrator who, in a conversational, question-and-answer setting with an interviewer/researcher, recalls

details of his/her life experiences. The interviews are recorded, processed, preserved, and transmitted in various formats for posterity.

This examination of oral history, or the "alchemy" of transmuting memory into history, demonstrates its educative role to all involved in the process: the *interviewee/narrator*, who has lived through and remembers his/her life experiences; the *interviewer/researcher*, who collaborates with the interviewee/narrator to construct historical narratives; and *present and future generations of scholars, students, and the lay community*, who will utilize the narratives as primary accounts about the past.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Acknowledgments</b> .....	v
<b>Abstract</b> .....	vii
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>Chapter 2: The Beginnings and Evolution of Oral History</b> .....	7
<b>Chapter 3: Memory, Narrative, and History: Critical Elements in the Construction and Transmission of Experience</b> .....	16
<b>Chapter 4: Interviewing Survivors and Eyewitnesses of the 1946 Tsunami on Hawai'i Island</b> .....	29
<b>Chapter 5: The Historical Context</b> .....	38
<b>Chapter 6: "There's No Plan, There's Just Coincidence" Marsue McGinnis McShane</b> .....	50
<b>Chapter 7: "To Me, It's Survival of the Fittest" Herbert Nishimoto</b> .....	88
<b>Chapter 8: "Good God, What is That?" Albert Stanley</b> .....	109
<b>Chapter 9: "What, No Water in the Ocean? April Fool!" Bunji Fujimoto</b> .....	131
<b>Chapter 10: "I Was Sixteen But I Guess I Knew What Mortality Meant" Masuo Kino</b> .....	158
<b>Chapter 11: Analysis of the Case Study: The Educative Value of Oral History</b> .....	186
<b>Chapter 12: Conclusion</b> .....	215
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	219



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

*"On a Monday morning, was April 1, we got on the bus, same as usual. As we hit the cliff above Laupāhoehoe<sup>1</sup> where we could see the [Laupāhoehoe] Point, the guys in the front of the bus started, 'Eh, no water in the ocean, no water in the ocean!' They all excited. I said, 'What, no water in the ocean? April Fool's,' we're saying. We always sitting in the back, 'April Fool, April Fool!' 'No,' they said, 'not April Fool,' kept insisting. So we looked out, and sure enough, we saw the water pulling out. So we looked, and okay, it's funny, but nobody knew what it was. It was unusual, something different.*

*"There were a lot of students out in the park area and out by the edge of the ocean. I think some of them said they went walking down to the shoreline. Myself, I told some people, 'Let's go down, take a look.' We went down to the middle of the school, the school playground. We were watching, the water pulled out quite a bit, and that preceded the next wave. Again, I wasn't able to see them, but some of the guys close to the edge of the bank were saying they could see fish flopping around in the rocks, where normally there's water. Us, we couldn't see that, but we could see that the ocean was kind of bare. Where there's supposed to be water, you could see only rocks. Then the waves started coming back in after it receded out so much. To me, wasn't anything to panic about because it wasn't a rolling kind of huge wave that you see or imagine later on.*

*"The guys who were close to the edge of the water were standing there watching. And I guess they realized before us that the wave wasn't normal, it was too big. So they started running. We knew we were in trouble, we better run. Fortunately, we were close enough to high ground that we just turned around and ran. In running, I heard a cracking sound in the back, that was the baseball—we used to call it the grandstand, the bleachers. And the big thing was cracking and the thing just collapsed. I remember one face running in front of that, he was one of the basketball players. They used to tease him all the time, big guy, slow, see? But later on they were teasing him. 'We never see you run so fast.' But he was running, he was making it. That's one face I remember that morning."*

---

<sup>1</sup>Diacritical marks such as macrons and glottal stops will be used for all Hawaiian words and place names in this study. Exceptions are made for written direct quotes and titles of publications not containing the marks.

This account of the April 1, 1946 tsunami at Laupāhoehoe, Hawai`i island, was remembered and told by longtime resident Bunji Fujimoto in a tape-recorded oral history interview which took place on July 10, 1998. Fujimoto was taking part in an oral history project I designed focusing on personal recollections of survivors and eyewitnesses of the deadliest natural disaster in the history of modern Hawai`i.<sup>2</sup> The result of the collaboration between Fujimoto and me was a historical narrative, constructed for the educative benefit of present and future generations who most likely have never seen nor heard of a tsunami.

Although Fujimoto survived the deadly waves, his younger brother, Toshiaki, was one of 24 people in Laupāhoehoe, and of 159 killed in the territory of Hawai`i that morning. Fujimoto was one of five individuals interviewed in this study. In their seventies at the time of the interviews, the five--four students and one teacher of Laupāhoehoe School--were asked to recall many and varied aspects of their life histories: childhood, schooling, and work experiences prior to the tsunami; who and what they saw and heard the morning of April 1, 1946; how and why they reacted to the waves the way they did; and how the events of that day affected them to the present day.

This study will examine the five oral histories through two lenses. First, as living historical documents, the oral histories reveal a human side of the tsunami tragedy, a side often overlooked by researchers pre-occupied with statistical evidence

---

<sup>2</sup>Center for Oral History, University of Hawai`i at Mānoa, *Tsunamis Remembered: Oral Histories of Survivors and Observers in Hawai`i*, 2 vols. (Honolulu: Center for Oral History, 2000).

and scientific explanations. As a result, personal stories of terror, sadness, hardship, courage, perseverance, and renewal are often missing from the historical record. Documenting people's life experiences and values, oral histories provide us with knowledge and understanding of tsunamis from both humanistic and scientific perspectives. Oral history, defined as the collaborative construction and transmission of narratives based on individual memory, involves an interviewee/narrator who, in a conversational, question-and-answer setting with an interviewer/researcher, recalls details of his/her life experiences. The interviews are recorded, processed, preserved, and transmitted in various formats for posterity.

Second, as case studies, the interview narratives reflect oral history's emerging role in an increasingly theoretical trend in social science and historical research--a trend in which the *process* of gathering data is almost as closely analyzed as the data itself. This theoretical emphasis is reflected in the work of oral historians such as Ronald Grele, Michael Frisch, and Alessandro Portelli,<sup>3</sup> who articulated and incorporated issues relating to personal and collective memory and narrative construction in the discipline of history. In this study, I will build on this work by examining three distinct elements of human existence: *memory*, or how and why we recall life experiences; *narrative*, or how and why we tell stories about what we

---

<sup>3</sup>See Ronald J. Grele, *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History*. 2nd ed. (Chicago: Precedent Publishing, 1985); Michael H. Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990); and Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).

remember; and *history*, or how and why we preserve these stories for present and future generations. Oral history, with its emphasis on personal life recollections, detailed and sometimes dramatic stories which emerge out of these recollections, and the need to make the stories available now and in the future, is the process and result of combining and refining these three elements. Therefore, in this study, I refer to oral history as the "alchemy" of transmuting memory into history, via narrative.

This interpretation of the theory and practice of oral history better enables me to demonstrate, in this study, oral history's educative role to all involved in the data-gathering and transmission process: the *interviewee/narrator*, who has lived through and remembers his/her life experiences; the *interviewer/researcher*, who collaborates with the interviewee/narrator to construct historical narratives; and *present and future generations of scholars, students, and the lay community*, who will utilize the transmitted narratives as primary accounts about the past.

In order to set the stage to examine oral history through the two lenses, it is necessary, in chapter two, to discuss the evolution of the methodology and describe three stages in its history. The first stage began in 1948, when the historian Allan Nevins saw the archival value of in-depth interviews with political, academic, and business leaders of society.

The second stage represented a consequence of the social, political, and intellectual upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s, as historians increasingly viewed history from the perspective of those previously excluded from the historical record, namely the working class, ethnic minorities, women and other "ordinary" people. Because

these groups rarely left behind written accounts of their lives, oral history became a major component of this "new social history." Interview topics covered everyday life and tasks. This dramatic broadening of the breadth and depth of historical perspective, in which oral history played a pivotal role, caused historians to look beyond the traditional focus of historical data-gathering and interpretation.

In the third stage of oral history's development, historians became increasingly concerned with memory--individual and collective--and narrative construction and transmission as subjects, not merely components, of historical inquiry. This stage represented oral history's evolution into a multidisciplinary, epistemological field seeking to explain *how* knowledge about the past is acquired and transmitted. It dealt with issues relating to a process by which life experiences are remembered, mined, and shared; then reconstructed, contextualized, and transmitted in narrative form in order to educate future generations about the past.

Chapter three expands on the discussion of oral history's evolution by discussing the three elements critical to the process of historical knowledge construction and transmission: memory, narrative, and history.

Chapter four discusses the methodological background of the oral history project focusing on survivors and eyewitnesses of the April 1, 1946 tsunami, including: how and why the project was conceived; how the interviewees were selected; what steps were taken to prepare for the recorded interviews; what types of questions were asked to jog interviewees' memory; how were the transcribed

interviews edited for this study; and to what extent the interviewees/narrators and interviewers/researchers collaborated to create the final narrative.

An historical and contextual overview of Laupāhoehoe--the peninsula located on Hawai'i island's Hāmākua Coast which was struck by the deadly waves in 1946--as well as of tsunamis in general, is the focus of chapter five.

The next five chapters contain the oral history narratives based on the life history recollections of Marsue McShane, Herbert Nishimoto, Albert Stanley, Bunji Fujimoto, and Masuo Kino. An introduction, which includes a biographical summary of the individual, precedes each narrative.

Chapter eleven analyzes the collection of oral history narratives as a case study illustrating oral history as the alchemy of memory, narrative, and history. The chapter then explains how this alchemy plays an educative role to all involved in the process: interviewees/narrators, interviewers/researchers, and present and future generations of society. This educative function reinforces the reasons historians are increasingly turning to life history narratives to provide society with humanistic perspectives by which to understand and make sense of the past in relation to the present and future.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE BEGINNINGS AND EVOLUTION OF ORAL HISTORY

The historian Nevins first used the term "oral history" in 1948 as he began collecting spoken reminiscences of prominent individuals such as political leaders, statesmen, and academic scholars<sup>1</sup> for "future historians, for research, and as a tool for orally based biography."<sup>2</sup> Recording and eventually archiving historical data often not found in traditional written records,<sup>3</sup> Nevins used a tape recorder which collected spoken data from the interviews, eventually producing near-verbatim transcripts which preserved the resulting narratives. Despite this new data-gathering technique's reliance on individual, eyewitness testimony and personal recollections based on memory, Nevins' objectives were consistent with the established "factual" and "informational" notions of history which prevailed at the time. "The verbatim record of what oral historians obtain," wrote Nevins' Columbia University colleague--and former student--Louis Starr, "is thus in one respect unique in comparison with other forms of primary source materials. It is deliberately created solely for historical purposes."<sup>4</sup> Later

---

<sup>1</sup>See Elizabeth B. Mason and Louis M. Starr, eds., *The Oral History Collection of Columbia University* (New York: Oral History Research Office, 1973).

<sup>2</sup>Quoted in David K. Dunaway, "The Interdisciplinarity of Oral History," in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, ed. David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum (Walnut Creek, California: AltaMira Press, 1996), 8.

<sup>3</sup>William W. Moss, *Oral History Program Manual* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974), 9.

<sup>4</sup>Louis B. Starr, "Oral History," in Dunaway and Baum, 40.

historians offered a definition of oral history consistent with Nevins' early use of the technique:

Oral history interviewing is a systematic collection, arrangement, preservation and publication (in the sense of making generally available) of recorded verbatim accounts and opinions of people who were witnesses to or participants in events likely to interest future scholars. It is basically an information-collecting technique, the results of which may be found in loosely coherent collections of tapes and typewritten transcripts or in use as source material for a film documentary or other published work.<sup>5</sup>

Nevins and Starr represented the first generation of historians to utilize oral history in their research and teaching. While the decades to follow saw increasing usage of the technique, it had difficulty gaining legitimate scholarly status among many historians, archivists, and other academicians, who often questioned the validity and reliability of individual memory.

The turbulent decades of the 1960s and 1970s, a period of widespread social, political, economic, and cultural change, brought out a new generation of scholars who rejected much of the elitism inherent in traditional history-writing and expanded the scope and reach of oral history by focusing on women, the working class, ethnic minorities, the poor, the nonliterate, and others generally absent from historical accounts.<sup>6</sup> This inclusiveness in history brought about a commitment to constructing the "life patterns of ordinary people," and "reintroducing human experience into

---

<sup>5</sup>Moss, *Oral History Program Manual*, 7.

<sup>6</sup>Dunaway, "The Interdisciplinarity of Oral History," 8.



historical research."<sup>7</sup> Oral history played a significant role in the drive toward empowering and "giving voice" to ordinary people, viewing them as contributing actors in the process of change and continuity on the historical stage. The new generation of scholars pursued history from the "bottom up" rather than from the "top down," by writing and rewriting history from the perspective of those who had been excluded, rather than the elites in power.<sup>8</sup> The historian John Toews, a proponent of what was being called the "new social history," and others adopted the view that the attempt to "recreate cultures of people left out of conventional history was more than legitimate, it was morally necessary." He noted, "We have to remember that American history is a compound of heterogeneous cultures. It is not disconnected."<sup>9</sup> The historian Gary Okihiro echoed Toews:

The collective voice of the people, once silenced, has a right to be heard. Oral history is not only a tool or method for recovering; it also is a theory of history which maintains that the common folk and the dispossessed have a history and that this history must be written. At the same time, however, this is not to ignore the importance of elitelore and the history of the ruling class, nor does it intend to equate oral history with the working class and written documents with the ruling class. Instead, the point is that there has been an overemphasis on the elite at the expense of the masses and that this imbalance has resulted in the writing of mythical histories.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup>Tamara K. Harevan, *Families, History, and Social Change: Life-Course and Cross-Cultural Perspectives*. (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2000), 3.

<sup>8</sup>Tom Griffin, "Is History Dead? Old Debate Gains New Life." *The University Report*, University of Washington, 3 (June 1989), 4.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>10</sup>Gary Y. Okihiro, "Oral History and the Writing of Ethnic History," in Dunaway and Baum, *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, 209.

The historian and feminist Sherna Gluck spoke as defiantly in advocating a stronger voice for women in history:

Refusing to be rendered historically voiceless any longer, women are creating a new history--using our own voices and experiences. We are challenging the traditional concepts of history, of what is 'historically important,' and we are affirming that our everyday lives are history. Using an oral tradition, as old as human memory, we are reconstructing our own past.<sup>11</sup>

The social historian Peter Stearns stressed that the contributions ordinary working people made to history were as much about their values and attitudes as they were about facts and behavior:

The study of workers or the lower middle class edges into an examination of work and leisure as historical phenomena. Sexual behavior; social mobility; family roles and functions; attitudes and practices relating to death; popular health and medicine, including mental illness; crime and law enforcement--all these areas have rich and growing histories. . . . At their best, the histories deal both with behavior and with values and attitudes. . . . Social historians intend to bring into the historical record not only all kinds of people, but all aspects of behavior and value systems, as well.<sup>12</sup>

The social historian Paul Thompson echoed his generation of reform-minded historians by asserting that "oral history is a history built around people." By expanding the scope of history to include the perspectives of ordinary people, oral history "offers a challenge to the accepted myths of history, to the authoritarian

---

<sup>11</sup>Sherna Berger Gluck, "What's So Special About Women? Women's Oral History," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 2 (1977), 3.

<sup>12</sup>Peter N. Stearns, "The New Social History: An Overview," in *Ordinary People and Everyday Life: Perspectives on the New Social History*, ed. James B. Gardner and George Rollie Adams (Nashville: The American Association for State and Local History, 1983), 5.

judgement inherent in its tradition. It provides a means for a radical transformation of the social meaning of history."<sup>13</sup>

Oral history continued to evolve from its functionalist, positivist stance characteristic around the time of Nevins' scholarship, to one more inclusive of and empowering toward previously neglected groups, to a third stage. Oral historians began to examine many of the methodology's theoretical underpinnings by acknowledging an academic shift in emphasis from an "interest in the object to an interest in the description of the object and the observer."<sup>14</sup> Leaders of this movement asserted that the theories and processes involved in oral history *themselves* represented a key epistemological component of the discipline of history. They saw oral history as being, "compiled within a historical frame negotiated by the interviewer and the narrator, within contemporary trends, within certain definable conventions of language and cultural interaction."<sup>15</sup> These advocates regarded oral history not only as a method of primary source *documentation*, but also as a *process* for constructing and transmitting history from oral sources.<sup>16</sup> No longer interested only in *what* knowledge is accumulated, oral historians increasingly sought answers relating to *how* knowledge is acquired from individual memory; how interviewees make sense of and find meaning

---

<sup>13</sup>Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 3rd. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 23-24.

<sup>14</sup>Ronald J. Grele, email to author, 15 December 1999.

<sup>15</sup>Dunaway, "The Interdisciplinarity of Oral History," 8.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 8-9.

in their life experiences; what role interviewers play in the process; and how, why, and in what forms this knowledge is preserved, presented, and passed down.

Historical writings began to reflect the increasing skepticism people had toward universal truth, as well as the very notion of the reality of the individual self. Because no absolute truth exists, the historians claimed, attention must invariably turn to finding and interpreting meaning in people's past experiences. The educational researcher Thomas Schwandt characterized this emerging historiographic trend as an abiding concern for understanding meaning and for grasping interviewees' definition of a situation. According to Schwandt, "the world of lived reality and situation-specific meanings that constitute the general object of investigation is thought to be constructed by social actors. That is, particular actors, in particular places, at particular times, fashion meaning out of events and phenomena through prolonged, complex processes of social interaction involving history, language, and action."<sup>17</sup>

Recent social science scholarship has reflected a post-modernist trend away from interpreting interviewees' memories as "truthful" and "accurate," and toward finding and interpreting meaning in people's past experiences. The sociologists Jaber Gubrium and James Holstein referred to current studies in ethnography as the "social construction of individual lives."<sup>18</sup> Interviewers and interviewees were seen as "active

---

<sup>17</sup>Thomas A. Schwandt, "Constructivist, Interpretivist Approaches to Human Inquiry," in Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds., *The Landscape of Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1998), 221.

<sup>18</sup>Jabar F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein, "Biographical Work and New Ethnography," in *Interpreting Experience: The Narrative Study of Lives*, ed. Ruthellen Josselson and Amia Lieblich (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Pubs., 1995), 46.

interpreters who construct their realities and communicate meaning in their experiences through talk and interaction, stories, and narrative."<sup>19</sup> The sociologist Judith Stacy characterized her discipline's ethnographic writing to be no longer "cultural reportage, but cultural construction."<sup>20</sup>

Crucial to this theoretical and interpretive framework was an emphasis placed on the collaborative process between interviewer and interviewee. This collaboration underlined the conversational, almost dialogic nature of oral history. According to the historian Ronald Grele, oral history interviews are "joint activities, organized and informed by the historical perspectives of both participants."<sup>21</sup> Grele referred to oral history interviews as "conversational narratives: conversational because of the relationship of interviewer and interviewee, and narrative because of the form of exposition--the telling of a tale."<sup>22</sup> He elaborated that conversational narratives "can only be understood by understanding the various relationships contained within this structure." These relationships, according to Grele, go beyond that of interviewer and interviewee. "When we interview someone, he not only speaks to himself and to the interviewer, but he also speaks through the interviewer to the larger community and its history as he views it. This is a dialogue, the exact nature of which is difficult to

---

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 46.

<sup>20</sup>Quoted in Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Practical Guide for Social Scientists* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Pubs., 1994), 1.

<sup>21</sup>Ronald J. Grele, *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History*. 2nd ed. (Chicago: Precedent Publishing, 1985), 136-37.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 135.

define. There are seemingly two relationships contained in one--that between the informant and the historian, and that between the informant and his own historical consciousness."<sup>23</sup>

The psychologists Ruthellen Josselson and Amia Lieblich stressed that a collaborative relationship between interviewer and interviewee is vital to obtain useful historical data as well as a coherent historical narrative. Emphasizing a relationship built around empathy, they saw the need for the interviewer to be "sensitive to the problems of dealing with human complexity and contradiction," and that it is always important to consider "how much one needs to know about someone else to feel that one can understand something about them."<sup>24</sup> The historian Jan Vansina saw oral history as representing an emerging form of collaborative subjectivity, where interviewees and interviewers collaborate to construct and transmit human observations, interpretations, and emotions in the form of narrative:

In the best of circumstances, even the best of witnesses never give a movielike account of what happened. . . . Eyewitness accounts are always a personal experience as well and involve not only perception, but also emotions. Witnesses often are also not idle standers-by, but participants in the events. Furthermore, an understanding of what happened cannot occur through mere data of perception. Perceptions must be organized in a coherent whole and the logic of the situation supplies missing pieces of observation.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 136-37.

<sup>24</sup>Ruthellen Josselson and Amia Lieblich, eds., *Interpreting Experience: The Narrative Study of Lives* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Pubs., 1995), xi.

<sup>25</sup>Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 4.

The underlying premise of the collaborative nature of oral history was that interviewees, above everyone else, are the center of attention. Without them, researchers would have nothing to present or interpret. In oral history, data and stories are not so much *extracted* by the interviewers so much as they are willingly *given* by the interviewees for posterity. The oral historian, in turn, accepts the gift, contextualizes it, and transmits it for the benefit of future generations.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup>Carrie Nobel Kline, "Giving It Back: Creating Conversations to Interpret Community Oral History," *The Oral History Review* 23:1 (1996), 39.

### CHAPTER 3

#### MEMORY, NARRATIVE, AND HISTORY: CRITICAL ELEMENTS IN THE CONSTRUCTION AND TRANSMISSION OF EXPERIENCE

As oral history continued to evolve into the third stage of its development, it created a framework centering around collaborative subjectivity, where oral history could be examined within the context of constructing and transmitting personal experiences about the past to future generations. It is therefore necessary, in this chapter, to discuss three critical elements of human existence: memory, narrative, and history.

*Memory.* People draw upon their personal and collective memory to help define who they are by linking them to a previous era. When asked to recall and articulate past experiences, as people do, for example, as parents and grandparents in informal encounters or in structured oral history interviews, they draw on their memory in deciding what to seek from the past. The psychologist Jerome Bruner believed that "a life is not 'how it was' but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold." Bruner implied that he, along with a growing number of cognitive psychologists, was not necessarily concerned with the *accuracy* of memories. Rather, he placed more emphasis on an individual's *belief* about what happened. According to Bruner, episodic



memories of specific life experiences should be examined as real entities--entities that are worthy of study independently of their objective truth value.<sup>1</sup>

Episodic memories Bruner wrote about were related to what the cognitive psychologists Roger Brown and James Kulik referred to as "flashbulb memories." Brown and Kulik analyzed individual memories of traumatic historical events, such as President Kennedy's assassination in 1963. Instead of studying people's memories for "factual, verifiable public information" about the event, Brown and Kulik focused their attention on memories "of their own personal circumstances when they 'heard the news.'" Of the respondents studied, almost all remembered in vivid detail how they found out about the assassination, as well as what they were doing at the time. Although Brown and Kulik could not assess the degree of accuracy of the memories, they viewed the respondents' recollections of the details of the event as data worthy of scholarly study about the what, how, and why of memory.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, what is important in an oral history interview is not only the facts that are remembered, but how they are remembered and why people remember them in the way they do. The historian Michael Frisch recognized the important relationship between oral history and memory:

What matters is not so much the history that is placed before us, but rather what we are able to remember and what role that knowledge plays in our lives. Oral history emerges as a powerful tool for discovering, exploring, and evaluating the nature of the process of historical memory--how people make

---

<sup>1</sup>David Pillemer, *Momentous Events, Vivid Memories* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 10-11.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 7-8.

sense of their past, how they connect individual experience and its social context, how the past becomes part of the present, and how people use it to interpret their lives and the world around them.<sup>3</sup>

Frisch's words remind us that memory is a complex phenomenon and that a close relationship exists between what oral historians call "individual" and "collective" memory. Individuals draw on their memories of the past to make sense of change and continuity in the present, not only about their individual lives, but about their community and the many social relationships within that community.<sup>4</sup> The sociologists James Fentress and Chris Wickham argued further that much individual memory is attached to membership in social groups of one kind or another. For example, a person remembers one's childhood as part of a family; one's neighborhood as part of a community; and one's work experience as part of an occupation, factory or office community. When individual memories accumulate about a topic a group of people share knowledge about, such as a community, they become part of that community's collective memory.<sup>5</sup> Fentress and Wickham added that memories are social because they are "structured by language, by teaching and observing, by collectively held ideas, and by experiences shared with others."<sup>6</sup> Historians and scholars of other disciplines which utilize memory as part of their methodology claimed that much data gathered

---

<sup>3</sup>Michael H. Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 188.

<sup>4</sup>Tracy E. K'Meyer, "'What Koinonia Was All About': The Role of Memory in a Changing Community," *The Oral History Review* 24:1 (1997), 2.

<sup>5</sup>James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory: New Perspectives on the Past* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), ix.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.

and transmitted via oral history had been previously discussed with others.<sup>7</sup> The anthropologist Judith Model noted that "orally transmitted data has been shaped over a long period of time through considerable thought and discussion."<sup>8</sup> The sociologist Nathan Wachtel claimed that "one only ever remembers as a member of a social group."<sup>9</sup> The sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, one of the early non-psychologists to enter the academic debate on memory, refuted psychologists' claims that memory resided primarily in the individual, and therefore context-free and isolated. Instead, Halbwachs believed that "all memories were formed and organized within a collective context. Virtually all events, experiences, and perceptions were shaped by individuals' interactions with others." Society's function, according to Halbwachs, was to provide the appropriate arena for the remembering of these events, experiences, and perceptions.<sup>10</sup> The social psychologists Catrin Finkenauer, Lydia Gisle, and Olivier Luminet claimed that "individual memories become social through interpersonal communication and collective remembering."<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup>John Bodnar, "Power and Memory in Oral History: Workers and Managers at Studebaker," *The Journal of American History* 75:4 (Mar., 1989), 1201.

<sup>8</sup>Quoted in Bodnar, "Power and Memory in Oral History," 1201.

<sup>9</sup>Nathan Wachtel, "Memory and History, Introduction," *History and Anthropology* 2 (Oct., 1986), 2.

<sup>10</sup>Quoted in James W. Pennebaker and Becky L. Banasik, "On the Creation and Maintenance of Collective Memories: History as Social Psychology," in *Collective Memory of Political Events: Social Psychological Perspectives*, ed. James W. Pennebaker, et. al. (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997), 4.

<sup>11</sup>Catrin Finkenauer, et. al., "When Individual Memories Are Socially Shaped: Flashbulb Memories of Sociopolitical Events," in Pennebaker, et. al., *Collective Memory of Political Events*, 192.

Collective memory, when constructed from individual memories, becomes part of a community's identity.<sup>12</sup> Halbwachs asserted that collective memory is "the sharing of the meaning and interpretations generations give to recalled specific events more than from the mere sharing of them."<sup>13</sup> The social historian Tamara Hareven asserted that interviewees remember their life experiences within the broader contexts of historical events as well as their own cultural world views. In contrast to the traditional view of historical data-gathering, Hareven said that "the cultural values influencing people's own perspectives on their lives provide the context within which they interpret their life histories and attribute meaning to their experiences."<sup>14</sup>

While acknowledging oral history's value in gathering data about events of the past, Ronald Grele looked toward the very essence of the relationship between history and human existence. Oral histories, Grele said, "can be used to discover unfolding consciousness, to document the varieties of ideology, the creation of meaning, and the more subjective aspects of historical experience."<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup>K'Meyer, "The Role of Memory," 3.

<sup>13</sup>Quoted in Guglielmo Bellelli and Mirella A. C. Amatulli, "Nostalgia, Immigration, and Collective Memory," in Pennebaker, et. al., *Collective Memory of Political Events*, 209.

<sup>14</sup>Tamara K. Hareven, "From Amoskeag to Nishijin: Reflections on Life History Interviewing in Two Cultures," in *International Annual of Oral History, 1990: Subjectivity and Multiculturalism in Oral History*, ed. Ronald J. Grele (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 9.

<sup>15</sup>Ronald J. Grele, "On Using Oral History Collections: An Introduction," *The Journal of American History* 74:2 (September 1987), 570.

This subjectivity becomes a focal point to define oral history and its evolution into a multidisciplinary, interpretive methodology in which individual and collective memory are important concepts to investigate. Fentress and Wickham claimed that memory is naturally divided into two segments, both of which are necessary to produce good history:

There is an objective part which serves as a container of facts, most of which might be housed in a variety of other locations. There is a subjective part, which includes information and feelings that are an integral part of us, and which thus are properly located only within us. The first part of memory is comparatively passive; it simply holds knowledge. The second part is more active; it experiences and recalls to consciousness. In this way, a distinction between objective fact and subjective interpretation is posited in the structure of memory itself.<sup>16</sup>

Fentress and Wickham concluded that memory is both social as well as subjective, and that "any attempt to use memory as a historical source in a sensitive way must confront the subjective, yet social, character of memory from the outset." While not denying that memory also can produce excellent, accurate, and objective information, such as that found in memoirs, diaries, and eyewitness testimonies, Fentress and Wickham believed that memory--social and subjective--is a way we as humans define who we are. "The way we present ourselves in our memories, the way we define our personal and collective identities through our memories, the way we order and structure our ideas in our memories, and the way we transmit these memories to others--is a study of the way we are."<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup>Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, 5.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 7.

*Narrative.* As social scientists and historians placed greater emphasis on the study of memory, a similar growth was seen in the study of narrative.<sup>18</sup> Narratives are stories. Oral history is the telling of stories about life experiences. The recalling and telling of these stories often enables interviewees to find representation, meaning, and identity in their life experiences, and hence better able to make sense of events occurring in their lives. To feminist researcher Marie-Francoise Chanfrault-Duchet, women's voices, along with those of other groups, have long been silenced. Giving women voice in the form of narrative in an oral history interview is a form of empowerment and representation:

The life-history approach has, in recent years, come to be seen as a successful medium for collecting women's words, that is, for reaching a social "group" that does not often speak on the social stage, or, more precisely, whose discourse has not, until recently, been perceived as legitimate. But the women's words collected by way of the life story are neither mere gossip nor words that can be treated as a set of information providing direct access to women's mentality. . . . Women's words are viewed as embedded in a narrative--that is, in a specific scheme that makes sense.<sup>19</sup>

Ronald Grele is one of several historians schooled in the traditional fact-finding methodology of their craft who shifted frameworks toward a collaborative subjectivity. This subjectivity caused these historians to closely examine theoretical and methodological frameworks associated with the construction of narratives resulting from interviewer-interviewee relationships. Grele went so far as to ask whether or not

---

<sup>18</sup>Pillemer, *Momentous Events, Vivid Memories*, 9.

<sup>19</sup>Marie-Francoise Chanfrault-Duchet, "Narrative Structures, Social Models, and Symbolic Representation in the Life Story," in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, ed. Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (New York: Routledge, 1991), 77.

history as a discipline is "problem-solving or storytelling?"<sup>20</sup> In her discussion of the differences between a "story" and a "report," Susan Chase asserted that in creating a story the burden lies primarily in the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. A report, on the other hand, is weighed heavily in favor of the interviewer/researcher.<sup>21</sup> Chase urged fellow researchers to collect stories rather than reports in their research by inviting interviewees to tell their stories, "to encourage them to take responsibility for the meaning of their talk. A successful interviewer manages to shift the weight of responsibility to the other in such a way that he or she willingly embraces it."<sup>22</sup>

Oral histories generally are constructed in two forms: out of interviewees' own remembrances of values, events, and lifestyles as they are organized in their minds and articulated to interviewers; and by interviewers/researchers as they edit and rearrange discourse into coherent, autobiographical, story-like formats. Borrowing from literary models, three major characteristics of story--*temporality, causation, and human interest*--are often combined in literature to form a plot structure. The educational researcher Martin Cortazzi called plot "the dynamic, sequential element in narrative literature, the only indispensable skeleton, the most essential but least variable element

---

<sup>20</sup>Ronald J. Grele, "Useful Discoveries: Oral History, Public History, and the Dialectic of Narrative," *The Public Historian* 13 (1991), 61.

<sup>21</sup>Susan E. Chase, "Taking Narrative Seriously: Consequences for Method and Theory in Interview Studies," in Josselson and Lieblich, *Interpreting Experience*, 2.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 3.

of narrative."<sup>23</sup> *Temporality* refers to time, the most fundamental characteristic of a narrative,<sup>24</sup> and sequence of events. All stories, whether real or imaginary, have a beginning state, middle action, and final state. *Causation* dictates that the middle action causes the final state. Rather than being merely a non-contextual succession of recounted events, stories are holistically constructed, where events are connected by time and causation.<sup>25</sup> The historian Hayden White underscored the importance of narrative in history by distinguishing between "annals" and "stories," in that annals possess "none of the characteristics that we normally attribute to a story: no central subject, no well-marked beginning, middle, and end, no peripeteia, and no narrative voice, . . . no suggestion of any necessary connection between one event and another." White also asserted that annals make no distinction between what is important or unimportant.<sup>26</sup> The *human interest* component of narrative assures that events and causes of events are incorporated into some form of plot, with a beginning and an end.<sup>27</sup> Oral histories, as stories, are indicators of the tendency by interviewees and interviewers to moralize reality. All stories, according to White, possess a form of closure endowed with some form of moral meaning.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup>Martin Cortazzi, *Narrative Analysis* (London: The Falmer Press, 1993), 85.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 85.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 86.

<sup>26</sup>Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 6.

<sup>27</sup>Cortazzi, *Narrative Analysis*, 90.

<sup>28</sup>White, *The Content of the Form*, 21.



All forms of narrative rooted in oral history result from interviewees' fundamental need to make sense of their life experiences. According to the educational researchers D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly, narratives and experiences are closely linked; narratives enable interviewees and interviewers to have "a point of reference, a life and a ground to stand on for imagining what experience is and for imagining how it might be studied and represented in researchers' texts."<sup>29</sup> Susan Chase also made the link between experience, narrative, and oral history: "If we take seriously the idea that people make sense of experience and communicate meaning through narration, then in-depth interviews should become occasions in which we ask for life stories."<sup>30</sup>

In the above context, experience is synonymous with life itself, with all its epiphanies, turning points, routines, customs, rituals, and everyday occurrences. No matter how narrow the topic of inquiry, the final result of an oral history interview should invariably be a narrative based on an interviewee's life. The life narrative is a collaboration between the interviewee/narrator recalling and providing details of his or her life experiences, and the interviewer/researcher asking questions, providing an empathetic atmosphere based on rapport and careful listening, and helping to construct a narrative for the benefit of future generations. Sherna Gluck, in the introduction to her book of life history interviews with women who performed previously male-

---

<sup>29</sup>D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly, *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), xxvi.

<sup>30</sup>Chase, "Taking Narrative Seriously," 2.

dominated work during World War II, argued for the construction and transmission of holistic, life history narratives. She asserted that her collected and constructed oral histories "are not mere snippets about the war years but full life stories. We see the women as rounded human beings with a past and a future."<sup>31</sup>

Concluding this discussion on narrative, an important relationship exists between oral history interviewing and the construction and transmission of narratives. No longer only concerned with collecting data, oral history researchers are increasingly turning to the study of narratives as they analyze the theoretical underpinnings of their field.

*History.* At the early stages of its development as a discipline, history's major aim was the construction and transmission of truthful and accurate information about the past. This construction and transmission was done by scholars seeking verifiable documents--usually written--and using these documents to interpret past events. Eventually, the notions of truth, accuracy, and objectivity in history were challenged by those who believed that the past needed to be reconstructed along more inclusive lines based on diversity, multiculturalism, and a skepticism toward what was once believed to be true and accurate.

Despite this growing need to write history to include previously excluded perspectives, historians cannot forget that they carry burdens of responsibility as they construct and transmit history for the benefit of present and future generations. Gary

---

<sup>31</sup>Sherna Berger Gluck, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, the War, and Social Change* (New York: Meridian, 1987), xv.

Okihiro warns that, despite the inclusiveness of history, all documents, oral and written, must be gathered and judged critically: "Historical documents derive from humans who have biases and prejudices, selective perceptions and memories, incomplete and limited powers of observation, and fallible memories. Further, people undergo changes over time and are subject to external influences and manipulation and, as such, are mirrors of their time and environment."<sup>32</sup>

Interpretations and definitions of history have varied according to the historians gathering and writing it and the context in which the gathering and writing is taking place. Deviating from the standard and general, "History is the knowledge of human beings in time,"<sup>33</sup> the historians Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob offer that the purpose of researching and writing history is to "make connections with the past in order to illuminate the problems of the present and the potential of the future."<sup>34</sup> The historian Mark Bloch believed that a main purpose behind the gathering and writing of history was to fulfill political and social ends, causing present and future human beings to act according to what happened in the past. Historical study, according to Bloch, was also important for the making of fuller human beings.<sup>35</sup> It is generally acknowledged that historians construct and transmit information about the

---

<sup>32</sup>Gary Y. Okihiro, "Oral History and the Writing of Ethnic History," 202.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 200.

<sup>34</sup>Joyce Appleby, et. al., *Telling the Truth about History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 10.

<sup>35</sup>Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (New York: Vintage Books, 1953), 9-10.

past for both of these reasons, which dictates the focus, nature, and purpose of studying history.

Memory, narrative and history are three common-based elements which, when combined, transform into the discipline of oral history. As the alchemy of these three often contrasting elements, oral history is replete with the strengths, as well as weaknesses, of each.

**CHAPTER 4**  
**INTERVIEWING SURVIVORS AND EYEWITNESSES OF THE 1946**  
**TSUNAMI ON HAWAII ISLAND**

The idea for an oral history project focusing around personal accounts of the 1946 tsunami came from a group of Hilo residents who were starting up a museum dedicated to educating the public about the history and dangers of tsunamis in Hawai'i. The group was composed of a mix of tsunami survivors and eyewitnesses, University of Hawai'i at Hilo scientists researching the physical effects of tsunamis in Hawai'i and other parts of the world, interested community members, educators, and elected officials. The museum came to be known as the Hilo Tsunami Museum. Eventually, its name was changed to Pacific Tsunami Museum, to reflect a more global emphasis and orientation.<sup>1</sup> After securing funds to start and maintain the museum, the group sought photos, artifacts, and first-person accounts, either written or oral. The group determined that personal accounts from eyewitnesses and survivors of tsunamis would be effective means of communicating to the public the dangerous effects of tsunamis, as well as supplement the many historical photographs and artifacts to be exhibited in the museum.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>The Pacific Tsunami Museum is located on Kamehameha Avenue in downtown Hilo, in a tsunami inundation zone. It occupies the concrete building which once housed the Bishop National Bank, later called First Hawaiian Bank. The building was one of the few structures on Kamehameha Avenue to survive the 1946 tsunami.

<sup>2</sup>Historical photos of the 1946 and 1960 tsunamis were collected at libraries and archives, as well as donated by individuals. Artifacts, such as personal items recovered

In my capacity as director of the Center for Oral History at the University of Hawai`i at Mānoa, I was contacted by the executive director of the new museum about the possibility of contracting for oral history interviews with survivors and observers of the 1946 and 1960 tsunamis. To help raise community awareness and increase knowledge in Hilo about tsunamis, the museum invited me to conduct two oral history methods workshops. These workshops trained several Hilo residents in the techniques of oral history and served as a starting point for systematic and community-wide documentation of personal tsunami experiences.

