

DONN BEACH

THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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(1907 -)

Donn Beach, greatly-admired and greatly-imitated restaurateur, describes the early experiences, including a voyage to Australia, that led to his lifelong interest in the South Pacific area.

Mr. Beach reminisces about his years in Hollywood in both the movie and restaurant industries, and his military service during World War II. He shares anecdotes about many well-known personalities he has met throughout the years.

Perhaps best known for his restaurants, Mr. Beach has also served as a consultant for resort development and has devised a number of visitor attractions for many tourist areas, including Waikiki's famous International Marketplace.

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INTERVIEW WITH DONN BEACH

At the International Market Place, Honolulu, Hawaii

September 16, 1986

B: Donn Beach

S: Alice Sinesky

B: It all started in 1907 in Mandeville in Louisiana across Lake Pontchartrain. It's between Mandeville and New Orleans in the country. I spent my early days in school in Mandeville and Jamaica and in Texas. We came to Texas during the oil rush back in 1924-25, I think.

My father fancied himself an oil driller. He drilled seven wells, six of which were dry. That sort of broke the family. Mother started on her own to do some catering for the oil field people--the drillers' people. In those days, we didn't have hotels out in the middle of nowhere.

She had built a series of boarding houses. I was then, I think, sixteen. She put me to work doing some of the chores. For four years we worked, and I found myself with \$40,000 in my pocket. Business was good. Mom wanted me to go to the university and I said, "I don't think so." I wanted to see the world. I took \$40,000 and went around the world twice. That gave me a taste of travel.

We were down in Galveston, my dad and me, at his cousin's home. He was building a beautiful white yacht in Galveston, Texas. We were having dinner with him and he was telling my dad about his intended trip. He was going to take his boat through the Panama Canal to San Pedro and he wanted to leave it there and get somebody to take it to Sydney [Australia]. He had a skipper and a crew all signed up, but he needed a supercargo. A supercargo represents the owner. He's responsible to the owner for everything--the payroll, under the captain, of course.

S: It has to be somebody that the owner can trust, obviously.

B: I overheard this conversation and I started jumping up and down, begging my dad to let me go. They decided I could go. So I went over to San Pedro and met the boat there. Met the captain and the crew of seven and the captain and myself

took off for Honolulu. About seven days later we crossed Diamond Head early in the morning.

My first impression--this was 1929--and I was nineteen--I'll never forget this--the trade winds and frangipani. As we crossed Diamond Head we came very close to shore en route to Honolulu to dock. It was like a wet blanket of flowers. In all these years, I've never forgotten. Every time I smell plumeria any place in the world it all comes back to me in glorious technicolor--this scene--my first trip to the South Seas.

S: How big was this yacht?

B: A hundred-twenty footer. The yacht moved slowly up to the dock, tied up at the end of Fort Street. The old Moana Hotel was the only hotel we saw along Waikiki Beach. The next morning the captain gave the crew permission to go ashore for two days leaving just me and the captain. I needed two days to lay in supplies for the next leg to Papeete. I needed to go up to the bank to cash some funds to pay the crew.

The owner of the yacht had given me definite orders to keep to the schedule that the captain had planned, so two days went by and not a single member of the crew appeared. The captain and I waited a few hours and then went to the chief of police. I explained that we had to have the crew on deck that afternoon. I could see that I had to encourage the desk sergeant to assist us, handed him a hundred dollar bill to which he said, "I think we can find your crew." Some four hours later three policemen dragged the drunken crew aboard. They had found them in Iwilei.

The following day we sailed for Papeete. The same thing happened. When we arrived, I needed to take on supplies for the trip to Sydney and the captain gave the crew two days' leave. He told them if they did not report in two days, he would hold their pay. Three days passed. No crew. I had to go to see the gendarmes. On the fourth day they were found all except one. They could not find him. I am sure he found a wahine and hightailed it up in the hills back of Papeete. I think he is still up there with a hundred grandchildren.

We took off for Sydney with six crew members and when we arrived at the docks in that beautiful harbor, the owner was on the docks waiting for us to tie up. We were four days late. He was furious. After explaining our crew problem he said, "I thought you might have had something like that."

I went on shore and turned over my records, balance of funds and received my accumulated salary. After a few days seeing the sights of Sydney I found myself on a freighter

en route through the South Seas. A whole year passed island hopping.

Returning from Tahiti, I visited my brother Hugh in Hollywood. He was working in the studios as "dress extra." During the late thirties the studios were producing some South Sea Island pictures. My brother had mentioned to some producers that I had just returned from many months in the islands. Also, that I had brought back a large collection of South Sea Island artifacts, curios, et cetera. I was promptly hired as technical director on the picture Moon of Manakura. Also, I rented my South Sea Island props to the studio for set decorations. I worked with John Ford on his Hurricane and several more South Seas classics during 1931.

S: Were you in the production end of it?

B: Well, I was technical director. Technical director or technical advisor, because they didn't have anybody else around there who knew anything about the South Seas. (laughs) I didn't know a hell of a lot myself. (laughter)

S: But at least you'd been there.

B: I got a hundred dollars a day and in those days a hundred bucks was a lot of money.

S: Well, sure, because that was in the Depression.

B: Right in the Depression. So I saved a little money there. In 1932 at the repeal of prohibition--we'd had fourteen years of darkness in that stupid thing called the Eighteenth Amendment--and finally we saw the light. Roosevelt had signed the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment. We'd all been drinking this horrible rotgut stuff--bathtub gin--for fourteen years. That was over a decade. All of a sudden we had liquor back. Most of the hotels and restaurants were broke because they needed the wines and the liquors.

S: Well, the combination of the Depression plus prohibition would have done most of them in.

B: It did about eighty percent of them in. I thought that I had a clue to the whole thing. I rented a little place just off Hollywood Boulevard on McCadden Place in a little hotel called the McCadden Hotel. It was thirteen feet wide and thirty feet long. About the size of this. In elongated fashion.

S: Like a Waikiki studio apartment. (laughs)

B: Yes, and I opened a little thing called Don the Beachcomber's. I had a lot of those props and stuff stuck

around. Nobody had ever seen a collection of those things. I rigged up a sort of a tropical storm. As you entered from the street through the doorway into this little hole--when the crowd was thinning out, I would go outside and take a hose and spray the hell out of it--water right over the front of it. Everybody could see this tropical downpour and my guests would say, "Let's have another drink." (laughter)

S: Was this just a bar or a bar and restaurant?

B: Just a bar. In those days you should have had a food service, but I didn't. There was no room in there to serve food. Having spent some time in Jamaica--and the smell of Jamaica rum is always in my nostrils--I developed rum drinks. No one had ever tasted rum drinks. A cocktail--you probably had martinis and manhattans. The ladies never drank rum because they never had been exposed to it.

S: Was that the era still of the Pink Ladies?

B: The Pink Ladies and another there was called the Mary Pickford. Little silly things. I made these gutsy rum punches called the Zombie, the Mai Tai and the Missionary's Downfall and the Sumatra Cooler. Altogether I've created some sixty-four rum drinks including the Mai Tai, which is quite popular now. The Zombie was a lethal thing. I used four different rums. One of the rums was 150 proof. I made this long concoction of rum punch and I limited it to two per person. Absolutely. I'd seen some horrible things happen with more than two. (laughs)

But this little place became very popular with the motion picture people because I'd known a great many of them in the studio. We had people like Chaplin and Marlene Dietrich. She was a great delight. I lived just under her at the Garden of Allah on Sunset. The famous Garden of Allah. Occasionally, when she would come home from the studio, she'd invite me for a German supper, a Bavarian supper, and I'd make Southern dishes for her. Back and forth.

S: She was a captivating woman.

B: A delightful person. I think I have to tell you this--it's a little risqué--but it gives you an insight to those days. She had just finished a picture--The Blue Angel, I think it was--and she liked this drink that I made called the Gold Cup. It was a lovely rum cocktail. It was her favorite. One of her entourage called me in the afternoon and said, "Donn, Marlene is coming after the opening (it was a premiere at Graumann's Chinese Theater) and she would like to have about twelve people." You could only get about thirty people in there on each other's shoulders. "Well," I

said, "you tell her that she knows that I don't reserve tables." "Well," he said, "do the best you can."

