

Filipino-American Historical Society of Hawai'i  
Oral History Project  
Interview #1

**ERNEST LIBARIOS, SR. (E)**

**Interview Conducted By:  
Melinda Tria Kerkvliet (M)**

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Mānoa Marketplace, Honolulu, O'ahu<sup>1</sup>

M: Okay, Ernie, can you give me your full name?

E: Okay, my name is Ernest Duterte Libarios. My birthdate is February 19, 1939, and I was born on a plantation, Pa'auilo, Hawai'i.<sup>2</sup> My parents names are...my dad is Herman Hildo Libarios and my mom is Efifania Duterte Libarios.

M: Occupation of your parents?

E: My dad, when he first came, he was recruited as a plantation worker to work on the plantation. And my mom, she was about 3 years old, 4 years old, she came with my grandparents. And, you know, she was just a housewife after that. Formal education...my dad, my dad reached only third grade, and my mom was fourth grade at the highest.

M: Okay, and what about you? Your primary education?

E: Oh yeah, right now, well, I went to Chaminade.<sup>3</sup> No, I was recruited from Kona to go to Saint Martin's.<sup>4</sup>

M: Saint Martin's?

E: These priests, who were from the Cathedral Basilica, they would hold classes at Iwilei, and we were in these classes.

M: How old were you? How old were you when you were recruited?

E: Oh, well, I was in Kona.<sup>5</sup> We moved from Kona. From Iwilei,<sup>6</sup> we moved to Kona. And when we stayed in Kona, that's when, what you call that, this priest called Father Jackson, he started to recruit us together. And 'cuz all us boys, all us Filipino boys, nobody wanted to go to school. So, we just run around stealing, breaking into cars and all that. And, then, I got suspended from

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

2 Pa'auilo is located on the Hāmākua coast on Hawai'i island, south of Honoka'a.

3 Chaminade University of Honolulu was founded in 1955 under the guidance of Marianists eager to establish a Catholic institution of higher education in Hawaii. It remains Hawai'i's only Catholic college.

4 Saint Martins was a boarding school established by Benedictine monks, in 1895, for boys and young men; expanded in 1900 with college courses preparing students for priesthood.

5 Kona is the leeward district of Hawai'i island.

6 Iwilei was a district in Honolulu near the shipping piers, pineapple canneries and, until 1944, a government-regulated center for prostitution.

school for running a gambling ring. I had a big gambling ring. National Guard trucks would come, and I would hold gambling rings, yeah.

M: What kind of gambling?

E: Paiute.<sup>7</sup>

M: Paiute. What's paiute?

E: Paiute and, da kine, forget the name of it. Well, paiute was one of them. The other one was, da kine, you know, you guess how much money it would be and all that.

M: Ah, roll the dice?

E: Yeah, dice too.

M: Dice too?

M: What, how did you learn that? How did you learn how to gamble?

E: My godfather at the time, they taught me how. They trained me, from small, how to cheat on cards.

M: Your godfather?

E: Yes.

M: And who is this godfather? Single?

E: My godfather, ah, I forget his name already. But the Filipinos lived in the home all together. And that's where I would go pick up the slop for our pigs to eat. To pick up the slop, they said, you're gotta learn how to gamble, how to play cards. I learned how to cheat at cards because my hands were fast. Yeah, that's how I learned, ah, I learned how to cheat and make money.

M: And where is Saint Martin?

E: Oh, Saint Martin's is a school. It's a Benedictine school at Washington...Olympia, Washington.

M: Oh, you went there?

E: Yeah, cuz the priest came and then, he started training us how to become altar boys and all that. That in itself is another story I gotta tell you about. Father Jackson, he became a sex abuser.

M: Oh, okay.

E: But that's another story in my life

M: That's another story, yeah. So, and then, you went to Chaminade.

E: Yeah but we went to Saint Martin's first, okay

M: Okay. Saint Martin's is on the mainland?

E: Yeah, in Washington. Olympia, Washington.

M: Olympia, Washington. How long were you there?

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<sup>7</sup> Paiute is a Hawai'i card game similar to poker.

E: Yeah, one year. But I didn't know that it was an all-male school. It was run by the Benedictine, you know, the monks.

M: Benedictine, yeah?

E: Yeah. 500 acres. It was all male. So, when I went there, I went with 2 students from Maryknoll.<sup>8</sup> They were upperclassmen.

M: All boys?

E: All boys, all male. I went nuts. I went crazy 'cuz no more girls, eh? I said, geez, what is this? All males? Father Jackson didn't tell me it was all male.

M: He's kind of train you to be a priest. [laughs]

E: Yeah, he sent me up there. And then, but I didn't want to go college, so I said, "Ma, I don't wanna go college. Look, I get suspended from school two times and you still send me school?" They said, no, Father Jackson said you gotta go. I said, "Otherwise, I like go join Marines." 'Cuz I joined the Marines already. I was recruited. But they had to sign the paper... 'cuz I was only 17, yeah. And they said, "Well, we talk to Father Jackson."

Father Jackson came and said, "So, what's the matter?" I said, "I don't wanna go college. I going waste my money 'cuz I no study." He said, he tell, "Well what you like do?" I said, "I like go Marines." So, Father said, "Well," looked at it [recruitment paper] and said, "Your mommy gotta sign, right?" "Yeah," I tell. "They no sign, you cannot go." I tell, "Yeah. So, what I going do?" He said, "You going work coffee land." I said, "No, I go college." [laughs] I went college.

M: That was a very easy decision.

E: Yeah, all my friends, four of us, they tell, where you going? I said I going college. They said why? I said. I explained to them. So, they had to join the Marines. I didn't join. I went to college. And, like I said, when I went there, all guys, whoa, I went nuts!

M: Why?

E: Crazy! No more girls!

M: Did you have to pay? Who paid for it? Scholarship?

E: I had to work janitor. I worked as a janitor.

M: Oh, that's self-supporting.

E: Yeah, but mom them had a good crop that year, fortunately, yeah. And my sister was going to this other school in Portland. It's called Multnomah.<sup>9</sup> She wanted to be a nun. That's why she went. It was all girls school, too. So, my mother said all boys school, all girls school. Nobody get pregnant and all that kine stuff. So, I said, okay. So, I went there. I said, wow, I was going crazy. My roommate, the guys, you know, I ran around with. I no study, so, we had the group and everybody no study, yeah, usually, freshmen year. So, this is one incident you said to mention.

M: Okay, yeah, good.

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<sup>8</sup> Maryknoll School is a private, coeducational Catholic school founded in 1927 by Maryknoll Sisters.

<sup>9</sup> Multnomah School of the Bible (later, Multnomah Bible College and Seminary and, now, Multnomah University) was established in 1936 as a private, coeducational, non-denominational Christian school.

E: So, they were gonna elect president, vice-president for the freshmen class. So, all my friends thought it would be funny if they elected me as vice-president. I told em, I don't wanna be president. They said, nah, we're going to elect you. We're going to elect you. And then, the president was the brain. Oh, the school has a high school too, all males. And then, so the guy was such a brain, you know. He was running for president, and they thought it was funny. They elected me to be vice-president. I said, I don't want to be in there. Cannot. You gotta run. You gotta. I said, I don't wanna be. Said, you cannot. You gotta learn the *Robert's Rules of Order*, you know, in order to come out. So, I didn't know what to do, eh.

M: What is it?

E: *Robert's Rules of Order*

M: Oh, that one

E: Parliamentary procedure.

M: Second the motion and all that, yeah?