While these workshops represented systematic, grass-roots documentation of tsunamis in Hawai`i, the group felt that oral history interviews would provide a solid foundation for subsequent interviews by family members of survivors, students, and other lay historians. The group also saw the need for bound volumes of transcribed interviews to be made available to researchers, students, and the general public both at the Pacific Tsunami Museum and at libraries throughout the state. The Center for Oral History, with its track record of academic and professional documentation and statewide dissemination of interviews, was contracted to meet that need. I was able to convince the group of the importance of collecting not only eyewitness accounts of tsunamis and their aftermath, but complete, life history interviews.

---

from the tsunami wreckage, were also donated.

I began by researching written sources available on tsunamis in Hawai`i.<sup>3</sup> I then traveled to Hilo to meet with Robert “Steamy” Chow, a retired Hilo police officer who was on duty the morning of April 1, 1946. A lifelong Hilo resident who is widely known throughout the town, Chow was a student in one of my oral history workshops and an original board member of the Pacific Tsunami Museum. He discussed the project with me, showed me his collection of historical photographs of tsunami-devastated Hilo, and shared a list of potential interviewees developed in consultation with other longtime Hilo residents. I was given other names by Hilo and Laupāhoehoe community members as part of a “snowball” sampling technique. Emphasis was placed on gender, ethnic, occupational, and geographical diversity. An attempt was made to interview residents who were impacted on different levels: those who suffered the loss of family members and close friends, onlookers with a clear vantage point of the ocean, and those whose lifestyles were altered by the tragic events.

In assessing each individual for taped interviews, I took into account interviewees' depth and breadth of knowledge, ability to recall and articulate life experiences, and willingness to participate as interviewees. I conducted the interviews at the interviewees' homes or other agreed-upon places on Hawai`i island and O`ahu between February 1998 and May 1999. Each individual was interviewed in at least one ninety-minute session; most in two or more sessions.

---

<sup>3</sup>Most of the secondary sources on the subject are scientific accounts and provide information on why and how tsunamis occur, such as the relationship between earthquakes and tsunamis.

Since I asked interviewees to comment on experiences and incidents oftentimes specific to their own lives, I did not utilize a set questionnaire. Instead, for each interviewee, I created an outline of interview topics which followed a chronological format, beginning with the interviewee's date of birth, childhood, neighborhood/community, education, and work, and progressing to recollections of their experiences in the 1946 tsunami. At that point, I asked interviewees for detailed accounts of where they were situated as each succeeding wave hit; who were with them at the time; what they thought, felt, and feared during the ordeal; and what they saw, heard, and did that day. Finally, the interviewees were asked to assess the tsunami's impact on their own lives.

The reasons for producing near-verbatim transcripts for this project were twofold: to more easily locate and extract excerpts from the tape for museum exhibit purposes; and to archive life history interviews relating to the 1946 tsunami and life on Hawai'i island during the twentieth century. The transcriptions were done by University of Hawai'i students employed by the Center for Oral History. They were trained to listen and type all words spoken in the interviews by both interviewer and interviewee, with the exception of habitual utterances ("uh," "um," "you know," for example), most false starts, and unnecessary words or phrases which would have made the transcript difficult to understand. For the most part, however, the transcripts represent as closely as possible what is actually on the cassette tape.

I then reviewed each transcript against the audio tape to correct mistranscriptions and unintended omissions of words and phrases, then slightly edited



each transcript for clarity and readability. An important part of the process was checking and re-checking each transcript for questionable statements and inserting explanatory remarks. Whenever I, as editor, added words or phrases in a transcript, I indicated the additions in brackets [ ].

Each interviewee then received a draft of their transcript for their review and approval. They were asked to verify names and dates, and clarify statements where necessary. While some interviewees barely looked at their transcripts, returning them in a matter of a few days with minimal changes, others painstakingly reviewed each line of their transcripts, making extensive hand-written changes, and taking from a few weeks to several months to complete their reviews. After receiving back the transcripts, I incorporated the changes, denoting their additions in parentheses ( ). The returned and revised transcripts represented what interviewees wished to leave for the public record. The transcripts were then final-typed and prepared for publication.

Prior to publication, each interviewee read and signed a legal document allowing the University of Hawai`i Center for Oral History and the general public scholarly and educational use of his/her transcript.<sup>4</sup> In addition, I apprised them of their rights as human subjects participating in a University of Hawai`i-sponsored research project. They understood that participation in the project was completely voluntary, that they were not required to answer each and every question, and that they could withdraw from participation at any time for whatever reason.

---

<sup>4</sup>All thirty interviewees agreed to be identified in the transcripts by their actual names.

The bound transcript volumes are published as primary-source documents.<sup>5</sup> I gave each of the interviewees a copy of their transcript at a special presentation at the Pacific Tsunami Museum in January 2001.

It is at this stage where the idea for this study came about. While the transcripts represented primary-source data documenting the human drama of the tsunami, this study proceeds to another level of construction, a level which calls for a more readable presentation of life history narratives. Going beyond collecting and archiving oral history interviews, Michael Frisch suggested that editorial intervention is often necessary to help readers better understand the presented data. Frisch claimed that many oral historians struggle with the problem of condensing a long and complicated interview transcript into a coherent and readable form:

Preparing material for a historical documentary is fundamentally different than simply recording and preparing material *as* a historical document. For one thing, the documentary use implies an end or focus, the necessity of having the material fit within and contribute to the exposition or illustration of some kind of thematic framework. This requires shape, focus, and movement, which is rarely explicit and controlling in the inevitably more open-ended documents at hand, but must rather be brought to them.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup>Center for Oral History, *Tsunamis Remembered: Oral Histories of Survivors and Eyewitnesses in Hawai'i*. The transcripts are hard-bound and available at Hawai'i state system libraries, University of Hawai'i system libraries, the Pacific Tsunami Museum, and the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. The original cassette tapes, while not available for public use without special permission, are currently stored at the Thomas H. Hamilton Library at the University of Hawai'i.

<sup>6</sup>Michael H. Frisch, *A Shared Authority*, 81-83. Readers are welcome to compare the edited narratives with the original transcripts. See previous note.

For this study, I edited selected transcripts by eliminating most of my questions, rearranging sections to follow a closer chronological order, and deleting repetitious and tangential responses. Fortunately, all five interviewees selected for presentation and analysis in this study were organized in their thoughts and sufficiently detailed in their recollections; I rarely had to make extensive and significant editorial choices. Unless enclosed by square brackets, which indicate words or phrases I added, all words and responses are the interviewees' own.

In order to create a more focused topic, I chose to forgo the more extensively-documented Hilo experience and instead selected transcripts of five interviewees whose experiences dealt with the tsunami's effects on Laupāhoehoe, Hawai`i, a rural area located twenty miles northwest of Hilo. The five--one teacher and four students at Laupāhoehoe School--were affected by the 1946 tsunami in different ways. Marsue McShane, the teacher, was a newcomer to the islands from Oxford, Ohio. On the morning of April 1, 1946, she, along with three other *malihini*<sup>7</sup> teachers living in a cottage on the grounds of Laupāhoehoe School, were swept out to sea. The only survivor of the four, McShane spent several harrowing hours in the open ocean before being rescued.

Herbert Nishimoto, Masuo Kino, Albert Stanley, and Bunji Fujimoto were students at Laupāhoehoe School who were drawn to the unfolding drama created by the huge waves. Nishimoto, like McShane, was swept out to sea and eventually rescued several miles north of Laupāhoehoe. Kino was caught in the receding water

---

<sup>7</sup>Hawaiian word meaning "newcomer."

but was able to hang onto a branch and eventually swim to safety, while Stanley and Fujimoto were curious onlookers who remained out of danger. Fujimoto's younger brother, Toshiaki, however, was swept out to sea and drowned, one of twenty-four individuals at Laupāhoehoe to die that day in the tsunami.

The five narratives are presented as what the historian John Bodnar terms "narrative structures" or "central plots," in which individual memories and often disorganized and discontinuous strands of evidence are constructed as stories.<sup>8</sup> Three central historical plots characterize these narratives: life and conditions prior to the 1946 tsunami; eyewitness observations, experiences, and feelings during the events of April 1; and life and conditions in the years following the tsunami, leading up to feelings and attitudes in the present day.

In plot one, life and conditions prior to the 1946 tsunami, the lives of the interviewees/narrators revolved around childhood, family, community, and schooling. In Hawai'i, particularly rural portions of Hawai'i island, such as in Laupāhoehoe, life was a relatively stable--if not poor--existence dominated by communal sugar plantation life. In Hilo, the island's largest town, light industry coexisted with agricultural endeavors, creating an urban-rural environment. This stability was shattered by the chaos created by World War II, which brought about widespread social and economic change to the island's population.

Plot two centered on interviewees' recollections of the events of April 1, 1946. These "flashbulb memories" were based on each interviewee's episodic recall and

---

<sup>8</sup>Bodnar, "Power and Memory in Oral History," 1201.

narrative responses, and made up the major portion of the oral history project.

Particular emphasis was placed on locating interviewees who could recall first-hand experiences with the tsunami. In Laupāhoehoe, it meant teachers, administrators, students, and full-time residents of the area. My questions focused on the interviewees' role as eyewitnesses to an historic event: What were they doing when they saw or heard about the tsunami? Where were they when the initial waves hit? Where did they go after seeing the subsequent waves? What did they see? At what point did they sense true danger to their lives or the lives of others?

Plot three involved interviewees' lives after the tsunami, which enabled interviewees to place their early- and mid-life experiences within the broader context of their entire lives. It also enabled them to view their experiences retrospectively, thereby giving them the opportunity to provide closure to their life stories. Was the tsunami a significant turning point in people's lives and a major historical watershed? Or, did it represent a temporary interruption and setback from which people and society bounce back?

The next chapter sets the stage for the oral history narratives by providing an historical context to the April 1, 1946 tsunami in Laupāhoehoe.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Larger than all the other Hawaiian islands combined, but with approximately one-tenth of the population of the entire state, Hawai`i island<sup>1</sup> consists of 4,028 square miles of dense tropical forests, dry deserts, volcanic mountains stretching to elevations as high as 13,000 feet, sun-splashed beach resorts, sprawling ranch lands, urban and rural towns, and large- and small-scale agricultural lands. Its historical and economic significance ranges from battlegrounds of ancient Hawaiian chiefs, ongoing volcanic activity, extensive fishing, ranching, and sugar production, and the state's mainstay of tourism.<sup>2</sup> The twin volcanic peaks of Mauna Loa and Mauna Kea in the center portion of the island separate the resort-dominated, drier leeward side from the rainier, cooler ranching and agricultural windward side.

The windward side of Hawai`i island is dominated by the Hāmākua Coast, a forty-mile-long stretch of rugged, winding coastline and lush tropical and agricultural valleys and streams. Starting at the port city of Hilo and continuing in a northwesterly direction until Highway 19<sup>3</sup> ends at the sugar plantation town of Kukuihaele and the scenic lookout over verdant Waipi`o Valley, the Hāmākua Coast was once the site of several thousand acres of sugarcane, industrial factories which processed tons of raw

---

<sup>1</sup>Commonly known locally as the "Big Island."

<sup>2</sup>Big Island Resource Conservation and Development Council, "North Hilo Heritage Corridor Strategic Plan" (Kamuela, Hawai`i, 1995, photocopy), 1.

<sup>3</sup>Also known as the Hawai`i Belt Road.

sugar each day, and a multi-national, multi-ethnic work force living in company-provided housing. The fields, mills and settlements were components of several sugar companies dotting the coast, where workers--mostly immigrants from Europe and Asia--and their families worked and lived.

One such sugar company plantation community is Laupāhoehoe, located approximately twenty miles northwest of Hilo. It was one of several sugar plantation communities located in the Hawai`i county district of North Hilo.<sup>4</sup> Bordered by the towns of `O`ōkala to its north and Ninole to its south, Laupāhoehoe was once the major civic center of the North Hilo district. Prior to 1946, a large portion of the town--including the school, churches, and homes--lay at sea level, on a flat, wide peninsula known as Laupāhoehoe Point. The peninsula, which juts out 1,500 feet beyond the general coastline,<sup>5</sup> inspired the area's name, Laupāhoehoe, which literally means "a leaf of volcanic rock."<sup>6</sup> Prior to the 1996 closing of the Hāmākua Sugar Company, the coast's--and the entire island's--last surviving sugar company, Laupāhoehoe was the site of hundreds of acres of sugarcane stretching from the ocean, near Laupāhoehoe Point, to an elevation of 1,850 feet. At the higher elevations, deep

---

<sup>4</sup>The district of North Hilo is approximately 355 square miles and includes the residential areas of Ninole, Kapehu, Pāpa`aloa, Laupāhoehoe, Waipunalei, and `O`ōkala.

<sup>5</sup>Betty Uchima Higa, photocopy, 2000.

<sup>6</sup>*Lau* means "leaf" in Hawaiian, while *pāhoehoe* is a smooth variety of volcanic lava.

gulches, formed over the years by sustained water runoff and from cataclysmic geological jolts, cut through the cane fields.<sup>7</sup>

Archaeologists note that Laupāhoehoe Point was inhabited by native Hawaiians who established settlements as early as 1490. Records further show that a sophisticated village existed there in 1780, with extensive fishing and taro-growing activity. A disastrous tsunami in 1868 destroyed a large portion of the village.<sup>8</sup>

In 1878, in response to increasing sugar activity on the Hāmākua Coast brought on by the U.S. Reciprocity Treaty,<sup>9</sup> businessman William Lydgate began the Laupāhoehoe Sugar Company. Lydgate erected his first sugar mill in 1879, which consisted of three cane rollers. He selected Laupāhoehoe as the site of his plantation primarily because of the peninsula's natural boat landing, which boasted one of three lighthouses located along the rocky coast. Later, Lydgate erected a larger, more modern seven-roller mill two miles away in Pāpa`aloa. By 1890, Lydgate was grinding all the cane grown in Laupāhoehoe at the Pāpa`aloa mill.<sup>10</sup>

By 1900, the fields and mill in Laupāhoehoe and Pāpa`aloa dominated sugar activity in North Hilo, leading to an insatiable need for labor to work the fields and mills. Immigrants arrived from China, Japan, Portugal, Korea, Puerto Rico, and the

---

<sup>7</sup>"Hawaiian Sugar Plantation History, No. 19 -- Laupahoehoe," *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, 6 July 1935.

<sup>8</sup>Big Island Resource Conservation and Development Council, "North Hilo Heritage Corridor Strategic Plan," 4.

<sup>9</sup>Passed by the U.S. Congress in 1876, this act lifted the foreign tariff imposed on sugar shipped from Hawai`i to the Mainland U.S.

<sup>10</sup>*Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, 6 July 1935.



Philippines to join native Hawaiians as laborers. The area around Laupāhoehoe Point became a bustling town, with hotels, restaurants, a theater, a blacksmith, a photographer, and other businesses. A courthouse, civic center, and school were also located in the area.<sup>11</sup>

As the sugar industry prospered, the area's transportation system evolved from mules and boat loadings to a railway system connecting Hilo with Hakalau, Laupāhoehoe, Honoka`a and other plantation communities along the Hāmākua Coast. This signified the beginning of a shift of Laupāhoehoe plantation's epicenter from the point to the cliff tops, where the railway station was located. Eventually, the railway system was replaced by automobiles and trucks traveling on macadamized roads.<sup>12</sup>

After decades of relative prosperity, Laupāhoehoe Sugar Company underwent changes indicative of sugar's declining profits and economic influence in post-World War II Hawai`i. In 1957, Theo. H. Davies and Company, Ltd., the holding firm which controlled various sugar companies on the Hāmākua Coast, merged its Kaiwiki Sugar Company, which operated a mill in `O`ōkala, with Laupāhoehoe Sugar. This move gave Laupāhoehoe Sugar two mills--one in `O`ōkala and one in Pāpa`aloha--in which to grind cane. In 1965, declining profits and outdated equipment forced Laupāhoehoe Sugar to close down its Pāpa`aloha mill and grind all its cane at the `O`ōkala mill.<sup>13</sup> Nine years later, Davies merged Hāmākua Mill Company, founded in 1877, with

---

<sup>11</sup>Big Island Resource Conservation and Development Council, "North Hilo Heritage Corridor Strategic Plan," 7.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>13</sup>"Sugar Plantation Will Close Down," *The Honolulu Advertiser*, 26 April 1963.

Laupāhoehoe Sugar Company.<sup>14</sup> Another merger occurred in 1978, further indication that sugar on Hawai`i island was no longer profitable. Honoka`a Sugar Company, founded in 1878, merged with Laupāhoehoe Sugar Company to form Davies Hāmākua Sugar Company.<sup>15</sup> Cane was ground at Honoka`a's newly-built mill in Haina, as well as Laupāhoehoe's mill in `O`ōkala. Finally, in 1984, in last-ditch attempts to save the financially-strapped company, former Theo. H. Davies executive Francis Morgan bought it, consolidated operations, and established the Hāmākua Sugar Company. Unable to sustain continued loss of revenue, Hāmākua Sugar Company ceased sugar operations in 1994. That same year, the parent company of nearby Hakalau sugar mill,<sup>16</sup> the Hilo Coast Processing Company, also closed its doors. The two closings signaled the end of sugarcane production on the Hāmākua Coast.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup>"Davies to Merge Two Plantations," *The Honolulu Advertiser*, 23 January 1974.

<sup>15</sup>P. Ernest Bouvet, *The Final Harvest, Commemorating the Hāmākua Sugar Company, 1869-1994; Epilogue: The Final Harvest and Beyond, 1994-2000* (Hilo, Hawai`i: P. Ernest Bouvet, 2001), 10.

<sup>16</sup>Started in 1882 by California interests, Hakalau Plantation Company, located five miles southeast of Laupāhoehoe, was taken over by C. Brewer & Company in 1910. Like nearby Laupāhoehoe Sugar Company, Hakalau Plantation Company employed hundreds of immigrant workers and their families living in housing provided by the company. Children of Hakalau Plantation Company workers attended Laupāhoehoe School after attending John M. Ross Elementary School in Hakalau. The Hakalau sugar mill, located at sea level on the Hāmākua Coast shoreline, continued to grind cane even after it suffered extensive damage in the April 1, 1946 tsunami. After a series of company mergers in which Hakalau Plantation Company ceased to exist as a business entity, its sugar mill became part of the Hilo Coast Processing Company in 1971. The Hakalau sugar mill ground its last cane crop in 1974.

<sup>17</sup>Bouvet, *The Final Harvest*, 10.

The decline and eventual demise of the sugar industry on Hawai'i island, coupled with a population shift to urban areas such as Hilo and Honolulu for better employment opportunities, were two critical historical developments following World War II. The war, together with the tragic and destructive tsunami of 1946 played important roles in hastening these historical developments, permanently altering towns such as Laupāhoehoe, Hakalau, and the entire Hāmākua Coast region socially and economically.

After the tsunami destroyed portions of Laupāhoehoe School and some of the remaining structures located on the point, the town was relocated to its present location at the higher elevation along Highway 19, which was constructed in the 1950s.<sup>18</sup> There, a new Laupāhoehoe School was built in 1952,<sup>19</sup> the result of intense, community-wide pressure to relocate the school to a higher, safer location following the deaths of twenty-four students, teachers, and residents.<sup>20</sup> Today, a public park stands at the site of the old school, with a special memorial dedicated to those killed. Few remnants of the old community on the point remain, such as the boat landing, the school's foundation, and a gymnasium.

Commonly but mistakenly called “tidal waves,” tsunamis, or literally in Japanese “great harbor waves,” are sea waves generated by volcanic eruptions,

---

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>19</sup>“\$875,000 Big Isle School Building Dedicated by Long,” *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, 14 October 1952.

<sup>20</sup>“Laupāhoehoe Parents Rebel at Sending Children to Old School,” *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, 18 April 1946.

underwater landslides, or seafloor ruptures associated with earthquakes. These ocean-going waves travel toward land at high speeds. As they enter shallower water, their speed is greatly reduced, forming high and steep walls of water, with broad, flat crests behind them. This development becomes especially pronounced in shoal water and in crescent, funnel-like bays.<sup>21</sup> Rather than a single wave, tsunamis arrive on land as a series of oscillations, sometimes seven to ten in all, the largest wave usually somewhere in the middle of the set. Most common in the Pacific Ocean because of the large number of eruptions, landslides and earthquakes occurring on the ocean floor, tsunamis have affected Asia, the Pacific Islands, the West Coast of the United States, and Alaska. The Hawai'i-based International Tsunami Information Center has calculated that, between 1813 and 1992, 112 tsunamis have caused 385 deaths in the Hawaiian Islands alone.<sup>22</sup>

In the early morning of April 1, 1946, a 7.4 earthquake shook the sea floor of the Aleutian Trench, ninety miles from Unimak Island in Alaska's Aleutian Islands. Although the earthquake was recorded on seismographs throughout the world, technology was not yet sophisticated enough to detect that a Pacific-wide tsunami was generated and heading southward directly for the Hawaiian Islands, over 2,300 miles away. Traveling at an average speed of 489 miles per hour,<sup>23</sup> the first wave reached

---

<sup>21</sup>F. P. Shepard, et. al., "The Tsunami of April 1, 1946," *Bulletin of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography of the University of California, La Jolla, California*. (Vol. 5, No. 6: 391-528) Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1950), 396.

<sup>22</sup>*The Sunday Star-Bulletin & Advertiser*, 6 September 1992.

<sup>23</sup>Shepard, et. al., "The Tsunami of April 1, 1946," 407.

Kaua`i at approximately 5:55 a.m., O`ahu at 6:30, Maui County at 6:50, and Hawai`i island just before 7:00.<sup>24</sup>

Although most of the island chain was affected, the waves had the deadliest effect on the crescent-shaped Hilo Bay and the surrounding areas, reaching land at heights averaging from twenty-one to twenty-six feet--with the third wave reportedly being the largest.<sup>25</sup> Other than for the recession of water from Hilo Bay, which exposed several hundred feet of ocean floor, there was no sign of impending disaster. Many curious onlookers remained at the ocean front, some venturing onto the exposed coral bottom to pick up flapping fish. Others dismissed verbal warnings as April Fools' jokes and continued with their everyday routines.

The onrushing ocean water inundated streets, homes, and storefronts, slamming into wooden two-story buildings along Kamehameha Avenue in Hilo's bayfront business district, reducing them to splinters. Most of the wooden frame structures on the *makai*<sup>26</sup> side of Kamehameha Avenue were either destroyed totally by the waves, or became bulldozers, plowing into other structures located on the *mauka*<sup>27</sup> side of the street. Structures that were spared suffered extensive water damage.

The water level rose to about seventeen feet at the mouth of the Wailuku River, located just north of the devastated downtown area, destroying a railroad bridge

---

<sup>24</sup>Walter C. Dudley and Min Lee, *Tsunami!* 2nd. ed. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), 4.

<sup>25</sup>Shepard, et. al., "The Tsunami of April 1, 1946," 441.

<sup>26</sup>Hawaiian word meaning, "toward the sea."

<sup>27</sup>Hawaiian words meaning, "toward the mountains."

and carrying a steel span 750 feet upstream.<sup>28</sup> Cars and tracks of the Hawai'i Consolidated Railway Company, an economic lifeline which carried sugar and passengers from the Hāmākua Coast plantations to Hilo, were destroyed so completely that the company was forced out of business permanently.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to leveling much of downtown Hilo, the waves, reaching a maximum height of thirty-two feet above sea level,<sup>30</sup> destroyed homes in the residential areas of Keaukaha, Reeds Bay, and Waiākea Kai, as well as most of the low-lying, teeming residential slum area known as Shinmachi, located just north of the Wailoa River Bridge.<sup>31</sup>

Meanwhile, at Laupāhoehoe Point, water reaching a height of thirty-one feet above sea level swept over the entire seaward portion of the peninsula. Structures were swept 500 feet inland diagonally to the northwest; many were left intact, while others were smashed to pieces. One house was swept a great distance out to sea by receding water before breaking up. The first three waves reportedly approached land from the northeast, but succeeding larger waves approached the shore from the east or

---

<sup>28</sup>Shepard, et. al., "The Tsunami of April 1, 1946," 441.

<sup>29</sup>Ian Birnie, "Transportation and The 1946 Tsunami," *Pacific Tsunami Museum Newsletters*, (<http://tsunami.org/newsletter2.htm>) 15 February 2001.

<sup>30</sup>Shepard, et. al., "The Tsunami of April 1, 1946," 443.

<sup>31</sup>Tom O'Brien, "Dazed Inhabitants Gaze at Rain Soaked Shambles of Hilo," *The Honolulu Advertiser*, 5 April, 1946, A-3.

southeast. The destructive force of the water did not let up until after the seventh or eighth wave.<sup>32</sup>

Laupāhoehoe School, which at the time had an enrollment of over 500 students from kindergarten through grade twelve, was located on the peninsula. Luckily, the main buildings of the school were located over 100 yards inland from the ocean shore, with an athletic field and wooden grandstand serving as a buffer between the school buildings and the ocean. This buffer enabled the school to escape serious damage. However, four teachers' residences, which were situated at the tip of the peninsula, fronting the ocean shore, were destroyed. Three teachers staying in one of the cottages were swept to their deaths. In addition, a fourth teacher and sixteen students, many of whom had just been dropped off the bus at the Laupāhoehoe School grounds that morning, were killed. Also perishing were the wife and three small children of vocational agriculture teacher Peter Nakano. Of the twenty-four persons killed, only two bodies were ever found.

Laupāhoehoe School principal Clarence Ferdun had the unenviable task of dealing not only with the physical trauma caused by the tsunami, but also the emotional and cultural tugs-of-war swirling around the immediate aftermath of the disaster. Fifty-two years after the tsunami, Ferdun was asked to recall and write about his role and feelings during a particularly trying period in his life:

The plantation manager and I knew that the parents would want a memorial service for the missing, so we organized a community memorial for all the missing. That service was held in the plantation gym. A large group attended.

---

<sup>32</sup>Shepard, et. al., "The Tsunami of April 1, 1946," 439.

This did not satisfy the parents who wanted a separate service for each child. So the community had sixteen more memorial services during the next ten days. It seemed to be the custom at that time that when a child died, a representative from each organization that he belonged to had to give a testimonial at his funeral. If he belonged to the Boy Scouts, someone from the Boy Scouts had to give a speech about the boy. If he belonged to a Buddhist youth group, someone from that group had to make a speech, etc. So I had to make sixteen testimonials in the next ten days before weeping relatives. It was one of the hardest things I have had to do during my life. This was especially so since some of the parents wondered why I had let these children get caught in the wave and swept out to sea.<sup>33</sup>

Ferdun and his family were living in the school principal's cottage, which was located near the main school building and therefore out of danger at the time of the tsunami. He was also faced with the task of completing the school year so that the seniors would be able to graduate:

Since we lost four teachers and others were not in shape to return to school, the school was closed for about two weeks. The Department of Education could not provide us with new teachers at that time of year, so we recruited people in the community to fill the classrooms. Some had had previous experience teaching, but others had not. One of our elementary school substitute teachers was a 9th grade graduate living in the community. When the teachers did come back to the classroom, they stood facing the ocean while teaching since they did not trust the ocean. A few of the parents would not send their children back to school at that point. So they sent them to Hilo or Honolulu.<sup>34</sup>

Other areas along the agricultural Hāmākua Coast were severely affected by the tsunami. Cash crops such as sugar and taro were destroyed. The mill of the Hakalau Plantation Company, standing less than ten feet above sea level at the water's edge,

---

<sup>33</sup>Clarence Ferdun, "A Report by Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Ferdun of their Experience during the April 1, 1946 Tidal Wave," photocopy, 1998.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.



was badly damaged, causing losses totalling \$375,000.<sup>35</sup> A clarifier tank, steel girders, and iron roofing from the mill were carried 800 feet inland.<sup>36</sup>

In all, the 1946 tsunami killed 159 people in the territory of Hawai`i, 121 on Hawai`i island. Of this total, only 115 bodies were recovered.<sup>37</sup> Many of those not killed by the force of the waves or the debris were swept out to sea by receding water and drowned. Throughout the island, homes, businesses, roads, railroads, bridges, piers, breakwaters, fishpond walls, and boats were severely damaged. Property damage totaled approximately \$26 million.<sup>38</sup>

The hours and days following the disaster were filled with the horrendous tasks of seeking and identifying bodies; locating valuables and other material possessions; participating in the massive and time-consuming cleanup effort; dealing with critical shortages of food, gasoline, and other essentials; and coping with the hardships of sudden homelessness and lost livelihoods.

The following chapters contain the narratives of five individuals interviewed for the tsunami oral history project. Each of the five were individuals of diverse backgrounds who witnessed the tsunami from different vantage points and perspectives, and were affected by the tsunami in different ways.

---

<sup>35</sup>"Hakalau Mill Losses \$375,000," *Hilo Tribune-Herald*, 1 May 1946, 3.

<sup>36</sup>Shepard, et. al., "The Tsunami of April 1, 1946," 439.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 463. The island-by-island breakdown of deaths is as follows: Kaua`i, 15; O`ahu, 9; Moloka`i, 0; Maui, 14; and Hawai`i Island, 121. The number of injured requiring hospitalization totaled 163, all but 10 on Hawai`i Island.

<sup>38</sup>Dudley and Lee, *Tsunami!*, 43.

## CHAPTER 6

### "THERE'S NO PLAN, THERE'S JUST COINCIDENCE"

#### MARSUE MCGINNIS MCSHANE

*Marsue McGinnis McShane<sup>1</sup> was born May 15, 1924 in Cincinnati, Ohio. Her father, Ralph McGinnis, was a professor of English and journalism at Miami University of Ohio. Her mother, Erma König McGinnis, was a homemaker. McShane, along with an older brother, was raised in the college town of Oxford, Ohio. She also spent part of her childhood with her grandmother in nearby Covington, Kentucky. McShane attended schools in Oxford, graduating from high school in 1941. She then attended William Woods College in Missouri for two years before transferring to Miami University and earning her bachelor of education degree in 1945.*

*Answering a recruiting call from Hawai`i for teachers, McShane arrived at Laupāhoehoe School in September of 1945, where she taught art and physical education to students from grades seven through twelve. She and three other female teachers, Helen Kingseed of Oxford, Ohio, Dorothy Drake of Columbus, Ohio, and Fay Johnson of Roanoke, Virginia, lived in a cottage on the shoreline tip of Laupāhoehoe Point. This cottage, one of four provided by the school for out-of-town teachers, was isolated and located near the ocean's edge, over 100 yards away from the main school*

---

<sup>1</sup>Marsue McGinnis McShane, interview by author, in Center for Oral History, University of Hawai`i, *Tsunamis Remembered: Oral Histories of Survivors and Observers in Hawai`i* (Honolulu: Center for Oral History, 2000), 763-91.

*buildings. The cottages were the only school structures built at the tip of the peninsula, a stone's throw from the crashing waves of the ocean.*

*On the morning of April 1, 1946, the four young women were awakened by residents who noticed the ocean receding. While the curious women stayed in or near their cottage to witness the strange occurrence, a huge wall of water swept them off their feet, out of their cottage, and into the onrushing/receding water. Kingseed, Drake, and Johnson were never found. They were among the twenty-four people killed at Laupāhoehoe that day.<sup>2</sup> McShane, who also was swept out to sea, managed to avoid being seriously hit by the swirling debris and jagged shoreline rocks. She spent many harrowing hours in the open ocean. She was rescued later in the day by men who were searching for survivors on a boat. One of the men, Dr. Leabert Fernandez, later became her husband.*

*The couple moved to O`ahu in 1952, where McShane taught at Kailua Elementary School. In 1954, she taught in California at three different schools. She returned to O`ahu in 1956, where she taught English at Punahou School. After leaving teaching to raise a family, she returned to the classroom in 1968 at Kailua Intermediate School.*

*Divorced from Dr. Fernandez since 1963, she married John McShane in 1969. She raised three children and two step-children.*

---

<sup>2</sup>McShane's three roommates, a fourth teacher (Fred Kruse), sixteen students, one teacher's spouse and three of her young children, were killed that day. The casualties at Laupāhoehoe totaled twenty-four.

*Our two oral history interviews were conducted on January 19 and 25, 1999 at McShane's Kailua, O`ahu residence, which she had turned into a bed and breakfast. Ironically, we sat for the interviews on her back patio, a mere fifty feet from the ocean shoreline, in a tsunami inundation zone.*

*My encounter with McShane was not the first time she had been asked to remember and tell her story.<sup>3</sup> What apparently surprised her was my wanting her to talk about her life experiences outside of the tsunami. She expressed to me that no one had asked her to recall her life experiences in such detail before. As the interviewing progressed, however, she seemed to enjoy my questions and our conversation, which, in her eyes, often had nothing to do with tsunamis.*

*McShane was, within the confines of our profession, a "good" interviewee. She usually stayed on course as she thoughtfully answered my questions, often providing more information than I expected with each response. She had a narrative structure and style of her own, complete with subtle pauses for dramatic effect. Midway through a particularly dramatic description of her ordeal in the open sea, she stopped, paused, looked directly at me, and asked, "Now, do you want to hear all these details?"*

*Our second and last taping session ended with McShane posing a question to me: "How did you get interested in oral history?" I started telling her a little of my story. As it turned out, I once was her step-grandson's soccer coach. Small world.*

---

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, Dudley and Lee, *Tsunami!*, 39-40; Hugh Clark, "Laupahoehoe's Memories of Terror--April 1, 1946, was Deadly Day," *The Honolulu Advertiser*, 2 April, 1979; and Beverly Creamer, "The Day the Sea went Crazy," *The Honolulu Advertiser*, 1 April 1986.

I was born in Cincinnati, Ohio way, way back in 1924. My father was a professor at Miami University of Ohio, which predates Miami, Florida by eighty years or something.<sup>4</sup> [He taught] English and journalism, and he was the head of the student newspaper and the *Recension*, the yearbook. He did all of that plus teach English 101, et cetera. They met in college. My mother became a housewife. She interrupted her education by marrying. I appreciate this now, [but] when I was in the fourth grade, she went back to college, majored in math, and got her degree, and I went to her graduation. Now, I'm a member of the American Association of University Women, and I realize what an achievement that was, you know. I was born in Cincinnati because all my relatives and my grandmother lived in Covington, [Kentucky] and she [grandmother] helped raise me. So when people ask where I was born, [I say] actually, in a hospital in Cincinnati, but I lived most of my time in Oxford, Ohio.

I had one brother who was two years older. And very normal playmates. I was a horse-crazy young girl, and it was difficult because we didn't live on a ranch, my father didn't have money. I loved horses! I don't know why but I did. When I was ten, my grandfather bought me a pony and we kept it at the dairy.

[The Great Depression] was hard because a professor didn't make much money. He used to report the news [of Oxford and Miami] to the Cincinnati papers to make extra money. He wrote poetry and things like that. But my mother's father was a meat man. At one time, he had six meat stores in Covington, plus he had a sausage factory,

---

<sup>4</sup>Miami University, located in Oxford, Ohio, was founded in 1809. The University of Miami, in Coral Gables, Florida, was established in 1925.

made wonderful sausages. So I can remember my mother driving down to see her mother, and she'd go to his meat stores and we'd have the back of the car loaded up with groceries and everything. My one aunt—my mother had two sisters and that's all. And one of them was very wealthy, and she used to buy all my brother's clothes. My grandmother used to take me to get shoes and everything. So we really, financially, lived very well for those times. But it was because of my [maternal] grandfather, so it's an unusual case.

I think it's so much harder nowadays. I mean, I never even heard of drugs. We ordered gin and tonics when we went out on dates. However, smoking was the in thing, and I never did learn to smoke. I tried because all the movie stars, like Bette Davis and everybody smoked, and now I'm glad I didn't learn. It was during the [Great] Depression, of course, and only the doctor's son had a car and we walked, rode our bikes, and roller skated to school, et cetera. So we didn't have the problems of today.

Oxford is a beautiful college town. It's right on [the Ohio-Kentucky border]. You cross the Ohio River and you go to Covington, Kentucky. And Dayton, you know, of the airplane industry is not far.[Oxford was], as my father said, town and gown. There was farming, dairy, corn, and there were no other industries. Of course there were retail stores and restaurants, the usual college town businesses. And I went to all the football games. Our high school football coach was [Wilbur] "Weeb" Ewbank, [who later coached college and professional football] and they call [Miami

University] the “cradle of coaches.”<sup>5</sup> So it was really nice. Then on Christmases and everything, I'd go down to my grandmother's and my aunt's in Cincinnati and Covington across the Ohio River. When the artist series would come to the university, I'd go to that so it was really a great place to be. I used to roller skate on the campus and et cetera.

One thing unusual is that we were in Oxford, Ohio, college town—and this (chuckles) amazes me when I look back from a perspective of today. Marian Anderson<sup>6</sup> came to sing at one of our artist series things. When she came, she couldn't find any place to stay because all the hotels were restricted. She couldn't go to any restaurant because she was a Negro. So where did she stay overnight for her concert? She stayed in the president of the university's house. I can remember the signs in the restaurants, “We reserve the right to not serve people whom we don't want to serve.”<sup>7</sup> And here, this [racism] was never taught in the schools and I didn't really think about this until I got into my third year of college and had this wonderful professor who said that belief in religions and race, like the prejudice against the Jews and everything, was never taught in the high schools or colleges or anything. This was the beginning of the Civil Rights [movement] and then later on, you learned that in the South, if you

---

<sup>5</sup>Miami University is well-known throughout the college football world as the “cradle of coaches,” where several now-famous coaches got their start.

<sup>6</sup>Marian Anderson, 1897-1993, was the first African American to sing at the Metropolitan Opera House, in 1955.

<sup>7</sup>Marsue is probably paraphrasing here.

were a Negro, you couldn't even go in the library. Can you imagine? Now I really think about that.

I went to McGuffey [School], named after the [founder of the] *McGuffey Readers* who's also from Ohio.<sup>8</sup> It was a practice-teaching school, the teaching school for the university, which was really great because we'd get teachers and they had master teachers, so the schooling was really, really wonderful. I liked school. We had, of course, all the professors' children [attending] and everything. But we also had all the farmers' children, if they were White. The high school that took Negroes was Stewart. But this, of course, never was pointed out to me until I got older and looked back. Very interesting. And I was not good at math or sciences. I remember the worst grade I ever got in my whole school career was in physics, and I was just really upset but I managed to get through. My brother, on the other hand, majored in math. I guess he got all the brains in the family.

I graduated from high school in '41. I had skipped a grade so I was seventeen. And of course, that December, my freshman year of college, was Pearl Harbor.

I first went to William Woods College in Missouri. It was a girls' college and it only went two years. My mother [once] went there. And, because they had horses there, I wasn't in any of the school activities. I was riding my horse.

---

<sup>8</sup>William Holmes McGuffey, 1800-1873, American educator and clergyman. Author of basic readers read by American schoolchildren throughout the United States, McGuffey once served as president of Ohio University from 1839 to 1845.



