

Filipino-American Historical Society of Hawai'i  
Oral History Project  
Interview #2

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

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

9 MARCH 2019

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

M: You're talking about Shirley<sup>2</sup> now?

E: Yeah, I said, they [newspaper] wrote about her, and the following week they have her on the front page also. Only thing, she died. So her legacy had...is back to back, I guess God said, I want you guys to know I planted this seed in her. She became a very strong leader of the disadvantaged. The Hawaiians, the Samoans and Hālawā.<sup>3</sup> And Hālawā had their reputation, yeah. If you're an outsider, you don't belong here.

M: Where did you meet Shirley? Where did you meet her? At Chaminade<sup>4</sup>?

E: No, at UH.<sup>5</sup> You know Alex Cadang? I was his best man for his wedding; we went to Chaminade. So one day at UH we were talking story on the steps of a building, and then Shirley came down because she was finishing up her fifth year.<sup>6</sup> And when she came down, Alex knew her because her brother was going St. Louis<sup>7</sup> and Alex was the big brother. And he the one wen introduce us. And we gonna go lunch and then he said, "I gonna go someplace, you go take her lunch." "I no like take her lunch. I no more money." [laughs] I was working for Job Corps,<sup>8</sup> yeah. Not too much money. But I told him, "Okay, okay, okay." So I took her to lunch. And from there that's how we met.

M: Oh. What's her background?

E: She had her parents from the Philippines, from Ilocos Sur.<sup>9</sup> Her grandparents came down as plantation workers. But her father came down as a worker, not as a plantation worker, just a regular worker, and then he ended up in the Army. He ended up as a veteran; he ended up working at Pearl Harbor.<sup>10</sup>

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

2 Shirley Ramirez Libarios (1943-1987), married Ernest Libarios 1969.

3 Hālawā is a district in west Honolulu, includes 'Aiea Elementary and Intermediate Schools.

4 Chaminade University, the only Catholic higher education institute in Hawai'i.

5 "UH" is often shorthand for the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, the main campus in the University of Hawai'i system.

6 The "fifth year" for an education major includes teaching practicum.

7 St. Louis is a Catholic high school located on the same campus as Chaminade University.

8 Job Corps is a federally-funded job training program for students ages 16-24.

9 Ilocos Sur is a province in northwestern Luzon.

10 Pearl Harbor Naval Base, a major employer of civilians.

M: Shirley was local-born, like you?

E: Yeah. Shirley was local-born. She could understand Ilokano...and speak Ilokano.

M: So she was bilingual, like you?

E: Yeah, yeah, yeah...and she went to all Catholic schools.

M: And she did not have a difficult, hard-working background as you had in Kona?

E: No, not her. But they worked hard in what you call that...in cannery.

M: In cannery? In pineapple cannery?

E: And they thought she was Japanese 'cuz she looked Japanese, yeah. So they made her luna. [laughs] I said, "How come you come luna?" "Cuz, I look like Japanese." "And what? You played the role?" "I played the role." [laughs]

M: Where did she go to school? So, she was a Honolulu girl?

E: Yeah, she was a Honolulu girl. She went to St. Joseph.<sup>11</sup> And then she graduated from Sacred Hearts<sup>12</sup>...not Sacred Hearts but St. Francis.<sup>13</sup> They closed the school, yeah?

M: That's right. And then from there?

E: And then she went to UH. And then she majored in education.

M: And then did she start teaching at 'Aiea right away? 'Aiea High School?

E: No, yeah, when she was finishing up her fifth year, and she started teaching...and then she started to get interested in working with the disadvantaged. That's how...and she had the heart. Somehow, I don't know...some people have the gift, yeah?

M: Correct. She was very early, right?

E: Yeah.

M: Her vision was really up there from the beginning.

E: Right...because of the grandparents...the grandparents from the Philippines...and her mother and her grandparents were very....

M: The women, yeah.

E: Oh, yeah, what is wrong, what's wrong, we got to improve the Filipinos. We always end up cleaning rubbish or all that kind stuff. And was good you know, but still...[laughs] I'd rather do that, and nobody grumble at me. [laughs] Nobody grumble at me. At least I'll know I gotta go home...go listen to my wife. [laughs]

M: The women were the one – they just want to push.

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11 St. Joseph's School is a coeducational K-8 Catholic school in Waipahu.

12 Sacred Hearts Academy is an all-girls K-12 Catholic school in Kaimuki.

13 Founded in 1924 St. Francis school was an all-girls Catholic high school located next to the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa campus. After going coed in 2013 St. Francis School closed its doors in 2019 due to financial issues.

E: Amazing, yeah, now women you see though, amazing, yeah, how the Filipino women always getting...uh...whatever...opportunity, yeah. They get the money.

M: So was it Shirley, who started you to sort of take care...to be concerned of the community?

E: The kids, the students, somehow she developed a love for the kids. I think it, kinda like her and Denise Villaflor – Ben Villaflor’s wife. She was in Shirley’s class. So she started talking about...she come from the background...Hālawa, yeah. So she the one was helping Shirley. Or she, Shirley, this is a teacher. The respect, she good. Because you listen to her. So somebody always vouching for you, yeah...Denise always was doing that. So Shirley would go in there, she’d scold all the Samoans, the big Samoan guys, man.

M: At ‘Aiea?

E: At Hālawa. What you call, eh, the slums. The Samoans, the Filipinos, they get along, yeah? Before they fight, yeah? But after that, they got along. Shirley would scold ‘em. They only put their head down. But their parents scold them. Whoa, they throw back blows, man. They fight back. But I think Shirley went teach them the value. She said, you guys no study, you guys no come smart, you gonna end up like that.

