

Filipino-American Historical Society of Hawai'i
Oral History Project
Interview #3

ERNEST LIBARIOS, SR. (E)

**Interview Conducted By:
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M: So, today, we just focus on, at least, three topics.

E: Three topics today?

M: As a counselor and then as one of the founders of Sariling Gawa² and then as deacon in the Honolulu Catholic diocese – the three topics.

So, at Leeward Community College, I understand your job involved many things. But the main focus was counseling and teaching self-development courses. What is meant by culturally self-development courses, Ernie?

E: In the beginning, when I went to Leeward, at that time, there was an anti-poverty program and throughout the nation, everybody was trying to reach out to the disadvantaged. It was particularly emphasized by the Kennedy family. And, so, one day, we were looking for counselors. Leeward just opened. There were two Hawaiians there: Ilima Williams and Elaine White...oh, and Mossman – three of them. And there was no Filipinos.

Right about then, I had...I was at Farrington High School because Farrington High School needed somebody to reach out to the Filipinos and build bridges between the local Filipinos and immigrant Filipinos. So that's why they hired me from Waianae because I had a reputation in Waianae already for helping out, you know, these kinds of groups. When I went to Leeward and Farrington, I started making clubs.

M: Clubs?

E: Yeah, and I started getting them to believe in who they are, getting them to feel part of it and I was running that...that was called the Neighborhood Youth Corps program. So I had the leverage of giving them money, but they had to work. So that in itself was a big incentive in development.

And then, Leeward, Marve Varege, who was in charge of the program, somehow we went to a conference and we met each other and he heard about me and he told me there's an opening. "Why don't you apply? We're looking for a Filipino, you know." And I said, "Okay. So, I said, what kind school is that?" He told me, "Community college." I said, "What is that, community college?" It's a new thing, yeah. So he did explain to me what it was. And, I said, okay, I'll try.

¹ Transcribed by Arlene Nagamine. Edited and annotated by Clement Bautista.

² Sariling Gawa ('Our Own Work') – a leadership workshop and camp for Filipino youth established in 1980.

And so, when I applied, they were happy with the interview. And they were happy; he was happy with what I could do or what the potential was. The only thing he couldn't help me with was the pay salary. The pay salary was lower. The Department of Education gave me a higher salary. It was Domingo Los Banos and the Neighborhood Youth Corps, which was a federal project, they combined both to increase my salary.

M: You were still single by that time when you started, yeah?

E: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I never even meet Shirley at that time. So, I decided I decided to go, and I went. And it was there that I started to fall in love with the students, you know.

E: Yeah, especially when I say, whoa, these guys are like me, you know. They had an education in the DOE, but it wasn't enough and, ah, we don't have enough money, so you face all the obstacles. And I say, yeah, and the worse part is that you don't have a reference group, you know.

M: Reference group.

E: Yeah.

M: Okay, support...network of support.

E: Yes. They didn't have one. And it's a good thing that I had the experience out in Waianae with the Onward Mothers and the Neighborhood Youth Corps and Hawaii Job Corps. I was a counselor there, so I knew how to put things together. So, I went to Leeward. We formed the Filipino Club – first time the Filipino Club.

M: Is that the Susi³?

E: Yeah, Susi, not Filipino.

E: And then, they decided okay, let's go make it into a course. I said, Oh Marve, let's go make it into a course. So, Marve said okay. And then he also forced the other counselors to teach a course.⁴

M: Oh, really?

E: Like that. But then, we decided we had some Hawaiians that wanted to...and they didn't have a program. So never had a reference group. So, I formed the Hawaiian Club.

M: You did?

E: Yeah, the Hawaiian Club. Also the Samoan Club. The three lowest ethnic groups – I formed a club there. And that was how we kind of liked the name trio.

M: Trio, the three of them.

E: We referenced the three, yeah. So, over the years, the Filipinos grew because, you know, we branched out, started Sariling Gawa and all those other programs, yeah, and that's where Leon them came in, yeah, and my son Niki and some other people and then the Hawaiian Club branched out on their own. Now they're, whoa, so strong.

M: They're strong.

3 Susi ng Pilipinas.

4 Self-development course, originally, Psychology 190, which became Social Science 101.

- E: So strong. The only problem is that they're fighting each other. They're always fighting each other. I don't know why...I think I know why.
- M: Ha, ha, it happens to other organizations, too.
- E: Yeah. Oh, it was excruciating. You see, in my class, I proposed they be positive toward each other. We emphasize goals, not cut down, you know. We encourage each other, rather than discourage. And I was just about getting to be kind of churchy, yeah. [laughs]
- M: Those are good, decent values.
- E: Because I was always afraid of God, you know. I said, you know, so, we gotta stop being afraid of each other. That's how we started promoting love in the group. But then, Filipinos started getting carried away. They're falling in love with each other, you know.
- M: In your class?
- E: Yeah, which...which I don't mind, but I said, you know, I don't want you guys to get pregnant because you're still going to school. So, I didn't know anything about sex education. I said, gee, except for what my mother and the Catholic Church teaches. [laughs]
- M: So, how did you teach it? You were talking to me about life map.
- E: Yeah, life map access. So, here's the thing, so, in order for us to identify ourselves, we build a deeper heart right in the campus. But then, the Filipinos, you know, they're very romantic. So, they started using the deeper heart as their bedroom button. Stop it, you guys.
- M: It's too much love.
- E: Yes, too much love, I said, don't get carried away, remember the Church.
- M: So what happened to the deeper heart?
- E: We, da kine, we changed it to selling food.
- M: Ah, ok. Selling Filipino food?
- E: All kines, I tell you. Nobody comes here at night because...[laughs] usually after school, eh, they start meeting each other and, you know, Filipinos, eh, they only have apartment. So they don't have privacy. But that one gave them all the privacy they needed. And I said, damn.
- M: Too much....
- E: Filipinos. They're very creative. So, but I give 'em credit for being creative. Those guys are really creative. But we gotta find out different ways. But that was one of the funny things that happened. But they grew. And then, that concept of positive and love, ah, started to generate into a higher level of relating to one another. And then, just about then, Waipahu had the killing, you know, the....
- M: The immigrants?
- E: Yeah, the immigrants and the locals. And so, the principals called us. They heard about us.
- M: Waipahu High School?