I graduated from William Woods right in the midst of the war, in '43. There were no men on campus [because of World War II]. There were just a few 4-Fs.<sup>9</sup> So the classes, there'd be all these women and maybe two guys. So my last two years of college were, you know, not college-fied. I decided I didn't want to just graduate and be educated. I wanted to be something, so I went back and changed [majors] to the school of education at Miami and took all of those courses. In those days, in Ohio, I guess all over, when you graduated from the school of education as a teacher, they got you a job in Ohio. I remember [a potential job in] Sandusky, Ohio. I was contemplating that, which brings me to why I came to Hawai'i. After I graduated from William Woods in '43, I went back and lived at home [in Oxford]. I didn't live at a dorm [while attending Miami University]; I was a commuter from home, I lived right in the town. I had a horse and eventually, two horses. My college life was riding horses and I just went to classes at Miami.

I graduated in '45. In March '45--the atomic bomb had not been dropped. War was still going on in the Pacific--I saw on the bulletin board, a letter that said, "Teachers needed desperately in Hawaii."

*Did they actually use that word, "desperately"?*

Desperately. Desperately. You were to write a letter [explaining] why you'd want to teach in Hawai'i and your credentials. I wanted to teach and Hawai'i was the first stop. Then I wanted to teach English in a school in Japan or South America or France, you know, I didn't want to go back to the same old place. I did want to get away. See,

---

<sup>9</sup>Medical draft deferment.

living at home, my college years were really not what they should have been, where you go to college, get educated and you find your husband and you get married and have children and you go on from there. I wasn't really career-oriented so much. I was a good teacher and I graduated with honors and everything, but I wasn't, "I want to be the greatest teacher, I want to be a principal, I want to go back and get my Ph.D. and teach in college." It wasn't that. It was just that what I had was enough to get me into schools to teach around the world. Of course I anticipated meeting the right man.

(Chuckles) But I had no idea it would turn out that I would live in Hawai'i forever. So I don't know what it was in my background. I used to go to Maine every summer for seven summers and stayed two months, July and August, and this was because of my wealthy grandfather on my mother's side. My father's mother and father were farmers essentially, tenant farmers. But they had four children and all of them got college educations. It was really something because they are all really sharp. And one, Ida, the only girl, became a schoolteacher and taught in Alaska. I guess it was sort of inbred. I mean, I guess this idea of getting away was sort of—especially when you're confined during the war and you don't get any travel and you don't have any life, you're just sort of there.

I wanted to teach around the world and I wanted to get out, and I thought, how wonderful. So I wrote a letter and I was accepted. If you could get your transportation paid for to Hawai'i, then you were all set because you were guaranteed a job. I had been contemplating [jobs in] Sandusky, Ohio and Parma, Ohio, but Hawai'i just took me by storm.

*So what was going through your mind when you saw the notice, I mean, what was your exposure or knowledge of Hawai`i at that time?*

Nothing. Zilch. Now, one time my mother took my brother and me to Florida and we lived there for six months. She was always taking us places and my brother went to school down there. That was my impression of the tropics. Of course, Hawai`i is so different from Florida. For one thing, it has the mountains. Florida is absolutely flat. I'd stand on the beach in Hawai`i and look up at those mountains and I couldn't believe how beautiful they were. I knew nothing about Hawai`i except that I wanted to teach around the world and this was a way. And they said that you'd live on the school campus. That was unheard of; the high schools had living places for teachers?<sup>10</sup> But I would have my housing, I would have all this—oh, it was really very enticing.

*Did you have any hesitation or any fears?*

No, you see, I signed up in March, war was still going on, but they seemed to be confident that the ship taking me to Hawai`i would be all right. And my brother was in the navy and he was in the battles in Japan and everything, and I thought, well, I would see him before anybody else because I would be in Hawai`i. He would have to go through there to get back to the states. As it turned out, I was the last one to see him because he'd go directly to Seattle and put the ships in mothballs up there. So I didn't see him until later—he was the best man at my wedding. But that was one reason why I wanted to go to Hawai`i because I thought seeing him would be great.

---

<sup>10</sup>Recruited teachers assigned to Hawai`i's rural schools often were provided housing on school grounds.

[My parents] were all for it. But of course, they didn't know anything about Hawai`i either. I mean, that's what I wanted to do, and that was okay with them, so.

They said that all new teachers taught on the outer islands and my assignment was Laupāhoehoe [School]. I didn't know how to pronounce it until I was on the train from Chicago to San Francisco and there were quite a few people there from Hawai`i, young people that had been sent to the Mainland after Pearl Harbor. And this one gal, her last name was White, very beautiful gal, said, "Oh, you're going to Hawai`i to teach?"

"Yes," I said, "I'm on the island of Hawai`i and I'm at La-pa-ho-ho."

And she said, "Oh no, it's `hoy hoy', Laupāhoehoe" And that's how I learned to pronounce it. I knew it was on the Big Island—but we didn't call it the Big Island, we called it the island of Hawai`i. But Honolulu was on the island of O`ahu. And I was very ignorant about Hawai`i. I read what they said in the encyclopedia [about Hawai`i], but they didn't mention Laupāhoehoe in the encyclopedia. (Laughs) They just mentioned that you raised sugarcane and pineapples and that's where Pearl Harbor happened, et cetera.

I got to San Francisco. The momentum of the invasion of Japan was still going on because the atomic bomb was just dropped.<sup>11</sup> I always think of that cover picture on *Life* of that sailor kissing the nurse. The streets were still filled with confetti and everything after that and it was really exciting. I came over on the [SS] *Matsonia* and

---

<sup>11</sup>The first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. The second was dropped on Nagasaki on August 9, 1945.

that was then a navy ship, a troop ship I guess, taken over by them [during World War II]. It was all grey. We had to wear life preservers the whole time; if we left our cabin, we had to wear a life preserver. We had many drills by the lifeboats and everything. In our deck were the teachers and the families returning to Hawai'i and so forth, we were in the upper echelons, and in the hold down below, were all these Seabees getting ready for the invasion of Japan.

It took I don't know how many days to get over here, but on the ship I met young ensigns and lieutenants that were being shipped to Hawai'i to eventually invade Japan, which made it nice because they later came to Laupāhoehoe to visit us and it was really nice for young gals, young teachers, to have all these contacts with naval officers and staff.

We went on Hawaiian Airlines from O'ahu to the Big Island, the first time I had been on an airplane. I'd gone up in an airplane once at a county fair but I'd never been on a big airplane before. As we flew along the Big Island, we saw the cliffs and the water and everything. And finally this little peninsula, "Oh, there's Laupāhoehoe," of course, briefly. We were met in Hilo by principals and the teachers who had put us in cars, those of us that were teaching along the Hāmākua Coast, like Pepe'ekeo, Hakalau, and Laupāhoehoe. So as we drove along [the Hāmākua Coast], we counted thirty-one bridges, and half of those were one-laned. We'd meet a cane[-hauling] truck [heading in the opposite direction] and we'd [have to] wait. It was just extraordinary.

There were five in our car. We got to Pepe'ekeo and we went up to the [plantation] manager's house. They were expecting us and we had tea and everything.

[The area] was called the "Scotch Coast," [because] a lot of the people were real Scotsmen. Then we drove on and they let the teachers out—"This is your school," and so forth. And then we got to Laupāhoehoe and we went down, down, down, down that [winding] road which is now closed.

*Now, did you and Dorothy and Helen and Fay all come in at the same time?*

Yes, there were just the four of us left. That's where they let us out. There we were.

*Was there culture shock for you?*

No, not really. I was just ready for anything. From our cottage, we'd look out across the big athletic field and see the school with the big banyan tree in the courtyard and everything. Above that was a huge gulch. And framed in the gulch was Mauna Kea. And of course, in December, it was covered with snow. So there I was with the ocean crashing behind me and looking up and seeing Mauna Kea covered with snow. It was just absolutely amazing. I thought it was the most gorgeous spot in the whole world. And it probably is.

[Whenever] I looked out my room at Laupāhoehoe School, there was a red hibiscus hedge and then a little bit beyond that was the cemetery. In this cemetery was a white horse tethered there to eat the grass and keep the grass down around the graves. Beyond the cemetery was a road and then there was a curve, then the ocean, and the sheer cliffs, and the road coming down, and usually waterfalls coming over that. It was the most unusual and gorgeous sight. It was really something, and I'd look out my window and that's what I would see.

I was a secondary [school] teacher. My major was English and art, sort of a joint major, with a minor in history. When I came to Laupāhoehoe, I was given all of the art for the seventh and eighth grade.<sup>12</sup> Art craft, they called it. Then I had a high school art class and then in the afternoon, I taught all of the high school girls' physical education. But it was really different.

*(Chuckles) What was different?*

Well, teaching art to these children. They hadn't had an art teacher for a long time. There were such talented kids. They were so good, most of them. They'd never had any clay work, and I just went all out. I remember when the sugarcane tasselled, that was amazing. December, the whole field was full of these silvery Christmas trees. So I cut them off and had the kids make decorations for the room. It was really quite wonderful.

*What about things like the language or pidgin English?*

(Chuckles) I mentioned the Japanese names. I had Takaki, Arakaki. And then I had Sadao Aoki, who later became very high in education [administration]. But S-A-D-A-O. "How do you say this? Hard *a*?" Then I had a lot of Filipino names. I had [a girl who's last name was] Expectation. I had Asencion. I had all of these odd names. I had the [plantation] chemist's daughter. It was just a real mix. Hawaiians, pure-blood Hawaiians. I had the Malani [family] and I remember I had a girl named Mona Malani. Isn't that beautiful? Mona Malani. Well, she was in high school and she

---

<sup>12</sup>As was the case with schools in rural areas in Hawai'i at the time, Laupāhoehoe School went from kindergarten to grade twelve. Prior to World War II, Laupāhoehoe School ended with the eighth grade.

was almost six feet tall and very gifted athletically. Then we had Kawaihona Laeha, who was part-Hawaiian, mostly Hawaiian. And she was a petite little gal that introduced us to the *hula*. She was a teacher's daughter.

The language was not really difficult. I always spoke straight to them. I remember being introduced to “*da kine*”<sup>13</sup> and “*puka*.”<sup>14</sup> What's a *puka*? I learned very swiftly and they were very happy to have these new teachers. They were very cooperative since there was no confinement—I mean it was beautiful outside all the time and they were very active physically. And most of them came to school in bare feet. Even when I taught soccer, they'd kick in their bare feet. I said, “You gotta have [shoes].” No, no, whammo, they'd kick the ball. It was very, very different. My first year of teaching was wonderful.

***Were you homesick at all?***

Um, well, I wrote voluminous letters to my mother. My mother and father had gotten divorced late, after the children were grown. I lived with my mother. But I missed her, I wanted her to come out to Hawai'i to see all of this. And I wrote to my father, too. But I really wasn't homesick. As I told you, my last two years of college I lived at home. I missed horses but then later on, the Umikoa Ranch invited the teachers up to ride horseback. One of the cowboys up there took a liking to me so I got my horseback riding. I really wasn't homesick at all. We used to camp down there and Mr.

---

<sup>13</sup>Hawaiian Creole English expression with an unspecified referent, for “what you might call,” “this stuff,” “thingness.”

<sup>14</sup>Hawaiian word meaning, “hole” or “opening.”



Laeha would bring all this wonderful food and we'd have—the first time we tasted *poi*. We were invited to all the weddings and *lū`aus* in the community.

I know they say that, “Oh, the sugar plantation is something like slavery in the South and cotton fields and everything.” It wasn't like that at all. These villages where the workers lived, they each had their own little house. I can remember going to visit some of my students and they'd have orchids hanging from the porch. They'd bring me cattleya orchids at school. Of course, maybe they didn't get paid enough. I always feel that the plantations were well run and the people were not slave labor at all, at least by the time I got there. And I got there when they were first unionized [starting in 1945] and they needed to be unionized, I guess, because to take care of the wages.

The weather was great, the weather was great. You think about the weather sometimes, later on. You think of fire in the fireplace and the snow and all that. But all you have to do is go back, which I have done, for a week in the winter. And you have to put on your coat to go out and you have to shovel out the snow. And it's not just that for a month, it's that for five months at least. No, I don't miss it at all.

***When you went, did you go with the idea of staying just one year?***

Yes, I was going with the idea of teaching around the world and of course, when I met the three housemates, they had the same exuberant feeling of teaching. In April, we were going to go to Honolulu to spend spring vacation, but we'd already put feelers out for teaching in South America, teaching in the English schools in Japan. And all four of us were of that thought of mind. We liked Hawai'i and we liked teaching there but we were trying to keep together and do this sort of adventurous

kind of thing. Dorothy Drake taught third grade, elementary school. And Helen Kingseed was an English teacher in high school, and Fay was the science teacher in high school.

*Tell me something about your three roommates. What were they like, personalitywise?*

Helen Kingseed was a graduate of Miami University, and I didn't even know her until we got to Hawai'i. Isn't that strange? She was the editor of the student newspaper. She was a BWOC: Big Woman On Campus. I remember she was very pretty, nice skin, and very intelligent, very capable and wonderful. She was one of six children, Catholic family. I don't think her family ever got over the fact that she was taken. She was a beautiful girl and had a wonderful sense of humor and smile. She was like all of us, but more vivacious.

Then Fay Johnson, the one from Roanoke, Virginia, was very pretty and very attractive to men. Very sharp. And she was full of life, too. The four of us went around the island on a sampan [bus] one weekend and stayed at Kona Inn and everything. We were very compatible, as I say.

Dorothy Drake, I didn't know her as well. She was an elementary teacher, it was on different hour [i.e. they had different schedules]. But she was quite a good athlete, she knew how to swim very well. And in fact, she'd had dates with Dr. Fernandez before I did. We were invited to all the parties and they gave a big party for us, the plantation. They gave a dance for us, and that's where Bert said he first saw me. But he dated Dorothy [at the time] because I was dating someone else, I forget.

But anyway, we used to go to their homes for dinner and they were so wonderful to us. And there were these Scotsmen<sup>15</sup> and I remember they put on their kilts for us and did the dances. One guy, the one who was head of the sugar processing, the raw sugar, played the bagpipes. And of course, the manager's wife and he himself were avid bridge players and she'd give bridge parties. Dorothy Drake didn't play bridge but Helen did. So Dorothy Drake, I knew less about. But she was a really nice girl, very healthy, very strong and a good swimmer.

And there we were. The [teachers'] cottage was right on the ocean. It was rocky, no sand. Down at the end, there were a couple of ironwood trees around this empty cottage or house. But no trees in front. There was kind of a little palm tree that was struggling over by the garage. And of course, there was the road and the wall, the great Hawaiian lava rock wall. I don't know when that was put up there, probably when the school was built. Great big tall palm trees edged the athletic field and all around there. Up above the Malanis' house were several houses—the Hawaiian people's homes.

The cottages were very comfortable. We had four bedrooms with a central dining room, sort of with an arch and a living room and then a little front porch with big steps going down. They were all [raised] up on stilts. And then steps going out the back. I had a front bedroom, dresser, nice bed, it was really neat. We did a lot of cooking even though it was a kerosene stove. We had a chart. We'd take turns and,

---

<sup>15</sup>By the turn of the twentieth century, two out of every five sugar plantation managers in Hawaii were of Scotch descent. See Lawrence H. Fuchs, *Hawai'i Pono: A Social History* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1961), 54.

“You're responsible for the supper tonight.” The stove was a kerosene stove and we had running water, of course. Two bathrooms between the bedrooms. But no refrigerator. So we kept our butter--our perishables--in the school cafeteria refrigerator. So the four of us worked out a chart where it was my turn to get the butter, the meat, or whatever. Then also, to put it away at night. And I can remember with the flashlight, going up to the cafeteria crossing that big athletic field, and the lily pond and stream, and there'd be all these bufos, big toads.

*And how many teachers' cottages were there [at the tip of the peninsula]?*

Well, let's see. Akiona's house was up on sort of the highland, a Hawaiian family. And then there was a little garage where Mr. [Clarence] Ferdun, the principal, kept his car, because his house was up next to the school but it had no garage. So he kept his car down there. And then next to the garage was our cottage. We were in number one cottage. And then the next one had, four more teachers, the fifth grade, I think, [was] one. Then next to that were the Nakanos and he [Peter Nakano] had his experimental chickens and everything. And he also had three children and his wife was going to have another. Three girls he had.<sup>16</sup> And then next to that were sort of the bachelor quarters. So that's one, two, three, four, and then there was a cottage sort of back off that was unoccupied. That's where [teacher] Fred Kruse lived.

And anything that went wrong, like the light bulb wouldn't work or anything, my fellow teachers that lived down there would come over and they'd bring a ladder

---

<sup>16</sup>Peter Nakano, the school's vocational agriculture teacher, and his wife were parents of four children: three daughters and an infant son, at the time of the 1946 tsunami. Two daughters, the son, and Peter's wife all died that day.

and change the light bulb. They were very, very good to us. Another thing was that the mail was not delivered down there. We had to get our mail up at Pāpa`aloa, at the post office up there, which was a little one-room post office with mailboxes. So walking up that hill was good exercise but it took forever. So anyone---like the principal had a car and [so did] others, and we'd always go out in the road and hitch a ride up to the post office. Then walking down was not so bad. All our supplies, there was the company store at Pāpa`aloa, but if we wanted to get curtains or anything, on the weekends, we'd go in to Hilo on the bus. Of course there was the train at that time. I was going to take the train but I never made it. The others, they said, "Oh, you've got to ride the train, Marsue." But I never got around to riding the train. And it was wiped out by the tidal wave.<sup>17</sup>

*So you arrived in the fall of 1945.*

Yes, the first week in September.

*And you started teaching at Laupāhoehoe.*

Immediately, yes.

*Immediately. And then, so on April 1, '46, this is still your first year teaching. That's when the tsunami hit. Can you think back now, what happened that day?*

You mean April 1? Well, it was the week before spring vacation. Everything was ready for this final week. We give tests, and art projects were due and all of this sort

---

<sup>17</sup>The train, owned by the Hawai`i Consolidated Railway Company, ran from Hilo up the Hāmākua Coast to Pa`auilo, carrying passengers and sugarcane. The cars and tracks were destroyed in the 1946 tsunami, and the company went out of business soon after.

of thing. And April 1 was Monday, of course, April Fool's day. Now, the school day started at 8:00 [A.M.] but the kids began to arrive at 6:30 because that's when their parents were due in the fields and so forth. So they'd drop their kids off or the buses would start arriving, 6:30. We could hear the swings rattling, the elementary kids and so forth and so on. We were still in our pajamas and everything. We had, at about close to 7:00, a whole hour to get ready for school. But we heard this knock on the door. It was Danny Akiona and he said, "Come and see the tidal wave." And we thought, tidal wave?

He said, "Come. Come and see it." So we put on our bathrobes and slippers and went out. My hair--I had horrible hair--was up in bobby pins. I put a scarf around it and went out. We traipsed out there and went up to where the cove was. That's where the monument is now.<sup>18</sup> So we stood there and looked. And our vision of a tidal wave was what still today everybody else thinks of: *The Poseidon Adventure*. We thought of the John Hall, Dorothy Lamour movies where they say, "Here it comes! Here it comes!" and they climb up a palm tree and all the bad guys are washed out and the good guys climb down and that's over with.

We looked down and saw the ocean sucked out [i.e., receded] like a bathtub emptying. Then it came back in and it came up a little bit above the high-water mark.

So we looked at that, "That's a tidal wave?" Something's wrong here, you know. We turned around to go back in and get dressed. Then by golly, it sucked out again. And our thought was, being from Ohio and Virginia, well, this must be a twin

---

<sup>18</sup>A monument erected to remember the victims of the 1946 tsunami.

tidal wave. Two of them. That's very unusual. I have to write about that. But this time it sucked out more and when it came in, it came in more [inland] and uprooted some *naupaka*,<sup>19</sup> you know these bright green plants? And washed them up and made kind of a mess there.

By that time, the kids that were swinging at the playground rushed over and they were watching the tidal wave with us. Here we were, with our hair up and in pajamas and everything. Then, after it did it a third time, we thought maybe the next one is going to suck out more. And the third time, it even washed some fish up into the athletic field. The kids were leaning down trying to catch the fish and everyone was having a field day. Oh boy, isn't this something, you know.

So we went back to the cottage—the four of us, to get some clothes on. We looked out our door and saw all this mess, all these plants uprooted and kids running around. We thought, I wonder if they're going to have school today with all this water rushing in and out and everything? Oh well. Mr. Ferdun is a very staid man, he'll probably have school. But probably we won't have athletics or something.

Then instead of school clothes, I got into blue jeans, saddle shoes, and socks. And a big lumberjack shirt. This was a wool shirt I'd gotten in Maine. As I said, I had my hair still up in bobby pins and a bandanna. We said, “Well, if we have school, we'll come back and change.”

Meanwhile, and this is interesting, they said, “We ought to take a picture of this mess out here and the kids catching the fish.” I was the only one that had film in

---

<sup>19</sup>Hawaiian word for a native shrub found in mountains and near coasts.

my camera. Oh, boy, I was so happy about that. So Fay Johnson and I went out on the porch in front [facing the ocean] to get a picture. Famous last words, I said, "Well, it's doing it again and I hope this is one of the bigger ones so I can get a . . ." But, it came and it just kept coming. It didn't crash, it kept coming, and got bigger and bigger. I noticed that Fred Kruse<sup>20</sup> and his science students were out there on the rocks looking at the uncovered seafloor, and he was standing out there. This wave just got bigger and bigger. That was the first time that anybody around us, anybody thought to be afraid. Here we were, landlubbers, and it never occurred to anybody to be afraid.

Well, I dropped the camera, came in the front door, Fay and I, and went to go out the back, down the steps and run away to higher land. But we got as far as the doorway, the jamb of the doorway. I remember looking back [toward the front door] and the water was just fighting at the windows. It broke the glass, and the cottage went whoomf! All four of us were there at the [back] door, ready to go out the door. I remember grabbing Helen Kingseed by the arm, but she was just sucked right away.

*Sucked out?*

Well, it was coming this way [toward land], not out. It was coming this way. And she was sucked down. We were in the water and hanging on to the roof. The roof went down so Fay and I crawled up to the comb of the roof. And it was going like this, like this [i.e., rocking], and washing up. Just the roof was left.

---

<sup>20</sup>Fred Kruse was the fourth teacher to die in the tsunami. The others were McShane's three roommates.



*So the cottage had actually collapsed?*

Collapsed completely. There was no basement. It was built on stilts, high. All the cottages. So there we were, hanging on to the roof. I climbed up and sat down on the comb. The coconut trees were—you know how strong they are—were just smashed down. And we went up and by god, it started sucking out again!

I can remember seeing Mr. Ferdun's car, no more garage, just turning end over end, sucking out, end over end like a tootsie toy. I mean, just like nothing. So we were sucked out again and pretty soon—there are big jagged rocks down there [at the tip of the peninsula, near the original site of the cottage]. This roof went clunk on these rocks and didn't go any further, the ocean went out further.

So we thought, it's going to tidal-wave all day and each one's going to get bigger and bigger. Our only hope was, while it's sucked out, to climb off the roof and [run inland] because the next one is just going to smash the roof and everything.

So we climbed off the roof, onto the rocks and we were making our way over the [rocks and] seaweed. We got about as far as (chuckles) that chair<sup>21</sup> and it tidal-waved again.

*So this is you and Fay?*

Yes. Now, when the roof was sucking out, we saw Dorothy hanging on to the corner of the roof. That's the last we saw of her. I never did see Helen again. I [last] saw Helen when she was by the door.

---

<sup>21</sup>The chair in McShane's patio was about twenty feet from where we sat.

So we got that far and it tidal-waved again. That's when I knew I was gone, because I knew the rocks were there. I could feel myself being clunked and turned around and bubbled. But I was a good swimmer, so I took a breath before going down. Why did I do that? These are the thoughts—it just prolongs the agony. I could feel myself being [dashed] on the rocks. I don't know if you've ever been caught the wrong way in a wave and pounded down at Sandy Beach<sup>22</sup> in the sand. I thought, my lungs are going to burst. But just before I did that, bubbles and everything, I kind of came up. I took another breath and went down again. And why did I do that? All these thoughts were going through my head. I knew I was going to die. I don't know whether I should say this in the interview or not, you don't care what I thought?

*No, please.*

Well, this is something that was very important to me at this time. Naturally, I don't say much about it because 99 percent of the people are believers and so forth. But at that time, I knew there was no God.

It was very important to me when I had boyfriends or dates and everything, that they felt the same way. There were a lot of military men, men we met on the boat, in the navy and the marines who were up there and we had a lot of contact with them. And they'd say, "Oh, you say that now but just wait till you're faced with death and you'll pray, you'll go back to God. You know there is. . . ."

I said, "No."

---

<sup>22</sup>A well-known body-surfing beach on O'ahu, known for its treacherous on-shore surf breaks.

And here I was, faced with death, I knew I was going to die. And I still knew there was no God. And I couldn't tell anybody. That was really one of my main thoughts. I couldn't tell anybody. But then I did come up a third time, and I was right by the top of the lighthouse there. And all around me was wreckage of the cottages, just trees and boards and everything. So I grabbed hold of a piece of a house, and I thought, every bone in my body must be broken. But I could tread water and my arms moved. Well, nothing's broken, I'm bruised but not broken. And I kind of clung on to this. My one thought, before it tidal-waves again, I got to get out and away from the cliffs. I'm going to be slammed against the cliffs or the rocks again. So I kind of paddled my way and tried to get out. As it turned out, I did get out, sort of into a stream that was going down this way with all this rubbish and everything.

Then I took stock. The sea was very rough. It was a wild kind of rainy day, but it stopped raining and it was not a very good day. But I remember taking stock. I said I had put on blue jeans, saddle shoes, socks, my hair was up in a hundred bobby pins with a scarf and everything. My saddle shoes and socks were gone. My blue jeans were gone, I still had on my underwear. There wasn't a pin left in my head, the scarf was gone. Thank goodness I had this big shirt which I buttoned. So I had a brassiere, panties and this huge shirt, thank goodness, wool shirt. And that's all I had. So I was out there in the rubbish. Now, do you want to hear all these details?

*Yes. This is very . . .*

It's very clear to me. So I was out there with this rubbish and I looked around and took stock that I was movable, everything worked. I looked up and high on the cliff,

Ninole, you know where that is?<sup>23</sup> There were people sort of standing. And I thought, I'm the only one that survived this. I'm the only one out here with all this wreckage. They don't know I'm here. I kind of waved. I knew then that I don't care what happens, I'm going to survive this thing. I knew there was a sugar mill about, what ten miles down the road that came down.<sup>24</sup> The cliffs ended and there was this sugar mill. If I can make it down there, maybe I can make it into shore, provided it stopped tidal-waving. Might be tidal-waving forever for all I knew. So I paddled around there and . . .

*By paddling, you mean—are you on something?*

Yeah.

*Okay, you're not treading water anymore.*

No, I'm hanging on to the wreckage. And then I exchanged the original boards that were nailed together for something a little bit sturdier. I finally got hold of a door that wasn't rough and kind of big, so I clung to that and I kind of raised myself up. I got seasick and it rained. I thought about sharks and octopuses and things like that. Here I was. Then I thought, with all this rubbish here, they're [rescuers] not going to be able to swim through that. So I didn't worry about that anymore. Then of course, this was 1946, the war wasn't even over a year. What about all the hundreds of PT boats? What

---

<sup>23</sup>The people she saw probably were standing on the roadside of the Hawai'i Belt Road, located on the cliffs overlooking Laupāhoehoe peninsula.

<sup>24</sup>The Hakalau Plantation Company mill was badly damaged by the tsunami.

about all the cruisers and the airplanes and everything in Honolulu, Pearl Harbor?

There would be a million boats out here but if they only knew I was here.

So I kept waving and so you'd think they'd come right away. But an hour went by, two hours went by, no help, no indication anybody knew I was out here. It was very frustrating. While I was out there, I was kind of on a stream going this way and then there was another current sort of going. And I saw, the waves would go down, you couldn't see anything, and then you'd come up—I saw what looked like two or three boys on a door or raft or something, and their faces were all white, like their skin was peeling off, I couldn't see very well. I kind of yelled to them, and I don't even remember whether they responded, they were way far away. But that turned out to be the three boys that later washed up at Kohala that were saved. It turned out that they had found a can of Crisco. And to protect them from the elements, they had covered themselves with Crisco. It was very smart. They were high school boys and I forget their names but you probably have the statistics.<sup>25</sup> I was out there, and hours went by. There are those three and there's me. They have to come and rescue us or something. Finally, one or two or three o'clock or something, I saw somebody else. It was one boy hanging on to—I forget what he was hanging on to. But when I'd go up on the crest, we even could exchange words. And we looked out and way out there was this ship. You know, a regular interisland ship. And he said he's going to swim to that ship.

---

<sup>25</sup>One of those boys, Herbert Nishimoto, corroborates this account in his story in chapter seven.

I said, "It's too far. You can't get out there. They should know we're here, they should come in."

And he said, No, he was going to swim out there. Well, he lost his life, I never heard from him again. He's one of the ones who lost his life. Now, why didn't they send help from Pearl Harbor? They never did send any boats, never did. Hilo didn't have a boat floating. Everything was destroyed in Hilo.

Meanwhile, finally, there was an airplane, one airplane.<sup>26</sup> And he was going around like this. And I kept going like this—waving. But he didn't buzz his motor, he didn't dip down, he didn't do anything for, it seemed to me like forever. Finally, he dropped a rubber raft, I guess it was. But it was so far away that I couldn't get to it. But that was the first indication that anybody had ever seen me. Then he circled around and I guess he noticed that I couldn't get to it and he dropped another one. So, I maneuvered around, I wasn't going to let go of my door until I was sure. And I can remember seeing this floating rubber raft thing. It had a handle on it and it said, "pull." So I pulled and it got up [i.e., inflated] into a rubber raft. So when that happened, I climbed into this rubber raft and relaxed because that was the first time I could.

It was starting to get dark and everything. All around this rubber raft were pockets. I opened one and it was fishing tackle, (WN laughs) so I could catch—they think I'm going to catch fish and everything. And I was about to open another, I thought maybe they'd have some water here or something.

---

<sup>26</sup>The Naval Air Service.

Now the boat that eventually rescued me and two others, was a pond boat up [from] Kamuela, you know, just a flat pond boat. And Dr. [Leabert] Fernandez was the one that felt that there were people out there. So they sent a plantation truck up there [Kamuela] to get this boat. They brought it down. Then they found someone who had a motor; that boat didn't have a motor. To get the motor onto the back of this boat, they had to saw the end off and build a new end for the motor.

I was told the owner of the motor<sup>27</sup> who knew how to run it, got in the boat. Dr. Fernandez did. It was his project and in case someone was injured then he could give them medical assistance. There was a Japanese man [Masaru Himoto] that was a very good diver, in case he had to go under[water]. And then there was the Hawaiian man <sup>28</sup> who knew the rocks, knew the way out because it was tricky, knew the ocean and everything in that region. It was quite a large boat. The boat went out about 4:30 [p.m.] I guess, maybe 5:00.

So they got me aboard Dr. Fernandez's boat. Before that, they had rescued two boys,<sup>29</sup> seventh and eighth graders. They had been hanging on to a *lau hala*<sup>30</sup> tree, which is very porous and was about to sink. So if they hadn't rescued those two boys, they'd probably have the fate of the other one that tried to swim out to the ship. One of them had a very serious head injury. His head was all wrapped up and he was lying

---

<sup>27</sup>David Kailimai

<sup>28</sup>Francis Malani

<sup>29</sup>Ronald Yamaoka and Yoshio Awakuni

<sup>30</sup>Hawaiian word for pandanus.

down. They got me into the boat and they had blankets there. At first, they tried to tow the rubber raft along but it was so difficult. And the boat—a wave crashed over and wet all the blankets and everything. And it was getting dark. So they had to turn back with the three that they rescued.

By the time we got back to Laupāhoehoe and inside the cove and landed, it was, I guess something like 7:00 [p.m.], 7:15, 7:30 or something. It was dark. There were people down there to see who came back in that boat, who they'd rescued. They put me in a car and put the two boys in another car. I can remember going up that long road, and lining the road were all these parents whose kids didn't come home that day. They were looking and looking in the car to see who they'd rescued. They took me to Laupāhoehoe Hospital.

*So when you got to the hospital, what kind of injuries did you have?*

I had taken in a lot of salt water, in spite of my holding my breath. I had thrown up a lot in the waves. I had a huge bruise on my hip and other things. But nothing serious. Just kind of bonged around. No bones broken and no head injuries. I just stayed there overnight for observation, making sure I didn't have anything wrong with my skull. Because Dr. Fernandez delivered all the babies, set all the bones, took out all the appendixes, treated all the flu, measles, whatever. He did everything and he was a wonderful doctor. He was a master of taking care of 5,000 people so beautifully.

*Did you know Dr. Fernandez before?*

Yes, yes I did. I'd had several dates with him and we had talked seriously about—he didn't believe in God either. He said, "If there's a God, why would he have something



like this happen?" And that's exactly my sentiments. We got along that way very well. He kidded that when he found me and rescued me, he said, "Say you'll marry me or I'll throw you back in." So we did know each other but I think he was more serious about me than I was about him, because I had these plans to teach around the world. But of course, Dorothy and Helen and Fay, [whom] I was going to teach around the world with, were all gone. So it changed my life. I fell more and more in love with him and I married him. He had two little boys, [ages] three and four, stepsons, which I feel are mine. And we had three more.

But that's a true story and I would not be in Hawai'i today if that hadn't happened. I think I would've gone—we would've gone on. Maybe I would've returned, I really don't know, but that sealed my fate.

*Did you hold out the hope that maybe some of your roommates or others would be rescued later? Was it that feeling that it wasn't over yet?*

No, no. Well, later on, there was Mrs. Akiona. She said she was saved because she wore Mormon garments. She'd been through the temple at Salt Lake City. Of course, her son,<sup>31</sup> the boy that woke us up, was dead. Dr. Fernandez was also the coroner and there was only one body ever found, and the head was just crushed. Some of the regular gauge train cars were never found, either. It [the tsunami] was so powerful. So powerful.

---

<sup>31</sup>Daniel Akiona

*Was Mr. Ferdun's car found?*

No, never.<sup>32</sup> But the odd thing was, I had my jewelry in my dresser. They reopened school May 1 to finish out the year. And I remember [one teacher] was wearing my honorary thing for teaching, I forget the name of the Greek letters. A little key that you get. And she was wearing it. I said, "Where did you get that?"

She said she found it down there. Well, I said, "That's mine." Another thing that turned up was a watch my grandfather had given me that had rubies and diamonds and gold. But no bodies were ever found.<sup>33</sup> And of course, I was [almost] completely without clothes, so I had to be completely outfitted. The Red Cross was wonderful. They supported the ones that were rescued, they saw that I got clothes and everything.

*So all the belongings that were in the cottage were lost?*

Everything. My typewriter, everything, except those couple of pieces of jewelry. It was strange.

*So when you went back, when school started again maybe about a month later, what was that like?*

That was terrible 'cause you'd have your class and you'd have these people missing. It was a very sad time, I have the yearbook from that time. But you get through it. By that time, I was living up in Dr. Fernandez' guest house and I'd pretty well made up

---

<sup>32</sup>People claim that Ferdun's car has been seen, lying in the ocean off the peninsula.

<sup>33</sup>Two bodies were recovered, out of the twenty-four persons who died, according to "A Report by Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Ferdun of their Experience During the April 1, 1946 Tidal Wave," Honolulu, Hawai'i, photocopy.

my mind to marry him. My life was all changed. The new teachers that came in to take the place of the others, substitutes, they were all really nice and supportive. But I really don't have very clear images of finishing out the school year, except that it was really sad. I don't remember anyone ever smiling or anything. But it was something that had to be done. And of course [the following school year], Mr. Ferdun left and went to another school.<sup>34</sup> But I didn't teach after that, I was married. But my brother [later] taught in the [new]school up above. They never did reopen the school down below except for that year.<sup>35</sup>

We lived there [in Laupāhoehoe] seven years. I got married and stayed, of course, in the doctor's house. Gee, I can't think of her name. Her married name was Crabbe, and she lived at Pepe`ekeeo, I think. She had a son and we used to get together with our children. She was a teacher that was washed up with the cottage.<sup>36</sup>

But I really lost track of the other survivors. My life was very full. I had these two stepsons, and [because] I was the baby of [my] family [in Ohio], I wasn't a babysitter, so I didn't know anything about little kids. [They were] three and four. He

---

<sup>34</sup>In September 1946, Clarence Ferdun was named department of education field assistant for the East Hawai`i district.

<sup>35</sup>Laupāhoehoe students, faculty, and administrators continued to use the old facility, which was partially destroyed by the tsunami, until the fall of 1952. That year, a new Laupāhoehoe High and Elementary School, located in the hills above the site of the old school, was dedicated. All that remains of the old school site is the athletic field, now a public park. A stone memorial stands nearby, honoring the students, teachers and other residents who perished. Each year, on April 1, faculty and students of Laupāhoehoe Elementary and High School visit the memorial and drape it with *lei*.

<sup>36</sup>McShane may be referring to Evelyn Crabbe, who was living in another teachers' cottage in Laupāhoehoe at the time of the 1946 tsunami. Crabbe survived that day.

[Fernandez] had been divorced about a year. I had nothing to do with, you know, that situation. He said it was a war casualty in that his former wife was a gray nurse in the Hilo Hospital during the war. So he began anew. He's quite a bit older than me, thirteen years older than me. But we got along.

*When did you go back to teaching?*

We moved to Kailua [O`ahu] in '52 because my husband wanted to specialize and become a plastic surgeon. So he took two years of general surgery residency at Queen's [Hospital]. Of course, at least those days, the interns didn't make any money and they lived at the hospital. But we had a lot of money saved up for this. But in 1953 and '54, we ran out of money, so I went back to teaching. The only job I could find on this side of the island was the sixth grade. And I really enjoyed that. I taught the sixth grade.

Then my [maternal] grandfather died. He'd left me some money. We had to move to the Los Angeles area because there were no plastic surgeons here that he [husband] could work under. But then we ran out of money again with four kids, so I taught in California. Because I taught the sixth grade here, I got a job teaching sixth grade in El Monte, California, which is near Arcadia. So that's when I went back to teaching again. I was so fortunate to have my teaching credentials and there are many things that I really liked about teaching. I think I was a good teacher. I wasn't gifted, disciplinarywise.

I didn't teach again until—oh, yes, I did. When we came back and he was just getting into [private] practice, and our two sons—my two stepsons, were enrolled at

Punahou. And if you taught at Punahou, you got a break in the tuition. So I got a job teaching English and art at Punahou. I [also] taught ceramics and jewelry-making. And I ended up teaching all the art history [courses]. I taught summer school. I taught there for three years until I got pregnant with my little one, Holly. Then I didn't teach again until my marriage broke up [in 1963].