So a lot of them, one guy, he works at a bar. He said, “Eh, you related to Shirley?” I said, “Why?” “She went ‘Aiea, yeah?” I said, “Yeah.” “That’s my teacher, you know.” “And what, good?” “Yeah, she went straighten me out.” “So what happened?” “She wen scold me many times and then I went to New York, I went in the military, I went school, I came back. Now I’m in charge of the factory.” So, because of Shirley.

M: Is he Samoan or Filipino?

E: Who the guy? Filipino. So, I get his name. That’s one of the people you can interview. That’s why I wanted to have a training program for teachers to teach them the importance of their role with different ethnic groups. Even though you’re not Filipino, you’re not the same ethnic group. But the human being is what.... That’s what I learned from Dan Fullmer...all that kind stuff.<sup>14</sup>

M: So, can we talk about LCC.<sup>15</sup>

M: You started at Leeward in 1989?

E: No ‘68. ‘61..I graduated from Chaminade.

M: ‘69 you joined Leeward Community College...it was newly established. And you stayed till Dec. 31, 2015? A total of 47 years. That’s a long time. So I guess my first question is who recruited you? And how did you start? How did you find the job?

E. I was an outreach worker. And I was working for the EGO – Education, Guidance and Opportunity. As a federal project and it was under the University of Hawai‘i, Department of Education. And that program was aimed primarily at the disadvantaged. Because prior to that,

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14 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.

15 LCC is short for University of Hawai‘i – Leeward Community College.

the disadvantaged could not understand why they were disadvantaged, they labeled 'em. But you label somebody doesn't mean you understand them. But somehow I made friends with them. And my reputation grew.

A lot of people were afraid to go to Wai'anae, 'cuz the Wai'anae people were wild, yeah. Yeah, you don't know what you're doing, you can get killed. But I looked at them, I act like them, I was not threatened by them. By my looks...it was the way I am. So I connected up with the Neighborhood Youth Corps Program...and that guy...he was the one who connect with all Wai'anae – everybody. His name was Sol Naone, he's still alive. Maybe I can call him up and you can interview him. He's one of the treasures of Hawai'i.

Anyway, he and I, somehow we connected. Always a professional but I could talk pidgin English. He was surprised I could talk pidgin English. He was more surprised I could talk Filipino. And so he was telling me that anybody could work with the unwed mothers, but nobody knew how. Everybody scared, yeah, 'cuz if you don't know what you doing with a girl that's pregnant, the boyfriend going come after you. You know there's jealousy and all kinds suspicion, yeah? But God gave me the grace and I got them together as a class, about 30 or 40 of them. And we would meet at the library. And they would finish up their GED.

Right about then, Shirley told me about this girl... this Filipino-Hawaiian girl that was looking for a job at the College of Education. And that was Lucy. I hired Lucy to work with them. Then, an opportunity at the Community College came and I ended up coordinating programs with Farrington High School. And I worked again with the District managers with high school dropouts. Fights every other day in front of the school yard. Gotta go out there, break up the fights.

But the Community College came up, a guy named Marv. Yeah, he was in charge of counseling. He was the one who called me, and he said, I need a person that is local. I need a person who knows how to work with the local population, 'cuz anyone who can work with unwed mothers, cause anyone with jealous boyfriends, you can get killed. So he hired me. And you know Annabelle Fong? She was up at the EGO, and she didn't want me to go 'cuz the Community College would go down. And Annabelle said ah, don't go Ernie, stay with us, stay with us.

M: Because at that time, you don't have a degree yet for educational psychology.

E: No.

M: And in 1969, this is all for experience.

E: And this is better. I getting paid for talking story. So this a good job to have. All you do is talk story, and they pay me for talk story. I told you how daddy got his first job in Pa'auilo? Sixty-five dollars. First, daddy went on his knees, he cried, he prayed. And he said, God, I never had so much money in my whole life. I said, wow, for real! And we gotta put that down. He said don't cash this check. This is good luck.

M: This is after working?

E: This is after working...'cuz they left Kohala, yeah? And daddy was working 25 years on the ranch. He was a cowboy. But he never made \$65 a month. When he made \$65, he said, ho, this is like going to heaven!

M: What was he doing as a cowboy?

E: He kept the cows to push them over there. But they were laborers basically.

M: That was another kind of job that he did. For 25 years he did that?

E: Yeah, 25 years. But at Kohala, that's where he was at, yeah. That's where he ended up. You need to appreciate what you get, 'cuz God gave this to you.

M: So you went to Leeward?

E: I went to Leeward. Eh, this place is good. I getting air condition. I talking story, I getting paid.

M: What was your job? Was it counseling? What did you think of counseling at that time?

E: I just wanted to help. I didn't know what counseling was all about. I was just talking story. Mom and Dad came one day, they said you get air-conditioning, you getting paid for this? You pay for the air-condition? Ho, different kind world you stay.

So when I went to Leeward, Annabelle quit EGO and she joined Leeward and became director of financial aids. She followed me! She...and what's that senator, that Chinese senator? Her and Annabelle are very good friends. In fact, Annabelle was supposed to run for senate. In fact, Annabelle was very popular. She was a graduate of Roosevelt, English Standard.<sup>16</sup> So when she went to the mainland, she talked like one haole. Everybody was surprised. She, loud voice. And that other lady became a senator, Title IV.<sup>17</sup> She the one who fought for Title IV.

M: Patsy Mink?

E: Yeah, that's the one, Patsy Mink! Patsy Mink looked up to Annabelle. Any time she wanted someone to be visible, she would send Annabelle. Cause Annabelle can talk, yeah. And Annabelle loved to talk.<sup>18</sup>

M: Back to Leeward, your students, what kind of students were there? When you say talk story, you were helping them with some of their issues? What were some of their concerns?