She arrived about eleven o'clock with fourteen people. There were people standing at the bar and over here there were three little tables and people with their backs to the wall. You had to walk past that to get in or out of the door. They traipsed in and she came through in a gold lame gown--a beautiful gown. She had a lovely figure. There was no place to sit. So they all stood behind the people sitting at the bar. I was behind the bar with a Filipino bartender I had taught to make rum drinks. I made a drink for her--her favorite--the Gold Cup. She was standing up and just as I handed it to her someone bumped her, unintentionally of course, and it fell right down her bosom. It was an iced drink. (laughs)

In this little room--the bar--there was no toilet. They had to go through the lobby and out through the hall to find this toilet. It wasn't a proper ladies lounge. You opened the door and you sat down. (laughs) Anyway, I grabbed some towels and rushed around the bar and grabbed her by the arm and took her out. I found this door and opened it. There was nothing--she had to turn around and sit down. I started to close the door and I was shoving the towels at her and she said, "For Christ's sake, come and help me. I can't get this gown off." She was sitting and the dress was holding and it was wet. Here she wanted me to take her gown down and dry her off. Well, I'm standing there like an idiot and the door was open because you couldn't get two people in there. She's sitting down and I'm standing in front of her mopping her. I pulled her lovely gown down--finally got it off of her shoulders. She tells the story on me because of the look on my face at that time. She was a great delight. That I recall so vividly.

S: Yes, something like that would stick in your memory.
(laughter)

B: The rum drinks and Don the Beachcomber's became quite well known.

S: And you concocted these drinks yourself? I mean you didn't have the Old Mr. Boston's Bartender's Guide? These drinks you did this yourself?

B: Well, I suppose there was an Old Mr. Boston's Bartender's Guide, but no one had had access to rum. But anyway, this bar was so crowded and so popular that I moved across the street and built a lovely restaurant. It's still there after more than fifty years.

Ninety percent of my reservations were motion picture people. We had Mary Pickford and so many. It's just blank

when you try to recall so many faces. Many of them are gone.

I'm in Hollywood now in 1936 and I'm across the street. We had what we called Polynesian food or South Seas Island food, which is actually my interpretation of Chinese cooking. In those days we didn't have many Chinese restaurants. They were all chop suey joints--not like today.

The Beachcomber became quite well known and we had imitators like Trader Vic. There were over 115 copies--South Seas Island copies--Polynesian food and drink--many of which are still operating. It's an amazing thing because it was an era of escape. That was the thing that I thought was rather remarkable, because I don't remember any particular type of restaurant food or cuisine that has lasted that long.

Then I came over to Honolulu--I always remembered it with a great deal of love--for a vacation. I had been working eighteen hours a day.

S: You hadn't been back since you made that initial visit?

B: When I took off for Sydney? No. I took a little place out here, which is presently called the Sans Souci Apartments. There were six or eight lovely little bungalows. I took one on the beach for seventy-five dollars a month. Two bedrooms and a lovely lanai, a little bar and a kitchen. I started entertaining considerably. Friends came over on the ship from Hollywood and they knew I was here. I became quite popular (laughs) as far as guests were concerned.

I needed some help and I noticed a newspaper article about a lady who was just starting a cooking school. I called her and introduced myself to her. I told her that I had been in the restaurant business, but I needed someone that I could teach while they were working. Sort of hands on. She said, "Well, we've got about twelve enrolled now. Can I send them out to you?" (laughs) "You mean the whole of them?" "How many do you want to see?" I said, "Well, let's have half a dozen."

Six of the cutest little Japanese ladies--women--girls--came out and I selected one. First of all, I called her and asked her how much I should pay her. She said, "Well, five dollars a week." A week. And food.

S: A week!

B: I said, "That's fine." This was a sharp little lady. She was about nineteen. She was going to learn how to cook and she was very eager. Then I taught her how to make drinks. Well, I had a staff already started there.

In the summertime a lot of people came in and I needed more people. I started to call the lady again for another one and this gal said to me, "My sister wants to work. She'll work for three dollars." So now I have a staff of two.

S: (laughs) For eight dollars a week.

B: Then I bought a station wagon. Part of my deal with the landlady at the Sans Souci was that I mowed the lawn or had it mowed. And that was a chore in those days. You pushed. (laughs) I thought that was a lot of bother. I needed somebody to drive, too, and run around and do chores. I was sort of mumbling to myself that I needed somebody else and she said, "My father. My father is a good chauffeur. Four dollars for him." So now I have a big staff for twelve dollars a week.

This was in 1939. I met a chap by the name of George Pease. We called him Skipper Pease. He was Naval Intelligence. They were training him here in Hawaii. He was a very personable fellow. I'd met him and we'd had several drinks and dinners and he finally explained to me what he was doing. He needed a front. I said, "Let's see if we can't figure something out." I'd been back and forth to Hollywood from time to time. This is over a period of two or three years.

S: You still maintained the restaurant back there?

B: Oh, yes. I had a good staff there. I'd come over every two months to Honolulu. I opened a little place called the Trade Winds Trading Company--curios--some of the things that I'd collected in the South Seas. I wanted him to operate it --to manage it. It was a perfect front for him. He also had the use of the station wagon. He'd take people out shopping or chores. It was a good front. This went on until early 1941 and I left him here. He stayed in my little apartment, kept the business going and used the station wagon.

I came back in late 1941. I wanted to do a restaurant here. I found a location right at the point at Kuhio Beach at the water's edge. On the right hand side as you go down towards the park. It was owned by the Cunha family, an old family. My attorney was Roy Vitousek and he'd negotiated a lease. Part of the lease was that I was to pay \$5,000 deposit. We were going to start building in October.

This was in October and the lease was finished. I had engaged Roy Kelley of the Kelley hotels as an architect. He was an architect originally. We had developed the plans. It was going to be a twenty-room hotel because we had to have a hotel in connection with serving grog. A bar and a restaurant downstairs. Twenty rooms was the minimum.

Come November, I had to go back to Hollywood. I got a call from this Captain Pease on November 20 (no one knew that he was in the Navy) and he said, "Donn, you have to get out from under that lease." I had a fifty-year lease there. I said, "Why is that?" He said, "You know why. I can't tell you, but you know. Get out from under it. Absolutely. Do it." So I called Vitousek, the attorney, and I told him. "I can't tell you why, but I have to get out from under this lease." He was dumbfounded. He said, "We worked four months to get this lease and you've got \$5,000 up. You're going to lose that." I said, "Well, I'll have to." He said, "All right, but I can't get you out of the lease. You're going to have to talk to the Cunha family."

I finally located Cecily, who was then living in Phoenix, Arizona. I knew her pretty well and I said, "Cecily, I've got to get out from under this lease." Of course she wanted to know why and I said, "I can't tell you why." Reluctantly, she said, "All right. You've just lost \$5,000." Come the day of the reckoning--the seventh day of December--and everybody knew why I had to get out from under the lease at that point.

I knew that I would be in the service: I was unmarried. I knew General [James H.] Doolittle. He was a major during those years. He was a delightful man. I think it was in February of 1942 that I got a note from Washington that I was commissioned in the Air Force. I'm in the service all of a sudden in the Mediterranean in the 12th and 15th Air Forces. I opened the officers' clubs in the training commands in Texas, Arizona and New Mexico before going overseas.

S: You mean they actually put somebody in the field that they were experienced in?

B: Yes, they finally did. I said, "I want to get out of here." I'd spent six months in Santa Ana. Finally, I had enough. I'd had a letter from Jimmy and he said that they'd like to get hold of me. I knew that he was some place in the Mediterranean. I just couldn't go down to my commanding general--he was a nice man--General Cousins--and say, "I want to leave." I finally went to him and said, "General, I really would like to get into action. General Doolittle has mentioned that I would be helpful to him." He said, "Well, tell you what I'll do. You go ahead and open the one up in Carlsbad. We're going to have one coming up in about two weeks--a new service command..."

S: This is Carlsbad, New Mexico?