I taught seventh and eighth grade at Kailua Intermediate School. We had seven feeder schools. They'd come in. If somebody didn't know how to read, they were assigned to the reading teacher and they had a whole classroom and everything. But after we became unionized, they had to pay the teachers a decent salary. We were supposed to assimilate them, the nonreaders. And so all of us English teachers had, first, one class of nonreaders that we had to go to. I dreaded that. We had a special skills lab and I had to go. It was just really not my forte. So teaching—I was there for twelve years—teaching got more and more difficult. Sometimes we'd have forty in the class, not enough desks for them to sit in, so they finally hired a substitute to take the overflow, say in October. And sheer numbers did us in.

So when I was able to have a bed and breakfast in my home, I retired at [age] fifty-five. Teaching just got to be too much. I couldn't teach the way I wanted.

*You said that your experience at Laupāhoehoe changed your life?*

Yes.

*And I know physically you changed your mind about teaching around the world, you got married and settled down.*

I got married, took care of the stepsons, I had kids of my own. A whole new life and supporting him in being a plastic surgeon and so forth and so on. So I truly love Hawai'i, I've never had any instances of racial prejudice or anything. I remember my relatives in Cincinnati used to be prejudiced against the Jews. And they'd say, "Oh, the Jews have just ruined Miami Beach." And they'd call them "kikes" and everything. But I never did feel that way and maybe it's because my mother and father were very open-minded. They saw that I knew about the church and everything, but they weren't very religious. Of course, my grandfather was unusual—he was a Catholic until his father died and then he never went back to the church. I think back now how advanced my mother and father were as far as prejudice itself of any kind [was concerned].

*Did you ever think, "Why did I survive and not others?" Did that ever occur to you?*

Of course. Not *why*, it's just that I *did*. One reason was, I didn't get hit on the head. Another reason was, I was a good swimmer, so I took those breaths. Another reason was, I was lucky.

*Do you consider yourself a lucky person?*

Oh yes, in many ways. Many ways. Really, just very lucky. You asked that question, "Why did I survive?" Well, why didn't *they* survive? Were they bad? No. They were better than I was. I mean, there's no plan, there's just coincidence.

*I like your rationality.*

That's just the way it is. It's interesting.

*Marsue McShane insists she'll live near the ocean for the rest of her life.*

## CHAPTER 7

### "TO ME, IT'S SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST"

#### HERBERT NISHIMOTO

*Herbert Sadamu Nishimoto<sup>1</sup> was born June 15, 1929 in Ninole, Hawai`i. He was the youngest of Senichi Nishimoto and Misano Masukawa Nishimoto's five children. Immigrants from Hiroshima, Japan, Senichi and Misano Nishimoto ran a small grocery store in Honohina, a town resided in by workers of Hakalau Plantation Company and their families.*

*When not helping his parents in the store or working for twenty-five cents a day at the sugar plantation, Nishimoto spent his boyhood swimming and fishing in the nearby streams, pig hunting, and participating in sports leagues organized by the plantations. He also tended the family garden, poultry, and livestock.*

*Nishimoto attended John M. Ross School,<sup>2</sup> Hilo Intermediate School, and Laupāhoehoe High School, graduating with the class of 1948. He was finishing up his sophomore year when the 1946 tsunami swept across Laupāhoehoe Point on the morning of April 1. Swept out to sea by the tsunami, Nishimoto survived first on a makeshift raft he made from debris, and later, on a rubber raft dropped to him from a rescue plane. Battling fear, hunger, thirst, exposure, fatigue, and trepidation caused by*

---

<sup>1</sup>Herbert S. Nishimoto, interview by author, in Center for Oral History, *Tsunamis Remembered: Oral Histories of Survivors and Observers in Hawai`i*, 795-813.

<sup>2</sup>Named for the longtime manager of Hakalau Plantation Company.



*an occasional shark, he and two companions drifted for miles. They were rescued the following day, twenty-seven hours after being swept out to sea, near Niuli`i, North Kohala, thirty-five miles northwest from Laupāhoehoe Point.*

*Nishimoto's extraordinary story has been documented in books and newspaper articles.<sup>3</sup>*

*A veteran of the Korean and Vietnam wars, Nishimoto retired after twenty-seven years in the U.S. Army. At the time of the interview, he lived in `Aiea, O`ahu with his wife, Jessie Moriyasu Nishimoto. They raised three children and at last count had seven grandchildren.*

*Nishimoto was a little reticent at first to be interviewed, especially since he previously had been persuaded by others to tell his story. Though his outward persona seemed apathetic, I believe it was more a symptom of his modesty, a "what's all the fuss about?" attitude. He was, after all, quite willing to share his knowledge, and seemed to enjoy telling and re-telling his story once we got started. In fact, he recently donated to the museum the metal oars he used to paddle him and his comrades to safety in Niuli`i aboard the rubber raft. The battered oars are displayed in a section of the museum dedicated to the Laupāhoehoe tragedy.*

*One reason Nishimoto may have felt comfortable with me was an obvious commonality we shared: our last names. As I made my way to his living room sofa*

---

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, Dudley and Lee, *Tsunami!*, 4, 20-21; Alan Mohan, "Laupahoehoe Student is Rescued After 27 Hours," *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, 3 April 1946, 2; and Hugh Clark, "Laupahoehoe's Memories of Terror--April 1, 1946, was Deadly Day," *The Honolulu Advertiser*, 2 April 1979, A-5.

*from the doorway of his home, he asked about my background. I told him that my father was originally from Honohina. Although we were able to ascertain that we were not related, Herbert told me that there were at least three Nishimoto families, all unrelated, from the Honohina-Hakalau-Ninole-Laupāhoehoe area. I told him that I was related to the Nishimoto family that was related by marriage to the family which owned Sakado Store in Laupāhoehoe. He said that he was familiar with that family. It was a good way to connect. We connected even further when he told me that the name of one of his sons was Warren.*

*I complimented him on his still trim physical build; he had kept in shape all these years as an avid swimmer and diver. On reflection, Nishimoto said that the 1946 experience gave him great respect for the uncertainties of the ocean. While his near-death experience gave him "more self-confidence" in his later life, it also reinforced his practical attitude toward life and death: "When your time comes, you go."*

I was born in Ninole, Hawai`i. It's about twenty miles north of Hilo, five miles south of Laupāhoehoe. My father had a store, Nishimoto Store. My father passed away in August, 1940. Then my oldest brother, Yukio, took over the store. [It was] a real general merchandise store. Groceries, clothing, foodstuff, canned food. Those days we didn't sell too many fresh meats because a lot of people didn't have refrigerators. So we sold a lot of dried fish [such as] codfish, that's about it. It was right next to the plantation, outside the plantation. They had a plantation store in Honohina, which was about four miles away, I'd say.

I worked in the store. I helped deliver bread and other groceries in a truck. Love's Bakery used to deliver from Hilo in the morning and people would [put in their] orders so we'd deliver. And the bread is mostly to the Portuguese families. The local Oriental people didn't eat too much bread those days. And we'd go out up in the hills [on the] plantation road to the different homes. Delivered rice, chicken feed, barley, and all that. We used to deliver. From Ninole, Kahuku, and we'd go to Kapehu. So, total from one end to the other end, you talking about seven miles. When I deliver, I'd take orders as well. And if they order one bag rice, I used to carry the 100-pound [bag]. For a fifteen-year-old, I was carrying the rice up the house, scratch feed for chicken--they'd all have chickens--carried it up to the house because they lived on the hill. I'd take orders, "What do you want?" And they don't pay cash [right away]. End of the month we give them a bill and they'll pay us then. All cash.

I had four brothers and two sisters. I had one half-brother. Same father, different mother.

My mother was born in Hiroshima. She came when---my father was initially married to my mother's, I believe, cousin. And she died. My half-brother, Earl, the oldest one, was small, so, you know those days, mail-order brides, so to speak. And I guess he [father] wrote a letter and the cousin came down and married my father. My mother, when she got married she was eighteen, I think. And they had a store, worked in the store and she used to work at a Portuguese house, you know, like a maid. That's where she learned to cook Portuguese bread and Portuguese-style cooking.

And she was a good swimmer. We used to swim in the river there, and we would give them all different names; Jackson Pond, John Vierra Pond, Old School Pond, that's where I learned how to swim. Waikaumalo Stream, Ninole Stream, Waiehu Stream, and Manoloa Stream. And as I got a little older, about fifteen, I was a Boy Scout and took swimming seriously. I used to go down to Waikaumalo Stream where the river was flowing kind of fast. So I'd take out the rocks and plug onto the lower side so it gets a little deep and reduced the flow. Then I'd swim. We didn't have time clocks. I would take an alarm clock over there. You know, the Big Ben alarm clock. And I used to swim against the current. I used to swim, first five minutes. Then later on, I was going about fifteen, twenty minutes. And I'd take the rock off on the lower side so the current got a lot stronger. I was swimming against the current for about twenty-five minutes steady. This method, I built my swimming stamina.

*So you wanted to swim competitively?*

I don't know. Country boy, what do we know about being competitive? (WN laughs.)

But I read something at that time, to become a good swimmer, you have to swim

against the current. The [cane] flume was too shallow. That's why even people older than I was, three or four years older, I used to outswim them, outdive them. And some of the ponds were fairly deep: fifteen, twenty feet. When we used to play tag they'd have a hard time catching me because I could dive deeper and stay down longer [and] swim faster than them. I don't know where I learned that, you know, swim against the current, and you become a strong swimmer. So I started [at age] fourteen or fifteen, somewhere about there.

We used to go spear fishing. On the Big Island, it's all rough waters. We talking about, five-foot wave, that's calm. And those days we didn't have any fins. And the kind of goggles we had, just plain regular bamboo goggles. I was a good diver, I was diving in twenty-five-foot-deep ocean. And even now, I can go twenty-five feet, thirty feet.

As kids, we used to play ball, softball, baseball, and basketball, and volleyball, too. I was too short, you know. Basketball was fairly good. Most of the kids then, if you're five [feet], eight [inches], you're center already, you know. Five [feet], six [inches], you're center, you know. (WN chuckles.) And so we used to play with the plantation league.<sup>4</sup> And that's about all our entertainment was, really. Oh yeah, we used to go pig hunting, go fishing in the ocean or go to a river and catch *`ōpae*.<sup>5</sup>

Sometimes we'd go camping. Every so often I look back and reminisce about my young days, you know. We had a lot of land in the back, at least one-half acre.

---

<sup>4</sup>Sports leagues sponsored by the different sugar plantations.

<sup>5</sup>Hawaiian word for a small, freshwater shrimp.

We used to raise a lot of our own vegetables. We had pigs, we had cows, and lot of chickens. At one time, we had about 400 chickens. So in the morning, I was up early. And my mother always told me I'm a horse. I get up early and I'm up galloping. I'm up about four o'clock. I wash my face and I'd go down feed the chickens, grass to be cut for the cow, and slop for the pigs.

*You also told me you worked plantation?*

Yeah, plantation. Cutting cane, planting and fertilizing cane, poisoning the grass [at] Wailea [Milling Company] plantation. Later [it was merged with] Hakalau [Plantation Company]. In those days, we used to work for twenty-five cents a day, summer vacations. Then when [World] War [II] came we had Victory Corps, we'd work Friday, Saturday, at the plantation. [I did], first, what you call day work, during the summertime, we'd go down with hoes, plant sugarcane; after it's plowed, the mules come down and drop the bundle of seedlings of cane. We throw it on the ground in line and with the cane knife cut it to about two or three feet length. It's a back-breaking job. And we plant the cane using a hoe. Just throw dirt on the cane after it's cut. Then after it's grown, we used to go in with the sickle, lay the grass down and other workers would come poison the grass. Then I did poisoning, too, you know, with a five-gallon tank on your back. We'd pump the arsenic poison to kill the grass. Fertilizer, I did just about all that. We had [independent] sugarcane land, too. We had about 8, 8½ acres, our family. My father was gone then so my brothers, my mother, [and] I used to help.

***So you contracted with the plantation?***

Yeah. We raised the cane and the plantation would harvest, grind, and buy the sugar from you. And that time, the deal was, I think you get the fertilizer from the plantation. Even the poison. It was all manual labor. Lot of work but lot of fun, though. You know, keep ourselves busy.

[I attended] John M. Ross School till seventh grade. Then I left Ninole in 1942. I went to Hilo Intermediate School for eighth and ninth grade [because] my sister moved to Hilo, so she needed somebody to stay with her. I had friends over there. And I was mostly on my own. I had a bicycle, if I want to go to my friend a mile away, I'd ride the bicycle, go down. So I stayed over there. I was more like a, what you call, independent guy. Then I came back to Laupāhoehoe [because] I kind of longed for the country life.

***So you spent two years in Hilo. And tenth grade you came back to Laupāhoehoe School. Was it a pretty new school at that time?***

No, Laupāhoehoe was an old school,<sup>6</sup> located at Laupāhoehoe Point.

***Okay, well, let's get into April 1, 1946. Tell me how did that day start out for you?***

Okay, well, 30th of March, Saturday we had the sophomore picnic at Laupāhoehoe School and we spent the weekend there. And the 31st, Sunday, we stayed there to go spear fishing. And I brought pork and beans because that's what we used to eat. So we had bread. We lived on that and some [of] the fish we'd cook on the beach. We stayed

---

<sup>6</sup>Laupāhoehoe High and Elementary School--its formal name, was established in 1883.

at [one of] the empty teachers' cottage there. There were about four or five cottages belonging to the school. The first one was the four *haole*<sup>7</sup> teachers, single. Miss [Marsue] McGinnis [later McShane], Miss [Dorothy] Drake, [Helen] Kingseed, and one more, I think.

***Johnson?***

Miss Fay Johnson. I'm the last one seen her alive, I think. And then Nakano family [lived in the next cottage], Mr. Peter Nakano. And the other cottage was the bachelor cottage. And there was an empty cottage. We stayed in an empty cottage back there.

But anyway, in the morning, about seven o'clock, Daniel Akiona, who lived out on the point by the bay, came running down and he says, "Oh, Mr. Kruse, Mr. Kanzaki, tidal wave!<sup>8</sup> Herbert, tidal wave!" I was up already and was in shorts. I put my blue jeans on, no shirt. And barefooted, I got out and I followed him [Akiona] running [inland] toward the point.

***How far from the cottage to the point did you go?***

Ah, cottage to the point, maybe 150 yards. We got to the point where the monument is. We could see the reef. And then when we got there, we saw the wave slowly filling up the bay. The first wave I'd seen filled up the bay area, then receded. I saw the reefs, which normally would be in ten feet of water. Then the next wave came in, tore an old shack which housed a small canoe. Part of the wave came over the knoll

---

<sup>7</sup>Hawaiian word for White person; Caucasian; foreigner.

<sup>8</sup>Fred Kruse and Frank Kanzaki were teachers at Laupāhoehoe School.



over the road, went into the school yard.<sup>9</sup> So at that time, we started running toward Akiona's house.

*The teachers' cottages were still up?*

Yeah, they were still up. The teachers' cottages were on stilts about seven feet above the ground and located across the road from the Akionas.

Then Akiona said, "Let's go up to the house." We ran up to his house. Behind the house, they had a dog. So Mrs. Akiona was letting the dog go and she was telling us, "Eh, go away, dangerous, go away, you boys."

And one of the girls came down, and she said, "Mr. Spencer says, you folks get away from here, it's dangerous." I saw Mr. Spencer taking his horse and a cow up to higher land area. From Akiona's backyard I could see the reef sticking out and we saw the wave coming in again. Akiona's house was surrounded by a stone wall and I saw the wave hit the school ground, which is a little bit lower. Then I saw this girl, a Japanese girl with glasses, hit by the wave. I think that she was adopted by a Portuguese family. Tell me the name, I would know.

*[Janet] DeCaires?*

Yes, DeCaires, this Japanese girl.<sup>10</sup> The wave hit over there, so I said, "Daniel, I'm going to dive across the road," you know, because we're up high. Jump down in the water and grab the girl and run in. But the current was too strong, the wave was still coming in.

---

<sup>9</sup>Actually, the ball park, which had a wooden grandstand.

<sup>10</sup>Janet DeCaires died in the tsunami.

Then I saw the wave come in the Akiona house entrance between the stone wall. I saw the stone wall breaking. Then Daniel said, "Let's go inside my house!" There's a railing so I tried to put my feet on the porch railing, go into the house. The house used to be a post office, I believe. And it was like a French door, half is door and half is glass. Then I saw the house turning over toward me. I was afraid my feet was going to get caught, my left foot was on the railing, under the house because the house was toppling over me. As I struggled to climb over the railing, I saw [what] looked like a kerosene stove come in flying through the glass. Quickly, I grabbed my head with both arms to protect my head area. Next thing I hear are the rocks grinding and lumber from the house bumping into my head. So quickly, I put both arms around my head. Then all of a sudden, the wave started receding, I could come up for breath of air.

*Where was Daniel?*

I don't know. I never saw him after that.<sup>11</sup> He was running through the front, and I was on the porch side of the house. And once the wall broke I was dragged, sucked out to sea. I was tumbling, so I held my hands over my head and I tried to go out feet first because I didn't want my head to hit on the rock. I looked back and saw the principal's car being sucked out to sea, Mr. [Clarence R.] Ferdun. I can still picture the brown car tumbling head over heels toward the ocean. Anyway, when I was being dragged out to sea, I saw this guy Mamoru Ishizu floating on a log. He had my aluminum bracelet. The fad was aluminum bracelets; this guy, Henry Matsushige, made it with "Herbert"

---

<sup>11</sup>Daniel Akiona died in the tsunami.

on it with little designs. And I said, “Mamo, eh, go out to the deep, I meet you out there.”

He said, “Where?”

We were fifteen feet away. Then the log hit the rock and he flew off. That's all I know.<sup>12</sup> Then I landed on a rock. Once in a while, I'd look back [toward land]. I saw a schoolteacher, Miss Faye Johnson. She was on land, right out say, where the lighthouse used to be. Somewhere around there. It was dry land. She was on shore. She had a cut on the left knee, I think. She had a coat over her, trench coat like. Brown, tan trench. I saw blood coming out, I could see at a distance.<sup>13</sup> I was thinking, Gee, why don't she run inside [i.e., inland]? But then I turned around, I saw the wave coming in, so I said, “Eh, I got to dive out to the deep.” So there's a reef in front of me. I jumped on the other reef, which was only about five feet away. Then my leg kind of slipped—I cut my foot. There was no pain, you know. I see it all white. Then after, I dove out in the water. That's just when the wave was coming, I dove on top the wave. Then next thing I know, I can feel myself being dragged by the wave. I say, Hey, do I have enough breath to hold myself? I try to kind of fight it, you know, try to come up. Try to come up for air then go down again, try to go out to the deep. Next thing I know, when I came up, I saw debris floating around me.

---

<sup>12</sup>Mamoru Ishizu died in the tsunami.

<sup>13</sup>Faye Johnson died in the tsunami.

*How far out were you?*

Oh, I was on the Waipunalei side of the Laupāhoehoe Point already, on the deep side. I would say about, maybe 100 yards out already. That's how fast the current took me that way. Then I found a log and a mattress. I saw a duck and a centipede on the log. I was afraid of the centipede (laughs) more than anything else. I found an axe handle so I killed the centipede, first thing. And the duck and I shared the log. With lots of debris, I gathered as much wood around me for floatation. I stayed on the mattress, didn't hold too long. With the axe handle as a hammer, I gathered debris to make a makeshift raft. Then I saw a shark, you know, coming around, so I got scared. So I start putting the lumber under me, even with the nails poking my stomach and my feet, trying to keep afloat.

I found another log had a rope or cord attached to it. Made it to a point, I tied it together. Then I found a [piece of] a floor, you know, T and G [tongue and groove] post. I brought the floor close to put the log on top. Then I had a small [piece of] lumber with nails on. And I just put it on top the "raft", nailed it down with the axe handle. The log was, I'd say, maybe about ten feet long, and maybe six or eight inches wide. And the other one was maybe longer, about twelve feet, I think. After I found that T and G piece over there, then I got on that, the floor. The flooring was about six-by-eight, maybe. And it was upside down. Whatever debris I found, I put 'em on top the floor.

And I found a bottle of Crisco and an apple. I ate all the apple. It was kind of brownish but I ate all except the seed and the stem. I ate the core, too. And the Crisco bottle I found floating, I rubbed that all over my body.

*What made you do that?*

I learned that [when] people used to swim, they used to put grease on their body. So I rubbed the Crisco to keep me warm, and from sunburn. I stayed on that [raft] for a while.

*Was there any time that you thought that you were going to die?*

[Pause] No. Well, it's really hard to say whether you knew you were going to die, you know. Because I wasn't wounded. I wasn't hurt. Of course I was scared. But like I say, after you fear, you start thinking of survival. Then you say, Wait, I got a chance. I wasn't afraid of the water; I was afraid more of the reef than the water. I shouldn't say water, the ocean, I mean. But I'm afraid of sharks. When I saw him [the shark], then I thought, now I got to do different survival tactics. Then I started getting lumber under me and I started pushing the axe handle through the waves and splash the water so the sharks don't come around.

I was tired myself. Then I'd say about noon-ish, I seen these two other guys, [Takashi] Takemoto and [Asao Kuniyuki], a guy from `O`ōkala and the other guy's from Honohina. One of them was on a fifty-gallon oil drum. And the other one was on a door. So I tried to paddle but the current kind of drifted them away, so I put my T and G to the guy on the door. The guy on the drum was close enough, so I jumped in the water and brought him closer, put him on the flooring with us. They were kind of

exhausted. I picked up a coconut, a dried coconut floating. So I peeled it and we shared the water. Three of us shared the water and we ate the coconut. That's all we had.

Then later on in the afternoon, I'd say about one o'clock, the PBY plane came over, that's the name of the U.S. Navy sea plane. It came over us and dropped the rubber raft. I swam to get our raft closer to the [rubber] raft. I pulled that cord and inflated the rubber raft. We got on the raft and paddled away from the debris because I didn't want the debris to puncture the rubber raft. So once we got on, and the aluminum paddles snapped on together, we oared away from the debris.

*And you still were about a hundred yards from shore?*

Oh no, more than that by then. Oh, we were about at least half a mile out.

*Could you see land?*

Yeah, we could still see land. Then that afternoon, down 'O'ōkala side, I could see people drop a rope and waving us to come in, you know, but the ocean was too rough. I don't think the other two guys would have made it anyway. I thought I was fairly strong. So we just oared and oared and boy, I just oared out. We just oared out until I passed out due to exhaustion. The other two guys was gone already, sleeping. They were passed out. So, I made sure the oars were secured. In fact, I had them under my leg, to make sure in case the wave should turn us, at least I'd have the oars.

Then, late at night all of a sudden, everything became peaceful—no lapping of the waves and the sea was calm. Then I saw light shining from the high cliff. Then the light disappeared. Initially when I saw the light, I thought, "Oh, this must be the

Honoka`a Landing."<sup>14</sup> Get bright lights and I saw the cable. Next thing, it disappeared. There was an island there, and we passed outside of the island. The current was taking us north. And I says, "Aw, shucks. Then that's all right. I better oar out," you know. Figure the current was taking us out. So I oared further out, in the dark, just away from the light.

*Did you sleep the whole night? Or what was the night like?*

Part of the night. Gee, it's a feeling you have, you know, like when you see a cowboy movie, the good guy is not going to die. I got that feeling, you know. I had the confidence. I was not scared anymore. You get so scared, then afterwards, you not scared anymore. I felt the same, you know, when I was in Vietnam, too. You get so scared, then after that you're not scared, then you start thinking. You might start to say, "Should I do this? It's dangerous. Or if I do this, it's not dangerous." Somehow it just clicks in you. I don't know what you would call it, god's intuition or what, you know. But lot of people are afraid of the ocean, the deep, you know. And to me, I think that the depth is safer than being dashed on the rocks. You know, people get hurt especially when they're close to shore, the waves dashing, dashing against the rock. I guess this is why I rode out, stay away from the shoreline.

Then, in the morning, we could see the waves at a beach. What's that beach over there past Honoka`a? People go down there.

---

<sup>14</sup>About seventeen miles northwest of Laupāhoehoe Point.

*Past Honoka`a? Waipi`o?*

Waipi`o. I seen the beach. I knew there's a river there. So I figured we're about mile and a half, two miles out already. The current was taking us out, so I thought maybe we were going toward Kawaihae, around Kohala. So I oared out, further out. This was about six o'clock in the morning. Then the current took us to the point right into Kohala, Niuli`i, right in. And I seen the plane circling about five miles away. Later on we found out that Mrs. Akiona was [floating] on a door. The plane landed to pick her up. The pilot probably couldn't see us; we were far away and the sun was shining. So I got a metal mirror [from] inside the rubber raft, trying to flash to the plane. The plane seen it and he came over to circle around us.

Then I saw people running on the hillside, bare hill, you know. We were right on the reef first, but I didn't want to come in [for fear of hitting the reef]. So I tried to oar out, fighting the current. I finally missed the reef. Then I saw the river and I saw these people running down the road. Two guys jumped in the water to swim out.<sup>15</sup> And this was just about 11:15 in the morning.

*How far did they have to swim out?*

Oh, we were [getting] close to shore, I'd say about 120 yards, at the most. They swam out and then I started paddling in. As soon as they grabbed the raft, the raft turned over. The raft was upside down. So the guy said, "Get on the raft." So I jumped on

---

<sup>15</sup>The two men were Gabriel and Solomon Kapeliela of South Kohala. Alan Mohan, "Laupahoehoe Student is Rescued After 27 Hours," *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, 3 April 1946. Nishimoto later told me that another person, Ah You Ah Sam, also swam out.



the raft. The other two guys grabbed the two lads and brought them in. I rode the wave right into shore on the rubber raft.

***So after you were rescued, I mean, after you came in, do you remember what happened after that?***

Well, after we got in, the lady covered me with a jacket, you know, a Hawaiian lady over there. I tried to walk up, I couldn't walk. All of a sudden, you're just exhausted. So they helped me up, then they took me to the Kohala Hospital. Then from there, I was transferred to Pāpa`aloha Hospital and stayed there about a week, maybe less than that. I had a bruised back. But other than that. . . .

***What about the other two boys?***

The other two boys, I don't know. I lost track of them.

***What was your mother's reaction to all of this?***

Well, you know, when I was out, when I was afloat, she called the priest, the *bon-san*,<sup>16</sup> to come up to pray. She light the candle. The light went off and then the *bon-san* told my mother, "Oh, your son just died," when the light went off. (Laughs)

Funny yeah, you know, people think my life just expired because the light went out.

***What was school like after? You know, I mean, it must have been hard to go back to school and everybody talking about it and. . . .***

At that time, I made my mind up, I said, "Look, the guys died, I'm sorry for 'em."

Mamoru Ishizu was a good friend of mine. I think about him. Hey, remember this is life, you know. To me, it's survival of the fittest. But if the guy's gone, he's gone

---

<sup>16</sup>Japanese word for a Buddhist priest.

already. It's done already, you know. And I think this is my outlook toward life. This is it. My time comes, I'm going. That's history. It's cruel to say that, but that's what I [believe]. When I die, I tell my wife, "Eh, I don't want the kids come to the grave to put flowers and all that. I'm gone already. I'm history already. Forget about me. Why waste your money and time to come to the grave?" That's how I look at it. It's a cold life, but this is what it is. Not only cold, it's cruel, too, but, you know.

***Did you feel that way before the incident or how has that incident affected your life?***

Oh, it was okay, you know, it didn't bother me. After that, I used to go fishing by myself. Even like Ninole, you need a rope to go down to catch `opihi<sup>17</sup> and, I don't know if you're a fisherman or not, to catch moi,<sup>18</sup> it's all white water. I used to go myself and throw net. I wasn't afraid. I just be careful, that's it. So it never did bother me.

And I used to talk about heroic stuff. But in Vietnam, I seen my good friends, my running partner, getting killed. And hey, what the heck. Why cry? You might die. Forget him already. Just leave the body and run, that's it. If he's wounded, you got to just bandage him and run away, that's it. That's how it is. And that's the facts of life, I think.

***So you served in Korea and Vietnam?***

Yeah. The Korean War, was mostly peacetime when I went in. It was '51 when I went in the service. I was going to go to the University of Hawai'i. Then this friend of

---

<sup>17</sup>Hawaiian word for a limpet, which clings to on-shore rocks.

<sup>18</sup>Hawaiian word for a threadfish.

mine--I don't know how come I ran into him--we were at a chop suey place in Hilo. We were having a few beers. And this recruiting sergeant came in down there to buy plate lunches. I guess they were working, they were recruiting people so they're busy, so I guess they were working on Saturday. He bought plate lunch. We told him, "Eh, Sarge, if you pay [for] our chop suey, we going to join the army."

"You sure?"

"Yeah."

So in the latter part of August, I went home. So one Monday morning, I'm fishing, came back, wash my throw net, cleaning *`opihi*. I was going to eat breakfast *`opihi*, you know. Then my mother says, "Eh, Herbert, there's a Hawaiian man out there with an army car." Those days they had that greenish, OD [olive drab] color, you know.

"Eh, Nish, come on in, we going." I look in the back, my friend is in there, "Eh, c'mon, let's go. You said you were going volunteer."

I said, "Okay." I went upstairs, grab my duffel bag, went in the bathroom grab my toothbrush, shaving kit. You know, that's the kind of character I was, I guess.

My mother asked, "Where you going?"

"I'm going downtown." I was sworn in. (Chuckles)

I was in the army. Next thing, I was in jump school in Kentucky, parachute school. But the army treated me well because I have a good retirement, you know. I can't complain. If I were to live it over, yeah, I would probably do the same thing. I had a good life.

*How do you spend your time nowadays?*

Now I play golf if I can and do other things, and travel. I'm busier than when I was working because my wife tells me, "Go do this." So I keep myself busy with the grandkids, that's it. And I always believe: never leave a stone unturned. I read a story, an article or satire way back. This guy crossing the river, he stepped on a stone, and he wanted to know what was under the stone. And he said, "To heck with it, I'll see it next time." There's no next time for that, you know. You might as well do it now while you can. So I'm a curious guy. Like when people talk about, oh, I want to see that place, I'll go. No next time, I'll go, you know. Too many of us, "Oh, I want to do that. Ah, it's too expensive, I don't have the time." You can always make time. You know, that's a poor excuse, I think. Sure, expense to a limit, to a certain limitation. But I try to go see places.

*Although Herbert Nishimoto swims and goes fishing regularly, and professes to have little fear of the ocean, he lives in Central O`ahu, miles away from any body of water.*

## CHAPTER 8

### "GOOD GOD, WHAT IS THAT?"

#### ALBERT STANLEY

*Albert Louis Stanley<sup>1</sup> was born August 31, 1930 in Hilo, Hawai`i. His father, Clyde LeGrand Stanley, originally from Berry County, Missouri, journeyed to Hawai`i as a young man in 1916 in search of excitement. Settling first in Hilo working for Hawaiian Dredging Company, Clyde Stanley married Rosina Bassler, a public health nurse working in Hilo. The couple eventually moved to Laupāhoehoe, where he worked as a maintenance superintendent for Hawaiian Consolidated Railway, Ltd. After suffering a crippling accident in 1942, Clyde Stanley became a well-known and prolific woodworker.<sup>2</sup>*

*Albert Stanley and his three sisters grew up in Laupāhoehoe. He attended Laupāhoehoe School through twelfth grade and graduated in 1948. Following graduation, Stanley worked as an ironworker for companies that converted scrap steel from the defunct Hawaiian Consolidated Railway, Ltd. From 1952 to 1956, he worked for the Hawai`i National Guard in Laupāhoehoe. In 1957, he went to Midway and was a storekeeper for Hawaiian Dredging Company.*

*Beginning in 1959, Stanley attended an airplane mechanics school at Northrup*

---

<sup>1</sup>Albert L. Stanley, interview by author, in Center for Oral History, *Tsunamis Remembered: Oral Histories of Survivors and Observers in Hawai`i*, 2000, 817-37.

<sup>2</sup>Martha Luna, "Laupahoehoe Man 'Handicapped' Into Becoming Expert Woodworker," *Hilo Tribune-Herald*, 26 June 1955.

*Aviation Company in California. In 1960, he began his thirty-five year career with Continental Airlines in Honolulu.*

*Retired since 1995, Stanley lives in Honolulu. He and his former wife raised five children and have seven grandchildren.*

*Interviewed in his Honolulu apartment, Stanley recalled the tragic events of April 1, 1946. A Laupāhoehoe School sophomore at the time, he remembered being driven to school by his mother. Halfway down the winding road leading to the school, Stanley noticed the peculiar behavior of the ocean. At that point, he and his mother witnessed the tsunami's destructive force on the school and peninsula.*

*Stanley lived in the house which was part of the Hawaiian Consolidated Railway, Ltd., of which a hub was at Laupāhoehoe. Today, that same home is the site of the Laupāhoehoe Train Museum. Stanley's life history roughly parallels the history of the railway company along the Hāmākua Coast: his father worked for the railway company, Stanley witnessed the 1946 tsunami which caused the company to soon go out of business, and finally, in the tsunami's aftermath, Stanley worked to salvage scrap steel from the defunct company.*

*Stanley's somewhat gruff exterior hid what I found to be a deep appreciation of history, and the role his family played in it. He proudly shared newspaper articles about his father and about his home being converted into the Laupāhoehoe Train Museum. The museum was established to educate the public about the history of the Hawaiian Consolidated Railway, Ltd.*

I was born in Hilo, Hawai'i on August 31, 1930. My father [Clyde LeGrand Stanley] was living in Hilo at that time. He was building the breakwater in Hilo [Bay].<sup>3</sup> My mother and my father were living there at that time. And after the breakwater was completed, he went to work for the Hawaiian Consolidated Railway, Ltd., which was just being completed. He moved to Laupāhoehoe at that time, and I lived there through my high school years and a few years after. He was a superintendent of maintenance on the railroad, in the Hāmākua section.

[Then one day], he fell off the trestle going down to [Pāpa'aloa] mill [of the Laupāhoehoe Sugar Company], it was in December 1942, and he became a paraplegic. And then he turned to woodworks, making small items out of Hawaiian native woods. Just something to do and keep himself busy. In those days they didn't have the facilities and the methods of taking care of invalids at home like they have today, where the people today are very fortunate. You know, the state provides them with all kinds of different things, you know, outlooks. He became the envy of many people, they came over and interviewed him, trying to get other invalids and people that stayed at home feeling that they could do something that was constructive instead of just being dormant. If you stay home and you don't have anything to do to take your mind off your problems, you're hurting. Lot of other things could develop.

***Could he make a living off of the woodwork?***

Well, yes and no. Tourism was just getting started. And couple of the tour bus drivers wanted to stop by and bring their tourists over. But they'd also want a little bit of the

---

<sup>3</sup>A project of the Hawaiian Dredging Company.

kickback from, you know, they're not doing that out of the goodness of their heart, everything's in business. And he didn't think that he could provide enough to keep a big thing like that moving. So he worked at his own pace and it moved pretty good. It wasn't something to really make money; he just did it for something to do. And people would stop by and buy something and visit with him. It was nice to have somebody come and visit, rather than being home isolated.

He made cribbage boards, and picture frames, and little lamps, and several games, small games. And they moved pretty good. Jewelry boxes. He couldn't handle really big stuff. I used to hustle around and get wood for him. And our neighbor had a big saw, so we could rip up the logs and the small stuff which he could use. And kept him busy.

I learned quite a bit about Hawaiian woods myself, you know, going scouting around. Coffee is a nice, white wood, almost like ivory. In the early days, the homesteaders that moved in that area planted a lot of coffee for their home use. And some of those trees got big. In fact, I got one that was about almost twelve inches in diameter. That's a good-sized coffee tree. You see the ones in Kona, (chuckles) maybe two or three inches. But on our side, I found a couple in the mountains that were big trees. Of course, they had to get big because of the guava and everything else; kind of survival of the fittest in the jungle. And I got all kinds of wood for him: *koa*,<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup>Hawaiian word for the largest of native forest trees, with light-gray bark, crescent-shaped leaves, and white flowers in small, round heads. The lumber is prized in Hawai'i, formerly for canoes, surfboards and calabashes, today for furniture and *ukulele*.



sandalwood. See, in the early days, sandalwood was a native of the islands. With all this reforestation that they're doing, they're [now] raising eucalyptus for pulp wood. Why don't they reforest with sandalwood here and there? You know what I mean? I don't know the growth rate of a sandalwood tree, whether it would be economically feasible. I mean, it's a long-term investment, whatever it is. But since it was grown here as a native, it must be compatible with this environment. I don't know. You stop to wonder how these woods got established here because when the White man came, there were forests of sandalwood here. How did it get here? (Laughs) They're talking about saving the forest or indigenous plants and things, nobody says anything about the sandalwood. They could reforest with that.

So anyway, he kept busy doing his woodwork and kept happy. He had a lot of pain because of the, I guess, the nerves in the accident. He had several operations. Eventually they convinced him that he would never walk. So they could sever some nerves and keep the pain away. But he went through days, I don't know whether it was the weather or cycles of the body, he took a lot of codeine and, boy, he swallowed half a dozen aspirins at a time, you know. When I was a young boy, I used to go over to the hospital. They didn't have controls on drugs like they have today. I never even thought of popping any pills. I brought them home. But it got so it affected his digestion and the doctor decided—well, he was already an addict, you know—and pulled him off cold turkey and I seen some withdrawals. You know, he really went through a lot of really miserable times. But that was all part of the treatment. I guess doctors, in those days, they did the best they can. They didn't have the medications

they have today. And all till he died, he went through good days and bad days. Over his bed we had a trapeze where he could hold the forward end and I'd pick up his legs and put him in the bed because he couldn't get in the bed by himself.

He was born in Missouri. Well actually, he was the second generation. He had half brothers that were old men. I mean, he was the youngest of the second generation. My grandfather died when he was a young man. His brother's name was Albert, and he was in Colorado working in the mines. And my father ran away. He was a teenager—thirteen, fourteen, real young. They rode the rails those days, like hobos. And he went to Colorado, stayed with his brother, and then got jobs. So he never had a high school education. It was a hard life. He came up by the grassroots.

They used to travel on the rails. He said one wintertime there was this big flat car, and there was a boiler on the flat car, they were going to take it somewhere. It was cold. You know how the wind's whippin' and he was just jumping on this train. I guess when it was going up the hill, it'll go slower. He figured, well, there's a firebox on this boiler, he's gonna crawl in the firebox and get out of the wind. He opens the door, these fireboxes had a latch that'd flip up, you know, lock down. And when he opened the door, there was somebody in there. He was dead. He froze. Because you get in, for a while it's okay, but the temperature is so cold and you can't move around. He said it could've been him. You know what I mean? And these things that he's experiencing nobody experiences, you know? Man.