E: Yeah, yeah, I didn't know nothing about that, so they said what? Finally, they elect you. Then, they held the election, and I was the vice-president. I was so scared, you know. But you know, God provides. You talk about God providing, yeah.

My roommate was from Idaho. He was a freshman too, he and I. He was the parliamentarian champ of Idaho, and he would train all the people in Idaho. So, he would train me every night. He taught me parliamentary procedure. He said he can train me. He said, I'll train you, Ernie. Every night we practiced. And then, one day, the president said he had to go to a conference, right, and Ernie gotta take over. All my friends started laughing, telling everybody: Eh, eh, we going make fun of Ernie when he go up there, you know. But, I had one semester and a half of training every night, from my roommate.

M: So you knew.

E: I knew that thing backwards, man. [laughs] Everybody's jaws dropped: "When did you learn that?"

M: So, how many Filipino guys were there in, that...is it called, Saint Martin?

E: Only two of us.

M: Oh, two. Saint Martin high school?

E: College

M: Saint Martin's College

E: Yeah, right now

M: But that's actually for high school, yeah?

E: They had a high school, too. High school dorm and then, the college on the other side.

M: And you were there for, ah....

E: Freshman year

M: Freshman year. This is college, eh?

E: It's a college. It's a university now.

M: Ah, okay.

E: Yeah, yeah. Saint Martin's.

M: Saint Martin's. It's in Olympia, Washington.

E: Olympia, Washington, yeah.

M: Did you learn anything? I mean, what courses did you take?

E: Here's the thing. I was influenced by the church a lot. My parents, every night, they said prayer. But, you know, hey, I hate pray. Why we pray? We're still poor all the time. My parents went scold me: "You the one give us bad luck. You always grumbling." I said, "Brah, look, we keep praying. We're still eating *utame* [Japanese bread] every night." I was small. She said, "You keep quiet, you don't talk like that. [laughs] God going punish us some more!"

But, anyway, so, I went Saint Martin's and somehow, I started going in the chapel. I would go into the chapel and pray. And, uh, I don't know, God started going into my soul and then, I would sneak in the chapel. One day, my roommate and my friends found me. They said, "Libarios, Oh, what's that? What you doing here?" I said, "Oh, I sleeping." They said, "No lie." I tell, "No, I sleeping." They tell, "Eh, God stay right there, you lying." I tell, "I knew. I pray." They said, "How long you've been praying?" I said, "Long time now."

M: Were you sad? Because you were away?

E: I don't know. I wanted to find out who I was.

M: 17 years old.

E: Yeah. I didn't know who I was. There's no Filipinos around. I spoke pidgin English. Nobody understood me. They said, how come you talk with a foreign language? I said, what do you mean, this my best English. [laughs] They said, you have an accent. What accent?

M: Everyone has an accent.

E: Yeah. But you gotta talk like haoles, eh?

M: Oh.

E: Anyway, so then, I told em. And then, my friend said, can we pray with you? I said, what? Said yeah, we pray. All right, so, we started praying the rosary each other. And it changed my heart. It really changed my heart. So, I joined the oblate. I was going to become a priest.

M: You were thinking about becoming a priest?

E: Yeah. I became an oblate.

M: An oblate. O – B – L – A – T – E .

E: Yeah. It's kind of like the stages before you go into seminary.

M: And what did you do as an oblate?

E: You go serve mass and all that kine stuff.

M: Okay, like a sacristan?

E: Yeah.

M: Altar boy, they call it.

E: Altar boy, yeah. 'Cuz in Kona, I didn't qualify to be altar boy.

M: You were a gambler.

E: Yeah, they said, they said, you're no good, Ernest, yeah. I was bad, though. I was bad. But God changed me. Somehow, it changed. And I started reading. Wow, I could read, you know. And then, my roommate, who was from Maryknoll, told me. We have grades every quarter. The first quarter came out, and I had 1.3.

M: You changed!

E: Huh?

M: You changed.

E: But that was the first quarter. And I told my friend, "Eh, man, I'm passing." He tell, "Libarios, you're crazy." Tell, "Why?" "It's not passing." I tell, "What is it?" He said, "You're flunking!" I said, "What?" He said, "Yeah, you continue like that, they're going to kick you outta school 'cuz es all D's." "Eh, I know 1 C and all D's."

M: Oh, why were you flunking?

E: Huh?

M: Why were you flunking?

E: I don't study. I didn't know how to study. I didn't know what to read, yeah.

M: Okay, okay. Because of the...because of...before...the foundation. Okay.

E: Right, yeah. So, then I woke up. And I said, they going kick me outta school? Said, yeah. But what about the money for tuition? They going keep 'em. They no going give you back. No more refund? They said, no. I said, oh, I felt sorry. So, I started reading, yeah. I took my ukulele. I came into my friend's class. I can play good ukulele. I good musician. I gave it to my friend. I said, you hold em because, if I keep 'em, I going play every night. I not going study. So, I told em to hold 'em. And I started studying. Eh, I loved it! I loved it. Yeah. I came good.

M: You changed.

E: I almost reached 3 point something at the end of the semester, yeah. But then, after one year, my parents said, we came back. Well, I went to go to Stockton go work during summer, yeah, 'cuz you cannot stay at Saint Martin's, and we had relatives at Stockton that owned, ah, what you call that?

M: Fields?

E: No, the kine they rent, when people, the farmers would come, they would rent.

M: Camps, in the camps?

E: Yeah. That's where I was supposed to go. I went over there to work on the farm because I wasn't afraid to work, yeah. And my roommate and I, we stayed in San Francisco at this sister's house. We stayed there. Oh my goodness, women again came into my life. [laughs]

M: At 17, you are 17 now.

E: Yeah, no, 18 already. And then, at Saint Martin's, no more women. You go to San Francisco – women all over the place. Whoa, we went nuts. We started going to these pornographic movies and all that kine stuff.

M: In Stockton?

E: Huh?

M: In Stockton?

E: No, in San Francisco. I went over there. And we was gonna go Stockton but my mother...I told Ma, "I ran out of money." [laughs] "What you do with the money?" I told em, "Aahh, Ma." [laughs] Guess what? Ma told, "We going send you ticket. You come home." I said, "Oh, Ma, Ma, I gotta go Stockton, go work." She said, "No." So, they send me the ticket, and I had to come home.

M: She knew?

E: Yeah. And when we got home, we had bad crop – really bad crop. So, my sister came home, too, and Mommy said, "You know, Ernest, we like send you college but we cannot send you school." I said, "Why?" She said, "Because we had bad crop, no more money." Then, I tell, "Ma, you gotta send me back school." She tell me, "Why?" "Because I love studying now, brah. I read book. I understand. Look, my grade. I get good grade." She tell me, "You lolo boy, 'No' every time. We like send you school before we get money, you no like go. Now we no more money, you like go school. How come God punish me?" I said, "I don't know, brah. I started reading. I like studying. If you no going send me school, I not going back school." "Don't talk like that." "Why?" "Because that's not good. Call Father Jackson."

Father Jackson was in Honolulu. Father Jackson, from Honolulu, talk to me about school. I said, "Father, I love studying now. I read all the books on, da kine, Saint Augustine, all the high end philosophers. I understood what they was saying. Lot of them never know what they were saying." He said, "You know what." I said, "Yeah." "There's a school that's opening up. It's called Chaminade." I said, "Where?" He said, "In Honolulu." And right then, he said, "They going admit women, then, you can go school over there. If get money, I'll get you money."