E: Well first of all, somehow, I got attracted to the Filipinos, the Hawaiians and Samoans. The three basic ethnic groups. They never had a Hawaiian Club before. They never had Samoan Club, never had Filipino Club. So I started the first Hawaiian Club which eventually now is the big Hawaiian program, at Leeward. That came out of our program. Samoan, we started, but we couldn't get it off the ground, it fell apart. And then we had the Filipino.

M: What was the reason? Why did you think you had to have those clubs?

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16 Roosevelt High School in the Makiki neighborhood, was Honolulu's only English Standard high school. In operation from 1929 through 1960, English Standard schools required students to pass an oral English proficiency test for admission.

17 Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 provided a variety of financial aids to students attending institutes of higher education.

18 Some clarifications might be warranted here. At the time of Libarios's LCC hiring (1969), Patsy (Takemoto) Mink (1927-2002) was a U.S. congresswoman, not a senator. Hawai'i's "Chinese senator" at the time was Hiram Fong (1906-2004), a Republican who support President Johnson's civil rights bills. Mink would go on to draft Title IX (1972), a bill prohibiting gender discrimination in higher education. Mink was a Japanese American married to John Mink, a Caucasian.

E: You had to recognize, we told 'em, the obstacles. Gotta learn how to read, the beware sign, you gotta learn how to say, these don't belong here, and how to overcome that. And they had to learn to get along with each other, cause they were fighting each other all the time. You know, like in Waipahu the local Filipinos and the immigrant Filipinos, they were killing each other, yeah? We were the first ones to intervene. We tell 'em, eh, you guys stupid killing each other, you guys all Filipinos. So we would train the guys to work at, to learn how to read groups.

We had two classes, one self-development, you learn self esteem, the other one you learn group dynamics – 3 credits. And the third one was group skills, that's part of this whole program. Yeah, that's how we're attracted. One of the biggest issue like you said, we had to deal with was guilt. Lots of Filipinos, they didn't recognize, but they felt guilty for getting ahead, like you and I, your family, your mom, yeah. Mom, I'm gonna get ahead of you, I'm gonna have to leave you behind, yeah? But some parents would encourage that, some parents say, nah, nah, no worry.

M: But sometimes, they're scared for you, too...to try.

E: Yes. 'cuz they don't know, they don't know how to predict, yeah? So we, I had to develop the approach to deal with these kids, without feeling bad. Deal with the guilt, but get ahead.

M: So what do you tell them?

E: So like for instance, we had what they called the Guns for Hire.

M: The what?

E: Guns for Hire. I gotta tell you about these guys. These are people that came out from Vietnam. They were Hawaiians. And then Waianae, they hear about me from Waianae yeah? So they were the Hire, 'cuz they knew how to kill. 'cuz they came back from Vietnam.

M: So these are Filipinos, Samoans?

E: Mostly Hawaiians, yeah, but they were all in my class. So I tell them, brah, you gotta find one different way 'cuz they going get you eventually. Yeah, 'cuz this not Vietnam, where you can run away, 'cuz this America. So that's one group, yeah, we dealt with.

The other group that I had to deal with was the syndicate – part of the syndicate. Uh, Wai'anae, they offered me the prostitution, they offered me the...what you call that...the chicken fights, and they offered me the...gun for hire. Not too much gun for hire, but had one more, I forget.

Somehow I ended up in Hawai'i Kai, yeah. And then they moved these guys about four blocks away from where I lived to observe me for about six months, 'cuz they never see Filipinos with education, yeah? They never see local boys with education. They were surprised that somebody educated that look like me and all that kind stuff. And so through all of that was to recruit me.

One thing I saw then, they came up to my house, and then I say, "Eh what you guys doing here?" They say, "Uh, Uncle, we just like be like you, yeah? We gotta move up in the Hawai'i Kai. Hawai'i Kai no more Hawaiians, no more so more Filipinos. And you the only one, yeah?" I said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah! We gotta get some more." Besides that, they said, "We were assigned here to observe you." I said, "Observe me? What you talking about?" They said, "They like recruit you, for the kind, the syndicate."

Oh, I got real mad, I really got mad. I told them, “You know, I don’t know about you guys, but one thing, I’m protecting my family. Don’t you guys hurt my family! You guys know how to kill. I know how to kill. I was taught there in Kona, we know how to kill. I just as good as you. Don’t you dare, you know, you leave my family alone!” So the guys gave me a call. Pulawa them ended up in jail. And then one day, Milo, one of the boys, Hālawa boy, he came from Vietnam, karate black belt, and all that kind stuff, he got mad, so he burn down the ROTC building.

M: Where, in..?

E: At UH. He burn ’em down. And then the next day, they were looking who done that went burn ’em down. So Milo came into my office, yeah, “Uncle.” “What?” “You heard about the fire?” “Yeah, who the crazy guy?” He said, “Me!” I said, “Shut up.” “No, I went burn ’em down.” “Why did you did that?” “Because they no listen to us veteans!”

M: So angry?

E: Yeah, real angry! I said, “Milo, you got learn how to channel your energy! Basically, not like the old Halawa days – somebody come, and you go fight ’em. Now days, you gotta use your brain.” He said, “That’s right, no? Hard, that’s right, no?” That’s why we gotta get program like this...train ’em!

M: So did they go to your class?

E: Yeah, Milo them.... It was hard to change their self esteem, yeah, and their perception of who they are. And they had a hard time dealing with, if I would give them something positive. They felt if I talked positive to you, I was manipulating you. And one day, I going get something from you.

M: No trust?

E: Yeah, yeah, yeah, exactly! Yeah, it took them awhile. Everyone of them, I thought, it would take at least three semesters to turn around. They said, “Take a long time yeah, Uncle?” They said, was even harder when they go back to the family. The family go against them, yeah? So, it was hard.