*How did he end up in Hawai'i?*

Well, you didn't read that yet?<sup>5</sup> (Laughs) He was footloose and fancy-free, you know what I mean? He came here, there was no job. He said they got off in Watertown.<sup>6</sup> And they walked and got on the railroad track and was coming in to Honolulu. And he saw right over there, *hanawai*,<sup>7</sup> you know they used to have cane fields and irrigation [ditches], raising all kinds of taro and rice and whatnot. He said, "I can do that kind of job." So he went over there and asked the guy how much he was making. He worked eleven hours and made a dollar a day. (Chuckles) And my father says, "Well, I don't figure I need that kind of job." (Laughs)

Those days, it was hard work. Anyway, he got into town and roamed around. And then he got a job, they were building the dry docks in Pearl Harbor and he went to work there in the [Pearl Harbor] Naval [Ship]yard for I don't know how long. Then he got a job with Hawaiian Dredging [Company] and used to do a lot of work with them. When they went to Hilo to make the breakwater, he went over with Hawaiian Dredging. And from there he went to work for the railroad.

*At Laupāhoehoe?*

Yeah. And that was where he finished.

---

<sup>5</sup>Luna, "Laupahoeohoe Man 'Handicapped' Into Becoming Expert Woodworker." This article contains an account of Clyde LeGrand Stanley's accomplishments, and how he came to Hawai'i from Berry County, Missouri by flipping a coin with a friend: if it came up heads, they would go to Alaska; tails, Hawai'i.

<sup>6</sup>A residential area of O`ahu that was located near where Hickam Air Force base is today.

<sup>7</sup>Hawaiian word meaning, "irrigation; to irrigate."

*What about your mom?*

My mother [Rosina Bassler Stanley] was born in Missouri, too. In the early days, they moved to Canada in covered wagons. My grandfather went farming up there in Canada. I went up there when I was about five years old. My sister and my mother and myself, we went up for a summer and stayed on a farm. And she moved to California and went to a nurses' school there. And then came down to Hawai'i, I guess, with a contract with the [territory] as a public health nurse. That's where she met my father on O'ahu. Then they moved to the Big Island when he started working there. I don't know all the complexities of their relationship. Anyway, she became a housewife and started raising a family, which was me and my three sisters. And two sisters became nurses. In fact, after they got through raising their families, they went back into nursing and retired as nurses. And my oldest sister still does a little bit of private duty. You know, somebody that needs help at home. And my youngest sister lives in California, she became a schoolteacher and retired as a schoolteacher.

*So what was it like growing up in Laupāhoehoe?*

Well, let me tell you, people talk about discrimination, I was a minority, you know.

*Haoles*<sup>8</sup> were minorities. And *haoles* were--I don't think it was envy--but resented in a lot of ways because they were bosses. The *haoles* would discriminate against them and racial discrimination was quite prevalent. (Chuckles) All my life I've dealt with discrimination. And sometimes I wonder how frivolous people are today. If somebody calls me a *haole*, doesn't bother me. If you go to that point where you can't tolerate

---

<sup>8</sup>Hawaiian word for White person; Caucasian; foreigner.

some kind of—I don't think it's discrimination, it's just the way people live. I mean, I live in the old school, but today I have to watch how I conduct myself because people take offense so easy. And I'm not out there trying to project any offensive thing.

I know when I was young, gee whiz, I got pushed around (chuckles), believe me. In fact, when I married a Japanese there were a lot of doors slammed in my face because of that. You know, even jobwise, you know, in the islands. But I never went and hollered about this, it's just the way things are. I mean, if society's that way, you have to learn to bend a little bit and try and project yourself.

*Was the discrimination growing up subtle or direct or . . .*

You know, the schools were trying to teach everybody English. I could speak good English, but believe me, if I went down to school and I started throwing my English around, somebody would want to pound me. You know what I mean? And I remember, when I was first grade, my mother dressed me up in a little sailor suit. And I cried. I didn't want to wear that to school. And that afternoon there's somebody waiting for me already. This little *haole* sailor (laughs), you know what I mean? It got so there were certain kids that resented me. They didn't even know who I was. It was no offense, it's just, you know, you're a *haole*. And so it didn't take long. I had some good friends that could come over with me.

You know, I didn't hold that resentment. I grew up and it's influenced my speech. From young, it's not the educational system, it's the environment. I mean, the people. When I speak to local people, I speak broken English. In fact, I can give you some pidgin that kids don't understand today, you know? Because I grew up in that

kind of environment. And even when I speak to people today, like Japanese or Hawaiian, I break into [pidgin]. And they have pretty good English, but it's something that's in me. Something that's embedded within me. I mean, I don't feel comfortable speaking good English. You understand?

And that is generated from years of society. Now, you take a kid that grows up in Harlem [New York] or Watts [Los Angeles] or someplace, and in an environment that they grew up with, they've got resentments because they live in a demoralized society. Maybe some of them don't even have a father, or a mother, maybe both. They're living with grandma or somebody. And lacking in aspirations. You take the Orientals that come from the Orient, you know, any country over there. They come here, they've got a strong family unit, and most of 'em will progress. I mean, they go to school to study, and they've got some kind of inside motivation.

I went from the first grade through high school at Laupāhoehoe High School. *Now was that unusual for a haole to be going to the public school at that time, in that area?*

Well, there were several of them. And high school, there were two or three. But normally when the kids grew up, lot of them went to Punahou.<sup>9</sup> The parents sent 'em to Punahou. And the high school years, my sisters and myself, we all graduated from Laupāhoehoe. There weren't many other *haoles* graduated from that school. They all moved away. I know I was the only *haole* boy in one year, junior year or something.

---

<sup>9</sup>A prestigious O'ahu private school started by Protestant missionaries.

*So what'd you do to have fun as a kid growing up over there?*

Oh, my goodness, we used to play baseball, basketball. We had teams, you know. The plantations promoted sports pretty well. In high school I used to play. And I used to like to hunt and fish. The country life. I had a garden, I had pigs, as a kid. Today, kids depend on mom and pop, you know, Let's go down to McDonald's. We didn't have any good eating places. One little saimin place and movie theater about a mile [away]. Pāpa`aloe had a movie theater. And they didn't have TV in those days. We used to listen to *The Shadow*, *Bulldog Drummond*, and *The Lone Ranger*, all on radio those days. And we hovered around that and enjoyed that.

Where I lived is called Pū`alaea, above Laupāhoehoe, our little town's name is Pū`alaea. And Pāpa`aloe is the town that's about a mile away. These Hawaiian Islands, every little nook and cranny has a different name, but a lot of these are kind of melting away in the transition of time, I guess.

We had neighbors. Most of them worked for the plantation. And lot of them had taro patches, they used to make *poi*.<sup>10</sup> Most people had kind of a side job, you know. Fernandez had lot of cattle and they used to butcher and sell meat. In those days you didn't have all the inspection programs and things like we have today. And Gonsalves, he was a judge [and] he was a lawyer, in the legal profession.

But they were all good neighbors, we all helped one another. There wasn't too much power. Around there, they owned all their own places. Some of them had a lot

---

<sup>10</sup>The Hawaiian staff of life, made from cooked taro corms or breadfruit, pounded and thinned with water.

of acreage, cane land and whatnot. My father was the only one that was not really progressive so far as real estate, but he made a good wage, he was making about average wage. When we were kids we had two maids, we had two yardmen. I mean, families didn't have those things. We were well positioned in life.

Because the plantations never paid that much. So actually, lot of these people, even today, they're land-rich. You know, land-rich but cash-poor. If they went and sold their assets, their land and everything, they would be [rich], because land values have increased dramatically.

*Let's talk about April 1, 1946. Tell me, how did that day start for you?*

Well, April 1, 1946 was a kind of rainy morning. It was a Monday morning and my mother was going to take us to school because it was raining. Well, that was fine and dandy with me. Usually, we'd walk down the hill [to the school, located on Laupāhoehoe Point], about a mile down. My friend Johnny DeCaires used to come down [to my house] every morning and we'd go to school together. So we were out there shooting baskets in the backyard, I had a basketball place to play in the backyard, and we'd shoot baskets, play around until it was time to go. And I told Johnny, "Eh, stay and come with me in the car to go to school."

He said, "Ah, no, I'm going." When it came time to go he just jumped on his bike and zipped down the hill. And about ten minutes later we got in the car and started going down the hill.

I used to spear fish and I was quite interested in how the water looked. As we were coming down looking through the trees, I told my mother, "My goodness, I've



never seen the ocean this rough.” So we got a little farther down where we could see better. Well, that ocean was really receding, came in, come up. By the [boat] landing there, they had a boat house where they used to keep canoes and everything. It took that out. Then the water went way out.

I could see the [ocean] bottom for half a mile. That water out there is maybe, I would say, the average depth is probably seventy or eighty feet. And then we could see this welling up outside. We started screaming and hollering because all this activity had brought a lot of school kids running down to check on what's going on. But when that water started coming in, they started running. But you ever try to outrun a wave by the beach? There's no way. I mean, those waves move. It came in, and a lot of the kids were pretty far up and getting away, but they could see this thing looming up. A lot of them climbed up on the grandstand, they had a ballpark there, and climbed up on this grandstand, and if they'd just gone another ten feet up the road there they would've been all right. Anyway, that grandstand melted down.

At that point the wave wasn't that big, lot of them probably just got scattered around, able to get away. But the ones farther on down, they were all swept out. The teachers' cottages, two of them went across the ballpark there and got stashed on the side, by the school farm. One of the [cottages] got swept directly out. I noticed one teacher up on the roof of the house and when the second wave came in, everything, they never heard from the teachers in that cottage.

And this guy, Herbert Nishimoto, you interviewed him. I didn't realize, I thought he went out, across [the ballpark], but he said he got swept straight out [into

the ocean] from there. And he was with Fred Kruse, the schoolteacher, and they never did find him.<sup>11</sup> I was supposed to stay with Herbert and the other kids [over the weekend prior to April 1, 1946, which fell on a Monday], but I was raising pigs so I had to go home and feed the pigs. Over the weekend, everybody stayed down at [the teachers' cottages following a class picnic] and they went to sleep at [one of the] cottages there, and go fishing. And Herbert was there, and-- I have difficulty with this guy's name--he died, Mamoru Ishizu. Anyway, his body [Ishizu], they found a few days later, it was washed up on the shore.

*So when you went down in your mother's car, where did you folks stop to look at it?*

We stopped about, oh, a third of the way down. It's all clear up there, and there's some [stone] walls. We were all standing on the stone wall looking down. My mother got all hysterical and we took her home. That's when my sister and I came back and took these pictures. We saw the big wave come. The action was, you know, it progressed up slowly to what I call the climax, the big wave, and then it worked itself down again. I didn't count all the waves. There were several waves, but it was just building up to it.

We knew about tidal waves, because, you know, kids, we get sassy, "Oh, I wish a tidal wave come, *hemo*<sup>12</sup> the school." (Chuckles) You know how kids talk, "*Hemo* the school, we don't need go school." Never even realized that something like

---

<sup>11</sup>Fred Kruse died in the tsunami.

<sup>12</sup>Hawaiian word meaning, "break apart."

that would happen. But I can remember those words coming out of my mouth. But when it really happened . . .

But actually, today you feel more secure because if we were to go diving and we have a [tsunami] warning, you wouldn't be caught. For instance, [if] I was out there diving that morning and it started coming up, [I could] probably get to shore, but (chuckles) you better start running.

*Was it actually a wave coming in? You know like how you associate a large wave?*

Like a flood coming in. You know, a fast-rising flood. So when it comes in, there's no holding it. I mean, it'll just come in as strong as it is. Actually, it could be capable of just coming right up here if there was an enormous enough action somewhere in the ocean. So I imagine in the early days, with the Earth shifting, just think if a big meteorite landed in the ocean, there'd be tidal waves, it would be inundating a lot of these little islands.

No, the water rushes in not like the average person would think, like a curling surface wave. It just comes in. Its reaction to the shore depends upon the topography of the ocean floor. So it will react differently in different areas. Same thing like waves here. There's good surfing spots and there are places with none because of the structure of the bottom of the ocean.

Look at this last hurricane that hit,<sup>13</sup> how people adhere to the warning, just beautiful. I see 'em all bailing out and that's paying attention to what happens. Like they had the early warning system here after that ['46 tsunami], and there was how

---

<sup>13</sup>Hurricane `Iniki, September 11, 1992.

many false alarms, and people got to the point, "Never mind this [cry] wolf business."  
And a lot of them wouldn't adhere to the warning.

*You remember what went through your mind as you were seeing people getting swept away?*

Well, you're so awestruck. I mean, I didn't have a keen mind like you have where I could generate all these thoughts (WN laughs), I was just there with my mouth open saying, "Good god, what is that?" You know what I mean? I don't consider myself an analytical person. I mean, I might analyze, but it takes me a week of thinking to come up with something like that (laughs). You understand? We never even knew about a tidal wave. It's something that since then they've come up with all their early warning systems and everything, but at that time nobody knew.

*How far inland do you think the wave went? Did it actually get to the school [buildings]?*

Actually the wave didn't come directly in, it came from two sides [of the peninsula]. See, it was following the terrain. The wave's general direction was hard to analyze exactly, it didn't come straight in like you see the waves there today, it came in more at a cross-section. And then I guess it got caught on the Hilo side of the point and when the water corralled up and came in, it swept across the point [i.e. from south to north]. Since then I've done my analytical thinking (chuckles). The force of the water got bottled up in here [i.e., the Hilo side of the peninsula] and then swept across this way. So when it met and both forces came, I remember a big geyser in the middle of the park where [AS claps] two forces kind of came together and pushed up.

*So the receding and the incoming force.*

Yeah, well, I would say that, yeah. You had a mixture of forces there. But the main force swept across the point, from there it took the teachers' cottages this way and then cached them on the side of the ballpark there. We used to go diving after that and we could see the principal's car and cars that were swept out into the ocean there, they were quite a ways out. I mean, stashed on the bottom there.

*Is that Mr. [Clarence R.] Ferdun's car?*

Ferdun, yeah. I don't know, there were several cars there.

*So you were there at the top, more or less, looking down and ready to take some pictures.*

Yeah, we were far away. After that, I guess an hour or so later, we went down to the point.

*So you felt safe?*

Yeah, everything was over. Maybe we could go down and help people, you know, there were people running around looking for their families. It was big turmoil. I remember one house, [it] was not all the way into the ocean, but ripped up. [There was] money all over. They didn't believe in the banks, I guess, so we picked up the money and threw it all in a box they had there. And there were people picking up fish. I didn't pick up many fish, I wasn't concerned. But it's amazing how many people were running down there. I imagine it's like any flood, in a disaster, there's pocketing a lot of stuff that they find. But it was utter devastation.

*This John DeCaires, your friend, was he . . .*

They never found him. That family lost three children.<sup>14</sup> They never found him or two of his sisters. So, really hard to explain something like that, a natural disaster.

*So when did school start again?*

I don't remember going back, you know. There was a lot of turbulence there. Like you say, the graduating class, I don't know where they had their exercises, the graduating exercises. Because at that point, they had the whole May, and then June usually, the first, second week of June that school is out. Yeah, I can't tell you. I really can't recollect that, how it affected me. But the following year we went back to school there.

*On the same grounds?*

Oh yeah, because the main school building wasn't demolished. It was just the teachers' cottages and under the shop. Well, actually it wasn't a shop. That was the ag department. Underneath one portion of the school was swept out, but the building stayed intact on top. There was just the downstairs portion [that was damaged]. So I don't know. I just imagine how many things happened that doesn't register here. Anyway, then they started building the school up above.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup>John, Janet, and Madeline DeCaires, three children of Antone and Cecilia DeCaires, were killed in the tsunami.

<sup>15</sup>The \$875,000 Laupāhoehoe High and Elementary School, located in the *mauka* section above the original school, was dedicated in October, 1952. The building of the new school was the result of much debate and controversy among parents, politicians, and education officials over whether or not to relocate the school to higher ground.

*Okay, so you graduated in 1948. Why don't you tell me briefly what you were doing from that point on?*

I went to work. Actually, before I graduated, on the weekends and whatnot, I was working for the railroad and the Industrial Development Company from September '48. So through June '51 I worked for Industrial Development Company, a trucking company to haul sugar into Hilo. This is all bulk, it wasn't bagged like in the old days. To make repairs to all the railroad [after the 1946 tsunami] wasn't feasible, so they just shut—that was the terminating factor of the railroad. And this Industrial Development Company came along and bought 'em for scrap, you know, whatever they could salvage from the railroad. And from June '51 to August '52, I worked as an iron worker. They had bought the railroad, bridges actually, they wanted the steel. Independent Iron Works already negotiated to build these highway bridges for 'em, because they were coming through with a new highway. And so they tore up all the bridges, the existing steel bridges, and hauled it into Hakalau. That's as far as they could get towards Hilo. And they had a big yard there where they stacked all this steel up and refabricated the steel for a highway bridge. There's several of the bridges there now that are on the old track bed. The existing bridge is still there, all they did is build another bridge on the outside and make the deck larger. So I worked there.

And then I went to work for Hawai'i National Guard there from August '52 to October '56. I was the unit technician there in Laupāhoehoe. They had built an armory down there, way down in the corner where [Fred] Kruse's cottage was. They put an armory there. So I went to work for the Hawai'i National Guard. And across on the

upper side of the [former] school they had a gymnasium. They moved the armory up to the gymnasium, and I worked there until I left the National Guard.

And in '57 I went to work for Hawaiian Dredging Company. When I left there I went to Midway, stayed there from September to July working as a storekeeper for Hawaiian Dredging. I really was kind of lost in my fantasy. You know, how you go through life. Like I say, my tracking system got a little bit disarrayed somewhere along the line. (Chuckles) And I was at Midway, and I was thinking, where is my life? I was twenty-eight. I figured, ah, I want to go to Alaska. I had crazy aspects. I was married, I had one child. I figured I'd go to Alaska. I wanted to get myself a fishing boat and also I wanted to become maybe a bush pilot and whatnot. I had these grandeurs of hunting; I loved to hunt. Figure I'd better learn how to fix airplanes because I gotta learn how to fly and take people into the interior, hunting and fishing. So I went to school [in California].

And when I was going to school I was working for McCulloch Corporation. That was from September '59 till August '60. McCulloch on Century. You know McCulloch chainsaws? They were making chainsaws and drone airplane engines for the government. Anyway, I worked there while I was going to school. I was going to school during the day--Northrup Aviation School--and at night I was working for McCulloch.



***What were you learning at Northrup?***

Aircraft mechanics. This was to make money. I had a family, I had to pay my rent. Nobody was paying, you understand? During the day I'd go to school and at night I'd work in here. Long days, let me tell you. How many people do that anymore?

Then, when I got through there, I went to work for Continental Airlines. It was August 1, 1960 I went to work for Continental. And I stayed till 1995 with Continental, working in the aircraft game. What happened that I never ended up in Alaska is my wife got pregnant and with two babies, it's pretty hard. My attitude changed. I figured it'd be better to hang onto something that's a little more secure. So that is my work record.

I was sixty-five [when I retired]. I said, "That's enough. Uncle Sam, I paid you enough."

After I got divorced, I decided at my age, I don't need a home. I mean, I don't need a big house. I'd much rather spend the money rather than keeping it in a house. Well, I've been living here about a year, a little over a year.

***How many children do you have?***

Five.

***Five children. And how many grandchildren?***

Seven. That's the shot there. Is there anything else you . . .

***I think that's all. Thank you very much for your time.***

Okay. Shut it down.

*Albert Stanley's cramped Honolulu apartment probably represented a significant lifestyle change from what he was accustomed to in Laupāhoehoe.*

## CHAPTER 9

### "WHAT, NO WATER IN THE OCEAN? APRIL FOOL!"

#### BUNJI FUJIMOTO

*Bunji Fujimoto,<sup>1</sup> the sixth of ten children, was born March 22, 1930 in Ninole, Hawai'i. His parents, Saiji Fujimoto and Ei Sorakubo Fujimoto, were immigrants from Hiroshima, Japan. Saiji Fujimoto was a laborer and independent sugarcane grower for Wailea Milling Company which later merged with Hakalau Plantation Company.<sup>2</sup>*

*As a youth, Fujimoto helped his father in the sugarcane fields. His chores at home included cutting grass for livestock, feeding livestock and poultry, and tending the family garden. Living in an isolated area, one of his favorite recreational activities was riding the cane flumes.<sup>3</sup> During school vacations, Fujimoto worked for the sugar plantation.*

*Fujimoto attended John M. Ross School until grade seven. Beginning with the eighth grade, he attended Laupāhoehoe School, graduating in 1947. In 1949, he*

---

<sup>1</sup>Bunji Fujimoto, interview by author, in Center for Oral History, *Tsunamis Remembered: Oral Histories of Survivors and Observers in Hawai'i*, 731-60.

<sup>2</sup>Wailea Milling Company was merged into Hakalau Plantation Company in 1944.

<sup>3</sup>Most of the Hāmākua Coast sugar plantations grew cane along the mountain slopes, while the mills usually were built below the cane lands, at sea level. Cane was therefore transported from the fields to the mill by giant, man-made flumes. Water from mountain gulches in the forest belt was run down these flumes. Workers would load the cut sugarcane onto the flumes as the force of the water carried the sugarcane down to the end of the flume, usually at the mill. Because of several deep gulches that traverse the cane lands, the fluming system included long trestles built as high as 125 feet.

*began working as a full time sugarcane field worker for Hakalau Plantation Company. In 1951, he began his forty-one-year career in the crop log laboratory of C. Brewer Company. When he retired in 1992, the laboratory section was known as Brewer Environmental Industries.*

*Fujimoto was interviewed in his Hilo home where he had lived since 1972. He and his wife, Matsue Uratani Fujimoto, raised two children and had three grandchildren.*

*On the morning of April 1, 1946, Fujimoto and his two brothers boarded the school bus which took them to Laupāhoehoe Point. The students were let off the bus near the school grounds. While Bunji watched the tsunami in relative safety from the school playground, Toshiaki, his younger brother, who like many other students ran up to the water's edge in curiosity, was swept into the ocean and perished.*

*Fujimoto, who was an avid collector of photographs relating to the tsunami and Laupāhoehoe's history, volunteered much of his time at the Pacific Tsunami Museum. Ever since first meeting him at the museum in 1997, I found him to be warm, friendly, modest, and soft-spoken. He often would offer to pick me up from the Hilo airport whenever I would arrive from Honolulu to conduct research and interviews, and drop me off at the end of my trips. He remained active as a docent until he died in 2000 at the age of seventy, educating and entertaining tourists and locals with his personal tsunami stories. His death was a significant loss to Hilo, the museum, and me.*

I was born [on March 22, 1930] and raised in Ninole, about twenty miles north of Hilo.

[My father was] kind of quiet. He liked to read a lot. He never said too much. Some guys tell me, I kind of took after him for a while, but now I don't know. My mother was a housewife. She did the chores around the house, take care of the babies, stuff like that. She was the second wife. My father's first wife died in childbirth when one of the children was born. Old style, you know, they need a wife. He needed somebody to take care of the children, so he sent home to Japan for [a wife]. My mother was the younger sister . . .

*Of the one that died?*

Yeah, yeah. Keep it in the family. Was probably about a thirteen- or fourteen-year difference in the age, and she was seventeen or eighteen when she came. She tells us later on in life, you know, after my father had passed away [in 1963], she wasn't really looking forward to coming. Especially a young girl, you know, this age. My father was in his thirties already. Oh well, I guess it's kind of what they called that obligation or whatever eventually caught up with her.

My father was a [sugar]cane planter, and he used to work for the plantation also. He came from Hiroshima, Japan in 1905 to work in the sugar industry. And from the little I recall, he said when he first came, part of his duties was to clear the forest so that the plantation can plant cane. So he used to go do that besides the regular raising of sugarcane.

Down to the mill from our house was, I would say about five, six miles, maybe. It was a long ways. The mill was in Hakalau down in the—Hakalau Stream down at the bottom [at the oceanfront]. And our house was way up in Ninole *mauka*.

*Was your father one of those independent cane growers?*

Yes. He used to raise cane. When I was growing up, in my younger years, probably a young teenager and earlier, all the way through to when I was a young man, he used to raise about twenty-five to thirty acres of cane. So we used to help, all the children, not only the boys. Both the boys and the girls used to work in the cane fields during the weekends and summers and stuff. We got our start working for our father. Doing *hō hana*<sup>4</sup> work. And when we were old enough, we started working [directly] for the plantation, primarily harvesting cane. In those days, child labor laws were kind of lax, so we used to work when we were about maybe eleven or twelve, cutting cane, harvesting cane. I wouldn't recommend it to anybody (laughs).

[My father] was working for the plantation also. Raising cane was a side business. [On the plantation] he used to go harvesting, you know, hand harvesting. He used to go flume cane. All strictly labor kind of thing. We used to do the same thing later on, I think. Oh, that man used to work real hard compared to us.

*Did he pay you?*

No, no! [It was] part of our upbringing. I don't think he was ever in a position where he can say, I'll pay you so much a day. All of us in the plantation community took it as our, I guess our growing up, of chores that we are expected to help out.

---

<sup>4</sup>Hawaiian Creole English word meaning, "to weed using a hoe."

We had animals. We had a horse. We had a cow for milk. We also had a couple of pigs there, so part of our chores was to cut grass for the horse and the cow, and feed the pigs. We had chickens, ducks, hens and rabbits. But the rabbits didn't last too long. You know, when you're children, to kill the rabbit is not that easy. Easy to raise, you know, you have a pair of mature rabbits, you have a whole bunch of little ones in no time, and they'll be ready for eating within six months. When came time to slaughter them, my father had to take 'em away.

We had a good-sized vegetable garden. Most of it was raised in the backyard. And there were some neighbors that we exchanged stuff with. If you had surplus, you take 'em to a neighbor way down the road. So we used to help in those areas, too. I don't know how much we could help, I won't try to guess, but we did our share, anyway. We were, I guess, farm boys, we had our own chores that we needed to do.

*And you were number six of ten children?*

Yeah, well, I'm not sure exactly because several of my—I was told—several of the older ones died before I was born. I don't know them. They were as babies up to about two years old, three years old. Those days, [when] babies were born, [many] died. So from the ones that I grew up with, I'm number six out of ten. The second of four boys and six girls.

We used to have to go walking all around to play with anybody. When I was real small, my closest neighbor was about a quarter mile away. The youngest in the family was about ten years older than me. We used to walk a lot, go to neighboring camps and down to the community and stuff for play and whatever. I don't remember

too much about my real young days. When the war [World War II] broke out, I was eleven. I remember going to a neighboring village, they used to have the visiting [i.e., traveling] movies, the old Japanese *benshi*.

***The narrator.***

Yeah, silent movies. We used to go see them, I don't know how often, several times a year, I guess. We used to walk through the sugarcane field paths and stuff. When I was about ten, I remember the county built a road to our homestead area, for vehicles. At least we had a road, but nobody could afford a car then. We didn't have a car until I was out of high school, our family. Everything used to come out by either [horse]backs or pack mules. We used to walk from the trail going to school and all, mile and a quarter, mile and a half, to John M. Ross School. Obviously in the wintertime when the days was short, had to leave real early.

Among other things, we used to go swimming down in the stream; the streams were always flowing. We used to catch *`ōpae*<sup>5</sup> in the stream. Another stream had *`o`opu*.<sup>6</sup> We used to go fishing with a pole. We used to go to a camp to play with some of the other boys. The closest camp was probably a mile, mile and a half away, but we used to walk and go. The plantation village used to have a gym and little small ball field and stuff like that. So we used to play whatever we could scrounge. We used

---

<sup>5</sup>Hawaiian word for a small, freshwater shrimp.

<sup>6</sup>Hawaiian word for the general name for fishes included in the families *Eleotridae*, *Gobiidae*, and *Blennidae*. Some in salt water near the shore, others in fresh water.



to make our own fun and go where the fun is. We couldn't really play around our house. We started climbing trees and stuff.

We used to play softball in school. I never played baseball until later in our middle teens. They used to call it hardball those days, yeah? They used to have those local leagues we used to play, high school. Even basketball--this was in our early teens--we used to go up to Hakalau. That's quite a ways. We used to go down to the main highway, the plantation trucks would pick us up and take us to the gyms in Hakalau to play basketball, and something that resembled basketball, anyway.

(Laughs) But basically, it was a community against community kind of thing.

Wailea Milling Company used to have plantation stores, those days. Plantation stores would take orders from the workers, what they want—the ones that couldn't go to the store. Rice, shoyu, miso, and some canned goods and dry goods. Miso, I think, they used to make. After the road was built, peddlers used to come. The store peddlers, the fish peddlers, and so on. And then I don't know how they shipped it to Ninole from Wailea, probably by train. And then they had the plantation pack mules—there was a mule team assigned for hauling goods and stuff for the workers that lived away [i.e., the outlying areas]. They used to bring rice and [other] staples. No such things as fresh meat and stuff because it wouldn't last, you know. We didn't have icebox. They couldn't bring ice anyway until later on when they made the road. Then we were able to cook with kerosene. I don't know how they used to cook before

that, I was too small, I don't really remember. Anyway, they always had a wooden place to make a fire in the house. They used to call it *kudo*.<sup>7</sup> You familiar with that?

[Our house] was a wooden-frame house, nothing fancy, just four walls. From my recollection, the girls were in one room and the boys were in another, and the little ones were with the parents in another room. We had three rooms where we could sleep, as far as I can remember. Plus the cooking area, the kitchen and dining area. We had a little shower, we had a separate *furo*<sup>8</sup> in the back; we had an outhouse. The only indoor plumbing, if you can call it that, was in the *furo* and kitchen. But facilities as far as toilet goes is [in an] outhouse outside. Cooking was [with] kerosene and firewood. We didn't have electricity where I was raised. We were kind of off the beaten track up in the hills, probably a mile and a quarter or so off from the main highway where most of the homes were. I don't know when my father built that place, but we were away from all the conveniences. No electricity, no telephones out there, so we have to make do with whatever we have. Was primarily kerosene and firewood. We used to go down to the edge of the streams and cut the *`ōhi`a*<sup>9</sup> logs for firewood, stack it up, and chop it. There was a [cane] flume, fortunately, that passed right by our house, so what they used to do when the flume wasn't being used, my father would say, "Oh, let's go up, we need to go cut firewood today." So we'd go up in the bushes

---

<sup>7</sup>Japanese word for an earthen furnace for cooking.

<sup>8</sup>A Japanese bath. In this instance, Kino is not talking about actually *building* the bath. He is referring to his job of building and tending the fire underneath it, making the water hot for bathing and soaking.

<sup>9</sup>Hawaiian word for a type of native tree.

and cut firewood close to where the flumes are running, carry the chopped wood down to the flumes and flume it down to our house. Stop it there, and then we'll store that for maybe—the firewood—probably a year supply or so at a time. Everybody used to do that.

It was a main, permanent flume. The sugar companies had their permanent flumes and temporary flumes. Temporary flumes were the ones that were put in the fields directly to flume the cane to the permanent flume. So right in front of our house, we had a permanent flume. When we were kids, we were constantly told, “Be careful when you cross the flumes, if you fall in the flumes, the water is strong enough, it'll take you down.”

You know, one of my nephews, when he was about, oh, not quite ten I guess, came to visit one day and somehow fell into the flume. And that particular day, there was a lot of water in the flume because I guess it was kind of rainy season. I had to go down, grab him. He was about 100 feet down. He couldn't get out by himself. Fortunate that place wasn't that steep yet so I managed to grab him out. Every now and then, he still reminds me about it. (Laughs)

*Did cane get stuck a lot along the way?*

Yes, that's why they had a watchman. I used to do that, too, in the plantation. Supposedly, the cane was tied in bundles. [We were] supposed to take off the leaves and tie the [cane] together [in] bundles. We'd just throw in the [loose] cane [on the flume]. Before you know, that [watchman] say, "Stop, there's a jam down below."

They had to pull [the pieces of cane] out. The one that we threw in is not the tight-packed bundle. The cane is all kind of loose so the water go through, eh? So they gotta stop and pull it out one by one until they get the [cane moving again]. Some of the jams was huge. That's when the jam was in the bigger flume down below. I don't know how they would fix that jam. I never really thought about it till you started asking.

*I think only Big Island they did flumes. Yeah, because of the slopes?*

Yeah. Right, right. The slope and the water. Gotta have the water. The other islands, all [cane was transported to the mills by] railroad. They didn't have constant running water, you needed a lot of water to run a flume.

*Okay, so how old were you when you first started working, I mean, actually for pay?*

I must have been eleven or twelve. Those days, you need a *bangō*<sup>10</sup> to work in a plantation. A *bangō* is a number that they assign to every [plantation] employee. At fourteen, you could get a student *bangō*. Before that, we used to work cutting cane, harvesting cane, but on a contract, piecemeal basis. So whatever work we did, stayed under my father's *bangō*. And they [plantation] would pay him. At fourteen, we got our own *bangō*. Somehow, the Wailea people, mostly started out cutting cane. They didn't have enough [full-time] harvesters. Some of the other camps, like that, they had *hō hana* gangs and stuff like that. The only time we did that kind of work was in the off season when they weren't harvesting at all, then they would offer us some other

---

<sup>10</sup>Japanese word for an employee number.

work. But all through school years, we were cane cutters. That's primarily piecemeal work, so they paid for whatever you do, by the bundle.

*How many bundles you think you could do in one day?*

High school, I could keep up with the men anytime: 200, 250. Sometimes on a good day, when they had nice harvesting conditions, maybe more than that. [I had to] buy my own machete. You have to sharpen it, carry your own sharpening stone or file to work. And after when you go home, used to have a grindstone, grind it down, flatten it out at least once a week or so. In fact, I have the same old grinder here. We didn't have electric then, so we used a hand grinder for our tools.

*So when you got your own bangō, you were able to keep the money that you earned?*

No, no. (WN chuckles.) Whatever we earned, we never did keep all my money. In fact, we used to give practically all to our parents and they give us whatever we need. I wouldn't say whatever we need, whatever they could spare is what it amounts to. Not like today, you know, you tell your kids to mow the lawn, they tell, "How much you gonna pay me?" (Laughs)

I went to John M. Ross School in Ninole--at least a mile and a half from my home--up to the seventh grade. When I started, John M. Ross School had seven grades. I believe was something like nine classrooms because just before I started, apparently, they added a couple of rooms because enrollment was increasing. I think we had, generally speaking, the same teachers year after year. The teachers used to live in the cottages right next door except for a couple who lived a couple miles down

the road. But the principal and most of the teachers from away used to live in the cottages next to the school.

We used to have regular basic arithmetic and reading and writing and a little bit of art and drawing. And gardening, among other things. No such things as computers and stuff like that. I don't know from what grade on, but we had to go down to help in the kitchen also, you know, take your turn. Nobody questioned those things. Today, you can't do that. "How much you going to pay me?" is the first thing. And then you got to pay your kids to go even if they volunteer. I think when I first started school, everybody used to bring lunch; they didn't have a cafeteria. Then, elementary, they built the cafeteria, but many of us couldn't afford the [lunch] especially with four or five [siblings attending] school. So we used to bring our own lunch, *musubi*<sup>11</sup> and stuff. And couple of times a month, to be on kitchen duty, they'd give us a free meal. That was about the only time we ate school lunch.

I always liked arithmetic, you know, math. I wasn't really good at it, but. . . . I liked history, geography. Even today, I like to watch all those travel and history shows.

***Did you go to Japanese[-language] school?***

Yeah. Japanese school was right across the street. Up until December of '41 obviously. I was eleven at the time when the war broke out and that was the end of my Japanese

---

<sup>11</sup>Japanese word for rice balls.

schooling.<sup>12</sup> But in the last couple of years, I didn't do much in Japanese school. We used to play hooky a lot, you know, go swimming down in the swimming hole and stuff.

I [liked] regular school better than Japanese school. Japanese school, somewhere along the way, I kind of lost interest. That's why, guys my age, most of them, guys who went to Japanese school religiously, they can read and write and speak better [Japanese] than me. The only reason why we can at least kind of manage to speak in Japanese [is] that our folks were Japanese and they couldn't speak, read, or write English . So we had to speak in Japanese. Sometimes, later on in life, you think, maybe I should have paid little more attention. But it's too late, eh.

Wartime was a little different in a sense that, this martial law for one thing. Well, we didn't know any better. Whatever they told us, the military or the police, or the so-called local guard guys who were appointed by the police under martial law basis, we would just obey. Among other things, had blackout, which, under today's conditions, I don't think that I'd be able to do it, you know, turn off all the lights every night and keep the house dark. No way.

But we made sure we had our windows all covered with pieces of denim, denim shades, I guess you could call them. In fact, [we had] kerosene stove, and gas lamps, so it didn't put out too much light anyway. We didn't worry too much about gas rations because we didn't have cars. But for the few families who had cars, it was

---

<sup>12</sup>With the outbreak of World War II in Hawai'i, all Japanese-language schools were ordered closed.

a hardship for them, [they were allowed to purchase] ten gallons a month, you know. They were in a situation where, being that they had a car, if any of the neighbors needed to go someplace in an emergency situation or someplace where they had to go, they would look after the neighbors, too.

What we understood, anyway, was that wartime, the military, they were the boss. Under martial law, you couldn't say "boo" without having permission practically. They controlled everything from food to gas and whatever else. The laws and everything were under the military. I don't know if they'd ever be able to do something like that in an emergency situation today. Probably not.

*And then fall of '42, you went to Laupāhoehoe. So what kind of a change was that, Laupāhoehoe?*

It was a bigger school, for one thing, older kids. Like anyplace else, you go up the ladder. At John M. Ross School, seventh grade was the highest. So you figure, oh, we the big shots. You work your way up and then you got to go right down to the bottom again. But that didn't bother too much because we met a lot of new people all the way from `O`ōkala, Laupāhoehoe, and Pāpa`aloha. There were four schools that fed into Laupāhoehoe School: John M. Ross, Kapehu, Laupāhoehoe, and `O`ōkala. Whole bunch of new people, and kind of get brand-new feeling, kind of in awe. John M. Ross and Kapehu were about the smallest schools. But then, you get into it. Kids, generally speaking, tend to assimilate very easily.

We used to walk down to the highway [from our house], catch the bus and the bus took us down to the school. [It was] about ten miles or about half an hour. They



had to make their stops and the old road was like a little lane. Used to do that every day. Get on the bus. To walk that mile and a quarter to where we caught the bus took us at least half an hour. You can imagine, we used to catch the early bus. The early bus comes, I would say, 6:30. Seven o'clock we were in Laupāhoehoe. To catch the 6:30, we had to leave home before 6:00 and walk down. Six o'clock it was dark yet. Rainy days, you carry a raincoat. [The bus would take us] all the way down to the old school. And they'd drop us off. Most buses had to make a second trip back to the closer areas. They'd take two loads. They used to call it the "early bus" and "late bus."

*Well, let's get into that day: April 1, 1946. I assume it was a just a normal day—started out to be.*

Well, was normal except that I believe we were coming off spring break. One week, yeah? And on a Monday morning, was April 1, we got on the bus, same as usual. As we hit the cliff above Laupāhoehoe where we could see the [Laupāhoehoe] Point, the guys in the front of the bus said, "Eh, no water in the ocean, no water in the ocean!" They all excited.

I said, "What, no water in the ocean? April Fool's!" We always sitting in the back. "April Fool, April Fool!"