B: Yes. "You do that and I'll let you go. You'd better take about ten days en route and get your affairs settled up." I said, "Well, General, I have a car and I can drive to

Carlsbad back and forth." He said, "I think you're talking about a different kind of a Carlsbad. This is New Mexico." I thought it was Carlsbad, California. A lovely little village. (laughter)

S: Well, I was familiar with the New Mexico one. I didn't know that there was a California one.

B: Well, I arrived in that horrible place called Carlsbad, New Mexico, where the bats are you know. [Carlsbad Caverns]

S: Yes, I've been there.

B: You have? Well, I drove in that heat and that dust and I found this--it was an old CCC camp. I was flabbergasted, but I persevered there for about six months. And I said, "Well, I've had enough of this." I wrote to Jimmy and about two months later I got a pair of orders that said, "You will report to Newport News, Virginia." On board these buckets--there was a big convoy going out towards Casablanca. That was where we were going to land. There were about thirty or forty ships in the convoy. These things were made by Kaiser. Those steel-hulled things. Just before we got into Casablanca, four subs found us and banged us about considerably.

I was in the hospital in Casablanca for a little while. Finally got down to Algiers where Doolittle was. I went to his office and there was no one there. I finally found him. He was having a haircut in one of the buildings around there. I reported to him and he said, "Where in the hell have you been? Nine months I've been trying to find you."

We sat down and he told me what I was going to do. He said, "We're going to set up rest areas. It's never been done before in the Air Force, but we're going to do it. We're going into Italy and France. I want you to set these rest areas up because when the long-range bombers from La Marsa come in..." They were bombing at that point. The 15th and 12th Air Forces were both there.

I was around Algiers for about a month just getting my feet wet. He gave me a pair of orders. The Germans were coming up from Taranto on the Adriatic. General Mark Clark was coming in at Salerno. I was supposed to go to Bari, Italy, on the Adriatic to look over an area for rest quarters. They were going to move over there from North Africa. He gave me a plane--a C-47--a crew and \$700 in gold strapped to my waist and a .45 and a jeep. We flew over Bari and the Germans were just moving slowly through. We had to circle until they had left. They dropped me in Bari late in the afternoon and took off back to Africa. I was sitting there alone. (laughs)

I started requisitioning. I had a whole sheaf of requisitions. All signed by General Doolittle. We wanted to grab all of the best buildings and amenities that we could find. To make a long story short, about a month later (I had done this requisitioning) I got a message from headquarters in La Marsa to go to Sorrento and Capri and try to grab as much as possible. The British 8th Army was pushing the Germans north. General Clark had just gotten to Naples and I followed his tracks. I waited for him to leave Naples--about three days--and I grabbed Amalfi, Sorrento, and went over to Capri early in the morning.

There was no way of getting over there in those days because they had bombed the hell out of Naples harbor. There were no boats and I saw a little boat with a motor on it and I talked to this fellow. He said, "I have no petrol." I said, "Well, I can get you petrol." I happened to have two cans extra. "Will five gallons get you across?" It's only thirteen miles over to Capri and he said, "Yes, that will do." We took off...

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 1

S: The Germans had just moved?

B: There had been no fighting there. They were using Capri as a recreational area or a holding area for hospital patients. They moved them up to Anacapri which is the other side of the island on the end of the island. I got to the docks in Capri and I asked who the mayor was. "Well, he's gone. He's gone with the Germans." I asked, "Who is the assistant?" "Well, there's Mr. Blanco who is the assistant."

I went up to the little square in Capri and found Blanco in the municipal office. I introduced myself. He spoke beautiful English and I spoke a little Italian by this time. I said, "I'm going to make you mayor." He said, "Splendid." I said, "Where was the German commander living?" He said, "It's only a few blocks. I'll take you up there." At the end of the Via Tragara, which was on the point of the land there, there was a magnificent villa and that was it.

When I walked into the villa, the food was still hot on the table. The Germans had just moved out. I requisitioned that beautiful villa in the name of General Doolittle and General [Carl] Tooley Spaatz (laughs) for the Air Force rest area. Subsequently, I got an officer to come in from Naples to assist me and we got a staff together and we requisitioned all the hotels and the pensiones. It was a beautiful fourteen-room villa that had seven baths in it, which was unheard of in Italy. Usually, there's one town and one bath.

S: It sure beat Carlsbad, New Mexico, by a long shot.

B: It certainly did. (laughs) I was there for a year as area commander on the Island of Capri. Then back to Bari and set up the rest areas on the Adriatic. About this time General Mark Clark was trying to take Rome (with great difficulty). We went in right behind him. I saw the old Excelsior Hotel in a movie the other day and it reminded me, Rome, 1944...

To shorten the story--this is in 1944--we (myself and three others) landed in Cannes in southern France and requisitioned beautiful hotels, villas and pensiones. We arrived at the Carlton Hotel late in the afternoon, having landed at the airport. We had to shoo a bunch of goats off the runway. About the time we landed on the end of the runway, the goats had detonated a mine that had been laid in the airport runway. It shook us up a little bit. We arrived at the Carlton and I walked up to the desk. I was a major with a sergeant and two other officers. I said, "Where is the general manager?" He hadn't seen American officers. He calls on the telephone and says, "The Americans have landed. The Americans have landed." There were only four of us. (laughs)

The manager came down and kissed us on both cheeks. "Mon dieux, mon dieux, the Americans have landed." We were there for about eight months, but I lived at Monte Carlo. Being the commanding officer, I was entitled to the best. There was no one allowed in Monte Carlo in the way of personnel. I lived at the Hotel de Paris in a great suite and motored back and forth to Cannes and Nice. We also requisitioned many hotels in Nice.

When I arrived in Monte Carlo, I drove up in front of the casino in a jeep and had a trailer on the jeep. There were still a few expatriates there. They couldn't get back to England--most of them were expatriates of England. This one lady rushed down these big steps that came down from the casino and yelled to me, "Have you got any bully beef? Have you got any bully beef?" She started taking off some bracelets and said, "I'll give you these for a can of bully beef." They hadn't tasted bully beef. I was smoking a cigar and people around hadn't smelled a cigar. There was no tobacco. Here they were in the most beautiful place in the world gambling and they had plenty of wine, plenty of cognac, plenty of fine drink, but no food.

S: What is bully beef?

B: Bully beef is canned beef in a tin.

S: Like corned beef?

B: Yes, corned beef. That's the British way of saying corned beef. (laughs) I said, "Well, I don't want your jewelry." I gave her some Spam that I happened to have. That was my introduction to Monte Carlo. I went up to see the manager and I told him who I was and what I wanted to do. He was most gracious. He said there were only twelve people in the hotel. The staff was still there.

He said, "Do you happen to have any coffee? I haven't tasted coffee in two years." I happened to have some Nescafe and I gave him a small jar of it. He booked me into this beautiful suite and I remained there for months. We did a little trading there because the bartender and I decided what a spoonful of coffee would trade for. It was a bottle of wine. One cup of coffee and that horrible stuff called Nescafe.

The manager called me one day and said, "Could I ask you a great favor because the Prince (Louis of Monaco) heard that you had coffee. He asked me if he could have some or buy some or acquire some. He sent down half a case of champagne. Perhaps if you could let him have some." So I gave him a pint jar. (laughs)

The people were absolutely destitute. The Germans had moved back so slowly and all the waters in front of Cannes and Nice were mined so there was no fishing. The Germans were up in front so there was no food coming down from Grenoble. They were just sitting there.

S: They were cut off.

B: Another story. While I was in Monte Carlo, there was some question as to how they were going to get the Germans out of a pocket just above Monte Carlo. The French and the American gunboats finally decided that they could, without destroying anything, bombard over Monte Carlo. The Germans were just sitting up in the hills looking down. Monaco was neutral.

Most of the residents of Monte Carlo were growing rabbits to provide some meat. The gunboats started a very heavy bombardment up over the city at the Germans in the hills. The tremendous concussion killed every rabbit. For the next few days a lot of rabbit stew was served up.

- S: That wasn't an aerial bombardment? They just fired from the boats?
- B: They shelled from offshore and shot over Monte Carlo and moved them out.

On the French Riviera I requisitioned for the Air Force generals so that in case they did want to come down we'd have a delightful place for them. I was searching around for a villa for General Spaatz and General Doolittle and went to Cap d'Antibes, which is just down around the corner from Cannes--a magnificent area. Saw a sign on a gate that said "Aujourd'hui" which means "today." I rather liked that. Went in and knocked on the door. I had my sergeant with me.