E: Intermediate. Yeah, they wanted to because the counselors that they had there, or the workers, they didn't know how to deal with, because the immigrants was a new population, you know. Nobody really know how to. Even the ones that spoke the language, you know, like Danny them? They never know how to deal with them too. We're all learning together.

So, we said okay. So, I said okay, we gonna, you guys, the president, Susi club, you guys, you know, talk about how to get along and all that kine stuff. We gonna get a new project. What's the project? We gonna talk to them. Oh, they carry gun, you know. I said yeah, but you know that's how they got killed. Knives, eh.

So, the group said, they started. I know some of them. They're all good. They get it rough or what. We can talk to them. And then, they went and talked to them. We had a big cafeteria. Stephanie, they all came. And it was the first time.

M: Who was with you? Just you? Susi Club...and the two gangs?

M: The locals and the immigrants.

E: Yes. First time they came together. And then, then, all the security guards...[laughs]...just in case.

M: Just in case, it's a rumble.

E: Yeah. But it was such a beautiful experience.

M: So, what happened?

E: They started talking. You know, why are you guys acting stupid? We're all Filipinos. Yeah, but the Filipinos over there, they, I don't know, they eat this kine. What about you? You eat that kine? So? Why you make fun? I don't know. Sometimes, they teach us to make fun of them, you know.

M: Oh. These are the local kids, talking about the immigrants?

E: Yeah. It became a habit, always looking for something flaws in their line. So, we told 'em that's not the way you gonna grow. Otherwise, the other ethnic groups going pass us. Then we started comparing. The Japanese, you know why they're way ahead...they no shoot each other. Look at the Chinese. They get along. And look at us Filipinos killing each other, no make sense, yeah.

So then, they started. And we started, you know, talking in harmony. That's right, you know. Let's go shake hands, shake hands, hug each other. You know, from now on, I tell ya, if it doesn't look right, you can talk to each other. Say, how come you do this? But that's the way it is, you know. That. And we also point out that your parents also was like this. But they became local. So, don't, you know, that's the process. They said, yeah. So, that's one of the things that we did that was really good.

And, of course, that continued to, ah, recruit for Sariling Gawa, etc. Then, the program, the SSCI portion, started receiving, ah, recognition. Yeah, people started recognizing that this approach has a very strong, ah, implication for the disadvantaged. So, I was wondering, can I jump into that?

M: Yes. Because that's actually, probably the main focus of your life, among other things.

E: Okay. So, over the years, I've written this. And this is what I'm going to be using for my doctoral program.

M: Oh, wow, good, yeah.

E: And maybe later on, you can, ah, just edit, whenever you think that. And just add on to that.

M: Okay, okay...oh, this is good. Transitional Counseling for Disadvantaged Students. This is, like the sum of what you've been doing at Leeward.

E: Over the years, yeah. And I've specialized it so that it becomes flexible enough to address minority Filipinos, but we can change that to Samoans, we can change that to, you know, Micronesians and all that kind of stuff. This program was developed from Cal Vanne.

M: Where is he?

E: He's on the mainland. Yeah, he had this approach which I really liked and it was a combination of Cal Vanne and Dan Fullmer.⁵ I was exposed to them, so it's a perceptual psychology site. Those were the three big things at the time. So, I combined all of them into this program. It worked so well that, a lot of the Blacks wanted to use it. Wendy and I went to the mainland to present this model. Oh, everybody was going crazy.

M: They liked that?

E: Yeah. Because it contained lots of possibility. Like, first of all, getting to know each other, acknowledging who you are, building your self-esteem and acknowledging your culture.

M: Your culture, uh huh.

E: And the other thing, which a lot of the models don't have, is building your own voice. You gotta develop your own voice, yeah. You have to tell your story. If you don't, the other persons will tell you who you are. That's why we said, we develop the Filipino group in the beginning. They became strong but strong in the wrong way, you know. They love each other so much, I tell you. I didn't know how to deal with that part. Don't touch. Let somebody else help you. But, they became strong. What's the last I was going to say. Oh, it almost got to a point where we were going to submit it to Oprah.

M: Oprah? Really?

E: Yeah, but we looked at the other models. Was okay but compared to what we have, you know. It was just that we had to budget it down all the time. She had all these other people, help her out, all these doctoral kind. And we gotta follow up on a couple of famous writers of books on counseling, they came to look at our models and wanted to incorporate this one into their approach. So, ah, we stopped there. And then, City & County heard about that, so they had what they call a summer program. And I don't know if you remember Vicky Bunye.

M: I do. Yeah, we worked together, yeah.

E: Yeah, she was exciting to work with.

M: Yeah, she had a good laugh.

⁵ Daniel Warren Fullmer came to Hawaii in 1966 as a professor at UH Manoa, tasked with creating the Ph.D. program in counseling and guidance, and expanding the graduate counseling program. Previously, while at Grambling College, Fullmer worked with the U.S. Congress and authored Title III of the Higher Education Act of 1963, which provided support for developing institutions of higher learning. Title III continues to aid colleges and universities across the country, including the community colleges.

E: Yeah, Vicky, I know. She was something, Vicky. Don't worry...go, go, go, man. No shirk off.

M: Vicky, yeah.

E: So, she was. So, she was in, ah, in charge of one position at City & County.

M: With Mayor Fasi?

E: Yeah, yeah. So, she recruited us to run the program because nobody knew how to work with the disadvantaged in the summer. So, we ran the program called "Gimme a Break" and the whole summer and, wow, at the end, we won national. You know, they, all the cities, in America, was running because there was federal money. They looked at ours and we had the best. So, we won.