"No," they said, "not April Fool." They kept insisting, so we looked out, and sure enough, we saw the water pulling out. So we looked, and okay, it's funny, but nobody knew what it was. It was unusual, something different. But then we went down to the school, instead of going right into the school [grounds] like we normally do, I think we walked down on the road up to about where the monument is [today],

instead of going into the school grounds. And then we were watching the waves start coming in, the early ones. And we knew that there was a shower house<sup>13</sup> or something down at the point, further out. That's been washed out by an earlier wave. I didn't think too much of it.

Then this wave came in, right up to the road. The road is still there, right in front of the monument. That was, under normal standards, quite high; it never came up to there [before]. But anyway, it came up and stopped. And it started going back out again. So I said, "Oh, I guess that's it." So a bunch of us went to the school; we normally hang out in the morning, just sit down, wait around until school starts. Hardly anybody were in the school grounds, but my feeling was that once you get in school, you shouldn't go roaming around outside school grounds.

The first wave that we saw--the earlier wave that came in onto the road--was at about 7:00. There were a lot of students out in the [ball]park area and out by the edge of the ocean. I think some of them said they went walking down to the shoreline. Myself, I told some people, "Let's go down, take a look." We went down to the middle of the school playground. We were watching, the water pulled out quite a bit, and that preceded the next wave. Again, I wasn't able to see them, but some of the guys close to the edge of the bank were saying they could see fish flopping around in the rocks, where normally there's water. Us, we couldn't see that, but we could see that the ocean was kind of bare. Where there's supposed to be water, you could see only rocks. Then the waves started coming back in after it receded out so much. To me,

---

<sup>13</sup>Other interviewees referred to it as a canoe house.

wasn't anything to panic about because it wasn't a rolling kind of huge wave that you see or imagine later on.

The guys who were close to the edge of the water were standing there watching. And I guess they realized before us that the wave wasn't normal, it was too big. So they started running. Because by then, you could see the waves had hit the bank, and when they hit the bank, it just didn't stop. It wasn't a great big wave, like I said, but just like a force pushing the water behind. It wasn't a rolling kind of [wave] that you could think of. I said, couple times, it's like filling a cup like this, just pour the water in, when you fill it up to the top, it flows over.

*Ah, I see. It wasn't like the kind of wave that you think of, a surfing wave?*

Yeah, yeah. What I saw anyway. What I know is that I saw it coming way over the bank, and the bank is a good twenty feet high [i.e., above sea level]. If you ever get down there, look down by the monument. It was over that. So we knew we were in trouble, we better run. Fortunately, we were close enough to high ground that we just turned around and ran. In running, I heard a cracking sound in the back of us, that was the baseball—we used to call it the grandstand, the bleachers. And the big thing was cracking and the thing just collapsed. I remember one face running in front of that, he was one of the basketball players. They used to tease him all the time, big guy, slow, see? But later on they were teasing him. “We never see you run so fast.” But he was running, he was making it. That's one face I remember that morning.

The other side of the park, on the lower end, there was a row of teachers' cottages, there were four of them. There was a grove of coconut trees. One of the

cottages was smashed into the trees. The trees obviously had to give way. I saw coconut trees falling down. Later on, in the far end of the park, [where] there was a little rise where there used to be the school's agriculture class hog farm, I saw two [teachers' cottages coming from the ocean side through the coconut trees]. Those are the two things I remember [i.e., seeing the grandstand being destroyed and the teachers' cottage crashing through the coconut trees].

I saw only one [cottage being] picked up. On the side of my eyes, running, two [cottages] we never found, so I would assume that when the wave picked it up, it just swept it out and went through the rocks and everything out to sea. And the teachers who were lost were all in the last two cottages. There were a row of four. The first two cottages were the ones that went through the coconut trees through the park, and stuck on the edge of the park.

*Oh, I see. And the other two were swept out.*

Yeah, they never found them. One of them had four teachers from the Mainland including Marsue McGinnis [McShane] and the other one had two bachelors, Frank Kanzaki and Fred Kruse, and that Nakano Family. [Kanzaki and Kruse] were in, I think, a duplex, and Nakanos, if I'm not mistaken, were in the other part of the duplex.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup>Peter Nakano's wife, Florence Nakano, and three of his children, Stella, Janice and Norman Nakano, along with teacher Fred Kruse, were killed. Teachers Peter Nakano, Frank Kanzaki, and Marsue McGinnis McShane survived.

*So the grandstand got damaged but not the school itself?*

Yeah. It picked up the grandstand, [which was located] on the *mauka*<sup>15</sup> end of the park. Inside, way at the *mauka* end of the park on the *mauka*-Hilo corner, I guess you call it, the southwest corner of that park. If you can imagine or if you been down there, you see, even today, there's a rock wall over there. The grandstand was right inside the rock wall. The school was at the edge of the rock wall where the wall ends. From here up, it was sloping ground. And there was one wing sticking out, and a little further in, there was another rock wall. So the water went all the way through the rock wall and just barely touched the part that's sticking out, but didn't do too much harm. [The water] went up and went through the toilets outside, the boys' and the girls' toilets. And also there was a shop building, industrial arts. It went through there, went through the lavatory and the toilet walls and everything. Didn't really collapse the toilet because they were kind of bolted down. But tore the walls apart. Picked up the shop building and moved it. The shop building was a classroom; we called it shop class. Teachers' cottages were on a stilts kind of building, wooden frame housing. They were high off the ground.

And there was another private house. Family named Akiona, I think, used to live there. That house went little farther [out].

*I think one member from that family died?*

Yeah, Daniel Akiona.

---

<sup>15</sup>Hawaiian word meaning, "toward the mountains."

*What about the DeCaires family?*

DeCaires family used to live up in Laupāhoehoe, up *mauka*. But they were among the students who came to school early.<sup>16</sup>

By the time [the second bus] came down, the wave had passed already.

Usually, they come after 7:30. Second wave came about 7:30.

*So then the damage that you were talking about, was that just from one wave?*

One wave. They had a couple waves earlier which didn't do much damage except for the one shower house. The third wave was the big wave, you know, as far as we know it. There may have been more than what we know.

*The way you described it, when you think of a tsunami or tidal wave, everybody thinks of a big wave coming and crashing over everything. But when you say it was like pouring over a cup and the cup overflows . . .*

I didn't see what went on out where the wave is. I didn't see that part. But I know from what I talked to others, wasn't a big rolling wave. Otherwise, they would have run sooner, they could have had more time to get away, the ones who were close to the ocean. Because they were the ones that saw it first. I guess must have been pretty close by the time they saw it because most of the guys who got caught were close to the bank right there. The ocean is here; they were right along the edge of the bank. I think Masuo [Kino] can give you a better description of that than I can.

---

<sup>16</sup>John, Janet, and Madeline DeCaires, three children of Antone and Cecilia DeCaires, were killed in the tsunami.

From then on, I ran up in the school, through the bottom of the building where we had our cafeteria. It was a little high ground. Ran through there. I didn't stop until I got up to the highway above where the present [Buddhist] church is.<sup>17</sup> [From there], up on the hill, you could look down. And by then, quite a few people had gone there. Nobody waited down below. They just took off. Then we didn't know how much damage had been done, we didn't know who was where. We knew, obviously, some people were caught in the water.

So we started looking around for our family, first of all, because I had two brothers there. My older brother and I, we found each other right away. But the third one [Toshiaki], we couldn't locate him, so we start asking our friends, "You seen our kid brother?" No. Nobody seen him. So, I guess we just came to the conclusion that he was caught in the water.

I was told later on, that he was right by the bank with Masuo [Kino]. Masuo was saying that he was talking to him that morning. He saw him [Toshiaki] over there. Maybe five years ago, one day we were talking about that and he said, "Yeah, your brother was with us." So anyway, that's what happened, as far as I can see.

Obviously, we were concerned. But, you know, the old days, you talk tough, *shikata ga nai*,<sup>18</sup> I cannot help. What's done is done, you cannot do anything about it. That's the feeling. Of course, we had to go home and tell our parents.

---

<sup>17</sup>The Laupāhoehoe Jodo Mission

<sup>18</sup>Japanese phrase meaning, "It can't be helped."

*How was that?*

I don't remember. I don't remember anything after this. I don't know how we got home. I would imagine the bus took us home. We were [home] for a while, and then we went back down to the school. I wanted to see if my brother was there. We went looking around to see if there were any guys, anybody, stuck, or who got caught in the bushes or whatever. I don't know how many of them were caught in the bushes. There were several of them. Other than Masuo, I don't think I remember any of the names. But all I know is that they came out all soaking wet, and you can imagine [being swept] through the whole park, you know, in the water, and through the bushes and everything else.

If I remember correctly, they took Mr. Nakano up to the hospital in Pāpa'aloa. I recall seeing him later, in the hospital room. He had to go down; see if his family was like us. And unfortunately, there were a whole bunch of others involved, so that's one of those things. Hopefully, none of your family or good friends are in there. But if they are, then it cannot be helped.

And the rest of the week, the neighbors, close friends, or relatives, [would] go down to the park area and up on the cliff, looking down, to see if there were any bodies floating up. I think the fifth or sixth day, there was one body that came floating up, found about half a mile down the coastline. All they could see from the top was a white little speck on the rocks; that looked like a body. Even with telescope they couldn't make out, but look like. They went down, rope, rappel down. The fishermen, they all were carrying ropes. They found out was a boy from `O`ōkala. Before that,



the day of the wave, one of the DeCaires girls, the youngest one [Janet DeCaires], I think she got stuck in the bushes, but she was dead, and they found her. And this other boy, Ishizu's boy [Mamoru Ishizu] that's the other one that was recovered, his body was recovered. Out of the twenty-four [killed], only three of them was recovered.

*So they never found your brother's body?*

No. We had a memorial service in our house. Of course, we had a little picture made a couple of weeks later.

*You remember your parents saying anything to you about the whole thing?*

I really don't remember. I don't remember even talking to them as far as it goes about it. Obviously, we talked about it a lot. I can't recall specifically.

[My brother was] a rascal. That's to put it mildly [laughs]. Rascal and plenty guts. Of the three of us, he would've been the one to go [out and look at the wave]. He used to like to do all kind stuff like climbing trees. He not only liked to, but he was good at climbing trees. His friends all used to call him "Monkey." We used to climb ourselves, everybody could pick coconuts, but we could barely hang on and push ourselves up. I wonder why, he'd just go walking up. Whenever there was a tree to climb where there was fruits and stuff, they'd send him up. I always wonder what he would have been like, you know, if he had grown up. This is only a conjecture of course, there's no way you can say—but being that the Korean War came after that, he would have been prime to be in the war.

*What do you remember about afterwards?*

I think we stayed out almost the whole month of April. I was a junior then. I had a older brother [Takeyoshi] who was a senior. We went back to school. Somehow we managed to finish up the year. I don't know who it was, [but somebody] was talking about their graduation. They said that their graduation was a little assembly thing [during] schooltime, they called a school assembly, and they had a little program and passed out the diplomas. That class was the one class that never had a graduation ceremony.

I remember the Red Cross coming talking to us, you know. See if anything can be done. What can they do, eh? Funeral was taken care of, stuff like that. That's the only thing in school I can remember. I don't even remember who took over the principal, whether Clarence Ferdun was there, whether he finished up the school year or not. He probably did, I'm not sure.<sup>19</sup>

*Okay, so then you graduated from high school, '47. And then what happened after that?*

[Nineteen] forty-seven, I was trying to figure out a way for me to go to school. Hilo College [now University of Hawai'i at Hilo] opened up that year. That was the first year they opened. At Old Lyman Hall, they used to call it, up in town where the Boys [and Girls] Club is now. I went to take a full load, used to commute every day from Nīnole, got on the bus.

---

<sup>19</sup>Laupāhoehoe School principal Clarence R. Ferdun left in September, 1946 for a position as DOE field assistant for East Hawai'i island.

I was an ag[riculture] major. It was one of the things that I used to do in high school, and I just continued that. I'd met my wife [Matsue Uratani Fujimoto] the second year. Oh, I stayed out one semester, then the second semester, I went back. But by then, I decided I should go to work. The days when I wasn't going to school, I was working for the [Hakalau Plantation Company], summer job cutting cane. Did that full time after the second year [of school in 1949]. And two years later [in 1951], a [crop log] laboratory job opened up. [C.] Brewer [and Company, Ltd.] decided to open a laboratory within the plantation, Hakalau Plantation [Company], where I used to work. I applied, I got the job. And when I went, the supervisor was the only one there at that time. He set up the lab and opened for business. And I was the second guy. Three years later, they found out they just couldn't handle in that particular place so they moved to Pāpa`ikou. I stayed there--Brewer Environmental Industries--for thirty-seven more years. From '54 to '92.

Of course, in between, had military service. Right after I got married in 1955, I was draft bait by then, I had gone through my physical and stuff. Two months later, I was taking basic training. After basic training, I went to Korea. That was after the Korean War. The Korean War ended in '53. In spring of '56, I went there; I stayed there a year and a half. I came home, I had military obligations, reserve obligations, so I joined the [Hawai`i National] Guard over here. Stayed in the guard ten years. Ten years later, Vietnam. When the reserves were called up, I got called up again. I spent another year in Schofield [Barracks]. By then, in 1969, my enlistment expired, and I came home.

*I was wondering, you were right at that age when the Korean War was starting.*

*How did you manage to stay out?*

By then, my father had retired. He was in his late sixties already. I was the oldest son [at home] with three younger ones below me still in school. So I got what they called a hardship deferment. When my [younger] sister graduated, my sister kind of took over. But the following year, when my brother graduated, I reported that to the draft board. My youngest brother. And that's in '53; I was twenty-three then. They reclassified me. Then in '54, I went for my physical, then one year later, they called me in.

*Well, you've been volunteering a lot of your time for this Pacific Tsunami Museum.*

*I just wanted to ask you why you do it.*

I don't know really how it came about. I think I was talking one time with a friend of mine, Bob Chow.<sup>20</sup> The next thing I know, somebody says, "Oh, they want to talk to people who had gone through the tsunami or had some experience with that." They couldn't think of anybody from Laupāhoehoe. So my name came up. They've called me off and on over the years, so I guess my name is on that list. I guess they have a pool of names. But some people don't want to talk. My older brother, he won't talk unless you ask him directly. But his family, his children didn't know [about the Laupāhoehoe incident] until they were quite grown up already. His children went to

---

<sup>20</sup>Robert "Steamy" Chow, retired Hilo policeman, was a central figure in the starting of the Pacific Tsunami Museum. Chow was on police duty assigned to downtown Hilo on April 1, 1946.

Laupāhoehoe School also, later on. When the subject comes up and you talk directly, then he'll say something, but other than that, he won't talk.

*You think it's important to talk about it?*

I would think so. It's for education purposes. Like now even, there's a generation of people, when they talk about a tsunami alert, they think it's a picnic or something.

They go down to watch and stuff. I heard couple of times, the last big alert they had, they had a couple of hundred people in the water on the shore waiting for the wave to come. With the surfboard, out waiting for the wave to come.

Hopefully, there's no next [tsunami]. But obviously, you're sticking your head in the sand if you say there's no next one. It's not *if*, it's *when*.

*Bunji Fujimoto died before the "next one" arrived, but his lessons survive.*

## CHAPTER 10

**"I WAS SIXTEEN BUT I GUESS I KNEW WHAT MORTALITY MEANT."**

### MASUO KINO

*Masuo Kino<sup>1</sup> was born April 2, 1929 in Kahuku Mauka, an isolated plantation camp near Ninole, Hawai`i. His father, Kenkin Kino, was a laborer and independent sugarcane grower for Hakalau Plantation Company. His mother, Makato Inamine Kino, was a housewife who raised five children, of which Masuo was the youngest. Kenkin and Makato Kino were immigrants from Okinawa.*

*Living in a very rural area along the Hāmākua Coast, the family survived without electricity and plumbing and relied on poultry and livestock for food and other necessities. Kino helped his parents by working in their sugarcane fields.*

*After attending John M. Ross School until grade eight, Kino started at Laupāhoehoe School, graduating in 1947. He then moved to Honolulu to attend the University of Hawai`i, earning a bachelor's degree in sociology in 1951, and a one-year certificate in social work in 1952. Eventually, he earned a master's degree in social work from the University of Chicago in 1956.*

*Returning to Hawai`i, Kino worked for the Maui branch of the territorial DPW [Department of Public Welfare] as a child welfare worker. In 1958, he did some child protective service work for neglected, abused and abandoned children in Honolulu. In*

---

<sup>1</sup>Masuo Kino, interview by author, in Center for Oral History, *Tsunamis Remembered: Oral Histories of Survivors and Observers in Hawai`i*, 711-27.

*1959, he began his career in the field of vocational education for mentally retarded citizens. By the time he retired in 1987, he was a rehabilitation facilities specialist for the state Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.*

*At the time of our interview, Kino lived in Kāne`ohe, O`ahu with his wife, Alice Kaneshiro Kino, whom he married in 1955. The couple raised two daughters and have three grandchildren.*

*Kino shared his dramatic 1946 tsunami experience in an oral history interview conducted in his home. He remembered getting off the bus at Laupāhoehoe School on the morning of April 1 and immediately running to the seashore to witness the receding water. A subsequent wave swept him inland toward the school grounds. Constantly being hit by rocks and debris, he tumbled beneath the water and came close to dying as the wave carried him toward a lava-rock wall located on the school grounds. Miraculously, the onrushing water broke up the wall just before Kino reached it, and he continued to be swept further inland. As the water receded, he eventually managed to grab a branch, preventing him from being carried out into the open ocean. As soon as Kino was able to touch land, he scrambled to safety.*

*Kino's narrative is a reflective account of an individual's ability to overcome major obstacles in life. Like Herbert Nishimoto and Bunji Fujimoto, Kino grew up in a poor immigrant household and camp, had to perform farm chores and labor at a young age, experienced and survived a traumatic near-death experience which had an important effect on his later life, and managed to become a successful, contributing member of society.*

*Kino was the only interviewee of the five in this study to contact and inform me about his tsunami experience, and was willing and available to be interviewed about it. When I told him that I was not only interested in his tsunami story, but his plantation experiences as well, he seemed even more willing to participate. Having read about the Center for Oral History's intention to undertake the oral history project, Kino wanted to make sure that his experiences were not forgotten by both himself, his children, and grandchildren.*



I was born April 2, 1929 on the Hāmākua Coast, a place called Kahuku Mauka, which is really a string of half a dozen homes over a stretch of about a mile and a half. Our post office address was Ninole, so that's why I always say I'm from Nīnole, Hawai`i. I'm the youngest of five, two brothers and two sisters. And by the time I was in the intermediate school grades, all of them were gone [out of the house]. So I'd say from about eighth grade on I was the only child at home with my mother, who was widowed by then.

My father [Kenkin Kino] was a very quiet man. He was a meticulously honest man. He worked hard, he died early. He came from Okinawa along with two brothers. He was somewhat educated; he could read and write well. I guess what I got from him was some sense of ethics, of right and wrong. But I think my mother had a stronger influence in my life. (Laughs) My mother [Makato Inamine Kino] was also from Okinawa. I'm quite sure she was a picture bride. They probably knew each other's family back in Okinawa. She was unschooled, but was very intelligent and resourceful. She was tough; she had strong ideas about things and I think she prevailed most times over my father. (Laughs) I think she was a great influence on me, and I'm sure, my brothers and sisters. She was more involved in child care than my father. She was resilient, handled stress pretty well, gave us some sense of what is right and what is wrong.

Although my father did that, too. That is, told us to work hard, be honest, give a full day's work, study hard. I'm sure that's not any different from many other Japanese and other immigrant families, too, for that matter. My father was a fairly

distant figure. My mother was the one who cared for us regularly, and if we got out of line she disciplined us and so on. But, I don't know, in the country we didn't need much discipline. After [age] five, six, you were on your own, you went to the rivers and caught `ōpae<sup>2</sup> and `o`opu.<sup>3</sup> Went into the gulches to pick mountain apples, wild passion fruit, and guavas. So, discipline was very minimal. We just went on our way.

[My father] was a sugar plantation field worker. Really laborer type, not working in the mill or in some semiclerical position, but cutting cane, fertilizing cane, poisoning weeds, plowing, and so on. He also leased maybe twenty acres from the plantation. The arrangement appeared to be sharecropping. So the family got involved in the care of the field, and when the field was cared for pretty properly, then he went to work for the plantation.<sup>4</sup> But I think he always was poor. He said he always harvested when the price of sugar was low.

This was Hakalau Plantation Company, on the Hāmākua Coast. I can remember as a twelve, thirteen year old, maybe even earlier, helping my father and mother tending the cane. Like *hō hana*,<sup>5</sup> *holehole*,<sup>6</sup> some fertilizing. You carry a big burlap

---

<sup>2</sup>Hawaiian word for a small, freshwater shrimp.

<sup>3</sup>Hawaiian word for the general name for fishes included in the families *Eleotridae*, *Gobiidae*, and *Blennidae*. Some in salt water near the shore, others in fresh water.

<sup>4</sup>Kenkin Kino was both an independent sugarcane cultivator, raising and harvesting cane and selling it to Hakalau Plantation Company, as well as a wage laborer for the same company.

<sup>5</sup>Hawaiian Creole English word meaning, "to weed using a hoe."

<sup>6</sup>Hawaiian word meaning, "to strip sugarcane leaves from the stalk."

bag, fill it with fertilizer and you walk the rows and you spread it out. So it was a typical thing that people of my age in that area did, which is work in the sugarcane fields.

***What chores did you have?***

We had a vegetable garden. We watered it and dug it and so on. We had some chickens. Of course, making the *furo*.<sup>7</sup> That was one of my jobs that I inherited from my older brothers and sisters. We always got old scrap lumber from the plantation when they were fixing the sugarcane flumes nearby. We'd pick up the discarded pieces and bring them home. Then you start with newspaper or bagasse and you would kindle the fire [underneath the *furo*]. And if you had some sweet potatoes you would throw them in the hot coals, too. (Laughs) Generally, that would be after the fire had died down.

***Being the youngest, were you the last one in the furo every night?***

Generally, because my father wanted the *furo* real hot. Whereas if I would go in I'd dilute it and make it kind of cool and he didn't like that. And I don't think my mother was so deferential to my father in the sense that he had to eat first or he had to go into the *furo* first. But just by practice he took a bath first. He came home dirty and tired from the fields, and he deserved to be the first and really soak up. I can't recall in what order my brothers and sisters went into the *furo*, although I'm sure we fell into some sort of pattern. But I do remember that I was supposed to go in when I could make it cool.

---

<sup>7</sup>A Japanese bath.

My house was an old house. One living room, one bedroom, a kitchen, a dining area. We had a separate *furo* and laundry structure and an outhouse. We also had a horse barn used for storage. We had a pretty high underhouse where we could hang our work tools and our raincoats, or *kappa*. And my brothers did some carpentry there. Not much different from the other houses, although the other houses could have been more substantial houses. A porch, a small yard, chickens, and so on. By today's standards, quite primitive..

We had no electricity, and our drinking water came from our roof [i.e., catchment], and water for other purposes we siphoned off from a little stream nearby and from the cane flume. So when I look back, it was physically quite poverty-stricken. But everybody was about the same, so we were pretty happy about life in general. I think as you get older you realize, Oh, they have this and we don't have that. But at that time I didn't feel very much different from other children in that area. Our nearest neighbor was about maybe 100 yards away, a Japanese family. The next one was another Japanese family, about quarter mile away.

### ***Okinawan or Naichi?***

*Naichi*.<sup>8</sup> We were the only Okinawan family in that [Kahuku] Mauka area. And then another half a mile up the road there was another *Naichi* family. Another half a mile, couple of more *Naichi* families. So we were kind of strung along this road, very isolated. Whereas at Kahuku Camp, a camp of a dozen houses, the children had lots of

---

<sup>8</sup>A Japanese person from one of the four major islands of Japan, excluding Okinawa.

playmates and they had electricity. They had indoor plumbing and they had a community *furo*. So, in a sense, Kahuku [Camp] people had more modern facilities, were more organized. We were pretty much on our own. So we were the hicks. (Laughs) There were Okinawan families in Kahuku Camp. And my mother was closer to the Okinawan families at the [Kahuku] Camp than the *Naichis*. But there was no organized thing for the Okinawans. I can't recall whether there was anything organized for the Japanese. Insofar as the plantation, they gave us a bag of candies, nuts and fruits at Christmas through the schools, and at the end of the harvesting season took us to Kawaihae for an overnight camp. Hakalau Plantation [Company] was not as progressive in terms of caring for the social and recreational needs of the people as I listen to my friend from Waipahu. At Waipahu<sup>9</sup> they had playgrounds, a gym and organized sports. Well, maybe in Hakalau itself there were parks, a gym and so on, but we were on the fringes of Hakalau plantation so we had no organized programs.

*How did your family get things like supplies?*

Very interesting. There was a plantation store in Honohina, and once a week, this salesman came with a truck, and he took our orders: cans of corn beef, or rice or chorizo or whatever. And then the following week, he would deliver them and you would order again. For medicine, another very interesting arrangement. A salesman would come around once in three, four months, leave a paper sack with all the different types and amounts of medicine. Then three or four months later he would

---

<sup>9</sup>O`ahu Sugar Company

come back and see what had been used. He charged you for what you had used. He would then refill the packet.

And the fish man, *sakana* man, came from Hilo or someplace on a schedule. Kahuku [Camp] was a stop so if you wanted fish you'd go down to Kahuku Camp and wait for that man. And there was a baker from Honomū, Ishigo Bakery, who came on certain evenings. He sold bread and ice cream. So if you wanted bread or ice cream, you would make that half mile trek from my home down to Kahuku [Camp], purchase it, and take it home. There was a dirt road on one side of the gulch and there was an unpaved road on the other side. But it was dark like heck at night and there were certain places where we were told were haunted. But we got used to it. In retrospect, a nice quiet, safe walk.

The plantation also gave us bagasse in bales. But we had to carry it out from Kahuku [Camp] to our homes. You get a long pole, tie the bagasse to the pole, and two people shoulder the ends of the pole. The bagasse was used to start the *furo* fire. In the earlier years, we cooked rice in a *kama*<sup>10</sup> over a fire. There was a large wooden box filled with dirt that served as a fire pit. [Later], most of the cooking was done on the kerosene stove. The plantation provided the kerosene prior to '46. It was part of the perquisites that came with employment at the plantation.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup>Japanese word for an iron pot.

<sup>11</sup>The plantation perquisite system ended in 1946 when the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union organized sugar workers throughout the territory of Hawai'i.

We raised vegetables: *daikon*,<sup>12</sup> *gobō*,<sup>13</sup> cabbage and so on.

And neighbors were pretty generous. When they had a big crop of something, they'd share. Heavy on the vegetables, very light on the meat. Sometimes fish, lots of rice. Again, not very much different I think from the diets of the people at that time. Sardines, chorizo and corn beef were pretty basic staples. You could go into the gulches if you were energetic and harvest fern shoots. We had a big bamboo grove next to our washhouse and *furo*, and we harvested bamboo shoots. And a lot of fruits around the place: avocado, mangos, oranges, bananas. By today's standards, very simple kind of food.

Mostly they [parents] spoke Japanese to me, plantation Japanese. Japanese was not their native tongue that they grew up in, but they had picked up enough. My mother, once in a while, would speak Okinawan to me, mostly when she was angry or exasperated with me or something. So the language at home was Japanese basically. The plantation kind that was liberally sprinkled with Hawaiian words and English words and so on.

I was a shadow to my brother who was five years older than me. And he loved to fish and shoot birds with his BB gun. So I just followed him and we would go down the rivers. There was a big river nearby with lots of *`ōpae* and river *`opihi* [*hīhīwai*].<sup>14</sup> Another river had *`o`opu*. Go swimming, make rafts out of banana trees

---

<sup>12</sup>Japanese word for a radish.

<sup>13</sup>Japanese word for a burdock root.

<sup>14</sup>Hawaiian word for an endemic grainy snail found in fresh and brackish water, eaten cooked or raw.

or *hau*<sup>15</sup> trees. I remember following another older person who was very good in agricultural things. He would surgically remove the testicles of chicks to make them fat. And I'd go follow him to a lot of places because he was in great demand.

But there was much work to do in my father's leased cane field. And [there was] school. Until the seventh grade there was Japanese[-language] school too. That pretty much filled up the day.

And I must say, in Kahuku Mauka, we didn't have time to run around at night. We all studied, and by kerosene lamp, too. And we produced pretty outstanding scholars, at least in the local schools. About four or five student body presidents of Laupāhoehoe High School came out of Kahuku Mauka. Perhaps parents had more control over us, more influence over us, and as I said, we studied hard. And it was expected that you study and do well in English [territorial public] school as well as in Japanese[-language] schools.

John M. Ross Elementary School was between Kahuku and Honohina. It was about two miles from my house. In those days, my god, some of the children walked three, four, five miles to school. For the children in the *mauka* area, it must have been about five, six miles round trip. And nobody felt it was inappropriate. That was everybody's expectation. Then the Japanese[-language] school was not too far from John M. Ross School. I went there till December 6, [1941] and on the 7th we had the bombing [of Pearl Harbor, signaling America's involvement in World War II], and that was the end of our Japanese education.

---

<sup>15</sup>Hawaiian word for a type of lowland tree.



*So your classmates at John M. Ross were mostly from Hakalau . . .*

No, from Honohina, Kahuku, Nīnole, a little bit beyond. First to seventh grade, I don't know what the enrollment was, probably 300. A very nice, small school. Ethnically, it reflected the community. Very heavy Japanese, some Filipinos, a few Portuguese, maybe one or two Chinese, and one or two Koreans. But predominantly Japanese, and the Filipinos were beginning to have families, so there was a number of them. I suppose that was pretty much the mix along the Hāmākua Coast in the sugar plantations. Oh yes, maybe a few Puerto Ricans. And no *haoles*. Well, the *haoles* were the plantation managers and supervisors, and I don't think their kids ever went to the public schools. Maybe they went to boarding schools in Honolulu [or Hilo] or elsewhere. But we were all products of public schools along the coast.

*Were there other Okinawans at John M. Ross?*

Yes, especially from Kahuku Camp, and a place called Camp Four, or "Yo-ban." There were a number of Okinawan families like Tamashiro, Maedo, Yamashiro, Hamadon, and so on. I wasn't very conscious at that time that I was an Okinawan and somewhat different. I'm sure my father and my mother felt some of the differences. My older brothers and sisters may have felt it. But I just felt I was Japanese or I was local, and I was a fairly good student so I didn't feel much of any difference or discrimination.

During the early World War II years, there was some discrimination as Japanese. We had this agriculture teacher in the sixth grade. He was appointed as some kind of warden so that he could wear a red band on his arm. And he always

used to threaten us and say, "If you don't listen to me I'll send you to the concentration camp." And we were not sure whether he really had the power to do that.

But I think because we were a small, close-knit community, I don't think the war changed the relationships that much. There was still Peter Agliam, Filipino boy, a good friend of mine, and Bunji [Fujimoto] of course, was Japanese. But I didn't feel very much a separateness from the *Naichis* or from the other races. In that sense we were spared much of the discrimination. Maybe in Honolulu there was more. But I never felt very strongly that I was an Okinawan or that I was not supposed to be as good as any other person. I did know that [Kahuku] Mauka was pretty strict *Naichi* people. I mean, they came from the old country and they had strong ideas about being Japanese. Their children married only into the *Naichi* families. That I was conscious of in my early teens. But I strongly believe that they treated me as the Kino boy, and not as the Okinawan boy.

But when you look back, you are glad, in a way, that you went through those experiences. My kids grew up with ample food, ample clothes, a nice house. But I think it enriches you that you've gone through such a childhood. You reflect, not with bitterness, but with appreciation for those experiences. I'm glad I was born there, went through so-called deprivations but still went on with school. As the cigarette commercial says, "You've come a long way baby." (Laughs)

Even today, after I jog, come back home and just open the water and the hot water comes streaming through and I think, Gee, back then you don't do that. You got

to fill up the *furo* with water and then fire it up. Now, what a convenience. You just open the faucet and nice hot water comes out. It may seem kind of trivial, but I appreciate that.

*Okay, so then you went to John M. Ross School from grades one to seven and then you went to Laupāhoehoe, which covered a broader area.*

Laupāhoehoe[hoe] High School, which drew students on the Hilo side from Honohina all the way to Laupāhoehoe, and from Laupāhoehoe on the Honoka`a side up to `O`ōkala. And the next high school beyond the Hilo side was Hilo High School and beyond `O`ōkala [residents went to] Honoka`a High School. So we were one of two high schools on the Hāmākua Coast.

It was a big school as far as I was concerned. At John M. Ross—I don't know if we had any A and B classes. In Laupāhoehoe[hoe] you were grouped, for example, 7A, 7B, 7C. The A class always got the brighter guys and the C got the slower guys. Again, the mix was the same, predominantly Japanese, some Filipinos, part Hawaiians, so you felt comfortable. The teachers were pretty much in tune with us except for the brand-new ones that came from Honolulu to do their couple-of-years stint. They brought their city ways, which we didn't quite appreciate sometimes. But it was a pleasant school. Again I was a fairly good student so I didn't experience any difficulties.

I liked to read. I read a lot and I was praised for that. And made book reports which the teachers used as examples of how you're supposed to make book reports. Ancient history was also very interesting. But the history teacher was also our

counselor and had a "plantation mentality." She was a plantation supervisor's wife. In counseling sessions we talked in terms of high school and [eventually] working for the plantation. She never aspired us to, "Hey, you want to go college and do something different?"

Except when we finally got a Mainland teacher. She didn't know any better, so she inspired us. She would say, "Hey, try it." And I still feel very grateful that she inspired me. And she and the principal got a four-year scholarship to the University of Hawai'i for me so that I was able to go to college. Otherwise I'd probably be on the plantation, maybe driving a truck or working in the fields or something. But as you look back, we were in a kind of a paternalistic society. "We are educating you for the plantations," sort of mentality.

*So the teachers that had that attitude, education for the plantation, were they local teachers?*

Yes, local *haole* teachers. They were the ones with that kind of attitude. The Japanese and Hawaiian teachers from O'ahu and the Hāmākua area, I don't think they shared that attitude. But the school counselor influenced us in terms of occupational selection and selection of courses. She was very strong in terms of you growing up and working for the plantation. And some of us weren't quite sure that was what we wanted to do. Then she retired and this new teacher came and inspired us, and I believe she was responsible for a number of us going to college. Probably our class, more than any other previous class, proportionally, went to college. And I'm pleased with that.

*So this was a teacher from the Mainland who . . .*

Yes. When I was a junior, there was a teacher shortage, so they recruited people from the Midwest and East Coast. They were *haoles* and yet very approachable. They sided with us sometimes when we had problems. I remember one time I was a school newspaper editor, and one of my best friends wrote a piece that made fun of the plantation system. And he got called in to the principal's office because this particular woman whom I said was the wife of a [plantation] supervisor felt that was not the proper kind of article to go in the school paper. This Mainland teacher really fought for us to keep that article in the paper. Whether it was a good article or not, she felt it was important for us to express ourselves. I think they brought a new kind of thinking into our school, or at least in our class. And I'm thankful for that. Prior to that, our image of *haoles* were that they lived in big plantation houses, they rode around on horses and in trucks and wore pith helmets. So it was quite a new and refreshing experience. Our class has fond memories of the *haole* teachers who came from the Mainland. Some of them died in the tidal wave, so maybe [we] remember them even more fondly.

*What was it like during the war, going to school?*

Well, we worked on Fridays and Saturdays in the sugarcane fields as part of the war effort. There was no Japanese[-language] school. And for a while they said, "Don't speak Japanese. It's un-American to speak Japanese." But I didn't feel the curriculum or the teachers were too different except for the one teacher I mentioned who kind of harassed us. We carried gas masks and some of the people built bomb shelters.

And my father in his wisdom said, "Nobody's going to bomb one house in the middle of the cane fields so I'm not going to make any bomb shelters." (Laughs)

Some of the families in Kahuku Camp made bomb shelters in their chicken coops and near their garages. But we in Kahuku Mauka never built any shelters. And that was funny when you look back. It was normal, going to school. There was gas rationing but we didn't own a car so we didn't feel it. We didn't drink so we didn't feel the liquor ration. I'd say it wasn't that different, as I recall.

There was once a rumor that the United States government was going to evacuate all the Japanese to California. But it never came to pass because I guess if you evacuated all the Japanese [in Hawai`i], who would be left to work in the plantations? So that ended that.

*Okay, we'd gotten to 1946. You were going to Laupāhoehoe School. Tell me about that day in 1946.*

Of course it was April 1. It was a Monday. And it was a kind of a rainy, overcast day. As I told you earlier, I was sixteen and I was a junior in high school. As usual we got on the [school bus] and took that forty-five-minute ride or so to the school. And I think there's significance that we were on the first bus because the first bus starts from the farthest reaches of the school's boundary and comes in first. And then there's a second bus that goes not as far and picks up the second batch of people. So we were on the first bus. Honohina people, Kahuku people, Ninole people, Maulua people. We

were at the school maybe like 7:15 or so.<sup>16</sup> As we came down the cliff road to Laupāhoehoe High School, we saw rocks [in the ocean] that normally were only partially exposed, but [were now] fully exposed and reefs that we never see, exposed. And everybody was really excited, “Hey, this looks real fun.” And as we came down that road the county workers working on the roadside stopped us. They warned the bus driver that the sea was very dangerous or something to that effect. But that made us more interested, and as soon as the school bus deposited us at the school entrance, most of the boys took off down to the seashore to see what was going on. And this accounts for the fact that many of the people who died or were caught by the wave were from Honohina and Ninole. We were the first students at the seashore.

*So after the road worker person said this is kind of dangerous the bus kept going anyway?*

Yes, we were maybe three-quarter miles from the school. I guess the county workers were concerned that the sea was very unusual and we should be cautious. I guess some people were, especially the girls. They went to look from a distance. The boys went right up to the ocean to watch this strange phenomenon.

*So what exactly did you see when you first got to the ocean?*

Well, there's a little inlet over there where people launch boats and if it's really calm, you can swim in there. And there's a little knoll above that and we were all standing on it, maybe a dozen and a half of us. And we could see a canoe floating aimlessly.

---

<sup>16</sup>Bunji Fujimoto and his two brothers were on the same first bus as Kino. Fujimoto estimated the bus arrival time to the school to be 7:00. See Fujimoto narrative.

The Akiona family that lived on the point had a canoe house. Apparently an earlier wave had demolished the canoe house. The sea was fairly rough and muddy, but not that unusual for that time of the year. The exposure of the rocks and the reefs were sort of unusual. I remember walking around and looking around and at a certain point, the waters began to recede and it literally went uphill. And it withdrew or receded, I can't say for sure, maybe a quarter mile, half a mile out. The ocean bed became exposed. I was probably the only one who went down into the ocean where the inlet was. I walked around for a minute or two looking for anything of interest. I didn't find any, so I came back up on the knoll and joined the other boys still standing there. Maybe five, ten minutes later, the water began to return as a huge wall of water. It wasn't a beautiful wave like you see in surfing magazines. It was just a wall of gray, black water. And as we just stood there and watched it got bigger and bigger and closer and closer. When it was maybe about 150, 200 yards away, everyone realized that we were in grave danger. We took off. Some people made it to the higher ground at the school.