A majordomo came to the door and spoke English. I said, "Who's the owner of this?" "Mrs. Williams. She's in England and I'm looking after her villa." "Do you mind if I look over the villa?" There were seven rooms in the villa and each of the rooms had a different color. She was a rather eccentric old lady. She would sleep in a different room each night.

Chatting with the majordomo, I said, "What else do you do besides being majordomo?" He said, "Well, I'm a chef." I said, "Really. What do you cook? What are your specialities?" He said, "I can do almost anything, but I do wonderful crepes and souffles." "Do you do an onion souffle?" "Yes." "Chocolate souffle?" "Yes." I said, "Well, you're hired." I took the place over for the generals and I told him that I wanted him to have a meal for us. We're going to have some friends the next week.

He said, "We have nothing to eat. Nothing to cook." "Well, what do you need?" He needed chocolate, sugar, flour and everything else. I arranged to have that.

I said, "Do you do bouillabaisse?" "Yes, I do bouillabaisse, but we have no fish, no seafood, nothing." I was hungry for a bouillabaisse. He said that there were two or three restaurants in Cannes that were famous for bouillabaisse and there was one at Nice. He recommended the one at Nice.

One day on my way back to Monte Carlo I stopped at this little restaurant that was closed. I searched around and found out where the owner chap lived. He was a few blocks away. I went over to see him and said, "Can you do a bouillabaisse?" "I could do a bouillabaisse, of course, but I have nothing." I said, "What do you need?" He said, "I need seafood, first of all." I said, "Why don't you go and get the fish?" "We need petrol to go out and there are mines out there. But I think I can get some friends to go out with me." "All right. You give me a list of the things you

need." He said, "I need some petrol." So I gave him a tin of petrol.

I sent the sergeant down to bring all the things. This lovely little restaurant was right on the seafront. It was all darkened at night. There was no one there, of course. It was closed. I told him, "Let me know when you are ready and we'll have this dinner because I must have a bouillabaisse." He said, "I'll call you when I have it ready." I said, "And by the way, we don't want to sit here, you and I, all alone and eat bouillabaisse. Why don't you arrange to have a couple of nice gals." "Oh," he said, "I can do that." I said, "Well, let me know, and I'll come down and we'll have dinner."

I arrived after he called me, three or four days later. We had to go in through the back door because it was all dark. We just had candles in the kitchen. He had everything except food; wines, liqueurs, the very best things. I said, "Do you do a martini?" "Oh, yes." He did a beautiful, cold martini for us. He had prepared a bouillabaisse for us, baked French bread, and made a nice salad. And these two cute gals (they couldn't have been over eighteen) were rather shy. They didn't speak any English and I didn't speak enough French to converse with them. So we had this wonderful tureen of bouillabaisse. There wasn't a sound. We sopped the bread up--the girls just lapping it up. Finally after dinner we had some liqueurs and cigars. He hadn't had one. We sat there and drank cognac.

I told him, "After dinner we're going down to my villa, Aujourd'hui and we'll have a swim and I have some recordings and we'll have a party." He said, "Good." It was then about eleven o'clock at night. I was ready to go and I said, "Well, let's get moving here." He fooled around a while and came back and sat down. Finally, he saw that I was a little bit upset. And I said, "Well, what is wrong? Can't we go now?" I was then a lieutenant colonel. He said, "Colonel, could I have a word with you?" He took me out to this darkened dining room and said, "You know, when I told my wife about this, my two daughters were there and they wanted to come." He said, "I'm so very sorry about this." (laughter) I'd made such wonderful arrangements for the whole thing. Well, that's war!

S: That backfired just a little bit, didn't it?

B: Just a little bit. I recall that with such delight.
(laughs)

S: The bouillabaisse was the highlight of the evening then.

B: I think I've talked enough about the war. Let us come back to 1946. Oh, later on I commanded the area of Venice and Lido--a beautiful place--for six months. Just at the end of the war, I got a message from General Doolittle. I found out that he was looking for me. He wanted to get me assigned to the South Pacific. I finally discovered that his South Pacific was some place in Palau or some dumb place down there and I got very sick. The medical colonel finally signed a certificate that I had diptheria or something. I forget what it was. Later on Jimmy Doolittle walked through the door of my restaurant in Hollywood and said, "I knew, you bastard. I knew what happened." (laughter)

In 1946 I got back to Hollywood. I was very disenchanted when I saw the gray marketeers that had taken over. There was a big change in the attitude. I longed for the tropics again, so I came back to Honolulu. Matson Navigation was very generous to me. The assistant vice president was a delightful man. I told him that I was looking for a restaurant area. He said, "Well, right across the street." He was pointing out to me where Liberty House sits now on Kalakaua. He said, "There's an acre of ground there that you could lease from us." I said, "How much?" He gave me the lease for \$250 a month for an acre of ground. Nothing there but coconut trees in those days.

We started building. I had Pete Wimberly, the architect who had just arrived from California. He didn't know anything about tropical architecture. We did the first thatched buildings in this lovely garden in and around these coconut trees where Liberty House sits at this moment. I built three little buildings, little dining huts, with a lot of waterplay and so on. I had the first luaus ever offered in the Islands.

The Royal Hawaiian was right across the street. The clientele, very discerning people. Luaus were a thing of hospitality only. You were invited to a home for a luau, but it wasn't a commercial thing. I tried to do the closest thing that I could do for a private luau. The setting and the whole thing. I hired a lot of fine musicians and singers, dancers. Alfred Apaka was my first. (laughs) He was the most expensive man that I had on my payroll. A lot of others like Iolani Luahine and all these great people. Last night I heard the beautiful voice of Nina [Kealiwahamana] at a gathering, and she sings just as beautifully as she did in 1959.

S: What kind of a menu did you have?

B: I had a Polynesian menu. Mostly Chinese food. It was my rendition. Rum drinks, music and dancing. A luau on Sunday. This was a typical luau, not an Arkansas picnic like you have today. For ten years I did my luaus. You didn't

buy a ticket. You got an invitation, a little passport, with your name on it, "You're invited on such and such a day," and on the back of it I indicated the type of dress and the whole procedure of coming to a luau. They had to sit on the floor and do the whole bit. I allowed people to contribute \$12 and that included all you could drink, except champagne.

In those days I was able to seat about 200 people. You had to wear a muumuu or a pareau and aloha shirts. We had a great many interesting people. The thing that I miss most are those days of grand entertainers. They were there. There were entertainers that we'll never see again, never hear again.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 2

October 9, 1986

B: It was in 1948, the dark days of Honolulu. There was a longshoremen's strike. Jack Hall was responsible for a six-month, devastating, bloody strike. It practically broke all of us. Everybody was dependent on Matson Navigation supply line from California. In those days we weren't growing things like we are now--vegetables and fruits. It all had to come in by ship. We all sat there--the hoteliers, restaurateurs, business people, and no tourists. We were almost bankrupt.

In those days I was president of the Waikiki Association and I got together a bunch of friends and people who were in the same shape. We decided to get a fund together and take care of Mr. Hall. As a matter of fact, we discussed the funds. About \$50,000 would have done this little job. We were going to Chicago and get some boys to give him a cement overcoat and dump him in Lake Michigan. Fortunately, about that time the strike ended. (laughs) We were really serious about this. No kidding.

They went back to work and got the supply line moving. And another three-month strike. That was nine months. We were really bad off. It was absolutely impossible for people to understand how one man could control... Anyway, the days got a little better with United Airlines coming in and it made it possible for us to have a much better livelihood.

S: Exactly what operations did you have at that point?

B: I had Don the Beachcomber--the old Don the Beachcomber where Liberty House sits now--and an import company.

S: That was the same company that you had started back before World War II?

B: Yes. My lease for Don the Beachcomber was up in 1955. Matson had decided to abandon the lease. They had eighteen acres in the heart of Waikiki including the old Outrigger Canoe Club, the hotels, Kalakaua down to the theater, where Liberty House sits, I had an acre of ground.

S: Prime property!