M: What about the Filipino students? Did they have similar problems?

E: Oh, Filipinos even worse!

M: Worse?

E: Yeah, especially chicken fight. Money talk, yeah! But to bring home money to you, yeah, why go school? When da kine can make more money. One boy, Agpata, who was related to the Agpata, Waipahu...this boy, Agpata boy, he made money, he had to get away from ‘Ewa – him and the wife, Filipino girl. They had to get away. They went to the mainland.

M: Why?

E: Because the family paroled back. Somebody gotta go in the family. Not enough...that’s why we gotta get program, to go to talk to the families.

M: Did you do that, too? Did you go talk to the family?

E: Yeah, but I had a hard time. Because no more time, yeah. Yeah, the dynamics are very different. You know, get Visayan dynamics, Ilokano dynamics, Tagalog dynamics and local dynamics. They all different.

M: In what way?

E: In how they handle problems. Some of them are more angry right away. Some of them take their time. But they're all different, with all different issues. But after a while, it started to work, because we trained the kids that were raised in these families. They knew how to talk to their parents. Right now, we get Sariling Gawa.<sup>19</sup>

M: Correct!

E: Yeah. That's how we used the Sariling Gawa kids to impact their families.

M: To go back?

E: Yeah, 'cuz they knew how to talk to their parents. Yeah, they know how to talk to their parents. Just like you, you can go to your family. You can talk to your family. If I were to talk directly, they would say, who you? I gotta prove myself, sometimes two years. I gotta prove, they can trust you. Like you mention that word, trust. That's why you can go to Sariling Gawa, you can see all the big changes, yeah. Shirley and I trained the first Sariling Gawa.

M: The first Sariling Gawa?

E: Yeah. You know, like Domingo? The judge?

M: William.<sup>20</sup>

E: Yeah. He was with the first group. Yeah, all Milli them.

M: Milli and Lito?<sup>21</sup>

E: Yeah. Oh, they was all fighting each other. They was in my house fighting each other.

M: Why?

E: They don't agree, they don't know how to solve problems.

M: To agree in order to solve something?

E: Yeah. They don't know how. The first thing they do, they know how to fight. They still remember, my house. With training at our house, I'm teaching them. It was interesting, I was watching the energizers, they teaching energizers. So last week they was teaching – this guy was teaching them how to do energizers. And one of the things they said was, "FOCUS!" So I said, "Oh my God, that was thirty years ago! I'm watching that!"

M: What was that?

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19 Sariling Gawa is a youth leadership project established in 1980.

20 William M. Domingo, a graduate of Farrington High School and UHM Richardson School of Law, served as a Deputy Attorney General, Deputy Public Defender, Assistant Federal Public Defender before being sworn in as First Circuit District Court Judge, on May 18, 2015.

21 Mildred Macugay Asuncion and Lito Macatbag Asuncion were two pioneer leaders developing Sariling Gawa over the decades.



E: FOCUS. They talk story on the side, yeah. So you gotta yell, FOCUS! That's the new rule. Yeah, you cannot teach that in the family. The family gotta learn, yeah? So I was walking by, and you gotta remember, no sex, no violence! Oh my God, what an impact, yeah? Yeah, but that's why I wanted to develop this program. I'm developing, you know, this CD. I'm gonna work on the manual.

M: Ok, you mentioned that starting along the same model of Sariling Gawa.

E: Yeah. Exactly, Sariling Gawa is the model. I told you a Black student came from Kenya.

M: Oh really, a Black student?

E: One was from Chaminade elect doctoral program. But his friend was also a preacher at Waipahu. You know at the Waipahu Theater, there is a church for Blacks. Oh you got to see, all the spiritual songs of the Blacks. So they came talk to me 'cuz they wanted to use it in Kenya, in South Africa.

One of the wives was in my class and I said, "If you're gonna use my model, you got to do one change. You got to respect women. You guys don't know how to respect women, you guys treat women inferior. They are not inferior. They are just as good as you. I know you. You beat up your wife. That's not the right thing to do." They said, "But that's the way we were raised. You know what I mean. They don't listen, whack 'em." "What about the guys? But you hit the girl."

So, I told him, "If you use my model, you cannot allow that." Then, "Think we'll change that." "Of course, you got to recognize women, they're as human as anybody. Look, I Catholic, look the Virgin Mary. Even Jesus went on his knees. Who are you? You one preacher, right?" He said, "Yes." "You go on your knees for Jesus?" He said, "Yes." "You know Jesus wept. So why you hitting your wife for?" But I can talk like that to him, because we have a history together, yeah?

M: Correct. I was going to ask you during this period 1970's to '80's, there was also political awakening, activities during this period. People fighting eviction, criticizing the war in Vietnam, martial law, etc. In Leeward, was there something going on too?

E: Oh yeah. Oh yeah, my brother them. When they came back from Vietnam.

M: Herman and Bobby.

E: Herman and Bobby them, when they came back, they were rejected. There was a big march at the UH protesting.

M: The war in Vietnam?

E: Yeah. And they saw my brother them, there was eight of them. They were discharged, so they were sitting around, and all of them had their hair cut. And all these had long hair, so they look at my brother them and say, "Eh, why you guys no help us protest?" Whoa, this guy named Toma, from Maui, he told him, "We just came from Vietnam. We had to fight for you guys." So there was a big gap between the ones who had to go to Vietnam and the ones who didn't go to Vietnam. But eventually, they got to talk to each other. But yeah, there was a lot of protest. There was a lot of anti-Hawaiian, trying to get ahead, trying to change the system. But that's when the Hawaiian guy, what's his name, he's on TV all the time? He's a radical.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Libarios is referring to Dennis "Bumpy" Kanahale who, in 1974, ended a 15-month occupation of Makapu'u Beach Park in exchange for 45 acres of land in Waimānalo on a 55-year lease to establish Pu'uhonua o Waimanalo ('Refuge of Waimanalo').