M: What did you do?

E: Basically the same. Self-esteem. These kids were all poor. You had to become poor to be in the program.

M: How old? The ages?

E: All high school.

M: Oh, all high school.

E: All high school, and they had to have almost ready to drop out, yeah...very marginal.

M: They're called sometimes, special students.

E: Yeah, exactly, but the majority were Filipinos. Yeah, because at that time, mostly Filipinos. Hawaiians too, but mostly Filipinos. So, they was in the program. And I...we recruited all teachers, all certified DOE teachers and stuff and they loved the program. And so, we didn't have to train them too much because they knew how to teach the kids. They knew how to discipline the kids and the kids knew how to be disciplined, yeah. So again, we worked on the self esteem. We worked on what is it that you want out of life, developing your own voice, and being proud of who you are, okay.

M: Being proud. That's the hardest thing, being proud of who you are.

E: Not bragging, but being proud, I said, yeah. When you brag, you put down the other person.

M: Correct.

E: You acknowledge who you are. That's what we try to teach the kids. And we had them on videotape, all of them. The City provided us with the tape. And every class, we would tape. We would tape them.

M: How was the reaction of the students? Were they happy? Did they cry?

E: Oh, yeah. But we had to give one part too that other programs doesn't deal with. And this was a new thing for us. How do you get your parents to support you? Because a lot of them, they started becoming, you know, proud of who they are, but they feel, my mother, that, "I'm going to tell you, Ma, you're doing wrong."

M: At home

E: At home, and they would tell 'em. "You guys think, you guys think you good, ah, because just because you get into the program, just because you get education." So, the kids would stop going. They would feel that, you know, ah, it's wrong for them to be. They felt guilty. So we had this program to deal with that guilt.

M: Guilt.

E: Yeah, guilt, yeah. They don't have to feel guilty but they did need to acknowledge your parents. It's because they don't have education and you go use words that they don't understand. But, you know, bring them up instead of putting 'em down.

M: Okay, uh huh.

E: Make them proud of who they are.

M: Okay.

E: And the best way to look at it is the haoles. So, you watch the haoles. When the kids get ahead, the parents encourage em. Go some more, go some more. Don't stop, you know. But us Filipinos, eh, no brag, burot.⁶ Bragging, yeah. It's not bragging, you know, because you feel good when you have control. But you need to respect your parents too, 'cuz they, they went through struggles just to get to where you are.

M: The hardest thing is when you go home and your parents are into drugs.

E: Oh, that's hard. Like the program now, we're going to start at Waiawa.⁷ But pretty soon.

M: At Hālawa, you will start?

E: Waiawa now. Because I was at Hālawa eight years, and now, we're going to do it at Waiawa.

M: Where is Waiawa?

E: This is the one, ah, you know, when you go up to Waipio and then get the Mililani graveyard.

M: Mililani, yeah?

E: Yeah, before you hit the graveyard, take a right and they have Waiawa. That's about hundred acres.

M: I saw it, because I used to go with Nora to the cemetery to visit Pete Tagalog's grave, to the right side.

E: Yeah.

E: You gotta go inside. Spooky, you know.

M: Yeah, the whole place is spooky. It's pretty, though.

E: That's why I don't want to go night time. If you want to place me night time, I said I don't want to go night time because I have women come with me. They wanna get involved. And these are all church women.

⁶ Burot (Tagalog): self-important, pompous.

⁷ Waiawa Correctional Facility, a minimum security prison for men located in Mililani, near Mililani Memorial Park. Mililani is a district in central O'ahu.

M: What do you do there? First, who are there? Who are the prisoners?

E: Oh, these are prisoners that you get two years...three years. They're not that long term. Some of them are long term, then, they go to Hālawā.⁸

M: Hālawā is tougher, yeah.

E: Oh, get all the rapists, the killers, the murderers.

M: So, this one is light, light offenses.

E: This one, only two...three years at the most, yeah.

M: So, what do you do there?

E: So, we're going to develop a program. One is dealing with scriptures. The other one has to do with a lot of singing.

M: What?

E: Singing.

M: Singing, ah, okay.

E: Because singing is like bread. And these guys they love to sing. You make 'em sing.

M: Are they mostly Hawaiians or Filipinos?

E: Ah, Hawaiians

M: Hawaiians, poor thing, eh.

E: And you see, the Filipinos, most of the Filipinos are entertainers.

M: Entertainers.

E: Yeah. They can dance. They can sing. And I think lot of them got involved with drugs too, you know, the entertainment world. Drugs is so open, yeah. You buy 'em, any kine.

M: It's a lifestyle.

E: Yeah, yeah, lot of them. So, but, a lot of them....

M: Have you started or you're gonna start.

E: Yeah, we gonna. But I had it going before. But then, I got sick. So, I stopped. And then the other church called and told me the Reverend – the Japanese guy – asked me if I could start it again. So, I said okay, I'll get my troops together.

M: Okay, when you went there the first time, how was the reaction of the prisoners?

E: First time they seen me, they thought I was one of them. They always...they always think I was one of them.

M: Well, that helps.

⁸ Hālawā Correctional Facility is a medium and special needs facility and Hawai'i's largest prison.

E: So, brah, what you're in here for? Ah, you know, you know. [laughs] Then, after that, you know, when we started praying, okay, eh, I make the girls go first, and then I go. Oh, you da guy? I don't know, I consider that a gift, that I look like them. [laughs] And I know I act like them too. Yeah, so we get along real well.

M: They can relate to you.

E: Yeah, I guess so. Then I can talk to them about God. They love to talk about God. Lot of them, they know the scriptures, you know, really good, man. They know better than me.

M: Ah, so, they read over there.

E: Yeah. They read and they interpret each other. They argue with each other. But, you know, what it's like, about the interpretation.