B: And in those days the lease rent on eighteen acres for this Matson property was \$30,000 a year. I heard about this from a friend of mine who was secretary to Queen's Hospital. They were the owners of the property. She told me that they were going to put it out to bid and they were going to give the bidder a fifty-five year lease on the whole property. I got in touch with Paul Truesdale and Clint Murchison in Dallas. I called him and gave him a little background. I said, "Paul, can you get together a million dollars? A check. Bring a cashier's check and put it in the Bank of Hawaii." The bidding is going to start in about a month.

He came over and put a million dollar check in the Bank of Hawaii. That got all over town. I knew what the upset price was going to be through my friend, the secretary. I told Paul what to bid. He won that bid. Kaiser and four or five others were bidding against him. First of all, Paul had to build ten million dollars worth of buildings on the property within ten years. So he sat down and said, "What are we going to do with this property now?" That fine piece of property was sitting there. The old Seaside Cottages were in here--an ideal spot for a market place.

I asked Paul if he would let me have three and a half acres to do the Marketplace. Pete Wimberly and I sat down and worked out the plans. Instead of just leasing frontage on Kalakaua, we turned it in toward Kuhio making it a mall or marketplace and increasing the gross tremendously. As a matter of fact, Pete and I built the whole marketplace (I signed the checks) for \$900,000. About six months ago Paul told me that he had somebody who wanted to buy it and they offered him \$60 million for the Marketplace. He leased the property across the street--the Outrigger--to, of course, Kelley and all this other stuff was built in the back. Paul has been well taken care of as the result of my telephone call.

So I moved over here from my old place--the Liberty House area into the Marketplace. I built the two buildings up in front myself because Paul gave me a very favorable lease for reasons apparent. Then I asked him to build the Beachcomber--a larger, more elaborate Beachcomber--which he did, the halau buildings where we're sitting now. I designed the operating formula and the merchandising format and the tree house up there, which was quite a showplace. Paul had a

fifty-five year lease on eighteen acres in the heart of Waikiki.

S: What year did this open?

B: Nineteen fifty-five. Thirty-year lease with a twenty-five option. Then I sold the Beachcomber, the halau, and the front buildings. I mentioned I built the two buildings up in front. Beefsteak and Coffee house. The other side was a series of shops. Two flanking buildings.

During that period I got a call from a producer in Hollywood, a fellow named Rosenberg. He said, "I understand that you know all about the South Pacific, especially Hawaii. I'm looking for a location to do a television series." They were Jack London sea stories that he was going to film. He said, "I need to have a location that looks like Papeete, but we can't afford to go there. We're on a bit of a budget so will you look around and find a spot." I knew already. Lahaina was it. I used to go in there fishing and I could see it in the foreground. It was very similar to Papeete. He said, "We need a hotel in close proximity to the beach or the harbor where we can tie up." He had a brigantine that he was going to bring in.

I went over and saw the owner. The old Pioneer Hotel was the one I had in mind. It had been closed for several years. I went to see the owner and got a fifty-year lease and a fifty-year option. Two hundred and fifty dollars a month lease. A little hotel with sixteen rooms. Quaint, lovely little old place. As a matter of fact, it was built on Lanai, cut in half and floated over. We had an engineer look it over to see if there were any bugs in it, none at all. I called him back and said, "We've got the location and the hotel." They came over and did three films there.

Later on I got a call from a producer that they wanted to shoot The Devil at Four O'Clock with Sinatra and Tracy and they came over and had a five-month shooting stint there. I did all the catering and furnishing of all the stuff. Technical director, too. That was a lovely old spot. As a matter of fact, the Pioneer Inn and the Lahaina area was what was left of historical beauty of the Islands of Hawaii. The old Queen used to come over on her jaunts around the Islands and stay in room six on the second floor. She'd have all her friends come and visit and all that.

Michener called me one day and said, "I understand that you have the old Pioneer Hotel and I'd like to rent it for six months. A room anyway." He rented room six and sat in front of that harbor and worked and wrote for six months looking out to sea. He visualized all those wonderful sequences that you saw in the picture and read in the book Hawaii.

S: I don't want to interrupt you, but where did you first meet James Michener?

B: In Hollywood. He was a frequent visitor to the Far East. He always stopped here. I met his second wife, a Japanese lady. He brought her through to Japan and spent some time here. I had a nice rapport with him.

Well, a fellow came to my office one day and said, "I understand that you want to sell the Pioneer Hotel." I said, "Well, I'll sell almost anything except my wife or my mother." (laughs) He put a check face down on the desk. I looked at it and said, "You bought a hotel." I walked away from the Pioneer. I'm unhappy about it now, but in those days you could shoot a cannon down Front Street and not hit a person. Lovely, quaint little town.

Pete Wimberly and I at this time saw the potential for a restoration for all of Lahaina to protect and preserve it. We got together an idea and went to the Legislature to get some money to develop a plan for the full restoration of all the beautiful little spots in the city. We sat there for practically the whole session. He one day and I the next. We got \$78,000 to turn over to a planner. Then we sat down with an attorney and wrote the most rigid kind of control for the county to maintain this restoration. To this day many people have tried to pierce that. They can never get into that lovely little town. Pete and I are both very proud about that.

S: I would say so. Because time and again, people will say that Lahaina is the closest to what it was compared to any of the other spots.

B: In one place you can see all of the beautiful old buildings and enjoy the flavor of old Hawaii.

S: You stand out there in front of the Pioneer Inn and you can picture the whaling boats.

B: (laughs) That was what Michener did.

Later, a friend of mine from Australia and I leased seven acres on the beach about two miles from the city of Papeete and built sixteen bungalows. That was the Les Tropiques Hotel, the first American hotel in Tahiti. We operated that for several years and later sold it.

The government was going to build an airport right in front of the hotel. (laughs) I didn't want an airport in front of my hotel. There's a major airport there now. Because of the proximity to the airport you couldn't build anything higher than a one-story building.

Do you remember the book by Herman Melville called Typee? [A Peep at Polynesia. 1846] In that book there was a girl by the name of Fayaway. I got a call from John Huston from London around 1955 or 1956. No, it was before that. About 1953. I had met Huston several times. As a matter of fact, I introduced him to his first wife at my home in Encino. He said, "Donn, have you ever read Typee?" I said that I had many years ago. "Well," he said, "reread it and look for the character Fayaway. We're going to do a picture starring Gregory Peck. I'll call you in three or four days."

I reread Typee and Huston called back. "I want you to locate that girl. Maybe you can find her in Hawaii for me." He went on to describe exactly what she should look like. "I'll be back in New York in about a week and I'll call you from New York. We'll come over and I'll bring the photographer and the art director and some others. In the meantime, get as many gals together as you can."

I called the newspaper, some friends, and put out the information that I wanted the girls to appear at a certain date for a tryout. They arrived. (Huston and his staff) Six of them. On Sunday afternoon I had over 200 gals waiting. Rather, he had them. (laughter) I had them corralled. We all sat down in one my little grass huts there and started interviewing these girls.

First of all, the assistant director eliminated everyone that had glasses or didn't have long hair and so forth. We got it down to about sixty. Two hours later. We went through the whole lot. Huston said, "I don't see Fayaway in this bunch. Let's go down further south. How about Samoa?" I knew old Aggie Gray in British Samoa. I called Aggie and told her what we needed. She said, "Well, I'll see what I can do." We arrived a couple of days later and about twenty-five or thirty gals showed up. No Fayaway.

We had to get to Tahiti by way of a magnificent Solent flying boat, the forty-four passenger double-decker. It was the only way to fly the Pacific. We were in British Samoa enroute to the Cook Islands. Then on to Tahiti. I got in touch with an old friend of mine, Colonel Harrington, at Aitutaki in the Cook Islands. I asked him to locate some gals. Gave him a description of what we wanted. We landed in this magnificent blue lagoon. You had to land in the water there to fuel. There was a little island of Akaiami. A little motu, actually. The only thing on the island was a little grass hut. We landed in the lagoon and as we landed you could see the canoes coming from different directions. (laughs) On this little motu, we had about twelve or fifteen girls show up. No Fayaway.