So, my sister and I were enrolled at Chaminade financial aids. And my sister became the first woman to graduate from Chaminade. She became the first Filipino lady to graduate.

M: Your sister's name is?

E: Lorencia. Yeah, she graduated. And the following year, I graduated. I became the first Filipino boy from Chaminade. Yeah. But I loved it! Oh, I loved studying after that.

M: What did you major in at Chaminade?

E: History. That's all they had. History. I wanted psychology but no more psychology, no. History, I majored in history.

M: And the teachers, were they religious or secular?

E: Yeah, all nuns...nuns and priests.

M: Was that co-ed before? I thought it was.

E: Yeah, it became co-ed.

M: It became co-ed. okay

E: But my sister them were the first co-ed, the first one to graduate.

M: But the high school stayed?

E: The high school – Saint Louis

M: Okay, that's the one. okay. That's right because, for boys only for a long time. Until now?

E: Until now.

M: Okay. So, at Chaminade you majored in history.

E: History, yeah. And then, there was this priest who is the head – he's still around – but he and Father Mackey got Chaminade, you know, accredited and all that. He was such a brilliant guy.

M: What's the name?

E: Father Tutas.

M: Father?

E: Tutas. T – T – U – T – A – S. Steven Tutas

M: T – U – T – E – S?

E: T – U – T – A – S.

M: A – S

E: Father Steven Tutas. He's still alive, and he's the head. He used to be the head of the Marianist Order, all the Marianist priests. University of Dayton. He was a man to look up to. And somehow, he and I got together. We liked each other, you know. And I would sit in the back all the time because, you know, Filipinos don't sit in front. If you sit in front, you're showing off. Only the smart guys sit in front, so I sit in the back. So, one day, he came up to me and he told me, Ernest, how come you sit in the back? I said, oh, that's how I was trained. And he said, what do you mean, trained us Filipinos to stay in the back? And he said, how come you don't answer the questions, you know.

M: You don't raise your hand.

E: You don't raise your hand. But, when he read my, when he would read my book, when he would read my stuff, you know, the one I would write, he would read it to the class and he'd say this person has all the answers, the deep answers and all that, but he would never identify who it was. Who dat? He would not tell. And so, he said one day, he said, "I'm going to tell everybody the one I'm reading is you." I said, "Father, don't do that!" He tell, "Why?"

M: Why?



E: “Because Filipinos supposed to be on the bottom, not on the top.” [laughs] I said, “I cannot handle.”

M: You cannot handle...celebrity.

E: And my sister was in my class. And she never know, eh. And then, so, one day, Father said to me, “We gotta tell em.” I said, “Okay, tell em. Tell my sister first.” So, Father told my sister. My sister got so mad. She said, “You...you knew all the answers and you didn’t tell me the answers. I was teaching you from small time. How come you don’t teach me?” I tell, “I don’t know some of em. I thought was stupid what I write, but I guess he liked it.” So, she said, “Yeah, you’re only showing off. Shut up.” I tell, “I just write what I write.”

M: It looks like two priests were very influential.

E: Yes, there was Father Mackey, who, he was the president of the school. He came to recruit me to become a priest, but he found out about Saint Martin’s.

M: What about Father?

E: Father Tutas.

M: Was there a Father Jackson?

E: And Father Jackson was the one that recruited me to go to Saint Martin’s.

M: That’s kind of interesting – the priest connection to your family. Okay, maybe, we can talk about growing up in Kona before you went to....

E: Chaminade, I mean, Saint Martin’s.

M: Mainland, yeah, Saint Martin’s. Okay, ah, you were born, you said, in Pa’auilo.

E: Pa’auilo...then went to Kona.

M: And then went to Kona. Why did you go to Kona? The family?

E: Oh, my family wanted to go back Philippines. So, we waited for Uncle Pedro, but the crop...but my Daddy waited 30 years and still never raise enough money. So, we never did go back.

M: Your uncle seems to be very important. What’s his name?

E: Pedro

M: Peter?

E: Pedro. P – E – D – R – O.

M: Pedro. Pedro what?

E. Libarios

M: Libarios. And he came to Hawaii ahead?

E: No, he was the one that was recruited first.

- E: And then, my grandfather said, you better watch Pedro 'cuz he doesn't know how to keep his money. He's just a wild guy. But he was really smart, very smart. He know how to write, but really smart, yeah. All the ranch people all wanted to hire him.
- M: He came alone?
- E: No, with my dad.
- M: With your dad...and your dad's family, no?
- E: No, just my dad, just my dad and him.
- M: And, do you remember what year, what year you think they came?
- E: Ah, '30s, I think.
- M: In the '30s. So, they were young males.
- E: Oh yeah. They were young, oh, only about 18, 19, I think.
- M: They were recruited?
- E: They were recruited, yeah.
- M: So, Pedro and your dad? And your dad's name is...I forget.
- E: Herman Hildo
- M: Herman Hildo
- E: That's the one that I'm writing about.
- M: Correct, yeah. And those, ah, so, let's follow the...where they went...where Pedro went and where your dad went.
- E: Both of them went to Kohala.
- M: There you are, uh huh.
- E: They started working in Kohala and then, they started getting treated badly. And then they broke, they broke their contract.
- M: When you say they were treated...treated badly. What do you mean?
- E: Oh, lotta times, they were treated like servants. They wouldn't show respect to the Filipinos.
- M: Who is "they"?
- E: The boss, yeah.
- M: The boss.
- E: Wake em up early. Go out work, man. Conditions were bad. Sometimes, you get rain and all that. They wouldn't, they wouldn't keep 'em in. You gotta go out work, and all that kine stuff.
- M: Uh huh. What kind of work did they do?
- E: Ah, plantation: dig, cut cane, yeah, haul. Put 'em on the donkey, no, they had train, eh. They put 'em on the train and all that. But just mean, treat 'em mean, yeah.

M: Did they join any strike?

E: Yeah.

M: They did? What did they do?

E: They started to get together. They were going to strike against the boss. And the boss found out. So, they would send strikebreakers. In the house, they come late at night. If you the leader, we'd grab you, tie you up.

M: The strikebreakers would do that?

E: Yeah, they would do that. And then, the chute, the river, yeah, so, they'd use the river 'cuz that's where they throw sugar cane. And the sugar cane would drain into the grinder but also would go out into the ocean. The rubbish, so that they throw the Filipinos, the troublemakers, yeah they throw 'em in there. And that's where the sharks are. They breed the sharks over there.

M: So, the strikebreakers...who would tell them to do that? The managers?

E: Okay, these are the strikers, right, the Filipinos. And then, you have the strikebreaker would come to break the strike. The manager would tell them.

M: Were there strikebreakers who would do that? These are Filipino strikebreakers trying to punish the Filipino strikers?

E: Right, right. They were getting paid, eh. They were getting good paid money, yeah. And they even recruited. They went back to the Philippines to recruit some and they brought them to Hawaii to break the strike, yeah.

M: But, I didn't know that they did that.

E: Huh?

M: I didn't really know they did that.

E: Oh yeah. That's why they left. That's why they ran away. They broke the strike but they started to kill plenty guys, eh? They said no, they don't wanna get killed. Nobody like get killed by sharks, you know.

M: So, how did they plan it? How to transfer? They went to Kohala, you said. These are still unmarried? Unmarried, huh?

E: Some of them were married.

M: They came as a group, move to....

E: No, they cannot go as a group. You gotta sneak out, late at night. You cannot...'cuz, if the boss sees you, you know, you gotta. You still have a contract, yeah.