M: Okay, did they tell you why they were there?

E: Oh yeah, lot of them.

M: What did they do?

E: Oh, the crime that they had. Oh, the ones at Waiawa are all mostly robbery, attempted rape, lot of times, oh, lot of, what you call that...abuse.

M: Abuse. They beat up their wives.

E: Wives or their children.

M: Domestic abuse.

E: Yeah, domestic abuse, lot of domestic abuse, yeah, lot of gambling.

M: Gambling too?

E: Lot of gambling, yeah

M: Do you still do work at the tougher one, Hālawa?

E: I stopped there when I got sick.

M: Okay.

E: Oh, not really sick. Here's what happened. I was there for ten years.

M: Ten years! Wow! Okay.

E: Good, you know. All my friends in there.

M: So, did you go once a month?

E: Yeah, once a week.

M: Once a week, wow.

E: I'll show you the manual.

M: Okay.

E: We developed a manual. – the books, the songs, the booklets and all that. It's the songs they can sing. Yeah, the language barrier. And we had. And we had tapes that we would play with them and all that. Then, councilman Okino – the Japanese guy – Okino?⁹

M: Yeah, Okino, I think.

E: Yeah, he, oh, somehow he got connected from Saint Elizabeth¹⁰ and he started coming. He came once or twice, and then he took over. He started bossing around the program.

M: Okay.

E: And he live right above me, eh, although it was about a block away.

M: Aha, aha.

E: And I told him, eh, what's going on? He knew, though, da kine, the scriptures. He said the scriptures said this and the scriptures said that and gotta follow along. I said, no way, man. You know, I'm dealing with these real life kine. Lot of the scriptures are pertinent, yeah, lot of the scriptures are pertinent to other, you know, their ways, but not to Hawaiian kine.

M: Ah, he was dictating to you what to teach...what kind of, what verses that should be used.

E: Exactly. And then, he wanted to implement the Man in You.¹¹ It's the program from nationwide. But I was exposed to the "Man in You" in what you call that, the Resurrection, you know, with Aiona¹² and us to run the program. So, I said I pick out what I can use. So then, ah, I don't know, I said, ah, then you run the program. Then I left.

M: You left, after ten years?

E: Yeah, I left...because my other friend at Waiawa, he's a reverend too, ah, Japanese guy, you know, he needed help. So, I said I gonna quit.

M: And this stems from your being a deacon.

E: Yeah.

M: When did you start being a deacon?

E: Ooh, I forgot what year was that.

M: Yeah, but, let's see, after, ah, let's see. You're still teaching at LCC.

E: I still was, yeah.

M: You haven't retired yet.

E: No.

M: And then you decided to be ordained.

9 Councilmember Gary Okino.

10 Saint Elizabeth Catholic Parish located in 'Aiea.

11 "That Man is You!" is a leadership program of the Paradisus Dei Catholic ministry designed to address the pressures and temptations men face.

12 James 'Duke' Aiona was a deputy prosecuting attorney, family court judge, lieutenant governor and unsuccessful gubernatorial candidate.

E: Yeah.

M: Why?

E: This was after Shirley died.

M: Okay. 1987

E: Yeah. After Shirley died, and I don't know, I just felt a calling, yeah, a calling. And so, when I went for the interview, oh, Wally Mitsue, yeah, he was DOE. Ah, he was also a deacon before me. He and I were running projects with the Youth Challenge and we won prizes. I gotta show you the Pathfinder that we have. He and I. He's a good short chap. So, we ran that program.

M: And he influenced you to be a deacon?

E: I think he felt God wanted me to do something.

M: Yeah. I guess people call it, sorry, people call it a calling.

E: I guess so. But, I didn't wanna, I tell you. I didn't feel, I didn't feel, ah, worthy. But I told the guy, I said. Then, they were recruiting for a class. So, Wally said, eh, they're recruiting for a class. You better go. I said, ah, I no like go. He said, nah, go.

M: Oh, you had to go to class to become a deacon?

E: Yeah, four years.

M: Oh, that's long.

E: That's what I said – too long for me.

M: Where did you go?

E: So, every month, we would go to da kine, you know, when you go down the Pali, the Bishop them.¹³

M: Uh huh, yeah, I remember.

E: That's where we go. Then we go one week of training. But then, every month, we meet about every weekend.

M: And what was the training about? Scriptures?

E: Yeah. I wasn't happy, but you know. I told em. I told em. The scriptures are good. But, you gotta face the reality of the people we deal with. They're different. They're not this type. I think, when you look at the scriptures, if you get one Filipino, the thing no match. The things are different. They have different background. They have a different outlook. You gotta develop different ways. Anyway, they're gonna interview you. So, I told em, you know, I don't feel that I'm worthy of, you know...of being a deacon. But I came for the interview because, one day, I'm going face God and I'll tell God, I came but they refused me.

M: Oh, not my fault!

¹³ Saint Stephen Diocesan Center, formerly Saint Stephen Seminary (closed in 1970), currently serves as the residence of the bishop of Honolulu and houses various offices of the diocesan curia.

E: Ha, ha, not my fault! You guys not going to hurt my feelings when you turn me down. [laughs] I said, you're not getting away that fast.

M: I did my best.

E: Yeah, I told em, that's the way I feel. [laughs]

M: This is all connected to your PhD. You're taking your PhD. I think you mentioned it in your CV that you gave me. You're taking your PhD from where?

E: Oh, it's the Pacific School of Religion¹⁴ in Berkeley.

M: Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley.

E: Yeah, okay.

M: And when did you start your PhD there?

E: It's DMin – Doctoral in Ministry.

M: Doctoral in Ministry. And what do you plan to do with it?

E: That's a big thing. Right now, um, after I finish, I don't know, I'm going to show you my fantasy.

M: Yes.

E: Is that okay?

M: Sure. This is, what you call, your further goals.