We were off to Tahiti late in the afternoon landing in that beautiful harbor of Papeete. I took the whole crew to my hotel, Les Tropiques. That was going to be our headquarters. This was just about a month before Bastille Day. I knew that anything could happen. Everybody goes on a vacation for a month. I told John that we're going to have some problems here. He said, "We're going to have to start filming." In the meantime, he started leasing and buying and stocking up on everything that had to do with the picture.

The actors were coming down and I had arranged for them to have bungalows at my hotel. The writer was there; a famous writer. He was doing the script from the book. We didn't know that the government had to okay anything done on the filming from the French angle. In the book, on the Island of Marquesas it happened that the French gunboat fired on some natives of the Marquesas. The governor asked us to come and see him. We brought him the script and he said, "You can't film this." Huston said, "Why not?" "Well," he said, "the French didn't fire on the natives; the British did." The writer had to recast this whole thing. That was another delay. Then it started raining. It rained for nine days. The sound of rain hitting on a thatched roof was the most maddening thing after about the fourth day.

I'll never forget. The rain stopped for a bit and we went to a movie uptown. It was an old tin roof theater there. The original Hurricane was being played. We went in and saw a bunch of people outside there eating and buying watermelon from the stands. We both had on our white bush jackets. White suits. The place was so crowded, noisy, stuffy. Finally, the manager found some seats for us. The film was in French with American captions and was overspoken in Tahitian so you could't hear a word any way with the sound of the rain coming down. (laughs) These kids were plopping seeds. The next morning we were pink on the arms and legs of our suits.

To make a long story short, we were there until the first of July and the producer kept cabling back and forth. There was no telephone connection between Hollywood and Tahiti, so he had to cable. The cable office was only open two hours a day. The producers were screaming because they hadn't received a single foot of film. About a week later the producers called Huston who said, "Cancel it. We can't go any further." The actor Gregory Peck had a three-month contract that was running out.

We closed down the whole thing and were going to have a farewell party in the dining room. We were sitting down at the table and we had invited some local people to thank them for their courtesies and all that. In walked a lovely lady and her daughter--Fayaway. All of us had been so taken with this--we had read so much about her that we knew exactly what

she was going to look like. And she was Fayaway. The last day. We never got to make the picture Typee in Tahiti. (laughs) That was that.

I've got to tell you a little story about Clark Gable. In my original place on Kalakaua I had an acre of ground, beautiful landscaped grounds with coconuts growing, little thatched huts, waterplay, streams. I knew Gable for quite some time because he lived right back of me in Encino, California. Between fences. He had beautiful saddle horses but no pool. I had a pool and no saddle horses. So we opened the gate so that he could swim and I could ride. We were fairly friendly.

I got a call from an MGM producer or honcho who said, "This is absolutely secret. Clark and Lady Sylvia [Ashley] just got married and they want to come to Hawaii for their honeymoon. Could you take care of them? A private house and everything. We'll take care of all the costs involved. Will you meet them at the airport?" I did. I got a little group of singers and dancers together to serenade them. Put leis on them. Took them directly out to Kahala.

Three days later I got another call from MGM saying, "Do you think there's anything we can do to promote this picture and Gable because we aren't getting any promotion out of this? Can you come up with any ideas that would warrant us flying over with the Movietone News? Make it authentic." I said, "Well, let me think." I called him back the next day and I said, "I think I have it. Visualize Gable and Sylvia coming into the garden, early in the morning, nobody around, the gates closed. We'll have a ceremony of planting a young coconut and as the coconut grows so shall their love. That sort of thing."

Two days later six people and a crew showed up. We did the scene. It was nicely done. We got a little spade, dug a hole and had a little three-foot coconut to put in the ground. In the meantime, I'd had a little plaque made. "On this day..." One year later I got a call from Gable at the airport. He said, "Donn, I've got a three-hour layover here. I'm going to Hong Kong to promote a picture out there. Can I come in and have lunch with you?" Certainly.

He got in a taxi and came out. I had a nice lunch laid out. We were sitting out in the garden. He kept looking around. He said, "Where in the hell is that god damn coconut tree that we planted? I'm going to dig it up." He had divorced Sylvia. I said, "It's right over there." Somebody had stolen it. Somebody had actually stolen it from seeing it in the newspaper article. I didn't tell him that somebody had stolen it. (laughter) I thought that was kind of funny. Too bad that he passed away.

S: Did you ever have the chance to meet Carole Lombard?

B: As customers in Hollywood, and I met them out at his house. My little garden there was three acres. In those days everybody had a ranch in Encino. Gable had ten acres. I had built a little plantation, a little Polynesian plantation. It was the most beautiful thing. I invited many motion picture people and they didn't want to leave. It was such an escape.

In 1959, the era of statehood...

S: Oh yes, we have talked about that. You had mentioned a limited monarchy that you thought was preferable to statehood, right?

B: I still think so. Well, a group of us got together and I thought that it was a hell of an idea. We could retain the flavor of the Islands. Not another state like Idaho. So a limited monarchy made a lot of sense. We had three of the remaining alii. We approached two of them and they said that they would be delighted. I think there was a brother--he's still alive. Then there was Kawanakoa. There was quite a movement and we got some funds together. Made a very bullish attempt on radio and newspapers. I wish I could find some of those old newspapers. I had a fire in my front building a couple of years ago and a lot of that stuff was destroyed including Michener's Rascals in Paradise. Anyway we lost the toss, unhappily I think for us all; for everybody concerned in the long run. I have a definite feeling about that.

In 1961, I was in the Philippines and the governor of Cavite asked me for dinner at his home on Cavite. He had seen Manila tourism was just coming into the Philippines. He thought that the Cavite area had much more interest than around Manila. I was doing some consulting work at that point. He said, "I'd like for you to help me here and see if we can't come up with something to bring Cavite into the foreground." You can see Cavite from Manila. A lovely spot. "What do you think?" "Well, you tell me what you have to offer that we can merchandise. Put it in a package."

His son walked in about that time and overheard what we were saying. A young fellow. University student. He said, "Dad, don't you remember the galleons out here? The silver galleons?" "Oh yes, we have some galleons out here." I said, "The silver galleons. I've read about those." And he said, "We've got a lot of dungeons." As I said I, had read about the early occupation of the Spanish area and taking all the silver out of Spain. They were building the galleons right there in Cavite. Fine, let's do some research.

I had a friend in Manila who was with the university and he gave me a lot of background on the early days of the silver fleet. We hired a couple of divers to go down and see if they could locate them. They found four; one in very good shape. In the next couple of days, we found some dungeons that had been used for various reasons. I thought between the two we could put together a pretty good story.

It came to me that in order to fund this thing we would use stamps. The Philippine people do beautiful stamps. They could be in the form of a galleon and the funding could be assisted greatly by the sale of these stamps. I spent a month there and helped get this thing off the ground.

He said, "What do I owe you?" I said, "Well, I don't want any cash. Do you have a nice little piece of beach property?" He said, "It so happens that I do." (laughs) We went out to see it the next day. About two acres roughly. He said, "How about me building you a little hut on this property?" I said, "I'd like a little native hut made out of nipa and bamboo." He said, "We'll do it." He called someone in his office and said, "I need two carpenters." He called the jail and said, "How many do you have in the jail?" "Twelve." "Let me have them all." In about two days--the most beautiful little bungalow you ever saw. Without plumbing, of course, but it was a beautiful place to have a beach home."

END OF TAPE 2/SIDE 1

S: Whatever became of that place?

B: At this point, it is not in very good shape. (laughs)

I'm now in 1962. What you see there is a 150-foot maharajah's version of a Mississippi riverboat. (displays sketch) I designed and built that in Hong Kong. Hong Kong at that point was just at the beginning of tourism. I went to the governor--this thing cost almost a million dollars--and I needed to have something other than food and drink to pay the bills. I went to him and told him I had plans. I showed him the drawings and all that and told him that I needed a location between Hong Kong and Kowloon.

He called his people in and said, "We could probably let you have a place in the water here near the British Yacht Club." He gave me a lease in perpetuity at ninety cents a month. Four acres, a hundred fifty feet in turning position, because he thought that this was an attraction that would bring Hong Kong a lot of potential.