M: Right now?

E: He had about 90 acres in Waimānalo.<sup>23</sup> Smart you know. He make all the women go protest, while he stay in the back...and they got thrown in jail.

M: Really, this was not the Waiāhole-Waikāne?<sup>24</sup>

E: No. Waiāhole-Waikāne was long time ago. No, this is Waimānalo. You still see him on TV. What's his name? Yeah, but he was smart. He let the women go up, because he knows that law enforcement would treat women differently as opposed to he would be in jail. And he got his land. He was smart. You know, like Enos, the one in Wai'anae.<sup>25</sup> Something like that, he got the land.

M: Were you directly involved when you were at LCC?

E: Half-half, I was more concerned with education.

M: The self development, the self esteem.

E: Yeah. That's was my interest, my interest was growing a lot.

M: I asked you this before. Pete Tagalog was in your class.

E: Yes. Pete Tagalog. He was the one. He never knew that he could do these things.

M: And how was he convinced that he could do it?

E: I started talking to him...and the brother was in the program, too. Yeah, Pete Tagalog.

M: Candy...Candido was in the program too?

E: Yeah, he was in the program too. We dealt with who you are. That was the big issue. 'Cuz they didn't know who they were. They, who society defined them to be. That's what they knew. I told them, no, you're bigger than that. Then they started to believe that, the human being has unlimited potential.

M: Just to clarify because last time, last session, it was very interesting but there were some details that I wanted to sort of expand for information. And you mentioned that your parents meet...they, they met in Kohala.

E: Kona.

M: Before they moved to Kona, yeah? They were working in Kohala.

E: Uh, they were working in Kohala...but they were separate plantation.

M: Uh, ok. Good. So they did not know each other?

E: No they didn't.

M: Do you know where...when they moved to...

E: They moved to Kona in the early '30s, I think...and late'20s.

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<sup>23</sup> Waimānalo is a district on O'ahu's eastern coast with a large Native Hawaiian population.

<sup>24</sup> The Waiāhole-Waikāne Struggle was an influential anti-eviction movement in Hawaii during the 1970s.

<sup>25</sup> Eric Enos is the co-founder and Executive Director of Ka'ala Farm, Inc., a Wai'anae based community organization that has operated the Cultural Learning Center at Ka'ala for nearly three decades.

M: I guess I would like to know the name, because it's important – the names of your parents.

E: My father's name was Herman Hildo Libarios and my mother's name was Efifania Duterte.

M: And both of them came to work as plantation workers?

E: No, my mother came as a dependent 'cuz she was only 3...4 years old when she came. And, uh, what had happened...was....can I pull from my grandmother's side?

M: Yeah.

E: My grandmother got married to this family in Bohol. Her husband was a merchant. And her husband, from that, they had two children, a boy and my mother, the youngest one. He was a merchant, but he'd go from all islands. And what had happened he started having all these affairs, yeah, and grandma found out about it, so she dumped him. She divorced him. So I guess in the Philippines, I guess there's no divorce in the Catholic Church. I guess they don't allow divorce.

M: No, cannot.

E: The recruitment was just occurring for bringing Filipino workers to the plantation. And just about then, grandma met this guy, Vicente. He was a houseboy. Yeah, a servant houseboy, 'cuz his parents had a lot of debts. And so he was paying off the debts by being a houseboy. I don't know what a houseboy means. I guess servant, yeah?

M: You stay in the house and you work for the family.

E: Yeah, yeah. You cook, you clean house and everything like that. He loved it. He had a kind of personality that you just gravitate to because he's very gentle, but yet intelligent, nice. So they met each other and then grandma found out about going to Hawai'i, but you had to be married. 'Cuz they wouldn't take her 'cuz she was just single. She asked him, you want to go to Hawai'i? You and I got to be married. [laughs] Grandma was good looking, you know, really mestizo, yeah? Grandpa wasn't, he was just regular Filipino guy. [laughs] Grandma was very aggressive, very assertive.

M: Do you know her full name?

E: Damiana...oh shucks...I forgot her last name.

M: That's OK. We'll get it later.

E: So grandpa said, OK, where is Hawaii? Where's that? So they volunteered, and they got accepted as a couple. I think they got married on the wharf.

M: Where, in Cebu?

E: Yeah, in Philippines, in Bohol. I think was Bohol. Yeah. And so they came to Hawai'i. Oh, Grandma's oldest boy stayed with the father. And my Mother stayed with Grandma, that's why they came to Hawai'i. And Dad, also, right about the same time was being recruited by his cousin. His cousin was a recruiter, and recruited grandpa, I mean uncle, and uncle got accepted.

M: This is Pedro.

E: Yeah. Uncle Pedro. But he was spoiled, he was the oldest in the family. Uh, he could pick people up, charge them money and like that, rather than work in the fields. But he was very intelligent too.

M: Were they farming back in the Philippines?

E: Yeah, they had pig farms, but they would parcel it out to other people to make them work.

M: Uh, okay. So they were landowners. They didn't have to go to Hawai'i.

E: No, they didn't.

M: But why did they go?

E: Just the adventure, I guess, to get out of the Philippines, and do something. Especially Uncle Pedro. He was always restless, always getting something to do. So he was coming, but grandpa said he won't survive because he doesn't know how to save money. So, meanwhile, my Dad got hanai-ed<sup>26</sup> by this family that didn't have a child. And they were very rich. They owned two islands and their own business, and all that and somehow they liked my Dad, too, 'cuz my Dad was very....

M: This is a...he was houseboy, you said.

E: No not my Dad, my Grandpa.

M: Did he finish...and what grade?