M: Correct, correct. So, sneak out and...

E: You sneak out at night and, uh, it's far, yeah, from Kohala to Kona. yeah.

M: Yeah.

- E: Yeah. Just like, sometimes, I look at the migrant workers, you know, in South America, where they're gonna try to cross the boundaries. I was thinking the Filipinos were doing the same. There were very unhealthy conditions. They wanted to get away. That's how they got away.
- M: And how do you do that, you know, from transportation....
- E: Walk. They walk. Lot of them walk at night.
- M: I cannot imagine the route.
- E: They would tell each other, though. Everybody would tell each other how to, how to sneak out, yeah, and all that, yeah.
- M: Boy, that's pretty good. So, did they, so, your dad and uncle, did they go together and move to Kona, both of them?
- E: Oh yeah, yeah. And my other *tatay* [father] the third one.
- M: There's another one.
- E: Tatay. He's Catalino Aboloc.
- M: Catalino. All single?
- E: Yeah, they were all single.
- M: Single. The three of them ended up in Kona? And what did they do in Kona?
- E: Ah, work in the coffee fields. The farmers, all Japanese farmers, own the land, Filipinos couldn't own land.
- M: At the time.
- E: Yeah. It was against the law for Filipinos to own land.
- M: Okay. And the Japanese could?
- E: Yeah, the Japanese could.
- M: Or were they just leasing the land?
- E: They leased it to the Japanese because the Japanese were in command. And, but, that's how oppressive it was. Filipinos couldn't own land, yeah. And so, the Japanese, because they were in control, let's say, if I didn't like you and I had something against you, I would tell the police, *kore*, *kore*, you, you, this the one, yeah, so they would arrest you, put you in jail, and all that.
- M: It happened?
- E: Oh yeah, yeah. That's how the Filipinos were, they didn't, they weren't, they don't tag along with the Japanese too much, but, they had the money, yeah. So, they had the business, so they would work with the Japanese.
- M: And what did they do for the...at the Kona, at the farm, at the coffee fields?
- E: They would pick coffee. They would cut the branch, prune the branch. When time for harvest, you fertilize also. They poison the grass, yeah, and then they grind the coffee with the donkey. There

was a whole cycle that they did a lot of. And then, the Filipinos were the one that provided the major laboring force.

M: For the coffee in Kona.

E: Yeah, that's how they continued for over 20 years – the laboring force and the Filipinos.

M: And then, your father got married in Kona? He met your mother?

E: He met my mother and then they got married.

M: And what was your mother doing in Kona?

E: Coffee too.

M: Okay, so that's the connection.

E: Yeah, connection. And they were so poor.

M: What do you mean, so poor?

E: I tell, "Ma, how poor you was?" She said, "We didn't, we didn't have bed." She said, "Only we had, what they call, horse blankets. And the horse blankets be on the floor, and you know how cold Kona, eh? We sleep on the floor." That's their blanket, like that. I said, "Wow, Ma, sometimes sorry I no appreciate you." She said, "Yeah, we suffer, boy."

And then, they don't have stoves. You gotta cook, you know, open fire. And then, in Kona, you don't have water, eh, you only have catchments. So, you take a shower outside and all that kine stuff, outdoor toilet and all that kine stuff.

M: You catch the rain? You had the storage.

E: Yeah, that's how you catch the rain.

M: How did your Ma end up there, not in a sugar plantation? Your mom, how did she end up in a coffee farm instead of a sugar plantation?

E: Because my grandfather and my grandmother, they were in Kohala, so they ran away too. They broke the contract.

M: They ran away too?

E: Yeah, they ran away too. They didn't want to be treated like that.

M: It's really a very interesting story of the Filipino-American experience. I don't think anyone has talked about that.

E: I don't think so. Nobody really.

M: Okay, so they broke the contract too. Grandpa, grandma and your mom. Who else?

E: And this is what I wanna caution you, too. This might, ah, alienate the Japanese because the Japanese are the ones that got credit for preserving the coffee, the coffee industry. But Filipinos were the ones, actually, providing the laboring force and they're not getting credit. So, if we start putting this, and I was going to, that's what I wanted to do, put it into words.

And then, my friend who came with me, he's a lawyer, he's Japanese, he's a lawyer, good friend with me, and I told him. I told Clay, "The Japanese going end up hating you, you know, because you taking away their pride, yeah."

M: No, cannot. You have to straighten up.

E: But he's a good person. He said, if it's the truth, it's the truth. I said, I just wanna warn you, I don't want you to scold me.

M: Yeah, 'cuz no one has really researched or maybe there are books already about Filipino laborers in coffee farms.

E: Not that I know of, not in that intense way that I saw it, yeah, yeah. So, that's how I ended up going to school, ah, of course, when I went to school, there was one person. His name is Bernard Garso.

M: Bernard Garso

E: Garso. He was the first one who went to college because of the boxing scholarship. He was a good boxer.

M: Is he a Pinoy?

E: Yeah. Filipino. He got scholarship to go to college. And I was. My sister was the second one to go. But she was from Saint Francis here, but I was the first, second male, to go, you know, to go college and, of course, all the prediction went to my dad, and they said, you're wasting your money on Ernie, on me, you know, because brain wasn't good, right and all that.

M: And was your dad also doing coffee? Coffee?

E: Yes. But my dad believed in education, and he believed in prayer. He said, "I'll pray for my son." And my mom too, she said we'll pray for him. But somehow, I succeeded and everybody was surprised.

M: Correct, yeah. But, you were talking about, ah, going to school and walking. You said it's far from your home.

E: You see Konawaena, five miles, yeah. And then, like I say, I was grumbling a lot because my sister was riding the taxi and I wasn't. So, my mom solved the problem by giving me the donkey. And, of course, donkey was very much fine. It's just like having your own jeep. You get your own donkey, eh.

M: Is that Konawaena High School?

E: Yeah, Konawaena High School, yeah.

M: Konawaena High School. And you had to walk five miles?

E: Five miles, yeah, within the boundary. If you lived within the 5 miles, you walk. If you passed that, let's say your house is 5 miles above, then you can catch the bus. The bus would pick you up.

M: Oh, okay. What time did you have to get up?

E: Usually, you get up before five, yeah, but after I had my donkey, I.... [laughs].

M: Tell me again the donkey story [laughs]. How did you get the donkey again? [laughs]

E: My parents.

M: This was when you were in Kona. The donkey was used in the coffee.

E: Oh yeah. They would carry the coffee bag, 100 pound bags, eh, you put them on the donkey, two sides, sometimes three on the donkey.

M: Yes, where did the donkeys come from?

E: Oh, the donkeys were imported, I think, yeah, imported because it was hard to buy jeeps, eh, no more jeeps and all that. So, you use the donkey.

M: That's the transportation at the time?

E: Yes, that's what they used.

M: Oh, okay.

E: Yeah

M: Because that's what they use now in Molokai.

E: Yeah, that's the same kine donkey, same kine donkey, yeah, the same kine.

M: And so, as a young boy, you knew how to ride

E: Oh yeah.

M: To lead the donkey.

E: Yeah, yeah.

M: How did you learn that?

E: Oh, you learn through, just jump on top. My father, my brother would tell me, get on the donkey and chase 'em.

M: And who owns the donkey?

E: We own it.

M: How many donkeys did you have?

E: At first, we had one. But there was a female and then, during the mating season, all the other donkeys would run away from their coffee. Because they make noise, eh. Haw hee, haw hee, haw

M: [laughs]

E: You could hear it all way up there. You see that house there? You can hear the donkey, you know.