I proceeded to build it with this understanding. I didn't get a written lease--this was a handshake--a lovely old man, the governor. I sent a manager out there as a

honcho for the building. About a year later he called me one evening and said, "Donn, hold on to your seat. We've just lost the Hong Kong Lady." I said, "How?" He said, "A hundred twenty knot wind hit it." A tidal wave came. It was in the cradle being built and was about two-thirds finished. A ten-foot tidal wave had just taken it out of the cradle and lifted it on to the end of the airport; it was sitting there half in and half out of the water. "You'd better come out."

I came out and flew over the airport and saw it sitting on the end of the runway. Forlorn looking thing. In the meantime, they'd been trying to take it off the runway. Because it was so heavy, they couldn't get a perch on it. They had to wait until a heavy tide came in. The tide did come in three or four days later and it just moved itself right off and sat in the water and moved out. Under it there were seven or eight yachts just crushed to little sticks. A lot of fifty-gallon barrels and she was just sitting on it like a duck sitting in a nest.

I took it back to the shipyard. The contractor, of course, had possession of it at that point and he was going to rebuild it because he had insurance. Another six months went by and I kept calling and getting reports that it hadn't been finished. About three months later I got anxious about it and called my manager, "Now what's happening?" "I think they've gotten the money." You see, the contractor, the shipbuilder, was under-capitalized. They had taken the insurance money and built a mobile oil rig of some sort.

I flew out immediately and put them in the courts. Six months later I got the ship back, The Hong Kong Lady. It still wasn't quite finished. The judge gave me the boat back unfinished. Now this is three years in the making and in the meantime we've got a lot of competition in tourism. Restaurants and hotels building up. At that same time the governor died. I went to the new governor and said, "I just want to pay my respects and renew our original agreement with the previous governor about my having a small, private gaming club on the Hong Kong Lady, with only valid passport holders being permitted to come in."

He was incensed. "I didn't see any evidence of this." "It was a handshake with the last governor." "We can't honor that." So I'm stuck with a beautiful ship just finished and no place to put it. There were two crews necessary; the catering crew and the operating crew. We had to carry air conditioning, diesel motors, engines.

A friend of mine in Singapore called me one day and said, "I think that I've got a place for it." I went up to see the fellow. He was chairman of the Malaysian banking group in Singapore and a very good friend of Lee Kuan Yew, the premiere. We made a deal. I sold him the boat and we

renamed it the Singapore Lady. I was to get my money out of it (didn't make any profit) and I was to operate, ten percent of the gross food and liquor and twenty-five percent of the game. The gentleman was also chairman of the Goodwin-Park hotels, six hotels, and it was an ideal thing for them to operate for their visitors.

I brought this ship in and put it in the harbor right in front of Clifford Pier, right before God and everybody. We started operating. I had ordered the gaming equipment. One night Lee Kuan Yew and this chairman got into almost a fistfight. A hell of an argument. In the meantime, the chairman told me that he had an agreement with the premier that we were going to be able to game privately. Lee Kuan Yew said, "No go." That put a quietus on that magnificent, beautiful Singapore Lady.

After that I went up to Brunei. The Sultan of Brunei wanted some consulting done for tourism in his little country. The only thing worthwhile was his palace. I went down--Pete Wimberly and I and Bob Allen who used to be the president of HVB--an old friend of mine. We went over to see him. Pete and Bob left and left me there and the tourism director and I sat down and tried to figure out what we could do for Brunei. They had all the money in the world--all the oil money. But they still wanted to have an enclave of tourism.

I asked the director of tourism, "What do you have that we might develop?" He said, "The only thing we have is the river." I said, "Let's go up the river." We got a boat and took off toward the Dyak country. All along both sides of the river were these great villages on poles. They were damn interesting to me. I had read something about them. I said, "Well, how would you get them in there?" "Well, we haven't got a boat that's adequate to take people up there in comfort."

I went back to Singapore and got in touch with a marine engineer and we worked out an almost flat-bottomed boat that seated thirty-six people with viewing on both sides, a very quiet little motor, just slowly going up river. That was the beginning of tourism. All they needed was a boat, food, drink and service. It was a very well-done thing. That was some more consulting. The hill tribes were interesting people.

That brings me to 1971. C. Brewer had planned a major visitor destination in Hilo. John Kay was vice president. They hadn't gotten a hook on really what to do other than a hotel. Hilo needed something to spark it up. I developed the idea for a market place within the compound of this hotel. Well-designed thing with great gardens and waterplay. I put together the operation; food and drink and

shopping in the center. At that point United Airlines planned to come in for the first time.

C. Brewer had also taken over the Volcano House and they were building on at Kau a reception area and restaurant, the idea being that people would come in and stay at the Waiakea Village (that was the name of the thing that we built for \$13 million), lunch at the Volcano House, in the afternoon go to Kau and the black sands and there the visitor was going to be shown these mini-plantations--growing areas--fruits and macadamia nuts and limes. That was the scheme. Then come back at night and stay at the Waiakea Village. It was a delightful concept. It didn't work. Not enough bodies and it rained like hell. (laughs) I spent a year there doing this thing and they paid me a nice sum of money and it was a beautiful thing. It's been sold two or three times since.

S: Don't you wonder what it would take to really get Hilo going?

B: Well, climate is so important. So bloody important.

S: That's why they're all over in Kailua-Kona.

B: That's right and there's very little infrastructure there as far as the town itself. Even after the big tidal wave they were just patching it up. They weren't doing any real construction. And then, of course, United Air walked away from them.

I'll show you a picture of the Marama here. Herb Kane designed the hull and I designed the little thatched hut. That's the interior all done in capiz shell. It was beautifully done, fixturized and furnished, and was to be put into the lagoon in Papeete. It's complete, for people in love with love. (laughs)

We built it here in Honolulu and I shipped it down on the last ship, the Matson ship, the Monterey. They were going out of business, you know. I put it on the deck. (laughs) It wasn't a cargo ship, but I managed to get Matson to agree to let me put it on because it was an attraction. We dropped it in the harbor at Papeete and I towed it over to Moorea. It was really designed as a prototype for a flotilla of these lovely accommodations out in this quiet lagoon. It was to be a habitat for discerning people away from hotel rooms and all that. I had a little two-seater paddle boat that you could take back to the beach and bring your things in and your friends, if you really wanted them. In the center of the salon I built a square table with a heavy glass over it looking right between the two pontoons. At night time it was lighted so that you could see all the lovely marine life in there. A beautiful thing.

Another unfortunate thing happened. I was going to do about ten of those at a time in various quiet lagoons through the Gulf of Mexico. I had several places in mind where there were quiet areas. I went up to see an insurance agent to insure them because they were going to cost a considerable amount. Between fifty and seventy thousand dollars apiece. He said, "What is it? Is it a ship or is it a house?" "It's a houseboat." He said, "We never did this." I said, "Why don't you get in touch with your main office and find out if you can insure these things? Get a bid on it." Finally got in touch with Lloyds of London and they would insure it, but at an outrageous price because they hadn't a handle on how the thing would function.

I didn't build any more. I still have it in Moorea in a lovely lagoon and Phoebe and I use it when we come from the Cook Islands. Rarotonga, the largest island, was very basic. It was just basic food. (laughs) Yams and things like that. We used to come over from Rarotonga to Papeete to Moorea. Spend a month and take back great, great loads of goodies. You can buy anything in Papeete. That was the Marama.

Let's talk about Governor King. He was a fine person. When I first opened in 1947 in Waikiki, the twelve o'clock closing was the hour. You couldn't get a drink after twelve o'clock. The visitors didn't particularly care for that because they were on holiday. I was president of the Restaurant Association and we were all very eager to change that.

I went down to see the Governor. I called and said, "I want to talk to you about something very important for the whole country. (laughs) All the Islands." I told him exactly what we were up to and what it would mean in the way of income and customer satisfaction. I said, "We'd like to get two o'clock closing for all the bars and hotels, and four o'clock closing for cabarets." The cost of maintaining a cabaret is much more than for a bar or restaurant. He said, "Well, I like the idea. Just write a bill, put it through the Legislature and I'll sign it. Goodbye." That was that. That session we got it through and that's how we got to drink until two or four o'clock in the morning. In those days we had bottle clubs after midnight. All these bottle clubs started around town and it was a mess.

S: That's sounds like the easiest piece of legislation that ever went through. Nobody argued or questioned? You didn't have any temperance groups hassling?