E: Uncle Pedro and Dad was about four years apart.

M: What kind of schooling did they have?

E: Uh, only third grade, they had.

M: They could read and write?

E: Oh yeah, yeah. In fact, Dad was always being recognized for his intelligence. But he was a very underachieving person, you know like – I don't want to be smart. Hide my intelligence. Especially when you get the Spanish people around, yeah? He don't want to show intelligence.

M: So they ended up....

E: Yeah, he went go watch Uncle Pedro. So he went with volunteers and that's how he came to Hawai'i. I like tell you one interesting part. They said when they landed in Hawai'i, the pier where they landed, thousands of them, they landed on the pier, and then one of the cousins, one of the older cousins heard that Daddy them was coming. So he went to the pier and he started yelling, Pedro, Pedro! Hildo, Hildo! *Hain ka man?*

M: Where are you?

E: Daddy them said, *kisamura*, who that. [laughs] Yeah, that, cousin. He identified himself, and then he started scolding them. He said, "You folks are stupid for coming to Hawai'i! You know how hard it is to work? You guys was in the Philippines, you guys get up any kine time, no more

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<sup>26</sup> Informally adopted.

pressure, you had land. You know all the support. Why did you guys come?” After that Dad said, whoa he scolding us in front of everybody you know. [laughs]

M: But why was that cousin here in Hawai‘i already?

E: Yeah. He was poor!

M: And he came....

E: He came to Hawai‘i first yeah, he was very poor.

M: This is cousin on your mother’s side or your father’s side?

E: Father’s side. Yeah. He was poor, that’s why he came to make more money, come Hawai‘i, they said. They said the money grow on trees. So he said, go back, go back. What you call, da kine bag...and you put money inside? They had this bag-like or purse they carried, ‘cuz wallet no more, before?

M: A little basket?

E: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So he said, “Here, I going throw you this money to you guys ‘cuz I know you guys no more money.” Then Daddy said, “Yeah, but what about you?” He said, “That’s okay, I get some money, this for you.”

M: Where was he working?

E: Plantation, in Honolulu. He said, “After you stay here, you guys come Honolulu. I get you different kind jobs for more money.” So threw the money, and they kept the money. But after that, they went to Kohala.

M: Did your Dad say how they were assigned to go to Kohala? How far away in Kohala?

E: Yeah, they were just divided: “You, the laborer, what kind of skills you have?” Oh, one of the things, if you can write. They didn’t want us to write. “No, we don’t know how to write.”

M: Did they check?

E: Yeah, they check if you have blisters here. So the ones without blisters are the lazy ones. [laughs]

M: So what did your Dad do?

E: So we asked him, “Dad, so what was it like working?” “Hard, whoa,” he said, “it was hard.”

Plantation, yeah, they didn’t realize how hard it was to, you get up early, the boss yell at you, mistreat you. You don’t have enough food, yeah, a lotta time. And it’s hot or cold, but especially cold in Kohala, like this, cold, and you’re out in the sun all day long, and you have your *kau kau* tin, you know, your food, but usually not enough, yeah.

M: Did they join any strike? Do you remember what kind of strike?

E: Yes, yes. The plantation house, they said, lot of holes, the water, you know, the rain, cold air comes in. It was very miserable, he said. So, they were gonna go. Either the plantation complied to their wishes or they were going strike.

M: Did he mention any date when the strike occurred and who was the leader?

E: Had the leaders, uh, Manlapit.

M: Pablo Manlapit?<sup>27</sup> So, they came early?

E: I think Manlapit guys

M: Back in '24...the big strike.

E: I remember they mentioning Manlapit.

M: They knew Manlapit. So they, uh, your father and uncle came early before 1924 then?

E: Yeah, I think so. Manlapit was one of them. That's the name that sticks out in my mind.

M: Okay, they mentioned his name.

E: At the same time, he was very much organized. He organized that. The plantation was smart, you know. They would, like I mentioned to you, at night, they would come.

They would find who the leaders were. Yeah, they know what house, plantation house they were, eh. So, when they come at night, they grab you, they bind you, yeah, and they drag you and they bring you up into the mountains like this because Kohala Mountains higher than this, eh. Yeah, you up there and then they throw you in the flume, the water, and the water, that's where they throw the sugar cane and the sugar cane would bring, the water would bring the sugar cane to the mill. That's where they would grind. But, they would also go, the rubbish would go into the ocean after.

M: Ocean. But, this story, this was told to you by your father or...?

E: Oh yeah, I think it's recorded. Yeah, if you look at the history, it was recorded.

M: Uh huh, okay. So, they would come at night.

E: But for sure, Daddy them told us.

M: Your Dad told you and Pedro, your uncle.

E: Yeah, they would tell us, but *tatay*<sup>28</sup> too.

M: Who?

E: Tatay Catalino Aboloc.

M: Catalino, yeah, the one who was following you guys.

E: Yeah, the three. No, one more, Manong Magde.<sup>29</sup>

M: Another one?

E: Magde<sup>30</sup>

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27 Pablo Manlapit (1891 – 1969) was a lawyer, labor organizer and activist in Hawai'i, California and the Philippines. Manlapit was instrumental in organizing workers across ethnic lines.

28 Tatay: formally, 'father'; informally, someone older given respect of a father.

29 Manong: formally (Ilokano), 'older brother'; informally, someone given the respect of an older brother.

30 Magdalino Celeres.

M: What's his name? Magde

E: M – A – G – D – E, Magde.

M: Magde. M – A – G – D – E.

E: But he had a different last name. I'll think of his last name.

M: Okay, sorry, so, there's Pedro. There's first your Dad, Hildo....

E: Yeah.

M: And then Uncle Pedro and then Catalino, a friend and then Magde.