M: Oh, that's kinda far.

E: Yeah. Donkey, mating season, they go nuts. [laughs] They went crazy. They're looking for build up their population, yeah, yeah.

M: Okay, so, who gave you the idea that you can just use the donkey to go to Konawaena, the high school?

- E: My mother. As a substitute, you know, because my sister was riding the taxi, yeah, and ah, we couldn't afford another 25 cents. So she said, "Okay, you like go school early, yeah, you like save energy." I tell, "Yeah." "Go ride the donkey." [laughs] "Ma, I no like ride donkey, es more low than Filipinos, you riding donkey." [laughs] "Then, you no grumble, you just ride." I said, "Okay, okay, okay, I go ride." I go and I tried it. Eh, this stuff not bad, I get to school early, you know.
- M: Can they run?
- E: Yeah. donkeys, they can. You can make 'em run, yeah. They cannot keep up. Try keep 'em. You run one mile with the donkey, you get tired. The donkey, they no get tired.
- M: And then, in the school, your classmates laughed at you because you were riding the donkey?
- E: Yeah, yeah. In the beginning, they were laughing. But then, when they saw the payoff, wow, I had recess time. Over one hour, I can play, eh? Eh, I like play too. [laughs]
- M: [laughs]
- E: So, that's why they paid me. I said better yet, make money. Yeah.
- M: So, when your mother found out about you, ah, collecting money, you had to stop.
- E: She gave me a big lecture. She said, "You shouldn't. We're all poor. That's why we're working. And you're taking money from the poor," she tell, "just like you stealing their food. You're not supposed to." So, I told mom, "Okay, now, so what you like, I return em?" She tell me, "No, I'll keep it." And mom kept the money. [laughs]
- M: But is that true, that all of the people at the high school were poor?
- E: Most of them. All of us, the ones that walked, all of us that walked, most of us were all poor.
- M: Were they Filipinos,? Japanese, too, Hawaiians?
- E: Mostly Filipinos...and we were all poor. The Japanese, ah, could afford, so they ride taxi. Yeah, and, you know, Kona is cold, you know, you know like this, way colder than this, because, we're on Mauna Loa, yeah?
- M: Mauna Loa?
- E: Yeah, Mauna Loa.
- E: Get snow, eh, and then the cold wind comes down. It's cold. And we're walking barefoot. We don't have shoes, eh. We're walking barefoot.
- M: Did you have enough to eat? Did you go hungry?
- E: Hungry, yeah, all the time.
- M: Why?
- E: Hard to, ah. We didn't have enough money, yeah
- M: How much was the salary? How were you paid? How were your folks paid?
- E: Coffee.
- M: You were paid coffee?



- E: The coffee, my parents were coffee farmers so they would sell the coffee and the money that they get from selling coffee, that's what you have to live on.
- M: Okay. So, they were not working for Japanese?
- E: The one we ended up in Kaneleo, no. Before that, we worked all for Japanese.
- M: Uh huh, and then?
- E: And then one year, by luck, they ended up with Magamishano house and he was going back to the Philippines, so he sold us his lease.
- M: Lease of land
- E: Yes, it was leased land.
- M: Who owned the land?
- E: Paris
- M: Who?
- E: Paris
- M: Oh, the Church?
- E: No. P – A – R – I – S. Paris
- M: Mr. Paris.
- E: And they're the family, you know 'Āina Haina,<sup>10</sup> get all that 'Āina Haina residence, that's the family over there.
- M: Okay, okay. So, you were leasing. How big was the land? How big?
- E: Seven acres.
- M: That's pretty good, pretty good.
- E: Really big acreage.
- M: Ah, how much did you pay, do you remember?
- E: I don't remember, but I remember when they were gonna sell the land, because this is the land, yeah, and our land was right here. And Paris wanted to get rid of these 2 lots. So, they said we're gonna sell em to you, what's going to be...\$5,000 or \$3,000. But the Japanese, Mr. Kawasaki, found out that they were going to sell it to us so he been outbid. His, ah, the son, they were in the military together, so the son said, uncle, I'll outbid the Filipinos. Yeah, because the Filipino's cut was all they had too.
- Anyway, so he up the bid to about \$8,000, I think. And my parents didn't have enough money – no money – how can da kine? So, my dad and my mom pray, pray. But, you know, this is why I kind of hesitant about the Japanese because they're fair, too.

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<sup>10</sup> Aina Haina is a subdivision in East Honolulu which experienced most of its develop following WWII.

The place we went to...our store, Mr. Kimura...Mrs. Kimura found out what Kawasaki was doing to the Filipinos and Mrs. Kimura said that's not right. They said that is not right. They said you shouldn't do that to Filipinos. Their money is as good as Japanese money.

So, Mrs. Kimura talked to Mr. Paris. And she told em, Mr. Paris, you shouldn't do that to the Filipinos. So, he said, okay, ah, give me \$1000 more, or something like that. And so my parents, and that's when, Catalino Aboroc had some money, so he gave us some. He lives with us. He gave us the money to buy the land.

M: He's single?

E: Yeah, he's single. And that's how we got the land.

M: So, you bought the land?

E: Yeah.

M: Seven acres.

E: Seven acres. And that's when, that's when the relationship between the Filipinos and the Japanese became, you know, tighter because my parents started telling, eh, you know, Japanese, they good too, you know, they're fair, too.

M: Correct. They can help.

E: Yeah, I said, how do you know? Look at what happened to me.

M: That's good. That's good example.

E: And they started joining the Japanese Club. The Japanese invited my parents.

M: Your parents. Oh, they started socializing.

E: *Kumiai*<sup>11</sup> together. The *kumiai* was kind of like a club where, if you have a death in the family, everyone comes and helps and donates. You don't have to do anything. We're gonna serve the food. We gonna cook the food and all that. It was very exclusive. They don't let other nationality join but they let my mother join.

M: How come they were nice to you?

E: I think because my father and the Japanese farmers, every time maybe before lunch, they would sit and talk story in the coffee land and they sit sometimes about two hours, talk story. And I used to tell my dad, "Dad, you cannot talk Japanese." He said, "Yeah." "Japanese cannot talk English or Filipino, how you guys understand?" He said, "We talk pidgin." They developed their own language. 'Cuz the people found out, that you know, that Filipinos not only eat dogs, they not only poke knives, they're pretty good people. [laughs]

M: Give 'em a chance. [laughs]

E: Look, look, in the coffee land two hours, they not poking each other. They're laughing, talking story and all that, smoke Toscani.<sup>12</sup> [laughing] That's when the stereotype started breaking in Kona.

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11 *Kumiai* is a Japanese term for 'union' or 'association.'

12 A Toscani is probably a Toscano cigar, an Italian cigar that utilized Kentucky tobacco leaves originally grown in the U.S. and transplanted in Italy.

M: Correct, the interaction. But were there people intermarrying? Filipinos marrying Japanese, Japanese marrying, very few?

E: No, very few.

M: How come?

E: Because they had the stereotypes, you know. Filipinos thought that, ah, you know. They thought Filipinos only poke knife. They run away with the women and all that kine stuff. The ratio, eh, was 500 to 1, and so, it was all very hard...stereotyping. They felt that the Filipinos were not smart enough, yeah.