I tripped in the tall grass and the bushes. I grabbed whatever I could. The wave flipped me over and carried me toward the lava rock wall that rimmed the school. I recall telling myself, "Gee, I'm going to die. I'm going to hit head first into that rock wall and I'm going to die." But miraculously part of the wave that preceded me smashed into the wall and broke it up. So I went flying through the wall, not headfirst into a stationary wall, but I was rumbling along, rolling along with all the rocks.



*Could you touch bottom?*

No, I couldn't. But I figured, I was pretty close to the school ball park. I wasn't high on the wave; I was on the bottom of the wave and I don't know how high the wave was above me. My friend Seiki Oshiro claims it was over fifty feet, but I wouldn't know. All I know is I was under tons of water and I was getting hit by all these rolling rocks and debris, and I couldn't breathe. I was sixteen but I guess I knew what mortality meant (laughs). I said to myself, "This is it, I'm going to die."

Then, miraculously, by the wave action or something, I popped up to the surface of the water, took a breath, and looked around. I was about halfway across the park. I saw my good friend, Yoshinobu Sugino from Honohina. He surfed by on a piece of lumber. I don't know where he got a piece of lumber or how he got on it. Then, next thing I realized was that I was approaching the [school] agricultural farm which was maybe five feet higher than the school park ground. The farm had fencing around it for the pigs and the chickens. I said to myself, "Oh, I'm going to get caught in all those wires and structures and I'm going to die." But again, miraculously the wave was high enough that I floated over the aggie farm instead of through the aggie farm. At that point I saw a brother of my classmate, Leslie Fujiwara. He was on a tree. I don't know how he got to the tree, but he was hugging on to this little mango tree.

And then I reached this stream bed, which is normally dry, or just a trickle. But that day it was a big river of water flowing down to the ocean, and I was swirling around, and desperately trying to grab hold of branches, trees, whatever I could get

hold of. But I was just grabbing on to the tips of the trees. Guava trees there were maybe twenty, thirty feet high. So I'm that high above the ground. I said to myself, "Gee, if I float down to the ocean I'm in big trouble because I would be in the open ocean." And I knew the Hāmākua Coast is not a [sandy] beach. It's just all rocks.

Finally, I got a good grip on a guava branch. I held on hard enough that I stopped my movement of flowing to the ocean. The water slowly receded and I slowly reached the ground. This was probably 100 yards from the seashore.

*Hundred yards inland from the seashore?*

Yes, yes. So I was almost there. And when I reached firm ground, my first thought was to take off to higher ground. So I started to move about, and three boys came out of the bushes. I don't recall in what order now but one was Herbert Tolentino from Ninole, one was Masao Ishikawa from `O`ōkala, and one was James Kawahara from Waikamalo. And so the four of us, all beat up, bruised, and cut, staggered out of the tall grass and guava trees. We eventually reached the school. And I can't recall this part but my good friend and classmate Seiki Oshiro, who had outrun the wave across the park, told me my first remark to him was, "Seiki, I no *make*<sup>17</sup> yet." (Laughs) According to Seiki, I repeated these words several times with great enthusiasm and great elation.

After reaching the safety of the school building, I remember going down to the tennis court area. I saw a few stranded fish, but I had no reason to pick them up.

---

<sup>17</sup>Hawaiian word meaning, "to die."

By the time I came out of the wave, the teachers' cottages along the seashore were gone or jammed in the aggie farm area. The industrial shop, which was a pretty huge two-room building, had been just literally lifted and moved maybe fifty, seventy feet and broken up severely. I don't think I was looking at buildings.

There were many people floating around me as I was flowing toward the ocean, but I can't recall who they were. Perhaps people like Herbert Nishimoto or my good friend Yoshio Awakuni, who floated out to sea and got saved. I know people were around me, but except for the ones I named, I can't recall their names or their faces.

*So from the time you went to the boat-landing area, you walked around and that's when you first got swept. From that point to where you ended up, how far would you say it was?*

Four hundred yards maybe. Laupāhoehoe Point is a peninsula. I was swept from one side, the Hilo side [south], clear across to the Hāmākua side [north], and then flowed down toward the ocean. It's hard to figure out how long I was in the wave. Probably not more than four or five minutes. Some people told me the wave came back on three sides of the peninsula. I don't know, I was under tons of water on the Hilo side. The force of the wave pushed me across the park, and possibly, if there was a wave from the front of the peninsula, that [wave] lifted me up to the surface so that I could take a breath, and figure out where I was and what's the next danger.

Some people also told me, "Oh, you must have been saved because you knew how to swim." I knew how to tread water; I knew when to breathe and when not to

breathe. But the wave just pretty much carried me where it wanted to take me. So swimming skills may have helped but it wasn't that you could consciously swim to a point to save yourself.

Then it occurred to me that I should get some medical attention. I don't know whether there was an order or advisory, but all the students were walking up the road that connects to the around-the-island road<sup>18</sup> Many of us were walking toward the plantation hospital, which was about three miles away in Pāpa`aloo. I don't recall how I finally got there.

I do recall that I wasn't seen. They said, "We're too busy. We have too many people so go home." I didn't get treated; I came home. I didn't have any severe injuries, just a lot of bruises and cuts all over my body: my head, my arms, legs.

I don't know how I got home, whether I hitchhiked or the school bus came by. But I got home, and my mother was home. And she was shocked because I looked like I had taken a swim in my clothes. I literally had done that. Hair all dishevelled, cuts and bruises on my face and arms.

I was thinking about it the other day. Today a mother in a similar circumstance would hug the child and cry. I guess being Japanese, she just said something to the effect that she was happy and relieved that I was safe. As I recall, she didn't express much emotion outwardly. But that was the way we generally handled our emotions.

---

<sup>18</sup>The Hawai`i Belt Road, or Highway 19.

In the days that followed, people were still floating out there. Some got saved. Information started to trickle in—who's missing and whose clothes were found and so on. It was kind of a grim period for a couple of weeks.

So it was a unique experience. (Laughs) In a sense I was born again; everything after '46 is bonus. Sometimes I think that way because there were so many ways I could have died in that wave. If the rocks had hit me a little harder, or I had lost my consciousness. Even if my head had bobbed above the water I wouldn't have breathed and I'd probably just kept on flowing to the ocean and end up in the ocean. So I think a bunch of us share a very unique experience.

*So when did you go back to school?*

I would say about a month later. This was in April. I remember going back to school and trying to pick up the pieces—maybe it was sometime in May. I remember writing a brave editorial in the school paper about why we should carry on and continue our education. And then June came and we finished school.

The following year we went back to the same school. I guess the wheels of the legislature started to turn slowly and eventually a new school was built. But we graduated from the [original] high school at Laupāhoehoe Point [in 1947].

The shop building was hoisted up somehow and put back on its foundation; the teachers' cottages were demolished and never rebuilt. The surviving teachers went to some other schools' cottage to live. I can't remember whether some of the teachers chose not to come back. Some of the students either at the end of the year or the following year transferred to other schools because they weren't with us in the

graduating class. In those days many students, especially girls, after tenth grade, would drop out of school [anyway]. They would work in the plantation or in the plantation hospital or someplace. So it was not unusual for a student to drop out after the eleventh grade.

*Were there any memorial services or anything like that? Do you remember coming back?*

I don't think we had one. Our class of '47, which graduated the following year, whenever we have reunions in Hilo, we always take flowers to the memorial at the point. Stand around for a while and take pictures. In a small school, you knew all the students in your class and most students a grade above you, a grade below you, so-and-so's brother, so-and-so's sister. All the names on the memorial—there's twenty-four names—I knew them personally or as so-and-so's brother, so-and-so's sister. As I said earlier, the students from Honohina and Ninole, the ones who died in large number—we went to John M. Ross School together.

I guess that's about as vividly as I can recall. Prior to the wave, during the wave, and after the wave. I'd say as far as the experience itself, that's about it.

Upon graduation, as I said earlier, this teacher and the principal had arranged for a scholarship for me to go to the University of Hawai'i, so I came to Honolulu. I had great ideas; I was going to be a journalist. (Laughs) And then I took English comp[osition] 100 and realized that there were so many good writers in this small class. That deflated me quickly. So I ended up as a major in soci[ology].

Well, I finished in 1951 and by then I had decided that I wanted to be a social worker. So I went to the School of Social Work at the University [of Hawai'i], for one year. In those days a one-year certificate was sufficient to work and to progress. Also, I was tired of school; I had been going to school for seventeen years. I also ran out of money. So I worked for about three years for the Department of Public Welfare. The department had a program to upgrade people's skills so one could go to a school of his choice and be paid a stipend. I chose to go to the University of Chicago's School of Social Service Administration because my supervisor was from that school and some of the people I knew were from that school. Also, my wife's nursing school classmate and friend was working in Chicago. I spent a year at Chicago and got my master's in social work. And as part of the obligation to having received the stipend, the department sent me to Maui where I was the child welfare worker for Maui County.

I came back to Honolulu after a couple of years, did some child protective service work for neglected, abused, abandoned children. But that was pretty stressful stuff. So I went to work for the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. They had an opening for a counselor for leprosy patients at Kalaupapa and Hale Mohalu. And although I was scared of the disease, I said it was better than being a child protective service worker. So I did that for a couple of years.

Then I returned back to [Division of] Vocational Rehab[ilitation], went up the ranks as supervisor, administrator, and rehabilitation consultant. My last job with the state was as a rehabilitation facilities specialist. My task was to enhance the ability of workshops like Lanakila Crafts and Goodwill [Industries] to provide persons with

disabilities the best service for the least amount of money. That position had statewide responsibilities so I did some interisland travel. I retired in 1987.

About six months later I took a temporary part-time job as a stock clerk at the Rehabilitation Hospital of the Pacific. The person whom I replaced subsequently didn't choose to come back, so I was offered a permanent [position]. I stayed there for five and a half years. That job was a very eye-opening experience, of being the low man on the totem pole, of observing how administrators work and how people in the laundry, housekeeping and purchasing departments think and feel. That was quite a contrast compared to the time I was involved in writing policies, procedures and directives for others to follow.

Right now I am very much involved with my wife in the care of our two grandchildren. It is an enjoyable and enriching experience. I don't think we retire; we just go from one job to another. (Laughs) So, that's our present job, of raising another generation.

***Do you think it's important for them to know about your experiences with the tsunami, and not only tsunami but your early life growing up poor on a plantation?***

Yes, and I've been meaning to one day maybe jot down some of these places and thoughts. About growing up in the [19]30s and [19]40s in the plantation, being poor but not knowing it. I think the tidal wave is a curiosity thing. I think my daughters would be curious to know how I survived it and what I felt and so on. But growing up poor in the plantation, yet ambitious, that might be very interesting to my two daughters and to my grandchildren later on.



Which reminds me, I would like to compare notes with other tsunami survivors. Maybe after this project [ends] I could read what other people told you because in a sense each of us were alone in the tidal wave. Like Marsue McGinnis [McShane] and my friend Yoshio Awakuni who were saved that afternoon or that evening. It would be interesting to read what they went through.

I think the experience enriches your life, it's a unique experience. Not many people go through it and live to talk about it. So in retrospect, I'm happy I went through it and survived it.

*One last question, there's a Pacific Tsunami Museum coming up, which is the reason why we're doing this project. Do you feel that's something that's important for our community?*

Well, when I first heard [about] it, if it was the same thing, it was to be located in Hilo and feature basically Hilo's experience. So I said, "Well, gee, here they go again. They forgot Laupāhoehoe." But I think it's important to preserve a piece of history of Hawai'i. Not in terms of preventing disaster so much, because nowadays we have such an efficient warning system. Not unless you're a fool and you go down to the ocean when the water recedes. But I think to preserve a part of history of Hilo and Laupāhoehoe Point. I think that's important in our society.

*At the project's end, after presenting him with a copy of his interview transcript, Masuo Kino asked if I could print two extra copies, one for each of his daughters. They will someday give copies to their children.*

## CHAPTER 11

### ANALYSIS OF THE CASE STUDIES: THE EDUCATIVE VALUE OF ORAL HISTORY

This chapter examines the preceding life history narratives as case studies illustrating the discipline of oral history as the alchemy of memory, narrative, and history. This alchemy plays a critical educative role to all those involved in the process: the interviewees/narrators; the interviewer/researcher; and present and future generations of scholars, students, and the lay community. This role reinforces the value of life history narratives in providing society with humanistic perspectives by which to understand the past in relation to the present and future.

In our search for meaning in our lives, as well as our identities, we often look to our memory of past experiences. Paul Thompson said that memory "reaches back into our own childhood beginnings and, in spite of being blurred and patchy and a bit confused, is central to our own sense of who we are."<sup>1</sup> The narrative researchers Carol Witherell and Nel Noddings took the relationship between memory and identity and added narrative into the process. "Narrative involves not only a sequence of events, but also a storyteller and an intended audience. Narrative structure contributes to our understanding of the meaningfulness of everyday life." Witherell and Noddings, who

---

<sup>1</sup>Paul Thompson, "Believe It or Not: Rethinking the Historical Interpretation of Memory," in *Memory and History: Essays on Recalling and Interpreting Experience*, ed. Jaclyn Jeffrey and Glenace Edwall (Latham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1994), 2.

closely studied the effects the making of narratives have on the formation of one's identity, acknowledged "the central role that narrative structure plays in the formation of the self and in the construction, transmission, and transformations of cultures. The narrator has a story that is embedded in his or her culture, language, gender, beliefs, and life history. To educate is to take seriously both the quest for life's meaning and the meaning of individual lives."<sup>2</sup> According to the psychologist David Pillemer, memory and narrative not only are closely related, but at times synonymous: "When in our everyday lives we say that we clearly 'remember' a specific past event, we usually mean that we can produce a detailed narrative description of the episode as it was personally experienced."<sup>3</sup>

As the alchemy of memory, narrative, and history, oral history not only benefits both interviewee/narrator and interviewer/researcher, but also serves as an educative bridge between generations. The historian Bernard Bailyn defined education as not only formal and institutional pedagogy "but the entire process by which a culture transmits itself across the generations,"<sup>4</sup> while Jan Vansina asserted that "culture is reproduced by remembrance put into words and deeds. The mind through memory carries culture from generation to generation."<sup>5</sup> The philosopher and theorist

---

<sup>2</sup>Carol Witherell and Nel Noddings, eds., *Stories Lives Tell: Narrative and Dialogue in Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1991), 3.

<sup>3</sup>Pillemer, *Momentous Events, Vivid Memories*, 4.

<sup>4</sup>Bernard Bailyn, *Education in the Forming of American Society* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1972), 14.

<sup>5</sup>Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*, xi.

John Dewey saw education as "that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience."<sup>6</sup> Dewey elaborated by saying that "education, in its broadest sense, is the means of this social continuity of life. . . . Society exists through a process of transmissions quite as much as biological life. This transmission occurs by means of communication of habits of doing, thinking, and feeling from the older to the younger. Without this communication of ideals, hopes, expectations, standards, opinions, from those members of society who are passing out of the group life to those who are coming into it, social life could not survive."<sup>7</sup>

Another view of education, offered by Clandinin and Connelly, posits that "experience is the stories people live. People live stories, and in the telling of these stories, reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones. Stories lived and told educate the self and others."<sup>8</sup> These observations remind us that the construction and transmission of stories based on memory educate human beings on both micro and macro levels. On the micro level, the process can deeply and simultaneously affect individuals on both sides of the microphone, since both are in the process of constructing knowledge. On the macro level, the knowledge they construct is transmitted to others across generations and time zones.

---

<sup>6</sup>Quoted in Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Transformation of the School* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), 122.

<sup>7</sup>John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: The Free Press, 1944), 3.

<sup>8</sup>Clandinin and Connelly, *Narrative Inquiry*, xxvi.

### *The interviewees/narrators*

As Clandinin and Connelly stated, "Stories lived and told educate the self and others." Finding and articulating the trappings of one's identity, discovering meaning in and making sense of one's life decisions and circumstances, and articulating one's "voice," are significant educative opportunities for the interviewee/narrator passing life experiences down to succeeding generations.

The psychologists Amia Lieblich, Rivka Tuval-Mashiach, and Tamar Zilber advocated the use of a "holistic-content" method in examining life history narratives and their use in research. As opposed to methods organized around subject categories or narrative forms, the holistic-content method involves "the complete life story of an individual and focuses on the content presented by it."<sup>9</sup> Similar to literary narrative analyses and clinical case studies, this method of narrative reading concentrates "on the specific content of an account, namely, what happened, or why, who participated in the event, and so on, all from the standpoint of the teller."<sup>10</sup> Assessing the educative value of narratives from a holistic-content method requires a reading of each narrative according to themes common to many life history accounts.

One theme can be regarded as *reflecting*, or, speaking of the past in relation to the present. By situating themselves in their pasts from the perspective of the present,

---

<sup>9</sup>Amia Lieblich, et. al., *Narrative Research: Reading, Analysis, and Interpretation* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Pubs., 1998), 12-13. The authors identify four contrasting modes in examining narratives: holistic-content, categorical-content, holistic-form, and categorical-form.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 12.

interviewees often seek positive, moral conclusions to their stories, even if the experiences they talk about seemed negative at the time. In remembering details about their pasts in light of their present, interviewees often have the benefit of reflective hindsight. It is this hindsight which better allows interviewees to attach meaning to their life experiences.

A second theme entails a *relational* analysis. Interviewees invariably see themselves in relation to other people. Parents, grandparents, siblings, friends, clergy, teachers, supervisors, spouses and children all play integral roles in a life story. Barbara Allen claimed that interviewees, when talking about the history of their communities, base much of their descriptions on the relationships "among the members that bind them together as a community and make for social stability and continuity."<sup>11</sup>

A third theme is *contextual*.<sup>12</sup> Interviewees in the narrative-construction process, sometimes with help from interviewers, contextualize their recollections to ensure that their stories are occurring in a specific time and place. According to Barbara Allen and Lynwood Montell, contextualization is a critical element of narrative--an element which distinguishes first-person, historical narratives from mere annals and chronicles: "By life histories we do not mean simply bare-bones identification of the major events in people's lives--where and to whom they were born, whom they married, where they

---

<sup>11</sup>Barbara Allen, "Re-Creating the Past: The Narrator's Perspective in Oral History." *The Oral History Review* 12 (1984), 7.

<sup>12</sup>See Lieblich, et. al., *Narrative Research*, 62-87. In discussing the holistic-content method of analysis, Lieblich uses both the *reflecting* and *relational* themes. I have taken Lieblich's third, *positive*, and placed it within the *reflecting* theme. In its place I added my own theme, *contextual*.

were educated and employed--but comprehensive, detailed accounts of the various stages of their lives.<sup>13</sup> When we ask interviewees, "What was it like?" we are seeking a contextual understanding of the human experience, such as feelings and attitudes associated with their life experiences. We are also collaboratively attempting to situate these experiences in their historical context in order to better understand their meaning and significance for present and future generations.

What follows is an examination of portions of the five narratives presented in this study, using the three themes outlined above as part of a holistic-content method of analysis. This examination helps support the assertion that the oral history process plays a critical educative role to interviewees/narrators who participate in such studies.

*Reflecting.* The events of April 1, 1946 not only meant a turning point in Marsue McShane's life as far as dreams of traveling the world were concerned, but also enabled her to reflect and make sense of her life experiences and the many conscious, rational decisions she made along the way. At one point in her story, as she battled for her life in the open ocean amidst chaos, destruction, and the deaths of her three soulmates, McShane reaffirmed a long-held conviction that historical events affecting people's lives were the result of coincidence, and not pre-destined by a divine, supreme being:

Well, this is something that was very important to me at this time. Naturally, I don't say much about it because 99 percent of the people are believers and so forth. But at that time, I knew there was no God. And here I was, faced with

---

<sup>13</sup>Barbara Allen and William Lynwood Montell, *From Memory to History: Using Oral Sources in Local Historical Research* (Nashville: The American Association for State and Local History, 1981), 63.

death, I knew I was going to die. And I still knew there was no God. And I couldn't tell anybody. That was really one of my main thoughts. I couldn't tell anybody.

McShane, in fact, credited "luck" for miraculously evading the debris and rocks as she was pulled out to sea by the receding waters. She noted that her good swimming skills were another reason she was alive to tell her story. Her rational outlook toward life was evident during our interview, conducted over fifty years after the tsunami, in her back patio located on O`ahu's ocean shoreline.

Herbert Nishimoto, like other survivors of near-death ordeals, sought to make sense of his experience by comparing his feelings connected with the 1946 tsunami with ordeals he experienced later in life. These hardships enabled him to better reflect on his life experiences with a combination of hope, skill, and rational thinking:

Well, it's really hard to say whether you knew you were going to die, you know. Because I wasn't wounded. I wasn't hurt. Of course I was scared. But like I say, after you fear, you start thinking of survival. Then you say, Wait, I got a chance. Gee, it's a feeling you have, like when you see a cowboy movie, the good guy is not going to die. I got that feeling, you know. I had the confidence. I was not scared anymore. I don't know what you would call it, God's intuition or what, you know. But lot of people are afraid of the ocean, the deep, you know. And to me, I think that the depth is safer than being dashed on the rocks. People get hurt especially when they're close to shore, the waves dashing, dashing against the rock. I guess this is why I rode out, stay away from the shoreline.

Nishimoto's reflection was indicative of an individual recalling a particular event in his life from a perspective many years later. In his case, as with other interviewees recalling similar circumstances, Nishimoto sought and articulated a positive, moral completion to his story.



Albert Stanley, who usually walked down the winding road to Laupāhoehoe School with a friend, instead caught a ride with his mother to school because of the rain on the morning of April 1. Leaving his home slightly later than usual, Stanley fortunately was not on the school grounds when the tsunami hit. Instead, he watched the drama unfold from a safe vantage point on the road high above Laupāhoehoe Point. Over fifty years later, Stanley, no longer a carefree teenager, reflected on his thoughts while witnessing the tragic circumstances:

You know, kids, we get sassy, “Oh, I wish a tidal wave come, *hemo*<sup>14</sup> the school.” (Chuckles) You know how kids talk, “*Hemo* the school, we don't need go school.” Never even realized that something like that would happen. But I can remember those words coming out of my mouth. But when it really happened, well, you're so awestruck. I was just there with my mouth open saying, “Good god, what is that?” We never even knew about a tidal wave. It's something that since then they've come up with all their early warning systems and everything, but at that time nobody knew.

Like Stanley, Bunji Fujimoto saw the critical need to educate the public. A docent with the Pacific Tsunami Museum and a collector a photographs and other artifacts associated with tsunamis, Fujimoto spent much of his spare time teaching young people about the dangers of such disasters. In his oral history, Fujimoto welcomed the challenge to reflect on his experiences for the benefit of those not familiar with tsunamis, hoping to help prevent the next generation from making the same mistakes his generation did:

Like now even, there's a generation of people, when they talk about a tsunami alert, they think it's a picnic or something. They go down to watch and stuff. I heard couple of times, the last big alert they had, they had a couple of hundred people in the water on the shore waiting for the wave to come. With the

---

<sup>14</sup>Hawaiian word meaning, "break apart."

surfboard, out waiting for the wave to come. Hopefully, there's no next [tsunami]. But obviously, you're sticking your head in the sand if you say there's no next one. It's not *if*, it's *when*.

Just as Fujimoto reflected on the inevitability of the next tsunami, Masuo Kino commented on his near-death ordeal by trying to make sense of the experience. While being tossed many yards by onrushing and receding water, Kino recalled saying to himself, "Gee, I'm going to die. I'm going to hit headfirst into that rock wall and I'm going to die." Miraculously, Kino did not die that day. In his interview, he reflected on his experience and his appreciation for surviving the ordeal:

I was sixteen but I guess I knew what mortality meant. In a sense I was born again; everything after '46 is bonus. Sometimes I think that way because there were so many ways I could have died in that wave. If the rocks had hit me a little harder, or I had lost my consciousness. Even if my head had bobbed above the water I wouldn't have breathed and I'd probably just kept on flowing to the ocean and end up in the ocean. So I think a bunch of us share a very unique experience.

Through oral history, the five interviewees were given the opportunity to reflect on their tsunami experiences in a unique way. They were encouraged to tell their stories in detail, to an empathetic listener, into a tape recorder for the benefit of future generations, and from the perspective of their present-day situations. Martin Cortazzi regarded narrative as an important means by which human beings "represent and restructure the world. It is the principle by which people organize their experience in, knowledge about, and transactions with the social world. When people tell stories, anecdotes and other kinds of narratives they are engaged in a perceptual activity that organizes data into a special pattern which represents and explains experience."<sup>15</sup> The

---

<sup>15</sup>Cortazzi, *Narrative Analysis*, 2.

educational researcher Antoinette Errante underscored a human need to seek and find one's identity and to make sense of one's experiences. "We increasingly recognize that all narratives, whether oral or written, personal or collective, official or subaltern, are 'narratives of identity'; that is, they are representations of reality in which narrators also communicate how they see themselves and wish others to see them."<sup>16</sup>

*Relational.* The death of Marsue McShane's fellow teachers and roommates Helen Kingseed, Dorothy Drake, and Faye Johnson meant that the life the four women had planned--traveling and teaching around the world--had been forever altered. The following excerpt underscores McShane's belief that life consists not only of a series of rational circumstances, but also a series of relationships; some short, others lasting.

I think he [Dr. Leabert Fernandez, McShane's rescuer and eventual husband] was more serious about me than I was about him, because I had these plans to teach around the world. But of course, Dorothy and Helen and Fay, [whom] I was going to teach around the world with, were all gone. So it changed my life. I fell more and more in love with him and I married him. He had two little boys, [ages] three and four, stepsons, which I feel are mine. And we had three more. But that's a true story and I would not be in Hawai'i today if that [the tsunami] hadn't happened. I think I would've gone—we would've gone on. Maybe I would've returned, I really don't know, but that sealed my fate.

Unlike McShane, whose life consisted of a string of relationships, highly independent Herbert Nishimoto claimed to have had few individuals who played key roles in his life. However, the incredible drama of his overnight survival in the open ocean was not without a cast of characters:

I was tired myself. Then I'd say about noon-ish, I seen these two other guys, [Takashi] Takemoto and [Asao Kuniyuki], a guy from `O`ōkala and the other

---

<sup>16</sup>Antoinette Errante, "But Sometimes You're Not Part of the Story: Oral Histories and Ways of Remembering and Telling," *Educational Researcher* 29:2 (2000), 16.

guy's from Honohina. One of them was on a fifty-gallon oil drum. And the other one was on a door. So I tried to paddle but the current kind of drifted them away, so I put my T and G to the guy on the door. The guy on the drum was close enough, so I jumped in the water and brought him closer, put him on the flooring with us. They were kind of exhausted. I picked up a coconut, a dried coconut floating. So I peeled it and we shared the water. Three of us shared the water and we ate the coconut. That's all we had.

Unlike McShane and Nishimoto, Albert Stanley emphasized many negative elements of his life relationships. An anomaly of sorts, Stanley was from a working-class *haole*<sup>17</sup> family and raised in a sugar plantation area dominated by non-white laborers and their families of immigrant stock. For the most part, *haoles* were the upper-class managers who lived lifestyles far different from that of the immigrant workers. Because his parents were not part of the elite that controlled the plantation, and most of Hawai`i at that time, Stanley in many ways felt that the discrimination by other children toward him was not justified. These negative relationships, which in his eyes made him a victim of the race and class stratification that existed on the plantations caused Stanley to grow up defiant and defensive:

All my life I've dealt with discrimination. I know when I was young, gee whiz, I got pushed around, believe me. In fact, when I married a Japanese there were a lot of doors slammed in my face because of that. You know, even jobwise, you know, in the islands. But I never went and hollered about this, it's just the way things are. I mean, if society's that way, you have to learn to bend a little bit and try and project yourself. You know, the schools were trying to teach everybody English. I could speak good English, but believe me, if I went down to school and I started throwing my English around, somebody would want to pound me. You know what I mean? And I remember, when I was first grade, my mother dressed me up in a little sailor suit. And I cried. I didn't want to wear that to school. And that afternoon there's somebody waiting for me already. This little *haole* sailor (laughs), you know what I mean? It got so there

---

<sup>17</sup>Hawaiian word for White person; Caucasian; foreigner.

were certain kids that resented me. They didn't even know who I was. It was no offense, it's just, you know, you're a *haole*.

Bunji Fujimoto's thoughts turned to his younger brother, Toshiaki. While Bunji's quiet, hard-working personality may have had something to do with his ability to survive the 1946 tsunami, his rambunctious brother died. In his interview, Fujimoto reflected on his relationship with his brother and even attempted to rationalize Toshiaki's death as inevitable, given the world conflicts Toshiaki eventually would have been facing had he survived:

[My brother was] a rascal. That's to put it mildly (laughs). Rascal and plenty guts. Of the three of us, he would've been the one to go [out and look at the wave]. He used to like to do all kind stuff like climbing trees. He not only liked to, but he was good at climbing trees. His friends all used to call him "Monkey." Whenever there was a tree to climb where there was fruits and stuff, they'd send him up. I always wonder what he would have been like, you know, if he had grown up. This is only a conjecture of course, there's no way you can say—but being that the Korean War came after that, he would have been prime to be in the war.

When individuals like Fujimoto are asked to talk about their life experiences and the relationships associated with those experiences, they most often talk about family members. Masuo Kino, in assessing his tsunami experience, remembered his mother's initial reaction after seeing him in a bruised, disheveled condition. These thoughts revealed as much of Kino's culture as his relationship with his mother:

I don't know how I got home, whether I hitchhiked or the school bus came by. But I got home, and my mother was home. And she was shocked because I looked like I had taken a swim in my clothes. I literally had done that. Hair all dishevelled, cuts and bruises on my face and arms. I was thinking about it the other day. Today a mother in a similar circumstance would hug the child and cry. I guess being Japanese, she just said something to the effect that she was happy and relieved that I was safe. As I recall, she didn't express much emotion outwardly. But that was the way we generally handled our emotions.

*Contextual.* Tamara Hareven once stated that interviewees recall life experiences within the broader contexts of historical events as well as their own cultural world views.<sup>18</sup> In these interviews, Marsue McShane placed her tsunami story within the larger context of her early life in Ohio. Although she had fond memories of her childhood in a university town, love of horses, and college years, she admitted to youthful restlessness which caused her to leave Ohio, become a teacher, and teach "around the world." Encouraged by the prospect of a prosperous and free world brought about by the end of World War II, McShane, young, attractive, and single, saw life as an endless string of adventures. A job offer in Hawai'i enabled her to begin her dream:

In March '45--the atomic bomb had not been dropped. War was still going on in the Pacific--I saw on the bulletin board, a letter that said, "Teachers needed desperately in Hawaii." I wanted to teach and Hawai'i was the first stop. Then I wanted to teach English in a school in Japan or South America or France, you know, I didn't want to go back to the same old place. See, living at home, my college years were really not what they should have been, where you go to college, get educated and you find your husband and you get married and have children and you go on from there. I wasn't really career-oriented so much. I was a good teacher and I graduated with honors and everything, but I wasn't, "I want to be the greatest teacher, I want to be a principal, I want to go back and get my Ph.D. and teach in college." It wasn't that. It was just that what I had was enough to get me into schools to teach around the world. Of course I anticipated meeting the right man. (Chuckles) But I had no idea it would turn out that I would live in Hawai'i forever.

Herbert Nishimoto's successful ordeal off Laupāhoehoe's rough waters had a great deal to do with his survival instincts honed as a plantation youth swimming, diving, and learning about the ocean and its tendencies:

---

<sup>18</sup>Hareven, "From Amoskeag to Nishijin," 9.

I read something at that time, to become a good swimmer, you have to swim against the current. That's why even people older than I was, three or four years older, I used to outswim them, outdive them. And some of the ponds were fairly deep, fifteen, twenty feet. When we used to play tag they'd have a hard time catching me because I could dive deeper and stay down longer [and] swim faster than them. So I started [at age] fourteen or fifteen, somewhere about there. We used to go spear fishing. On the Big Island, it's all rough waters. We talking about, five-foot wave, that's calm. And those days we didn't have any fins. And the kind of goggles we had, just plain regular bamboo goggles. I was a good diver, I was diving in twenty-five-foot-deep ocean. And even now, I can go twenty-five feet, thirty feet.

It would be difficult to make sense of Nishimoto's story of survival without a contextual glimpse of his life experiences. Nishimoto was physically-fit and had a strong understanding and knowledge of the ocean and survival techniques. These traits enabled him to take control over the elements threatening to overwhelm him.

Frank and opinionated, Albert Stanley observed and commented on the twists and turns which marked the different stages in his life. In the following excerpt, Stanley offers his view on the need to educate the public on the dangers of future tsunamis. He places the 1946 tsunami within the context of a later disaster, Hurricane Iniki, which struck the island of Kaua`i on September 11, 1992. While Iniki was a recent occurrence, the last major tsunami to strike Hawai`i was in 1960. Stanley believed that, while islanders are fully cognizant of a hurricane's destructive power and will no doubt adequately prepare themselves for the next one, they are still largely unaware of the dangers a tsunami poses:

Look at this last hurricane that hit, how people adhere to the warning, just beautiful. I see 'em all bailing out and that's paying attention to what happens. Like they had the early warning system here after that ['46 tsunami], and there was how many false alarms, and people got to the point, "Never mind this [cry] wolf business." And a lot of them wouldn't adhere to the warning.

Contextual readings of interviewees' entire life experiences reveal a great deal about their actions in their later years. Growing up the son of Hāmākua Coast independent sugarcane growers, Bunji Fujimoto spent a great deal of his childhood in poverty and working hard in the sugarcane fields. This humble background, coupled with the tragic loss of his brother in the 1946 tsunami, may have played important roles in Fujimoto's willingness to educate others as a docent with the Pacific Tsunami Museum, where he volunteered until his death. Recalling his early years on the plantation, Fujimoto compared his own life to the kind of life young people enjoy today:

He [father] used to raise about twenty-five to thirty acres of cane. So we used to help. Both the boys and the girls used to work in the cane fields during the weekends and summers and stuff. And when we were old enough, we started working [directly] for the plantation, primarily harvesting cane. In those days, child labor laws were kind of lax, so we used to work when we were about maybe eleven or twelve, cutting cane, harvesting cane. I wouldn't recommend it to anybody (laughs). Whatever we earned, we used to give practically all to our parents and they give us whatever we need. I wouldn't say whatever we need, whatever they could spare is what it amounts to. Not like today, you know, you tell your kids to mow the lawn, they tell, 'How much you gonna pay me?'

Like Fujimoto and many other Japanese who lived and worked on Hāmākua Coast sugar plantations, Masuo Kino grew up in poverty. His family had no indoor plumbing or electricity, and relied on their own poultry, livestock, and gardens for food. The following excerpt, in which Kino describes his family's economic status on the plantation, is both a reflective and contextual account of a bygone era in the history of modern Hawai'i:



We had a vegetable garden. We watered it and dug it and so on. We had some chickens. Of course, making the *furo*.<sup>19</sup> That was one of my jobs that I inherited from my older brothers and sisters. We always got old scrap lumber from the plantation when they were fixing the sugarcane flumes nearby. We'd pick up the discarded pieces and bring them home. Then you start with newspaper or bagasse and you would kindle the fire. And if you had some sweet potatoes you would throw them in the hot coals, too. Generally, that would be after the fire had died down. We had no electricity, our drinking water came from our roof [i.e., catchment], and water for other purposes we siphoned off a little stream nearby and from the cane flume. So when I look back, it was physically quite poverty-stricken. But everybody was about the same, so we were pretty happy about life in general. I think as you get older you realize, oh they have this and we don't have that. But at that time I didn't feel very much different from other children in that area.

Kino survived poverty on the plantation as well as fatal injury from the 1946 tsunami.

He took these experiences with him as he journeyed through his life. This contextualization provided meaning to his later years as a professional social worker.

A few months after conducting the interviews, I sent each of the interviewees a bound copy of their transcript with a letter of thanks for participating in the oral history project. Kino, in a return letter, related to me what doing the interview had meant to him, particularly from an educative standpoint:

Warren,  
Thank you for including me among the people from Laupahoehoe to be interviewed for the tsunami project. I now feel assured that Laupahoehoe will not be overlooked because of the comparatively small number of deaths and because of its obscurity. The taped interview was a new and somewhat challenging experience. It turned out to be highly self-revealing, cathartic and satisfying. Your timely questions and caring comments brought back many

---

<sup>19</sup>A Japanese bath. In this instance, Kino is not talking about actually *building* the bath. He is referring to his job of building and tending the fire underneath it, making the water hot for bathing and soaking.

memories--some sad, some happy--all precious and treasured. Thank you.  
Masuo Kino<sup>20</sup>

### *The interviewer/researcher*

As the latter part of Masuo Kino's letter illustrates, the life narrative is a collaboration between the interviewee/narrator, who recalls and provides details of his or her life experiences, and the interviewer/researcher, who asks questions, provides an atmosphere based on rapport and careful listening, and helps to construct and reconstruct the narrative. Instead of the interviewer/researcher being regarded as the "author" of an historical piece involving an interview, collaboration means that both participants play equally key roles in the construction and transmission of historical information from memory. This collaboration educates the interviewer as well as the interviewee. According to Susan Chase:

Qualitative researchers certainly agree that the questions we ask make a difference in the quality of the information we collect; that our questions should be phrased in everyday rather than sociological language; that we need to ask about participants' experiences, thoughts, and feelings to gather data thick enough to shed light on our sociological problems; and that the relationships we construct with interviewees affect the quality of their responses to our questions.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup>Masuo Kino, letter to author, 24 May 1998. The letter is reprinted in its entirety. Kino's "cathartic" experience while recalling his life experiences helps support the growing body of research addressing issues relating to the use of oral history as a way to help diagnose stress and contribute to therapeutic intervention. See, for example, Mark Klempner, "Navigating Life Review Interviews with Survivors of Trauma," *The Oral History Review* 27:2 (2000), 68.

<sup>21</sup>Chase, "Taking Narrative Seriously," xi.

Alessandro Portelli regarded oral history to be a "multiauthored, multivocal genre,"<sup>22</sup> while Vicki Ruiz spoke of the "multinodal worlds of the narrator and the interviewer."<sup>23</sup> Ronald Grele discussed the gradual shift in research to where the construction of narratives resulting from a relationship between interviewer and interviewee was worthy of scholarly study.<sup>24</sup>

The educative value of collaboration in qualitative research brings up several issues relating to the emic-etic relationship power relationships connected with race, gender, class, and educational levels; and the ideological, political, and cultural agendas and world views of the interviewer/researcher and the impact these can have on the interview. These complex issues have caused ethnographers, oral historians, and others who use qualitative, open-ended interviews in their research, to re-examine their relationships with their narrators. Beth Blue Swadener, conducting interviews in a school setting, reflected on her changed outlook and attitude toward her research:

I have consciously sought to move away from the position of researcher studying subjects who were often objectified, while moving to an increasingly collaborative partnership. Put another way, I have moved from the foreground of my research--as the primary interpreter and teller of stories from my data--to a position in the background who is woven into the far more complex tapestry

---

<sup>22</sup>Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 24.