E: Okay.

M: Further goals in your life.

M: As you said, you have to have goals.

E: Yeah, right. Why, why, why am I here and Niki is not here, my son. He should be the one here, not me.

M: Who?

E: Niki.

M: Vicky. Vicky Bunye?

E: No. Niki, my son Niki.

M: Sorry, yeah, yeah.

E: Yeah, Niki should be the one. I keep telling God. God, you took the wrong person, not me, you know.

M: You think so?

E: I think so. But Niki was able to relate to all these – all the vice-presidents at the university. They all loved him.

¹⁴ Pacific School of Religion (Berkeley, CA) is an interdenominational graduate school, seminary and center for social justice.

M: He's got your personality.

E: Shirley, I think. But, and then, the local kids, they all relate to him. And even elementary school because he was the elementary school teacher, you know. He go in the classroom. He just mix up with the kids, throw 'em up in the air, and all that kine. Wow, you cannot teach that thing. They're born with that kine of stuff, man.

So, okay, here's what happened, here's what happened. You know, God moves in different ways, eh, you know. So, we had a trip, one from Moloka'i. I had to go with the Bishop. But this one, they had to go, we had to go for Damien because he was becoming a saint. So, we going all the way to Europe and we had to end up at Rome. And my son too.

M: Oh, you went with a group?

E: With the Bishop. And then we gonna end up on dedicating Damien. So, we end up, in what you call that, Rome, where the Pope is and then all the deacons over there, you know, we're all sitting down and, uh, the deacon has to read the Bible and all that kine stuff, so, and with the Pope, you go where the Pope is. That's stand, yeah. So they said, guess what who we're going elect. They said, hey, hey Ernest, we elect you.

M: You got elected!

E: I said, what! Hey, what do you mean me. Because I'm the youngest of all. I said, I'm not the youngest but the newest. So, I said, you should get somebody else – better than me, you know, I said.

M: Was the Pope there?

E: Yeah, the Pope was there, in Rome, and yeah, all the different, what you call, all his, all the people that he was with. You know, when you see the Pope, get all these other guys, eh?

M: Yeah, big room, all red.

E: So, you go up to the Pope. He blesses you, and then, you go up and read.

M: Oh, how did you feel?

E: Whoa, was that an honor! God. I felt, my God! I think, God, how come me, you know? Why? I couldn't understand, yeah, you know. I can see if the person went to private school and all that kine stuff, yeah, and, uh, but everybody liked the way I read because I read, you know, like I telling story, my donkey story, I use the same approach.

M: Donkey story, yes.

E: But it's the same, the same, what's that, the same venue, eh, I use. That's why they wanted me. They heard me. I said oh, okay. It's so funny, yeah. That night before I was supposed to, you know, the night I was supposed to go the following day, so I was practicing in my room, yeah. And I didn't realize that, ah, on the mainland and Europe, the walls are thin and I guess I was practicing, practicing for myself. Then I hear the wall, bang, bang, bang, somebody banging on the wall.

M: What did you have to say because you were presenting to the group?

E: I was practicing.

M: What, what did you say, do you remember? What you practiced?

E: Oh, just, you read the scriptures with the, you know, that God said you're going to be condemned. God said, you are going to be condemned. Some people, cry, eh, when they read. I cannot, I cannot do that.

M: You dramatized it.

E: Yeah. I feel it, so, I express it, you know.

M: So, you, like an actor?

E: Exactly.

M: That you are feeling it deeply.

E: Yeah. I learned that, ah, in Kona, 'cuz all the Filipinos, we didn't have books, and we don't have magazines, and they had magazines but it's Life magazine. They don't read da kine, eh. So most of the Filipinos, we tell stories. We sit around, sometimes about two hours.

M: Talk story?

E: Everybody had their own story. Everybody expressed their story. It's funny.

M: What kind of story?

E: About their life...they grow up. Well, sometimes they tell their stories about good fishing. Or what is even funnier is when they go nightclub, you know, da kine, taxi dance, yeah. So, it's funny because most of them, all single, too, yeah, and then we don't have electricity, so we have only lamp. So, when you tell your story, if you don't say it in a way that's funny, nobody listen. Everybody talking story, speaking on the side. [laughs]

M: What language was used?

E: Visayan.

M: Visayan?

E: Yeah. They all speak Visayan.

M: What about the Ilokanos? They were not there?

E: No. My Ilokano was in Pa'auilo.

M: In Pa'auilo?

E: And most of my godfathers were all Ilokano. Twenty-five of them all Ilokano.

M: Twenty-five of them?

E: Yeah

M: And this is in Kona?

E: Oh no, this is in Pa'auilo plantation, yeah, that's when I was...that's where I was born.

M: Okay. And the Ilokanos were there.

E: Yeah, mostly Ilokanos.

M: But, at Kona...

E: Mostly Visayan, yeah. And my mother said when I was in Pa'auilo, I could talk Ilokano.

M: Oh, because you were around them.

E: Yeah, all my godfathers, they were Ilokano.

M: Twenty-five of them?

E: Twenty-five of them

M: They were not....

E: All single, yeah.

M: All single. They were older, much older, or....

E: Ah, they were in their early 30's...early 20's, yeah. At that time, the Filipinos couldn't bring wives to the camp. So, there was a point where there was a disproportion. There was one woman for 500 Filipino males. That's why the Filipinos had that reputation of swapping wives, yeah, stealing wives and all da kine, yeah.

M: And the other ethnic groups don't want them?

E: Yeah.

M: The Japanese, the Chinese?

E: They didn't want them too. They had come to make them feel inferior.

M: It must have been lonesome for many of them.

E: Yeah, very, very. That's why I felt a lot of love for my ninongs.

M: I was going to ask you, was there really a big gap between the Ilokanos and the Visayans?

E: No, the locals not.

M: Oh, okay, the locals and the immigrants.

E: Yeah, yeah, we all got along.