E: Magde, yeah. Four, four single guys.

E: Four guys.

M: Four guys. [laughs] They're all single.

M: Yeah, okay, and the four of them decided to migrate, to escape to Kona? Is that the story?

E: Yes, from Kohala 'cuz they were being mistreated, but they were, like Uncle Pedro them, they were kinda, what you call that, they weren't the type to sit back, you know. They would, yeah, even when they were in the Philippines, they were very against the Spanish too. So, already their mind was, eh, you gotta treat me good, you know.

M: Okay, so, they were not subservient, yeah.

E: Yeah, yeah. And when they went there, they started helping, planning. And they found out, you know. So, Daddy them decided that, eh, they going catch us, they going throw us in the ocean, brother. Say, yeah. So they broke their contract. That's when they came to Kona.

M: And the managers did not, uh, they can hire police to track you down, yeah, during those years?

E: Oh, you cannot find Kona. Kona is big.

M: That's why they went there.

E: Way bigger than Honolulu.

M: That's why they were there.

E: Yeah, you go into the coffee fields like this. It'll take you years to find one guy.

M: And how did they know that's the place to escape?

E: Oh, this was, funny. Filipinos, they have a communication system, you know, like, if I walk over here and I see you. Yeah, we talk, you know, we talk, whisper to each other, tell where's the place to go? You go to trail number twenty something or like that, you know, look for the kiawe tree and when you reach the kiawe tree, go right and then, you know, there's a certain house you can go. This is where the Japanese would hire you and all that 'cuz the Japanese were doing the hiring. Yeah, they owned the land.

At that time, Filipinos cannot own land, yeah. It was against the law, yeah. So, they worked for the Japanese. So, the Japanese needed workers. They didn't have workers. That's why the Filipinos were very important to the coffee economy. And that's something we gotta write on. We gotta

credit the Filipinos 'cuz it was their labor that provided for the sustenance of the Kona coffee that we share.

Right now, they're worldwide, yeah, oh, all over the world. I heard, my brother told me, one pound of green – green cherries. They pick 'em green. You try it out and there's a husk. You bring it to the mill. You husk it again. And it's black. And that's what they use to roast. Or they roast that, then they grind it, and that's the coffee you drink.

M: Oh, I thought you had to pick it red?

E: Yeah, you could have picked it red. But they call 'em green after. First is green, then come red. Then you pick it red. And then you bring it to the grinder. The grinder picks up the red. And there's another husk, a white husk underneath. So, you dry that. After it gets dry, then you bring it to the oven. And the oven roasts it. So, you take out the white. And then, what remains is something like this color coffee. yeah. And that's what they call the green coffee 'cuz it's not roasted yet. So, when you roast that, then you grind it and that's the coffee you drink.

M: Oh, so many processes, yeah.

E: Yeah, yeah, lots of steps along the way, eh.

M: But, in the beginning, let's see, your Dad and the three friends escaped, moved to Kona, almost at the same time your mother's family were also escaping.

E: Right.

M: They also escaped.

E: Right about the same time.

M: And landed in...

E: Kona.

M: Kona, too

E: Kona is big.

M: It's a good story, Kona as the place to hide.<sup>31</sup>

E: Yeah, yeah

M: Good story.

E: They became invisible.

M: Yeah, and the police managers, police could not go there and look for them.

E: They cannot find them.

M: They broke the contract.

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<sup>31</sup> Kona is also the district where Pu'uhonua, 'a place of refuge', is located. Traditionally, for Native Hawaiians, the Pu'uhonua protected the kapu [law] breaker, defeated warriors, as well as civilians during the time of battle. No physical harm could come to those who reached the boundaries of the Pu'uhonua.



- E: Oh yeah, you gotta look for Filipinos. They're the guerillas, man. That's why, in the Philippines, the Japanese had hard time. They couldn't defeat the Filipinos, eh. They're smart. They know how to hide.
- M: And the Japanese, your neighbors, did not tell the plantation that, eh, eh, we have some of the escapees here.
- E: Some of them did.
- M: Some of them did, ah, okay.
- E: Yeah, some of them did, like, if I didn't like you, I would tell em, yeah. And then, their accusation, which was one-sided justice, you know, because only on the side of the Japanese, eh. And they would say *kore, kore*, you, you, you.<sup>32</sup> So, the sheriff would just handcuff you, yeah.
- M: So, what did, ah, I see, your Kona years were very important. You were there from 19...let's see. I have it.
- E: 1940, I think. I think I was there from third grade.
- M: I think from 1947. No, no, you were shy in there. You were farm work 1949-1957.
- E: Yeah.
- M: First, you were born. Okay, let's see, your folks first. They got married. Your folks got married in...?
- E: Pa'auilo
- M: Kona
- E: Oh, yeah. Kona. I'm sorry.
- M: Do you know when they got married? The year? Probably, you're the eldest, yeah.
- E: My brother. Let's see, my brother and I were....
- M: You were born in 1939.
- E: Yeah.
- M: You're the eldest?
- E: Eight years apart. So, he was '31, 1930, I think.
- M: 1930. Aren't you the eldest, Ernie?
- E: No, I'm the third, actually the fourth. One died, yeah.
- M: Oh, okay, so, who are the brothers?
- E: Two older brothers – one died when he was a baby. My oldest brother, he lived.
- M: Okay, what's the name of your eldest brother, you remember?
- E: Salvador...Salvador Libarios.

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<sup>32</sup> Kore (Japanese): pronoun pointing out something/someone near the speaker.

M: And then?

E: Salvador, I think he is Duterte, too, you know. Libarios. Salvador and, uh....

M: After Salvador?

E: Uh, what is he? I forget.

M: You forget your brother!

E: Jaime...Jaime.

M: Jaime. [laughs] Okay.