In fact, that image of Filipinos not smart enough. When my friend who went with me to Saint Martin, started working at Finance Factors<sup>13</sup> and, you know that was Hiram Fong, yeah, the boss. So, he got into Finance Factors and then I came back from the Marines and then my friend said, you like work at Finance Factors? I said, I no more financing background. He said, I get you in. So, he talked to the guys. And they said, we don't let Filipinos work Finance Factors.

You know that they think Filipinos stupid, eh. I tell, "For real?" Said, "Yeah. They think Filipinos not smart. That's why they don't have Filipinos workers. You gonna be the first Filipino. You better not let me down." I said, "Shit, I don't know if I want work. I don't have the background." He said, "No, I teach you." My friend was really good, yeah, at financing.

So, he taught me financing and all that. But, for the next five years, they didn't hire anybody because I could do the job. Because every six months, they would hire somebody else. And so, that's when they started changing their perception of Filipinos. They found out that Filipinos, especially the Ilokanos, they said, "Whoa, the buggahs, they know how to save money, good, man...not like the Visayans, they spend all da kine." That's why Finance Factors started hiring Filipinos.

M: But, when you were growing up, did you have Japanese friends too?

E: I had Japanese friends, but it was almost silence, like you and I, maybe we hang around maybe five, 10 minutes. We go our separate ways, eh.

M: You don't visit each other's houses?

E: No, no.

M: This is in Kona now, eh?

E: Yeah. Mrs. Kimura's son was one year younger than me. He would come to my house at night and we would eat, because it was forbidden for Filipinos and Japanese to interact.

M: Forbidden by whom?

E: Kona.

M: Kona society? There was no code, formally by the community?

E: Yeah. You're just raised like that. So, he would come at night, he would eat, and he would say, "Eh, you know I was breaking the rules, eh?" I said, "Yeah, I know."

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<sup>13</sup> Finance Factors is a Hawai'i-based savings and loan company started in 1952 originally to serve Chinese and other minorities in Hawai'i.

M: But in the playground, you would play together.

E: We would play, only baseball, like that, only maybe 10-15 minutes.

M: But not visit each other. Strange huh. You don't visit each other's home. You don't go into a Filipino home. You don't go into a Japanese home.

E: No, very seldom, yeah.

M: This is when you were about teenage, 15.

E: Yeah. All the way until I was going to college, already. Yeah

M: So strong.

E: Strong, really strong, the lines were very strong, against each other. That's why my friends, my classmates, they're surprised that I finished my master's. I had the highest degree in my class. Yeah, because when I graduated, I was 100<sup>th</sup>. We had the 100<sup>th</sup>. I was right in the middle of my class.

M: Chaminade?

E: No, Konawaena. We had 200.

M: Oh, this is high school still, you're talking about.

E: Yeah. So, I was what they call 125. So, I was on the bottom of the first half. I was top of the second half, you know, right in between. So, when they told me I was going college, everybody started laughing.

M: Laughing. But your friends, they would laugh? Not Japanese friends?

E: Japanese friends, I would say Japanese.

M: Japanese friends laughing.

E: Filipinos, no go college. Automatic you don't go. Now that they know, when they found out that I had my master's, whoa, everybody went. Now if I finished my doctoral, and I go back to the class reunion, going be even more crazy. They going tell me, wow, Ernest. [laughs] Even I'm surprised. You know, God.... I don't wanna talk about God this time.

M: That's okay. That's okay. You can!

E: Okay, I going to share with you. I going share with you.

M: I just told you the interview's gonna be informal.

E: I going show you the behind the scene nobody knows about it. We were very poor in Kona. You know, the houses, you know, the latch, we would cover it with Life magazine pages so the wind don't come in 'cuz we that poor, yeah, and cold in Kona, you know.

And my sister and I would sleep on the floor. So, we'd share our dreams, all of our dreams. So I told my sister, eh, and my sister was a very smart girl, we came closer. "Eh, you know what, guess what I dreamt last night?" She told me, "What?" I said, "I dreamt that I went, I was in this hall, in a hall." She said, "Yeah?" "And I was there by the mike. The audience wanted me to talk and then

I started talking.” She said, “And then, what?” “I was using words I no understand.” “And?” “And people understood what I was saying. I was telling them something.” And my sister started laughing. “There you go, you crazy again, talking.” I said, “No, I just sharing with you my dream. This is what happened!” She tell, “You making up story?” I tell, “No, this is what happened.” She said, “You’re crazy, you’ll always be crazy and that kine of stuff.”

And then, move forward, you know, 30...40 years away. I started working at Wai‘anae<sup>14</sup> because they hired me to work at Wai‘anae to work with the disadvantaged youth, because not too many people can work with them. And I had the reputation of working good. And I developed a reputation of knowing the disadvantaged, how they work, how they operate. So, the University called me one day. They wanted me to speak to the audience.

There was the separation, yeah, Hawaiians, Filipinos. They wanted to know more about the disadvantaged. So, they said, well, Libarios knows about it. Because I had the project for unwed mothers. I run the project. I give ‘em to get the high school diploma and all that kine stuff. So, they told me, they said, okay, can you talk to all the social workers, the judges and all that kine stuff...about, you know, what’s in the mind of the disadvantaged ‘cuz Wai‘anae had the bad reputation, eh. I said, okay. So, I go into the hallway and I look, and my God, this is my dream.

M: You remembered?

E: I had flashback and I said, wow, this is where I had this dream, you know, 20-30 years ago . And then, I shared the dream. I shared it with the group. I told, I had this dream 30 years ago and they told me, crazy. They thought I was nuts because they dunno know me, eh. I tell you I’m not crazy. Maybe you think I’m crazy, but, I tell you things about the disadvantaged that nobody even know about.

M: Uh huh. It was a dream, yeah.

E: It was a dream, yeah.

M: I mean, who put the dream in you?

E: I just dreamt it.

M: You dreamt it. But the motivation, who encouraged you to go on and on and on, and you know, go to school, your grandma, your mother or your father?

E: It was almost like a calling.

M: A calling. But you could just be looking around you – just be a farmer.

E: And then, working with the kids, you know, working with the disadvantaged, I understood them because I was like them, yeah. And I was thinking, hey, this is an easiest job. I’m getting paid for do this, you know. I didn’t have to work on the farm, yeah.

M: But, as a young kid, who encouraged you? You said you were gambling.

E: Dad, my dad and mom.

M: Because in Kona, in your youth, you said you were gambling.

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<sup>14</sup> A district on the leeward coast of O‘ahu.

E: But my dad and my mom believed in education. They said, somehow if you can go college, go. They cannot afford it but they'll find a way. We go pray.

M: Even if you were very poor. You were not eating, you said.

E: He would tell us the only way you can get out of poverty is by education.

M: They believed that?

E: They believed that, yeah, dad especially. Yeah, he saw that. He saw da kine, Catalino [Aboloc] at night, yeah.

M: Catalino. Yeah, he's *tatay*.

E: Es why everybody talk to him. They type their letters because of his education.

M: How? So, he's an important guy in the family, Catalino. You called him *tatay*.

E: *Tatay*. Yeah, we called him *tatay*

M: And he never married.

E: No, he never married.

M: How was he related to your family?

E: They lived in Pa'auilo together. They lived in, ah, maybe, you see that village over there, maybe that distance.

M: So, he was a good friend of your uncle [Pedro] – of your father – the three of them.

E: He followed Dad.

M: The three musketeers

E: Yeah, he followed Dad.

M: Why did he never ever marry?

E: I think it's because he was bald-headed and he felt that, ah, he, wasn't good enough for the girls. Yeah, so, everyday, he would find different ways to grow hair, like he'd get, ah, you know, the *kalamunggay*.<sup>15</sup> He'd squeeze the *kalamunggay*, rub it on his head, and put handkerchiefs to grow hair.