M: Ilokanos and Visayans

E: Yeah, yeah, especially those that went fishing. We all got along with each other.

M: Fishing?

E: Yeah.

M: Where did you go fishing?

E: Oh, out in the ocean.

M: In the ocean? Oh.

- E: Yeah. So the Ilokanos, the Ilokanos were smart when fishing.
- M: You went with them?
- E: Yeah, we'd go fishing with them and the Hawaiians, we go with the Hawaiians and all that.
- M: And were there some Ilokanos, too, in Kona?
- E: Oh, yeah, yeah. The Ilokanos good. They would teach the Visayans how to cook.
- M: Okay, so, there was more interaction?
- E: Oh, yeah, yeah. There was no conflict, yeah.
- M: There was no conflict.
- E: I think what the breakdown of barriers started in, da kine, the plantation when the lunas¹⁵ would treat the Filipinos badly. And then, what made the socialization of each other positive was that they would get up early in the morning...3:00 am. They cook their food and they would sit down and talk story and they would share Toscani.
- M: Toscani? Toscani, what's that?
- E: The drink, not cigarette.
- M: The one that's black?
- E: Yeah.
- M: They share that...and...
- E: Yeah, they was in that and it was...so, and then, the bus would come, the luna would come and everybody jump on top.
- M: This is in, ah, the..
- E: On the plantation.
- M: In Pa'auilo?
- E: In Pa'auilo. Yeah, and also Kohala.
- M: Kohala, yeah.
- E: That's how they got to know each other and the barrier was, ah. They realized, eh, Ilokanos, they're pretty darned nice guys, you know, and the Ilokanos said, eh, the Visayans they're hard workers, too, you know. They're not only lazy, huh?
- M: They're in the same boat, working hard.
- E: Yeah, yeah. But the stereotype is what killed them, eh. After that, when they went to Kona, they all got along. They was only two theaters. So, we lived, maybe from here to there at, what you call, the show place, and the people would walk, maybe three to four to go to the movie and after that, they walk home, yeah, that's how they got to know each other. Only Filipinos would walk.
- M: Walk? Was there no other...

¹⁵ Lunas: plantation bosses.

E: No cars.

M: What about donkey?

E: The dancing?

M: Donkey...use the donkey instead of walking.

E: No. ha, ha. They don't wanna use. They don't want to wear out the donkey. [laughs]

M: [laughs]

E: That's right...I never thought about the donkey. [laughs] They would rather walk, ha, ha.

M: You mentioned also that, ah, the women, the Filipino women, were quite strong, are quite strong but, uh, growing up....

E: They're very assertive.

M: Assertive.

E: Very assertive and they would, ah, it's almost like, you know, in the *hanai* program.

M: Uh huh, hanai, yeah, adopting.

E: Yeah, like, you're my aunty. You can scold me and I cannot be disobedient to you, because if I disobedient to you, you would tell my father and I'll get licking. And it was always all this disagreement...not disagreement...agreement that you, when I'm out in the public, you're my mother, you can scold me, you can tell me what to do and all that, and I gotta obey. Yeah, but very assertive. And yet, they were very, ah, courteous.

M: Do you still remember Pete Tagalog?

E: Yeah.

M: And, ah, what was he like in your class? He took your class in '73, and he had just started, I guess, he started, ah, assuming the role of leadership.

E: Ota town.

M: Ota Camp.¹⁶

E: Ota Camp, yeah, it was.

M: And he was taking your course, according to this article [*Honolulu Advertiser*, 7 May 1972, p. D-1].

E: Yeah. At that time, Filipinos were not considered, ah, leaders.

M: At the time, uh huh.

E: Yeah. And then, they were considered, eh, keep them in the camp and they'll be all right. But somehow, ah, the camp boss, ah, there was controversy and they were going to kick them out and all that, and that's when Pete asserted himself.

16 In 1971 the Filipino residents of Ota Camp, a plantation camp, organized to fight their eviction. With assistance from community activists, Ota Camp resident Pete Tagalog rose to become a leader for a thirty year struggle to retain a community and lifestyle.

M: Asserted himself.

E: Yeah, he was in class. He was not... He was assertive but not, da kine, oh, public.

M: Did he talk in the class?

E: After a while.

M: After a while?

E: Yeah, after a while. And him and the brother.

M: Ah, Candido. Candido.

E: Yeah. He told em, you guys, somebody has to stand up for the Filipinos. We getting pushed around. We cannot, we cannot, ah, we cannot tolerate that. How we going do it? Just be...fight for your rights, fight for justice and all that. And ah, so, that's how we started forming. And then, you feel, very, ah, bonded with the group. You feel that the group was going to help you. And then, there were faculty people that found out about it but they would come and help, like Dick Yap.

M: Dick Yap, yeah.

E: And they would come and help and all that. And lot of times, the landlord would use language they couldn't understand, so Dicky and them would interpret for them. These are your rights. Your rights tell you, do this, do this, do this, and not. Yeah, that was the days, man. It was big.

M: Did you go to Ota camp before, the old Ota camp? Ever go?

E: Oh, yeah, all the time. yeah. And it was the first time for those people who protested, yeah.

M: Yes. Openly?

E: Yeah. And this was for the living conditions. The protest before was for the working conditions, social justice for many people.

M: So, what other projects, ah, did you want to talk about?

E: Okay. Well, we were developing, what you call that, ah. I don't know if I mentioned it to you, but the disadvantaged started taking power in, you know, in the project that we had.

M: What project?

E: A the counseling project that we had, and then the....

M: In Hālawa?

E: No, at the school.

M: At Leeward?

E: At Leeward. So, these ethnic groups started to embrace their greatness, and that you're great, you're a winner, it says right here: I'm okay, you're okay. So that's how they got again out. And many of them, at that time, were coming back from Vietnam. But lot of them didn't know what to do when they got back. They said yeah, we are veterans. But we have two things. Some people hate us because they didn't want the war and some people hate us because we were still, ah, minorities. We don't have the right color skin.