<sup>23</sup>Vicki L. Ruiz, "Situating Stories: The Surprising Consequence of Oral History," *The Oral History Review* 25:1-2 (1998), 72.

<sup>24</sup>Ronald J. Grele, "Useful Discoveries: Oral History, Public History, and the Dialectic of Narrative," 61.

of collaborative work, in which the [subject's] voice has replaced mine at the foreground of narration.<sup>25</sup>

Swadener's changed attitude regarding her role in her research reflected a departure from what is now considered an "old-school" ethnographic/fieldwork attitude, where the researcher almost always regarded himself, as well as his own culture, as the focal point of research. The following excerpt, by an anthropologist in 1965, is indicative of the ethnocentric attitude oral historians have strived to change:

The role of the fieldworker is of great importance here. That is, is he purely participant observer and thus virtually "one of them" or is he the mysterious, powerful, and awesome stranger? There have been differences of opinion on this score in the past, but here one does not always have a choice and the question may be more academic than real. A European fieldworker in the New Guinea Highlands, for example, no matter how hard he may try can never truly become a genuine member of the native community. This does not mean that he cannot be adopted by someone, called by a kinship term, and invited to participate in certain of the group activities. It means simply that the gap between his own culture and that of his subjects, plus his visibility, status, and knowledge, are too great to be surmounted; this would be true no matter how long he might stay in the field. Adapting to a steady diet of sweet potatoes supplemented periodically by badly cooked pork, living in an environment where there are no conceptions of personal hygiene as Western-Europeans know them, and the limited extension of certain moral prescriptions about brutality and killing are too much to ask for the relatively meager ethnographic facts one would return with after a period in the field.<sup>26</sup>

When I first began contacting potential interviewees for the tsunami oral history project, I immediately thought about the issue of power, i.e., a university

---

<sup>25</sup>Beth Blue Swadener and Monica Miller March, "Reflections on Collaborative, and Not-So-Collaborative, Research in Early Childhood Settings," in Kathleen Bennett deMarras (ed.), *Inside Stories: Qualitative Research Reflections* (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1998), 171.

<sup>26</sup>L. L. Langness, *The Life History in Anthropological Science* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 33.

researcher conducting interviews with individuals in a community I was largely unfamiliar with. Fortunately, I conducted the research under a contract with the Pacific Tsunami Museum, a local community organization with solid grass-roots support.<sup>27</sup> This helped me establish rapport as I contacted potential interviewees and explained to them the intent of my research.

Although I was raised in Honolulu, my father was born in Honohina and his family was known around the area, as well as in Hilo where he and his family later moved. The mention of this local connection was extremely helpful as residents recalled my familial ties, "Oh, you're Parson's boy,"<sup>28</sup> or, "You're Richard's nephew? How is he?" After we established the fact that we weren't related, Herbert Nishimoto seemed pleased to know that I was related to the Nishimotos who were connected by marriage to the owners of Sakado Store in Laupāhoehoe.

I explained the oral history process to each interviewee: they would have the opportunity to look over their transcript and make changes; the transcript would be deposited into the state library system; and they would get at least one copy of the transcript and, if they wished, the cassette tape. As each interviewee gained a better understanding of the process and realized that his/her story would be a permanent part of the history of Hawai'i, most of them gladly agreed to participate. Most in Laupāhoehoe were even more motivated; many felt that the Laupāhoehoe tsunami

---

<sup>27</sup>One of the important goals of the Pacific Tsunami Museum was to collect personal stories from survivors and eyewitnesses of Hilo and elsewhere in the islands.

<sup>28</sup>My father's father was a Buddhist minister near Laupāhoehoe and later Hilo, hence my father's nickname, "Parson."

story--24 persons killed, compared to 135 for the rest of the territory of Hawai'i--was largely ignored and untold.

Prior to beginning the project, I had a cursory understanding of the tsunami's effect on the islands; I had read some personal accounts in newspapers and magazines and viewed several photographs. However, it wasn't until I met the interviewees and recorded their experiences, reviewed the transcripts, discussed the content and style of the transcripts with them, and presented them with their personal bound copy, did I come to realize the impact and meaning the entire experience had on me. The project personalized the tragic events of April 1, 1946--giving added import to the events and consequences of that day. It reinforced on me the role I play in peopling the historic stage that is sometimes all action, devoid of characters and emotions.

*Present and future generations of scholars, students, and the lay community*

Because no warning system was in place in 1946, and no one really understood what a tsunami was, many of the 159 people who died were either apathetic bystanders, curious onlookers, or adventurous funseekers who went onto the exposed ocean floor to pick up flapping fish just before the deadly tsunami struck. The hours and days following the disaster were filled with the horrendous tasks of seeking and identifying bodies; locating valuables and other material possessions; participating in the massive and time-consuming cleanup effort; dealing with critical shortages of food, gasoline, and other essentials; and enduring the hardships of sudden homelessness and lost livelihoods.

The tragedy of April 1, 1946 led to government and community-wide attempts to mitigate the disastrous effects of future tsunamis. In 1948, the Tsunami Warning System (TWS), a communications system to transmit reports on earthquakes and tsunamis in the Pacific, was established by the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey. TWS was in operation during tsunamis in 1952 and 1957, which struck all the Hawaiian Islands. Unlike the 1946 disaster, residents were warned well before the actual arrival of the tsunamis. Although there was considerable damage, no deaths were reported in either wave.<sup>29</sup> In 1995, Congress mandated a tsunami hazard mitigation plan for Hawai'i, Alaska, California, Oregon and Washington. Funds were allocated for improving seismic networks and equipment, public awareness programs, and development of inundation and evacuation maps. Also developed were six deep-ocean tsunami detection buoys, which provided data to scientists concerning the severity of approaching tsunamis.<sup>30</sup>

However, the most important tsunami-mitigating component is the studying and learning from the collective memory of tsunamis past: the need to educate a public steeped in ignorance and complacency. Between 1900 and 1965, a total of thirteen

---

<sup>29</sup>The TWS was also operable during the May 23, 1960 tsunami which hit Hilo just after 1:00 A.M. Warnings were sounded early in the day of May 22, shortly after it was determined that a tsunami was generated by three major earthquakes in Chile. Many Hilo residents evacuated their homes upon hearing the warning. However, when no tsunami arrived, many of these residents returned to their coastal homes during the night, thinking that the danger had passed. Sixty-one persons died. See Dudley and Lee, *Tsunami!* for detailed accounts of this tragedy.

<sup>30</sup>"Systems for Detecting Dangerous Waves are Improving--But Slowly," *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, 18 April 1998.

significant tsunamis<sup>31</sup> produced by distant earthquakes were reported for Hawai'i. However, ocean scientist and tsunami expert Daniel Walker noted that "from 1965 . . . no Pacific-wide tsunamis have struck the Hawaiian Islands. This has led to a false sense of complacency and lack of awareness that may add to the dangers associated with tsunamis, especially for the youth of Hawai'i." Walker also noted that with more people living, working, and playing in areas designated as tsunami inundation zones statewide, "in the event of a destructive tsunami, lack of knowledge could lead to an unnecessary repetition of past tragedies."<sup>32</sup>

Over the years, several books, newspaper and magazine articles, and videotaped documentaries have been produced to educate the public about the dangers of tsunamis. Oral histories and other first-person accounts by survivors and eyewitnesses have been part of a broad, statewide education program coordinated by the Pacific Tsunami Museum. Walter Dudley, Jeanne Branch Johnston, and Donna Saiki are three Hilo residents spearheading this program. Dudley, a professor of ocean sciences at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo, co-authored a book on tsunamis. The book is a combination of scientific analysis and social history, explaining the how, why and when of tsunamis. It includes heart-wrenching personal stories by residents. In the last chapter of the book, Dudley reiterated the educative purpose of the museum, and the role the construction and transmission of oral history narratives plays: "The goals of

---

<sup>31</sup>Those with wave heights greater than three feet.

<sup>32</sup>Daniel A. Walker, *Tsunami Facts*. SOEST Technical Report 94-03 (Honolulu: School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology, University of Hawaii, 1994), 4.



the museum are to provide public education about tsunamis, to preserve local history, and to promote research and study of tsunamis. The museum has been actively collecting first-hand accounts of tsunamis from survivors. Their personal experiences need to be preserved as part of the local history of the islands, but they are also a valuable educational tool to teach current and future generations about the effects of tsunami waves."<sup>33</sup>

Johnston is a former Hilo resident and a survivor of the 1946 tsunami. As a six-year-old living in the district of Keaukaha, she witnessed the destruction of her family home and eventually was forced to evacuate to higher ground. This experience, coupled with her desire to educate the community, inspired her idea to start the Pacific Tsunami Museum. In addition to securing corporate and grass-roots funding for the starting and maintaining of the museum, Johnston conducted numerous interviews with fellow survivors throughout the state of Hawai'i--interviews which are key components of the museum's educational outreach program.

Saiki, the museum's current executive director, along with the museum's first executive director, Susan Tissot, were strong supporters of making oral histories the foundation of the museum's overall existence. According to Saiki, "Science only tells part of the story. The real educational value comes with the personal stories, because people can relate to them better than scientific explanations. These stories can't be gotten any other way than by talking story before the people who remember pass

---

<sup>33</sup>Dudley and Lee, *Tsunami!*, 337.

away. The stories will last forever."<sup>34</sup> A retired Hawai`i island public school principal, Saiki saw the educative value of memory, narrative, and history to a public unaware of the dangers of tsunamis. She said, "We are finding that teaching comes more through the stories of those who lived through the tsunamis. Now, younger generations of local residents need to be educated as well as tourists. It's been so long [since the last tsunami], it's not in anybody's recollections anymore."<sup>35</sup>

The efforts by people to raise public awareness about tsunamis resulted in two major projects based on oral history undertaken by Hawai`i island schools. The first project, by Waiākea High School in Hilo, was a product of the National Learn and Serve Program, which related traditional classroom studies with learning through community service. With grants obtained from the program, students and teachers interviewed dozens of Hawai`i island tsunami survivors,<sup>36</sup> producing a book.<sup>37</sup> Most of the 225 students who took part in the project never before experienced any incident so traumatic. Through their interviews, they gained a unique understanding from the people who did.

According to teacher Debbie Miyao, the educative value of the project lay not

---

<sup>34</sup>Donna Saiki, email to author, 2 December 2001.

<sup>35</sup>Hunter Bishop, "Hilo Museum Helping to Chronicle Big Isle's Tsunami-plagued Past," *Hawaii Tribune-Herald*, 1 April 1999.

<sup>36</sup>In preparation for this project, I was invited to Hilo to conduct a day-long training workshop in oral history methods to Waiākea High School teachers and students.

<sup>37</sup>Waiākea High School, *Waiākea High School Tsunami Network, 1998-1999* (Hilo: Waiākea High School, 1999).

only in the data acquired, but in the process of researching and gathering the interviews as well. Miyao said that the intergenerational relationships that were established and fostered were among the major goals of the project. Miyao described how two students, "tough girls--a chip on their shoulder," lost their hard edge after interviewing a man whose parents died in a tsunami. "The three of them ended up crying," Miyao remembered. Student Cindy Pabro reflected on the renewed bonds of understanding between young and old when she related, "My father went through it (the tsunami). Now I understand why he's so overprotective."<sup>38</sup>

Another school project involved Laupāhoehoe School teachers and students, who connected with their area's past by conducting oral history interviews with thirteen survivors of the April 1, 1946 tsunami and producing a book.<sup>39</sup> The project commenced in 1996, and commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the tragedy. Lucille Chung, a longtime Laupāhoehoe resident and community leader, and Jane Uyehara, the school's principal, wanted the commemoration to go beyond the students' annual pilgrimage to the memorial monument at Laupāhoehoe Point. They initiated the project incorporating an integrated, hands-on curriculum.<sup>40</sup> The students participated in multimedia development with audio, video, and computer equipment, and gained

---

<sup>38</sup>Hunter Bishop, "Learning through Service: Tsunami Survivors Tell Students their Stories through Unique Program," *Hawaii Tribune-Herald*, 6 December 2000, 1.

<sup>39</sup>Laupāhoehoe School, *April Fool's...The Laupāhoehoe Tragedy of 1946: An Oral History* (Hilo: Obun Hawaii, Inc., 1997). This book received an award from the American Association of State and Local History.

<sup>40</sup>Lucille Chung invited me to Laupāhoehoe to speak to the students and teachers undertaking the project about oral history and its importance.

communication skills through interviewing and writing. A sixteen-year-old student remarked that the project helped her discover "a sense of where I live," while another student said that before working on the project, she never realized that one of Hawai'i's most tragic and destructive natural disasters occurred in her own community.<sup>41</sup> The generational interaction was also a valuable experience for students and seniors alike. During a 1994 school-wide conference, which gave birth to the project, community members expressed a need to pass on the history, heritages, and values associated with Laupāhoehoe to the students. Little did the students realize that the project not only provided valuable historical data from the memories of longtime residents, but it provided the residents a forum by which to share their pain, which for many had been repressed over the last fifty years. According to the book's foreward:

Students initially were not enthused with the type of work they would have to do (reading, writing). However, as the months progressed, the excitement of newfound knowledge of actual events and people they were familiar with, permeated the project. This short term activity encouraged academic growth and personal and family identity. The by-product was the character development of each student involved. In years to come, our hope is that the students will take this experience and those of their elders, and use it to create a better Laupāhoehoe community. Welcome to our home!<sup>42</sup>

While the interviewing project was conducted by students of the high school, the elementary students--who share the same campus--also were involved with the project. Their essays and poems which were based on informal interview sessions with

---

<sup>41</sup>Hugh Clark, "Student Project Recalls '46 Tsunami, *The Honolulu Advertiser*, 17 March 1997.

<sup>42</sup>Laupāhoehoe School, *April Fool's...The Laupāhoehoe Tragedy of 1946: An Oral History*, foreward.

their grandparents revealed a sensitivity and empathy often typical of intergenerational encounters:

Dear Grandpa,

I learned a lot about the tidal wave that hit Laupahoehoe Point and Hilo Bay on April 1, 1946. The students were playing when they realized that there was no water on the bottom of the sea. They watched the first waves come in and go out. The students ran back and forth until one kept getting bigger and bigger. They ran as fast as they could. The big wave wrecked the teachers' cottages and washed away teachers and students. Twenty-four people died that day. No one wanted to fish at Laupahoehoe Point for a long time afterwards. Do you remember this sad time?

Chad Dela Cruz, grade 5.<sup>43</sup>

Dear Grandpa Ah Choy:

I remember when you told me about the "Tidal Wave." You and some other kids were playing with the water telling it to come up to shore. All of a sudden, a big wave came destroying many things. You said that you ran as fast as you could to save yourself. The wave killed 24 people and floated some away. The wave did not touch the school, but they felt it was not safe anymore. The wave was as high as a tall pine tree and went right below the school. Also, Mr. Kailimai was a brave person to save 2-3 people. I thought it was very touching that you said you really wanted to help people that were crying and screaming for help! When you were telling me the story, I thought it was a joke because it was on April Fool's Day. I'm really glad that you're alive today to tell me that story. Love always,

Brandy Ah Choy, Grade 5.<sup>44</sup>

**RUN! RUN! RUN!**

Gigantic wave came crashing down,

People fled from all around.

The wave tore families apart,

Left friends with broken hearts.

Deadful voices rang,

A sorry song was sang.

Heavy tears ran down faces,

Slowly fell to earthly places.

It's coming hard and coming strong,

---

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 49.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 37.

It shook the ground with a loud BONG!  
RUN! RUN! RUN! as fast as you can,  
Don't look back! OH MAN! OH MAN!  
by Lenny Ambrosio, Grade 5.<sup>45</sup>

Another letter from Masuo Kino provides an appropriate conclusion to this chapter. The letter simply and directly illustrates the educative value of oral history narratives to interviewee, interviewer, and future generations:

Warren,

A belated "thank you" for the transcribed copy of the interview. It fulfills, in large measure, my plan to leave a personal and family history for my children and grandchildren. Please send me 2 copies of the transcribed interview. My two daughters read it and were fascinated and touched by my descriptions of my childhood and the tsunami experience which you so skillfully elicited. "Thank you" once again--from the Kino family.

Masuo Kino<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 29.

<sup>46</sup>Masuo Kino, letter to author, 15 August 2000. The letter is reprinted in its entirety.

## CHAPTER 12

### CONCLUSION

This study presented and examined five oral histories of survivors and eyewitnesses of the most deadly natural disaster in modern Hawaiian history: the April 1, 1946 tsunami. The oral histories were examined through two lenses. First, as living historical documents, they presented a personal and human side of the tragedy, a change from the statistical and scientific accounts which previously dominated the literature about tsunamis. In order to achieve a balance between humanism and science, this study demonstrated the critical need to record and preserve the life experiences, values, and assessments of people who were impacted by the disaster.

Second, the interview narratives served as case studies by which to study oral history's evolution from a data-gathering tool used primarily by historians to fill in gaps in the written historical record, to a multidisciplinary field in which historiographical issues regarding the *process* of gathering data are examined along with the data itself. The result of this evolution is the search for the interrelationship between elements of *memory*, or how and why we recall life experiences, and *narrative*, or how and why we tell stories about what we remember, which often produces *history*, or how and why we preserve these stories for future generations. Oral history, defined as the collaborative construction and transmission of narratives based on individual memory, represents what I term the "alchemy" of memory, narrative, and history. This alchemy plays an important educative role to all involved

in the process of converting memory into history: the *interviewees/narrators*, the *interviewer/researcher*, and *present and future generations of scholars, students, and the lay community*.

The oral history narratives told us as much about the 1946 tsunami as an historical event as they did the way people made sense of and found meaning in their past, how they connected their individual experiences with their social-cultural-historical context, and how they used memory and narrative to interpret their lives and the world around them. More specifically, they told us about the meaning survivors and eyewitnesses of the April 1, 1946 tsunami attached to what they saw, heard, and did that day within the context of their overall life experiences, as well as broader historical patterns relating to how they individually and collectively dealt with environmental and social trauma. In short, in Alessandro Portelli's words, we learned "not merely what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did."<sup>1</sup>

We also discovered that human beings have the capacity to proactively influence the process and product of their life courses. In this study, we saw human beings with values and beliefs making choices under extremely difficult circumstances and under conditions not always of their own making or choosing. The narratives confirm French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre's assertion that, in studying life and people's roles in it, what is important "is not what life has done to people, but what

---

<sup>1</sup>Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 50.



people do with what life has done to them."<sup>2</sup> According to Jerome Bruner, narratives created from oral histories enable us to study the past as "vicissitudes of human intentions."<sup>3</sup>

This study has demonstrated that oral history should be examined not only for its results, but as a process as well. As documents, the oral histories of tsunami eyewitnesses and survivors represent historical data that will supplement already-existing material. They therefore must be used and evaluated with the same circumspection as other sources. Oral histories are unique, however, in that unless collected quickly, the information may be lost forever as the sources of this valuable information die.

On the other hand, oral history has become a discipline encompassing more than collecting and analyzing interviews. In utilizing social science and educational terminology indicating the field's multidisciplinary evolution, oral histories are *constructed* and *transmitted* as well. Recent scholarship in the field has dealt with such issues as: the oral history interview as a shared communicative event, the interviewer-interviewee relationship, collaborative narrative construction, and making sense of and finding meaning in remembered experiences.

---

<sup>2</sup>Quoted in Thomas Dublin, *When the Mines Closed: Stories of Struggles in Hard Times* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 4.

<sup>3</sup>Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 13.

The discussing and analyzing of these issues demonstrates the power spoken reminiscences have on our quest to identify, analyze, and ultimately improve the human condition now and in future generations.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### BOOKS AND JOURNAL ARTICLES

Allen, Barbara. "Re-creating the Past: The Narrator's Perspective in Oral History." *The Oral History Review* 12 (1984): 1-12.

\_\_\_\_\_. "In the Thick of Things: Texture in Orally Communicated History." *International Journal of Oral History* 6 (1985): 92-103.

Allen, Barbara and William Lynwood Montell. *From Memory to History: Using Oral Sources in Local Historical Research*. Nashville: The American Association for State and Local History, 1981.

Allen, Susan Emily. "Resisting the Editorial Ego: Editing Oral History." *The Oral History Review* 10 (1982): 33-45.

Appleby, Joyce, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob. *Telling the Truth about History*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994.

Armitage, Susan H. "The Next Step." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 7 (1983): 3-8.

Bailyn, Bernard. *Education in the Forming of American Society*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1972.

Baum, Willa K. *Oral History for the Local Historical Society*. 2nd ed. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1977.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Transcribing and Editing Oral History*. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1977.

Beechert, Edward D. *Working in Hawaii: A Labor History*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985.

Bellelli, Guglielmo, and Mirella A. C. Amatulli. "Nostalgia, Immigration, and Collective Memory." In *Collective Memory of Political Events: Social Psychological Perspectives*, edited by James W. Pennebaker, et. al., 209-20. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997.

Bennett, James. "Human Values in Oral History." *The Oral History Review* 11 (1983): 1-15.

- Berger, Peter L., and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966.
- Bertaux, Daniel, ed. *Biography and Society: The Life History Approach in the Social Sciences*. Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1981.
- Big Island Resource Conservation and Development Council, "North Hilo Heritage Corridor Strategic Plan" (Kamuela, Hawai'i, 1995, photocopy), 1.
- Birnie, Ian. "Transportation and The 1946 Tsunami." *Pacific Tsunami Museum Newsletters*. <http://tsunami.org/newsletter2.htm>, 15 February 2001.
- Blatti, Jo. "Public History and Oral History." *The Journal of American History* 77:2 (1990): 615-25.
- Bloch, Marc. *The Historian's Craft*. New York: Vintage Books, 1953.
- Bodnar, John. "Power and Memory in Oral History: Workers and Managers at Studebaker." *The Journal of American History* 75:4 (Mar., 1989): 1201-21.
- Borg, Jim. "Ripples from the Ring of Fire." *Honolulu Magazine*, April 1996.
- Bouvet, P. Ernest. *The Final Harvest, Commemorating the Hāmākua Sugar Company, 1869-1994; Epilogue: The Final Harvest and Beyond, 1994-2000*. Hilo, Hawai'i: P. Ernest Bouvet, 2001.
- Brecher, Jeremy. *History from Below: How to Uncover and Tell the Story of Your Community, Association or Union*. New Haven, Connecticut: Commonwork Pamphlets/The Advocate Press, 1986.
- Bruner, Jerome. *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986.
- Carr, David. *Time, Narrative, and History*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.
- Carter, Kathy. "The Place of Story in the Study of Teaching and Teacher Education." *Educational Researcher* 22:1 (1993): 5-12.
- Center for Oral History, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. *Tsunamis Remembered: Oral Histories of Survivors and Observers in Hawai'i*, 2 vols. Honolulu: Center for Oral History, 2000.

- Chamberlain, Mary, and Paul Thompson, eds. *Narrative and Genre*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Chanfrault-Duchet, Marie-Francoise. "Narrative Structures, Social Models, and Symbolic Representation in the Life Story." In *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, edited by Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, 77-92. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Chase, Susan E. "Taking Narrative Seriously: Consequences for Method and Theory in Interview Studies." In *Interpreting Experience: The Narrative Study of Lives*, edited by Ruthellen Josselson and Amia Lieblich, 1-26. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1995.
- Chinen, Karleen. "The Hilo Tsunami Museum: Memories of the Past to Provide Lessons for the Future." *The Hawaii Herald*, 16 August 1996, A-1.
- Clandinin, D. Jean, and F. Michael Connelly. *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Personal Experience Methods." In *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1994.
- Clark, E. Culpepper; Michael J. Hyde; and Eva M. McMahan. "Communication in the Oral History Interview: Investigating Problems of Interpreting Oral Data." *International Journal of Oral History* 1 (1980): 28-40.
- Cohen, Cindy. "Building Multicultural and Intergenerational Networks Through Oral History." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 7 (1983): 98-102.
- Connelly, F. Michael, and D. Jean Clandinin. "Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry." *Educational Researcher* 19:5 (1990): 2-14.
- Cortazzi, Martin. *Narrative Analysis*. London: The Falmer Press, 1993.
- Cremin, Lawrence A. *The Transformation of the School*. New York: Vintage Books, 1964.
- Creswell, John W. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1998.
- Curtis, George. "Tsunami and Science." *Pacific Tsunami Museum Newsletters*. <http://tsunami.org/newsletter1.htm>, 2001.

- Cutler, William W. III. "Accuracy in Oral History Interviewing." *Historical Methods Newsletter* 3:3 (1970): 1-7.
- Davis, Cullom; Kathryn Back; and Kay MacLean. *Oral History: From Tape to Type*. Chicago: American Library Association, 1977.
- Denzin, Norman K. *Interpretive Biography*. Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications, 1989.
- Department of Geography, University of Hawaii. *Atlas of Hawaii*. Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1973.
- Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*. New York: The Free Press, 1944.
- Dublin, Thomas. *When the Mines Closed: Stories of Struggles in Hard Times*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998.
- Dudley, Walter C., and Min Lee. *Tsunami!*, 2nd. ed., Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990.
- Dunaway, David K. "The Interdisciplinarity of Oral History." In *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*. 2nd. ed., edited by David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum, 7-22. Walnut Creek, California: AltaMira Press, 1996.
- Eakin, Paul John. *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999.
- Errante, Antoinette. "But Sometimes You're Not Part of the Story: Oral Histories and Ways of Remembering and Telling." *Educational Researcher* 29:2 (2000): 16-27.
- Faris, David E. "Narrative Form and Oral History: Some Problems and Possibilities." *International Journal of Oral History* 1:3 (1980): 159-80.
- Federal Writers' Project. *These Are Our Lives: As Told by the People and Written by Members of the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Georgia*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1939.
- Fentress, James, and Chris Wickham. *Social Memory: New Perspectives on the Past*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992.

- Ferdun, Clarence. "A Report by Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Ferdun of their Experience During the April 1, 1946 Tidal Wave." Honolulu, Hawai'i, 1998. Photocopy.
- Filmer, Paul, et al., "Developments in Social Theory." In *Researching Society and Culture*, edited by Clive Seale, 23-36. London: Sage Publications, 1998.
- Fine, Michelle. "Working the Hyphens: Reinventing Self and Other in Qualitative Research." In *The Landscape of Qualitative Research: Theories and Issues*, edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 130-55. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1998.
- Finkenauer, Catrin; Lydia Gisle; and Olivier Luminet. "When Individual Memories Are Socially Shaped: Flashbulb Memories of Sociopolitical Events." In *Collective Memory of Political Events: Social Psychological Perspectives*, edited by James W. Pennebaker; Dario Paez; and Bernard Rimé, 191-207. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997.
- Freeman, Mark. *Rewriting the Self: History, Memory, Narrative*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Friedlander, Peter. *The Emergence of a UAW Local 1936-1939: A Study in Class and Culture*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1975
- Frisch, Michael H. *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990.
- Fuchs, Lawrence H. *Hawaii Pono: A Social History*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961.
- Gardner, James B., and George Rollie Adams, eds. *Ordinary People and Everyday Life: Perspectives on the New Social History*. Nashville: The American Association for State and Local History, 1983.
- Gillenkirk, Jeff, and James Motlow. *Bitter Melon: Stories from the Last Rural Chinese Town in America*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987.
- Gluck, Sherna Berger. *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, the War, and Social Change*. New York: Meridian, 1987.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "What's So Special About Women? Women's Oral History." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 2 (1977): 3-14.

- Gluck, Sherna Berger and Daphne Patai, eds. *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*. London: Routledge, 1991.
- Grele, Ronald J. *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History*. 2nd ed. Chicago: Precedent Publishing, 1985.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Useful Discoveries: Oral History, Public History, and the Dialectic of Narrative." *The Public Historian* 13 (1991): 61-84.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "On Using Oral History Collections: An Introduction." *The Journal of American History* 74:2 (September 1987): 570-78.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Values and Methods in the Classroom Transformation of Oral History." *The Oral History Review* 25:1-2 (1998): 57-69.
- \_\_\_\_\_, ed. *International Annual of Oral History, 1990: Subjectivity and Multiculturalism in Oral History*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1992.
- Griffin, Tom. "Is History Dead? Old Debate Gains New Life." *The University Report, University of Washington* 3 (June, 1989): 4.
- Grim, Valerie. "History Shared Through Memory: The Establishment and Implementation of Education in the Brooks Farm Community, 1920-1957." *The Oral History Review* 23:1 (1996): 1-17.
- Gubrium, Jaber F., and James A. Holstein. "Biographical Work and New Ethnography." In *Interpreting Experience: The Narrative Study of Lives*, edited by Ruthellen Josselson and Amia Lieblich, 45-58. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1995.
- Hall, Jacquelyn Dowd, et. al. *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987.
- Hareven, Tamara K. "From Amoskeag to Nishijin: Reflections on Life History Interviewing in Two Cultures." In *International Annual of Oral History, 1990: Subjectivity and Multiculturalism in Oral History*, edited by Ronald J. Grele, 9-42. New York: Greenwood Press, 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Families, History, and Social Change: Life-Course and Cross-Cultural Perspectives*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2000.



- \_\_\_\_\_. *Family Time and Industrial Time: The Relationship Between the Family and Work in a New England Industrial Community*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.
- Hareven, Tamara K., and Randolph Langenbach. *Amoskeag: Life and Work in an American Factory-City*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.
- Hareven, Tamara K., and Kanji Masaoka. "Turning Points and Transitions: Perceptions of the Life Course." *Journal of Family History* 13:3 (1988): 271-89.
- Henige, David. *Oral Historiography*. New York: Longman Group, 1982.
- Holstein, James A., and Jabar F. Gubrium. "Phenomenology, Ethnomethodology, and Interpretive Practice." In *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 262-72. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1994.
- Horowitz, Roger, and Rick Halpern. "Work, Race, and Identity: Self-Representation in the Narratives of Black Packinghouse Workers." *The Oral History Review* 26:1 (1999): 23-43.
- Hughes, Maxine. "Shinmachi: Gone but Not Forgotten." *Hawaii Tribune-Herald, Orchid Isle Magazine*, August 9-15, 1991.
- International Tsunami Information Center. *Tsunami Newsletter* 28:1 (1996).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Tsunami Newsletter* 28:2 (1996).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Tsunami Newsletter* 29:1 (1997).
- Ives, Edward D. *The Tape Recorded Interview: A Manual for Field Workers in Folklore and Oral History*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1974.
- Kelly, Marion; Barry Nakamura; and Dorothy Barrere. *Hilo Bay, A Chronological History: Land and Water Use in the Hilo Bay Area*. Honolulu: Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, 1981.
- Klempner, Mark. "Navigating Life Review Interviews with Survivors of Trauma." *The Oral History Review* 27:2 (2000): 67-83.
- Kline, Carrie Nobel. "Giving It Back: Creating Conversations to Interpret Community Oral History." *The Oral History Review* 23:1 (1996): 19-39.

- K'Meyer, Tracy E. "What Koinonia Was All About': The Role of Memory in a Changing Community." *The Oral History Review* 24:1 (1997): 1-22.
- Kodama-Nishimoto, Michi; Warren S. Nishimoto; and Cynthia A. Oshiro, eds. *Hanahana: An Oral History Anthology of Hawaii's Working People*. Honolulu: Center for Oral History, 1985.
- Lander, James F. *United States Tsunamis, 1690-1988*. Boulder, Colorado: U.S. Dept. of Commerce, NOAA, National Geophysical Data Center, 1989.
- Langness, L. L. *The Life History in Anthropological Science*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965.
- Laupahoehoe School. *April Fool's... The Laupahoehoe Tragedy of 1946: An Oral History*. Hilo, Hawai'i: Obun Hawaii, Inc., 1997.
- Leviatin, David. "Amoskeag and Beyond." *The Oral History Review* 21 (1994): 105-9.
- Lieblich, Amia, et. al., *Narrative Research: Reading, Analysis, and Interpretation*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1998.
- Mason, Elizabeth B., and Louis M. Starr, eds. *The Oral History Collection of Columbia University*. New York: Oral History Research Office, 1973.
- McMahan, Eva M. *Elite Oral History Discourse: A Study of Cooperation and Coherence*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1989.
- McMahan, Eva M., and Kim Lacy Rogers, eds. *Interactive Oral History Interviewing*. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1994.
- Merriam, Sharan B. *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998.
- Mintz, Sidney W. "The Anthropological Interview and the Life History." *The Oral History Review* 7 (1979): 18-26.
- Mishler, Elliot G. *Research Interviewing: Context and Narrative*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986.
- Montell, William Lynwood. *The Saga of Coe Ridge*. New York: Harper & Row, 1970.
- Moss, William W. "Oral History: An Appreciation." *The American Archivist* 40 (1977): 429-39.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *Oral History Program Manual*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974.
- Nathan, Harriet. *Critical Choices in Interviews: Conduct, Use, and Research Role*. Berkeley: Institute of Governmental Studies, 1986.
- Neunschwander, John A. *Oral History and the Law*, Rev. ed. Albuquerque: Oral History Association, 1993.
- Oblinger, Carl. *Interviewing the People of Pennsylvania: A Conceptual Guide to Oral History*. Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1978.
- Okihiro, Gary Y. "Oral History and the Writing of Ethnic History." In *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*. 2nd ed., edited by David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum, 199-214. Walnut Creek, California: AltaMira Press, 1996.
- Oral History Association. *Guidelines and Principles of the Oral History Association*. Los Angeles: Oral History Association: 1992.
- Perks, Robert, and Alistair Thomson, eds. *Oral History Reader*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Pillemer, David. *Momentous Events, Vivid Memories* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).
- Polkinghorne, Donald. *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988.
- Portelli, Alessandro. *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Time of My Life: Functions of Time in Oral History." *International Journal of Oral History* 2:3 (1981): 162-80.
- Pukui, Mary Kawena, and Samuel H. Elbert, *Hawaiian Dictionary*, rev. and enlarged ed. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986.
- Pukui, Mary Kawena, Samuel H. Elbert, and Esther T. Mookini. *Place Names of Hawaii*, rev. and enlarged ed. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1974.
- Ritchie, Donald A. *Doing Oral History*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Oral History/Public History Connection." In *Public History: An Introduction*, edited by Barbara J. Howe and Emory L. Kemp, 57-69. Malabar, Florida: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Co., 1986.
- Rogovin, Milton, and Michael H. Frisch. *Portraits in Steel*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993.
- Rosengarten, Theodore. *All God's Dangers: The Life of Nate Shaw*. New York: Avon Books, 1974.
- Rubin, Herbert J., and Irene S. Rubin. *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1995.
- Ruiz, Vicki L. "Situating Stories: The Surprising Consequences of Oral History." *The Oral History Review* 25:1-2 (1998): 71-80.
- Samuel, Raphael and Paul Thompson, eds. *The Myths We Live By*. London: Routledge, 1990.
- Schrager, Samuel. "What Is Social in Oral History?" *International Journal of Oral History* 4:2 (1983): 76-98.
- Schwandt, Thomas A. "Constructivist, Interpretivist Approaches to Human Inquiry." In *The Landscape of Qualitative Research: Theories and Issues*, edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 221-59. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1998.
- Seale, Clive. "Qualitative Interviewing." In *Researching Society and Culture*, edited by Clive Seale, 202-16. London: Sage Publications, 1998.
- Shepard, F.P.; G.A. MacDonald; and D.C. Cox. "The Tsunami of April 1, 1946." *Bulletin of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography of the University of California, La Jolla, California*. (Vol. 5, No. 6: 391-528). Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1950.
- Shopes, Linda. "Beyond Trivia and Nostalgia: Collaborating in the Construction of a Local History." *International Journal of Oral History* 5:3 (1984): 151-58.
- Slim, Hugo, and Paul Thompson. *Listening for a Change: Oral Testimony and Development*. London: Panos Publications: 1993.

- Smith, Louis M. "Biographical Method." In *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 286-305. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1994.
- Smith, Richard Candida. "Ronald Grele on the Role of Theory in Oral History." *The Oral History Review* 21:2 (1994): 99-103.
- Stake, Robert E. *The Art of Case Study Research*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1995.
- Stake, Robert E. "Case Studies." In *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 236-47. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1994.
- Starr, Louis B. "Oral History." In *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*. 2nd ed., edited by David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum, 39-61. Walnut Creek, California: AltaMira Press, 1996.
- Stearns, Peter N. "The New Social History: An Overview." In *Ordinary People and Everyday Life: Perspectives on the New Social History*, edited by James B. Gardner and George Rollie Adams, 3-21. Nashville: The American Association for State and Local History, 1983.
- Stricklin, David, and Rebecca Sharpless, eds. *The Past Meets the Present: Essays on Oral History*. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1988.
- Strobel, Margaret. "Doing Oral History as an Outsider." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 2 (1977): 54-57.
- Swadener, Beth Blue, and Monica Miller March. "Reflections on Collaborative, and Not-So-Collaborative, Research in Early Childhood Settings." In *Inside Stories: Qualitative Research Reflections*, edited by Kathleen Bennett deMarras, 161-72. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1998.
- Thelen, David. "Memory and American History." *The Journal of American History* 75 (1989): 1117-29.
- Thompson, Paul. "Believe It or Not: Rethinking the Historical Interpretation of Memory." In *Memory and History: Essays on Recalling and Interpreting Experience*, edited by Jaclyn Jeffrey and Glenace Edwall, 1-16. Latham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1994.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Problems of Method in Oral History." *Oral History: The Journal of the Oral History Society* 1:4 (1972): 1-47.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Tonkin, Elizabeth. *Narrating our Past: The Social Construction of Oral History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Vansina, Jan. *Oral Tradition as History*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.
- Wachtel, Nathan. "Memory and History, Introduction." *History and Anthropology* 2 (Oct., 1986): 2-11.
- Waiākea High School. *Waiākea High School Tsunami Network, 1998-1999*. Hilo: Waiākea High School, 1999.
- Walker, Daniel A. *Tsunami Facts*. SOEST Technical Report 94-03. Honolulu: School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology, University of Hawaii, 1994.
- White, Hayden. *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987.
- Witherell, Carol and Nel Noddings, eds. *Stories Lives Tell: Narrative and Dialogue in Education*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1991.
- Yin, Robert K. *Applications of Case Study Research*. Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications, 1993.
- Yow, Valerie. "Do I Like Them Too Much?": Effects of the Oral History Interview on the Interviewer and Vice-Versa." *The Oral History Review* 24:1 (1997): 55-79.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Ethics and Interpersonal Relationships in Oral History Research." *The Oral History Review* 22:1 (1995): 51-66.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Recording Oral History: A Practical Guide for Social Scientists*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1994.

## NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

- Hilo Tribune-Herald* (name changed in 1964 to *Hawaii Tribune-Herald*):  
 1 April - 1 May 1946  
 26 June 1955  
 1 April 1999  
 6 December 2000

*The Honolulu Advertiser:*

1 April - 6 April 1946

26 April 1963

23 January 1974

2 April 1979

1 April 1986

17 March 1997

18 April 1998

1 April 2001

*Honolulu Star-Bulletin:*

6 July 1935

18 April 1946

14 October 1952

18 April 1998

*The Sunday Star-Bulletin & Advertiser:*

6 September 1992.