M: Oh, because he was bald.

E: (laughs) Yeah. You know how Filipinos, eh. They're very egotistical, eh.

M: He was self-conscious.

E: Yeah, or he'd get, you know *paria*.<sup>16</sup> He'd get the *paria* leaf, leave 'em on. Two days, he leave it on, he tell, "Whoa, come stink your head?" [laughs]

M: He did grow?

---

<sup>15</sup> AKA *calamunggay*, *mulunggay* or *moringa*.

<sup>16</sup> Bittermelon (Ilokano)

E: No. [laughs] Came all green, his head.

M: But how did he learn? Was he educated? He went to school in the Philippines?

E: I think in the Philippines, he was a musician. He was a very good musician too. And somehow, he taught himself how to type.

M: Was he the one who taught you how to play ukulele?

E: Yeah, he taught us how.

M: You can play, eh?

E: Among our friends, but *tatay* was the one that showed us mostly.

M: Your father was a musician?

E: No, Catalino

M: Oh that one, Catalino?

E: My dad couldn't play.

M: You call him *tatay*.

E: *Tatay*, yeah

M: Why?

E: I think he's kind of like godfather. Yeah, that's why mom them told to call him *tatay* – to show respect for him.

M: That's father in Tagalog.

E: Oh, is that right?

M: *Tatay*, yeah.

E: I think it's...yeah.

M: What did you call your dad?

E: Daddy

M: And mom, Mommy?

E: Mom, yeah.

M: And still in Kona, in that house, you were living with your, ah...how many in the family, how many relatives around you?

E: Oh, we had five. That's when after we expanded the house, yeah?

M: That's when you were able to get the lease, yeah, or you bought it.

E: Yeah, we bought the lease.

M: Seven acres. You bought the lease?

E: We bought the land.

M: You bought the land.

E: Yeah.

M: That's an improvement, yeah.

E: Oh yeah. That was, whoa!

M: That means you are getting up there.

E: Up there. It was so unusual. I didn't know how to act.

M: Okay, so, you expanded the house, you said?

E: They expanded the house because we had plenty leftover wood, eh, if we expand. And so, there was three single guys with us. Oh, there was five of us in the family.

M: Five children, only one girl.

E: Only one girl, and my father and my mother. Now, on the house, on the side, we had lot of workers that worked on the farm. 'Cuz the Filipinos, they found out we had the farm, so they wanted to move. That's how we got the labor. We didn't have a problem with laboring. They all came.

M: All single?

E: All single. And they all stayed with my Dad. And then, Honolulu people would come during the coffee season, and they would stay by the grinder and then pick up coffee and harvest them all the time.

M: So, you are in business. This is before you went to Saint Martin's.

E: Yeah, this was before Saint Martin's.

M: This is how you got a little bit of money, the family.

E: Yeah, that's how we got money. And right about that time, too, my father, when he was working for Hickam,<sup>17</sup> he got asbestosis.<sup>18</sup>

M: He worked for Hickam?

E: Yeah, he worked for Hickam, you know. This is a different story, though, if you don't mind.

M: Okay, go ahead.

E: My father, he, they started picking rubbish, yeah, and so, my father....

M: What do you mean picking rubbish?

E: In Hickam, the rubbish can like this, they would go and pick em. They didn't have cars. So, you pick the rubbish.

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<sup>17</sup> Hickam Air Force Base in Honolulu.

<sup>18</sup> Asbestosis is long-term inflammation and scarring of the lungs due to inhaling asbestos fibers. Complications may include lung cancer, mesothelioma, and pulmonary heart disease.



M: So, that's the job he worked?

E: Yup, that was his job .

M: Father and son?

E: Father and son-in-law.

M: Father-in-law. Oh, okay.

E: And there was about six or seven of them on the truck, you know. And they would run, pick up the rubbish, throw 'em in the truck.

M: This is in the workroom?

E: Yeah, at Hickam...and then, somehow, my father started working in the office, you know, pick up rubbish. And then, the boss, who is in charge, would watch my dad...how he work. And my dad, even da kine, Ilokano...*alisto*<sup>19</sup> You don't walk...you run. He learn from Ilokano. [laughs] My father said he learned from the Ilokano...and then, my father said I keep up with the Ilokanos.

M: He worked hard.

E: Yeah. He said, *Dili ko tugutan*,<sup>20</sup> I won't let them put me down. I'll keep up with them. They loved it. They get good fun. They always, they call each other *'bay*.<sup>21</sup>

M: Your father was good fun, eh.

E: Good fun. Yeah, Ilokanos are good fun too, you know.

M: Yeah, they laugh a lot.

E: Yeah. And then all the stereotypes started fading. They said, well, you guys not like that. I don't know, that's they been taught us. So, anyway, he started working. Somehow, he ended up working in the office. And he would run, pick up the rubbish, run again, pick up the rubbish. And the boss would watch them, you know, because he would run over, picking up all the rubbish. That's a lot, man. But then, Dad said, no, Filipinos take pride for that.

So, one day, the boss would tell dad, "How much you get paid?" So, Dad said, "Oh, I get paid, I don't know how much, dollar fifty cents an hour or something like that." So, he tell em, "You like make more money. Oh, how many kids you have?" He said, "Five." He said, "Whoa, all da kine, all da kine, still yet in high school? Yeah, no 'nough money, no?" He said, "Yeah, hard...", he tell, "you know, really hard." "You like earn more money?" He tell, "Yeah. What I gotta do?" He said, "Go work da kine, asbestos. You know, da kine...sandblasting." Dad said, "What dat?" "You know, da kine, the one who go into the submarine and all that kine stuff?" He said, "Yeah...", so, he tell, "I don't know." He said, "I teach you how – all the different buttons – how to use the buttons and all that." So, dad said, "I try." And dad started learning, really learning, good, you know. Dad was smart, you know. He didn't realize how smart he was. He became so good at that, that he became the top man, you know, after 3-4 years of learning, yeah.

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19 'Fast, clever, smart.' (Ilokano)

20 'Keep up with them.' (Ilongo)

21 Short for *abay* 'companion, buddy' (Cebuano)

And then, the war – they were going to drop the atomic bomb. I guess I told you. Oh, they were going to drop the atomic bomb and...but they needed this bombardier instrument. They needed to sandblast the whole thing. And it has to be pure, cannot have contamination on it. So, they were looking for the top sandblaster in the United States...and they found out it was dad, yeah.

Fourth grade, now. But then, somehow he knew the whole stuff. So, the people from Washington came, talked to dad, said, “You know, we get this stuff. You think you can sandblast this?” Dad said, “I don’t know. I can try.” And they said, “You know what this for?” Said, “No.” Says, “Oh, for the atomic bomb.” He said, “What the atomic bomb?” He didn’t know what that, eh? They tell, “Well, you don’t have to know, as long as you can clear ’em.” He said, “I going try.”

So, they gave dad one big quonset hut. Every morning, two guards would come with 45’s and escort dad into the quonset hut. And dad would look at, da kine, the thing, yeah. So, I said, “Dad, so what you look at?” He said, “I dunno.” I said, “How long you was doing that?” He said, “Two weeks. What, I only play radio...[laughs] and what, they bring me lunch.” [laughs] So, finally the last few days, he said, “I bettah start working on this already.” So, he sandblasted the whole thing, came out all nice. It’s clear and he showed them the work. The guys in Washington came, all generals, they all came, you know.