M: That's the Filipino kids?

E: Filipinos and Hawaiian.

M: Filipinos and Hawaiian.

E: So, they was in my class, and later on, you can read the write-up, but what started, ah, so, just to show you what started, ah...had these 3 brothers that were in my class and then, they became what they call, guns for hire.

M: Oh.

E: Yeah, they knew how to kill. So, they would have the syndicate hire them. They go kill people, and they get paid. And they were all in my class. They kind of felt guilty because, you know. I said no, there's better ways to live, but you know, you gotta deal with that, because you're very skilled at that, you know, so you can do other things, you know, be a hunter or join the park ranger.

So those kinds of things were happening at the time. Then the syndicate were really surprised to see a Filipino educated. They never know even one Filipino student. At that time, it was rare. So, they started, they wanted to recruit me to be part of the syndicate.

M: To counsel them? Ha, ha.

E: No, one was to run the chicken fights because they know I knew how to chicken fight. I was good. I was good at chicken fight, too. Gotta read, eh. You know, da kine, the feet. You gotta know to read the scales, yeah, certain scales, the chicken fight high. Certain scales they only fight low, and all that kine. And that's how you bet, yeah.

M: So, you can detect who the winner might be the way the chicken jump.

E: Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's how you do that.

M: And where did you learn that? From your ninong?

E: Yeah.

M: You can write a play on your ninongs.

E: I know. Boy, I tell you, boy. They were socializing me all kinds of ways. [laughs]

M: That's the sense of humor.

E: Yeah. That's why I got confused in life. [laughs] Sometimes my classmates called me drunkard. I was drinking all the time. [laughs]

M: [laughs] And back to the syndicate, so they were recruiting you.

E: So, they reached out. They sent the boys. One wanted to chicken fight, "Uncle, you like be in charge of chicken fights?" "No, I no like do that kine stuff." "You like be in charge of prostitution?"

I don't want guns for hire. No get stupid. I never had college for nothing.

M: So, that stopped. So, what happened to those three brothers?

E: Oh, ah, one of them got killed, one got killed, one went to jail.

E: Yeah. So, he went jail. But in the meantime, I had moved to Hawai'i Kai.¹⁷

E: Yeah...we moved to Hawai'i Kai.

M: How long did you stay there?

E: We stayed there ten years.

M: Long time?

E: Yeah. We stayed there, and that's when Niki lost his identity of who he was as a Filipino.

M: All right. That's right, because there's no community there?

E: Yeah. And then, when he moved in there, we were proud of being Filipino. And when he would ask ah, the peers, the girls, what nationality you are, so they would tell 'em Japanese and Hawaiian. And he would tell, Niki would, they ask, what you? Filipino. And they would tell em, what is a Filipino? [laughs] Dad, what is Filipino?

M: And Niki would be, how old?

E: Only about second grade.

M: Second grade.

E: Yeah, but, you know.

M: He did not know?

E: He did not know. But they loved Niki. Somehow, they were always making him citizen of the year.

M: What language did you speak at home? Did Niki learn Visayan?

E: No.

M: No, why?

E: 'Cuz Shirley spoke Ilokano and I spoke Visayan but the easiest language was English.

M: English. Okay.

E: And every now and then, we used words.

M: Bad words?

E: Yeah...bad words, good words. And my brother Herman was living with us.

M: Oh, okay.

E: And my brother, Rodney, lived with us. And Jimmy Tagalog, nephew of Pete Tagalog.

M: How come?

E: My brother was from the Big Island, but he was getting into trouble, yeah. So, my mother told 'em, take him away because he going end up in jail. So, we took em. I took him here and he went to Roosevelt High School, yeah. And my brother and Ron just about last year and from there, he

¹⁷ Hawai'i Kai is a middle/upper-middle class district in east Honolulu developed, starting in 1961, by Henry J. Kaiser as O'ahu's first planned community.

went to college. And, Pete Tagalog nephew was in my class getting problem with the family. So, he moved out and stayed with us. But anyways, the observers were observing us, right?

M: Like a real Mafia. It's good they left you alone, and your family instead of hassle you.

E: Yeah. But I guess it was rare for a Filipino with a degree at that time. And then, the Hawaiians identified with the Filipinos

M: Correct.

E: Yeah. So, that's how. So, I told them, leave me alone because you guys going get it, if you don't leave me alone.

E: So, they left me alone. And then, Milo went crazy. He burned the ROTC building at UH.

M: And Milo is?

E: The one that was talking to me at Hawaii Kai, observing me, yeah.

M: Okay, okay. He burned down the ROTC.

E: ROTC building. [laughs] That's how crazy he was. He came to me the next day, in my class, and he tell 'em and he tell me, "Uncle, you saw last night?" "No, what happened?" He said, "ROTC building." "Yes, somebody went burn em, yeah?" "Who went burn 'em?" He said, "Me." I said, "No talk to me, I no like know this kine information." He tell, "Why?" "Because I gotta report you...I no like, you know." He said, "I no like go jail." I said, "I no like put you in jail." "Yeah, but I gotta tell somebody."

M: He has to tell somebody, [laughs]...to unload it.

E: Yeah. "Don't you dare tell anybody you told me." He tell me, yeah, yeah.

M: So, what happened, what happened to Milo?

E: He went to jail. They caught him. He's such a brain. He's so smart, Milo. He's throwing away his brain.

M: Why did he do it, did he say?

E: I think he wanted to protest that the United States is not following what they had promised that they would do. You see, at that time, that time was very controversial, yeah. So, all the veterans stayed back. Lot of 'em were dissatisfied and then the way the people treated them.

M: Was Milo Filipino or Hawaiian?

E: Filipino.

M: Filipino?

E: Yeah.

M: Did you have any brother who served in Vietnam?