B: We had one or two ministers that objected. This was just after the strikes and we hadn't even recovered. We were trying to recover and this was one way of doing it.

Sometime later I called Governor King and said, "Sam, we'd like to talk about the Ala Wai Canal and the Ala Wai golf course." "Come up. I'm about to go to lunch. Come to lunch with me." We went down to a Chinese restaurant and I laid it on him. I said, "We need a convention center in Waikiki. In close proximity." I envisioned the traffic as being tremendous, which it is. I could visualize taking the golf course out. He said, "You'll never do it." "Why?" "Because the Japanese play on it." (laughs) "We won't take it out. Have no intention of doing away with it. Let us take it off, go down as many feet as we can, put the sod back over the whole area. We've then got adequate room for all types of convention activities plus perhaps a branch of the Bishop Museum. Because people don't find their way out to that magnificent museum. You're in walking distance. You don't have to get in a car or taxi. You just walk across. We'll put a bridge over the Ala Wai Canal.

S: A pedestrian bridge?

B: Yes, oh yes. Charming bridges. Three or four of them along there. The entrance could be off McCully and do a circle up there for University Avenue in that general area. You could eliminate the need to come in on Kalakaua to a great degree.

He said, "It makes a lot of sense. A lot of sense. We own it. The City and County owns it." Pete Wimberly and I have been for many years on the same wave length. (laughs) We got some engineers together to figure out a way how much the project would cost and it was ridiculous versus what they're planning now at DeRussy. That's the stupidest thing that was ever foisted on anybody because of the traffic generated in an already impossible area.

I've written a couple of letters to the editors about the same thing. I'm trying to re-introduce it because I think it's that important. Can you just imagine people coming out of their hotels and just sauntering across the street a few blocks? The cost would probably be one-twentieth of what the same facility would cost at DeRussy. I'm still working on that.

S: It's kind of sad when you look back and realize that for all these years so many people have known that we absolutely have to have a convention center.

B: This was back in 1949. Can you imagine?

S: That's what I mean. Almost forty years later and we still don't have a convention center.

B: They had this referendum and had 35,000 opposing DeRussy and rightly so. I wish they would consider the Ala Wai

because it is possible. There have been other locations-- Fort Armstrong. That doesn't solve much. Going out to the zoo doesn't solve anything either. We need the zoo and we need that whole park area. But here sits this beautiful green golf course. It isn't used that much. Put the damn thing back and you still retain the green and still the openness and we would have a magnificent facility within walking distance of ninety per cent of the visitors.

S: Just put it a little lower than Moscone, right?
(laughs)

B: That's right. Well, I've covered that.
I want to tell you something about Kaiser.

S: Okay. Fine. As in Henry J.?

B: As in Henry J. In the big Beachcomber here in the rear of the Marketplace I had Alfred Apaka, Rosalie Stevenson, Iolani Luahine and a great number of others. Forty in the cast at luaus. During the week we had about fourteen plus orchestra. Entertainers. It was the one place to come.

When I was in Tahiti, I brought up Tahitian dancers. It was the first time that any one in the Islands had seen Tahitian dancers. It bowled them over. People were lined up through the Marketplace and out into the street to get in. One little dancer I brought in first (her name was Anna and she had danced for me at Les Tropiques). I had great difficulty because Immigration didn't know anything about Tahitian dancers. The local musicians' and artists' associations were against any imports.

I went up to see the Immigration people and he said, "Well, what is it any way?" "It's a dancer, a Tahitian dancer." He'd never seen one. He said, "How is she different from the hula dancers?" "There's a great difference." "Well," he said, "prove it." I got ahold of Iolani and she wrote a letter and the curator of the Bishop Museum, that great, delightful man...

S: Kenneth Emory?

B: Yes, Kenneth Emory. He wrote, "I have seen these dancers and they are superb performers. Completely unlike anything we have in the Islands. I recommend very strongly..." I finally got her in along with six others later on.

About this time Henry J. had bought the old hotel [the Niamalu] at the Hilton Village. He bought it and was going to operate it. I used to see him and his wife in the

evenings in my restaurant. They were enamored of Alfred Apaka; she, in particular. He was an excellent musician, singer and a handsome man. The Kaisers used to come in once or twice a week.

I understood from a friend that they were going to build down at the Village a thing called the Tapa Room and had planned to proselyte my people; Alfred, Iolani and Rosalie. The key people in my show. We had already, through the Hotel Association, evidence that he was proselyting from all the hotels. In those days, we never did that. If you came to me and you had quit a hotel or bar, I wanted to know how and why. I called the manager to find out if this was true. We never went out and tried to steal somebody. He didn't mind that at all. He was a merciless old bastard.

A little later after the Tapa Room was opened down at the Village, Alfred called me one night. "I'd like to talk to you, Donn." I said, "Come over." He said, "I don't know how to tell you this, but Mr. Kaiser has offered me \$750 a week." I was paying top prices of \$250 a week. He said, "What'll I do?" I said, "Alfred, go, and tell the old bastard that for \$800 a week, I'll come myself." (laughter) He went over and Kaiser tried to get Rosalie and she told him to shove it. Both she and the great artist Iolani.

Then one day my little maintenance man came into my office and told me, "You know, Mr. Donn, two or three fellows are looking and talking about that punkah." I had a great punkah, Indian punkah, to move the air back and forth. We had rigged it up using a 1939 motor from an old washing machine. Nobody had done this. It did the work and they couldn't figure out how it was done. How this thing moved. These three engineers came over from Kaiser's place and offered this little maintenance man \$20 to tell them what made it go. (laughs)

S: One Maytag!

B: Evidently Kaiser was able to get an engineer to figure it out. They opened the Tapa Room with Alfred and on opening night, big crowd, and in the center of the dining room they had this big punkah. They were all dancing and something happened--there was a long, single rod in the ceiling. The torque wasn't right and it snapped. The steel rod hit a lady and broke her shoulder blade. It was in the newspaper the next day. The lady had sued him for \$30,000. I chuckled about that.

I wrote him a letter. "My dear Mr. Kaiser, I understand that you have broken your punkah. It may come to you as a surprise, but I come from a very long line of punkah makers. And I will repair your punkah for \$30,000." Signed, Donn

Beach. He never realized that he had done anything wrong. That's Mr. Kaiser for you.

END OF TAPE 2/SIDE 2

On reflection...

I don't think I have said much about my lovely part-Maori wife, Phoebe. When I met and fell in love, it happened in Fiji. The one and only woman I ever loved. She was born in the Bay of Islands in the north island of New Zealand. We spent the first years of our lives together honeymooning in our little beach house on a white sand beach on the island of Rarotonga in the Cook Islands. We commuted to Moorea and lived in our Polynesian houseboat, the Marama, anchored out in the blue lagoon of Moorea. Phoebe is the Vice President and special "go for" of our Blue Lagoon Development Co., Ltd. We are still honeymooning in Waikiki.

These days Phoebe and I are busy as bees developing interesting visitor attractions, consulting with resort developers in the Pacific Asian areas.

We now live on Waikiki Beach. At day's end and as the sun sinks slowly in the west we raise our rum punches and thank God for his many blessings. As Lord Byron so aptly said, "There's naught no doubt so much the spirit calms as rum and true religion."

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THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Watumull Foundation Oral History Project began in June of 1971. During the following seventeen months eighty-eight people were taped. These tapes were transcribed but had not been put in final form when the project was suspended at the end of 1972.

In 1979 the project was reactivated and the long process of proofing, final typing and binding began. On the fortieth anniversary of the Watumull Foundation in 1982 the completed histories were delivered to the three repositories.

As the value of these interviews was realized, it was decided to add to the collection. In November of 1985 Alice Sinesky was engaged to interview and edit thirty-three histories that have been recorded to mark the forty-fifth anniversary of the Foundation.

The subjects for the interviews are chosen from all walks of life and are people who are part of and have contributed to the history of Hawaii.

The final transcripts, on acid-free Permalife bond paper and individually Velo-bound, are deposited and are available to scholars and historians at the Hawaii State Archives, the Hamilton Library at the University of Hawaii and the Cooke Library at Punahou School. The tapes are sealed and are not available.

August 1987