And that’s when, ah, what’s that president? I forget. Nineteen forth-five...that’s when they dropped the atomic bomb. Yeah, Truman, he was the one. So, he said, so they took ’em, and they said okay, this is what we going do. And then, they dropped the atomic bomb. That’s what dad did. After that, they said, you know, you saved over 100,000 people, because, you know, if the war had continued, these people would have died. So, you know, at least the Filipinos saved a lot of...

M: But did your father get sick from the asbestos?

E: He did. He got sick from the asbestos ’cuz he started breathing, yeah. He got sick from the asbestos sandblasting. At the end of the war, they were going to give...oh, he cannot stay on the job unless you citizen.

M: He wasn’t a citizen?

E: He wasn’t a citizen. So, the boss told em, “Libarios, eh you cannot stay on the job unless you citizen.” He tell, “Why? What dat?” “Yeah, you gotta be citizen.” He said, “How you do that.” He said, “Don’t worry, we make for you.” So, he said, “Gotta take test?” “Nah, no need. I get ’em.” “Oh,” he said, “I gotta talk to my wife, then.”

He talk to my mom. He tell mom, “I cannot stay on the job because I not a citizen. I gotta be citizen.” My mom said, “You cannot be citizen.” “Why?” “Cuz you stepping on the Filipino flag.” “But,” dad said, “what you mean stepping on the Filipino flag? I been save the Filipinos. In Japan, look, they could have killed some more Filipinos.” “No, dad, you stepping on the side.” Dad said, “[I] talk to the boss.” He said, “My wife said I stepping on the Filipino flag.” They said, “Why, who the boss?” My dad said, “My wife the boss.” He tell, “Whoa, she get all the children. She watch the children, not me. She the one watch all the children. She the boss.” He tell, “Well, we gotta release you.” So, they released dad.

And that’s when dad started, you know...all the Visayans, all the Filipinos at A’ala Park.<sup>22</sup> They found out about dad. And so, they started giving dad money to support you guys. Not too many people had, da kine, five children. Everyday dad would go to A’ala Park. Here, here.

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22 A large park near the Honolulu train depot between Iwilei and Chinatown. A’ala Park was a gathering place for Filipinos.

M: But why, I thought you were in Kona.

E: No, not yet cuz we still were in Honolulu. We never move yet. So, Dad said, eh, I make more money in A'ala Park than working...[laughs] 'cuz free, no more tax, eh? And you know Filipinos. They all pity each other. If I know you starving, I give you money. And if I no more money, I go buy food for you. That's what they do. So, Daddy started making money and all that. And finally, we was going back to Kona. So, we moved to Kona.

M: When did you move to Kona?

E: I think it was '47, I think.

M: So, you were, let's see

E: Fourth grade...third...fourth grade

M: Okay, so, you were in Kona after the war?

E: After the war, yeah. So, we stayed in Kona. We had the land, and about four years after that, the people from Washington came. They came. They was searching for dad. They wanted to find dad because he had the reputation of the atomic bomb. Nobody else could clear it, but dad did. So, they wanted to learn how he did it. They were gonna, they came, and we were starving, right, no more money.

M: This was before you bought the land?

E: Yeah, oh, we bought the land already but...

M: But you were still starving? You bought the land already...but you were still starving?

E: We still. Yeah, we were still poor. So, they came, and they were going to hire dad as a trainer to go to Guam to train all the Guamanians on how to do sandblasting 'cuz in the Pacific Basin, if Japan or Korea come, Guam will be the first one they going attack, yeah? So, they wanted to train them. They go hire dad, double the pay. "Oh, yeah. I can teach 'em how. I know how", he said, "okay, oh, he said, how long I going stay?" "One year and six months." "So," he said, "oh, I can bring my family?" They said, "No, only you." Oh. The contract was only for dad.

So, he told, "Mom, we can make plenty money, God saving us, give money." Mom said, "Where you...we're going to Guam. All the boss and all that...only yourself?" "Yeah." Said, "No, cannot." Dad said, "What?" "You cannot." "What?" She said, "You cannot go. You cannot leave your family. Family important. What if you go there and you going find another wife. And then, what? What going happen to us?" He said, "No, I no going find anybody. All these years, I stay with you." She said, "No, I don't trust." So, Dad couldn't go, told the boss, "I cannot go." He tell, "Who the boss?" "My wife. Whoa, my wife. Whoa, I no mo' citizenship, I no mo'...I cannot get double my pay, I no need work 'cuz I teach em what I know."

M: She's strong.

E: Yeah. And guess what, ten years after that, my mother comes to dad. Said dad, "What?" "I like citizenship." [laughs]

M: Your mom said that?

E: My mom said that. Why? He said, "Because, if you not citizen, they going send you back Philippines." You gotta be citizen at that time. And then, "What? Gotta pass the test." I said,

“Who? Me, too? You see, before, we could’ve get em free. Nothing. You said stepping on the flag. What now, what?” “But, now, different because the children no like go back Philippines.”

M: The children, you guys?

E: They not used to. We going back Philippines, what? We going leave our children? No lie. So, more better we be citizen. So, dad said, “Whoa, I gotta study?”

M: But, they passed the test?

E: They passed. They studied, yeah. Actually, they said it was kind of easy. The people was nice. They taught em all the answers. They said, you see this, this the answer. Said oh, easy. But, that’s the story of how dad....

M: They were...I wanted to ask. You said you retained your languages. You speak Cebuano.?

E: Yes

M: And you speak Ilokano, too?

E: Mostly Cebuano.

M: They always say that language is the foundation of culture. In your family, how come the family did not want to go back to the Philippines?

E: I think daddy realized that, they said, life in the Philippines is very hard. He said that even though he was *hanai*<sup>23</sup> by the family, he said, still if you compare the middle class and you compared the poor class in Honolulu, he said, Honolulu the poor class is way above the middle class in the Philippines.

M: Oh, okay.

E: It’s a big difference.

M: Okay, so, it’s better to be poor here.

E: Yeah. And he said that, if I bring the kids all over there, they not going happy, which did happen to my grandma’s children. They all came back.

M: They all came back.

E: Yeah, they all went back. But they stayed in the Philippines maybe 5-10 years. They never like. So, they all came back to Hawai’i. They all came back to Hawai’i. Yeah, they said, you work hard but you don’t have advance unless you belong to a crooked family. Get a lot of corruption, eh? I said, really. He said, yeah. I said, ohh. That’s why they came back to Hawai’i – to get a better life, he said. Even though you work hard, but it’s fair, yeah, yeah.

M: And did they ever go to visit – your dad?

E: My dad, yeah, when my brother, them, came back from Vietnam – they had the war – I mean, it was 50 years later, uh, my two brothers said we going bring dad and mom, going bring them back to the Philippines to see and when dad went back, he started crying, he said because of his brother who started drinking, and all the land that he had, he sold them all, you know, ’cuz of drinking

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23 Generally, adopted informally or raised by another family.

problem, yeah. But, he was the one that didn't come to Hawaii because he said, stay and watch the family.

M: This is the youngest

E: The youngest one, yeah.

M: The youngest brother?

E: Yeah. That's why he was not happy. He wanted to come home to Hawai'i. But he stayed back.

M: Did you ever go back? Visit...you?

E: Who?

M: You.

E: No. I was supposed to go back three times. But, I got sick. About two weeks before going. But I wanna go with my friend now because I figure, wow, I'm getting old, yeah. I wanna see the Philippines.