E: Yeah, my brother Herman.

M: Herman.

E: And my other brother, Ron.

M: Ron too.

E: Yeah.

M: Ron...Ron was my student, yeah.

E: So, good thing about Herman is that we had our program.¹⁸ So, he worked right into the program.

M: For the...?

E: The disadvantaged

M: The disadvantaged.

E: Yeah. And so, Shirley was teaching, ah, the SSCI class at 'Aiea.

M: Okay, that's Introduction to Selfhood?

E: Exactly. And they knew what to do because the concept they grew up with it, you know. And Ronnie too, he started working with the City.

M: Okay. So, they did not join any protest groups here when they came?

E: Half and half, at a distance.

M: So, my wrapping up question is, before we go eat somewhere, just your thoughts since you're eighty years old now. You had a lot to do with the local Filipino community here. What do you think is the status of the Filipino community in Hawaii and what can be done if there needs to be something to be done?

E: I think the status is that Filipinos are still in transition. We're all in transition. The irony of it is that we are going to be continuous in the socialization because Filipinos from the Philippines are still coming over. Yeah, they're coming over, but they're coming over now and their socialization is much more accelerated than when I went through. So, the Filipinos are going to make an impact much faster than our generation. 'Cuz I told my brother them, that, try look at, da kine, Ben Franklin, you know and the fast foods.

M: Oh, okay

E: You look at the fast foods. All Filipinos.

M: Which one, L & L?

E: Yeah, L & L, McDonalds. Yesterday, we went to this Japanese place.

M: Gyotaku, no?

E: It's...I forget the name. Our brother took us.

M: In Waipahu?

E: In Waipahu. It's owned by Japanese, and it's all Japanese names and all that. But you look at the servers, all Filipinos.

¹⁸ At Leeward Community College.

- M: Correct. You look at the back, cooks, all Filipinos. But the owners are Japanese.
- E: So, the Filipinos are smart. They're socializing themselves now. They're talking to the locals. They're not like before, in the plantation...they only learn pidgin. They're learning the other language and all that. But the socialization is important.
- M: At this point, Ernie, because I went to Asahi yesterday with some friends and the cashier was Filipino. The waitress was Filipino and I asked her who is cooking? Another Filipino.
- E: Yeah. You look at, you know Waimalu? If you go, from 6:00 in the morning, the sushi place. Whoa, the line is long. Sakura. They have a very famous sushi. All over there. And you look at who's taking the order? Filipinos. You look in the back, who's cooking? Filipinos. Who's bringing the food in there? Filipino. They're all Filipinos. And they're all talking to each other Filipino.
- M: Oh, okay. That's another angle because some people would say, oh, we're just taking the lowest jobs in Hawaii. But your point about being socialized in the society is a good one.
- E: Yeah, and they're getting paid for it. They're talking story. They're getting paid. Smart! Yeah. Filipinos, all these contacts in society. Before, they were isolated. They only stay at the chicken fights. That's how they would make money. But now, they branched out. If you look also at all, you know, the security jobs, lot of Filipinos are in there now. Even though they cannot talk good English. But they're learning how to talk good English and all that. At the airport, you see a lot of Filipinos because now, they branched out.
- M: That's an interesting point, Ernie, because we always think of Filipinos as victims but actually...
- E: They're moving up from just being landscapers, cleaning your yard, you know. They're more assertive now. So, in that sense, their status now is recent. You look at different doctors, too. A lot of Filipino women are in there. They're working their way to become nurses. You cannot hold them back.
- M: Okay, maybe, we can wrap up. Did you want to say anything else?
- E: I think, education, too. They're becoming much more. Ah, if you look at Waipahu, their re-entry program. They're graduating with their high school diploma and their AA degree. So, they're accelerating. A lot of Filipinos are doing that.
- M: And they are accredited, yeah? Accelerated.
- E: Yeah. We'll see more of that kind of model, that it's a trend to become educated rather than to be uneducated. The older Filipinos wanted to be uneducated.
- M: You think so? Wanted to become uneducated?
- E: Yeah.
- M: But why? How? Because they do not want to brag?
- E: It's part of the hierarchy. You cannot be beyond the hierarchy. The oppression was so strong they didn't want to go against it and be called a rebel or become a strikebreaker or be called a troublemaker and all that. Now, the younger generation, they're beginning to see the irony of that kind of upbringing. And they're realizing, I think, that it's not fun to be poor.

M: It's not fun to be poor.

E: Yeah. It's hard to be poor, yeah, yeah. And the thing is, I think, that what they do is that they're translating that to the Church. The Church is encouraging them that it's not nice to be poor. But you need to have your values such that it takes Christ put in a positive way. So, the church is beginning to become less oppressive than what they were in the past.

M: Before, now, more open, yeah?

E: More open. They're not using guilt as a way of controlling behavior here, yeah. It's like I have it here, I'm okay, you're okay, you're unlimited. That's how the Church is beginning to contend with the life positions.

M: I wanted to ask you. Don't you ever feel blue or lonesome? And how do you get out of that? Because, you know, you try to teach positive thinking

E: We're using humor a lot.

M: Who are these friends of yours?

E: Leeward...all Leeward. We're talking about how life was like.

M: So, you meet every Friday?

E: Every Friday, Doug Kaya calls everybody.

M: Okay. Where do you go?

E: McDonalds

M: McDonalds? In Waipahu?

E: No, by Pearlridge, not Pearlridge but Pearl City. Yeah, and you know, it's really funny but we're the only ones faculty, yeah. The rest are all, uh, what you call it, working people instead of retired. They're all there.

M: Uh huh, talking story? So, that's your answer to my question about when you are blue or lonesome you said sense of humor, with laughter.

E: Yeah, with laughter, sense of humor, thank God. I pray a lot, yeah. Kids, they talk to me.

M: Okay, thank you very much.

E: You're welcome! [laughs]