E: Yeah, he was the one that looked different.

M: Okay, and then, who else?

E: He died when he was six months old. Then came my sister Lorencia. And then came me.

M: And next. You're number four. One, two, three, four. Okay.

E: And then came Ronald.

M: Ronald, my student, okay.

E: Right, and then Herman, Jr. – Herman Hildo.

M: Herman Jr., 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. Oh, OK, so, when they got married.

E: They got married in Kona.

M: Were you the only one born in Pa'auilo?

E: Yes, oh. Hey, Ronald was born in Pa'auilo.

M: What about Salvador?

E: Kona...all in Kona.

M: Jaime in Kona. Lorencia, Kona.

E: Yeah, I think Ronny was born in da kine, too, Pa'auilo.

M: Okay. Why did you move, I think you told me the reason, you moved from Kona to Pa'auilo.

E: Yeah, because of wages, a better paying job.

M: In Pa'auilo.

E: Yeah. My grandma had moved from Kona to Pa'auilo 'cuz of the wages. Grandma was always aggressive, yeah.

M: Oh, was she also picking coffee, working?

E: Oh yeah, she had nine kids, picking coffee.

M: She had nine kids?

E: Yeah, nine of them. I think, was nine, but she fed them all, you know, hard.

M: Where's grandpa?

E: Coffee, too.

M: Because they had nine children.

E: They ran away from Kohala, eh? Yeah.

M: So, that's the reason why they moved to Pa'auilo?

E: Yes, because grandma heard that the wages was higher.

M: But plantation work now, not coffee anymore.

E: But the plantation bosses started to adjust. They became much more pleasant. They became much more civil. They treated the Filipinos much more with dignity.

M: Better?

E: They said they were treated way different. And that's why their lives was better, they said. There was always this race relations. The haole and then the next white would be the Portagees,<sup>33</sup> yeah. They were the luna. But they didn't know how.... They weren't, they were ignorant. She said, they didn't know how to read, lot of them. They didn't know how to treat. They only knew how to treat them as servants. The Portagees, they treat the Filipinos as servants because they came from Portugal, yeah.

M: They were not intermarrying?

E: After a while, they did.

M: But not in the beginning

E: Not in the beginning 'cuz they were white. White was supreme, yeah.

M: Yes. Is that really true, I mean, in the behavior?

E: Oh yeah, yeah, very true. That was the rule. You're white, you're right.

M: If you're white, you're right. If you're brown, you're a clown.

E: [laughs] Don't stick around.... [laughs].

M: Don't stick around. Okay, so, when grandma moved...

E: So, when I came here. I look like that. Eh, I'm brown. They said, when you're brown, don't stare.

M: Don't stare, don't stare like that.

E: Don't stare, yeah. When I came here<sup>34</sup> they all look at me 'cuz I no look Japanee. I no look haole. Eh, I talked to the lady that owns the laundry over there, downstairs [at interview location]. She came out about four times to look at me.

M: Did she ask, did you steal the cart?

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33 'Portagees' is the older Hawaiian English [pidgin] pronunciation referring to Hawai'i's Portuguese.

34 Manoa Marketplace is a shopping area in an upper middle class neighborhood and was developed as a retreat for haole (Whites) elites. Now integrated, Manoa remains – in image and reality – a community associated with haole kama'aina ('old timers') and individuals with higher incomes.

E: Yeah [laughs] 'cuz I had time walking, eh, so I took 'um. You can tell, eh, when they, you know, when you don't belong here.

M: Maybe, she's thinking, oh, I'd better finish my laundry. Are you always conscious of that?

E: Yeah, I was raised in that way. Always that way. In fact...oh, I told you about Dan Fullmer, eh?

M: Who?

E: Dr. Dan Fullmer .

M: What happened?

E: You know him?

M: Who?

E: Dan Fullmer. He was a professor at College of Ed?

M: No, no. I don't know a lot. I don't know many people in College of Ed. Okay.

E: Oh, he was recruited. Dan Fullmer.

M: Spell it.

E: F-U -L -M -E- R. He got married to Janet, and Janet was also doctor in, da kine, College of Ed. She's Japanese. Dan Fullmer was this famous guy. He wrote books and books. And he was supposed to be in the Navy submarine, came from Oregon. They recruited him from Oregon to be at the College of Ed. But also this black school in New York, I forget the name already. There's a famous black school that had football team, sports and all that. They used him as a consultant, even though he was white but he had the black heart.

M: Oh, okay, compassionate and fair.

E: Yeah, yeah and you know, very brilliant. You should read his book. I going show you his book.

M: So, was he your professor at the College of Ed.?

E: College of Ed., yeah. He was there over 20 years. Died, I think.

M: So, you were telling me there is this white person...who is kind to a brownie.

E: I know. I happened to quit Finance Factors and I was looking for a job and I happened to work at what you call that, Hawaii Job Corps.

M: Yeah, you were working at Finance Factors 1962-64, after you graduated from Chaminade, after you got married.

E: When did I get married? '69, eh?

M: Was it '69?

E: I think it was '69. I forget already. Wow, I'm getting all mixed up.

M: Oh, okay, that's all right.

E: I think this interview is just about a highlight of where I was. I took his class and I was the only Filipino.

- M: To go to Professor Fullmer's class in College of Ed. for your master's in psychology?
- E: No, I was just taking his class because I loved what he was saying. He was a consultant.
- M: What's his name again?
- E: Daniel, D-A -N -I -E -L, F-U- L -L- M -E -R
- E: Everyone knew him
- M: He was good, eh.
- E: Oh, brilliant, brilliant man.
- M: Okay, so, you were the only Filipino?
- E: Filipino, yeah. He was training me also, to be a counselor at, what you call that, the United Church of Christ. And then, they had that counseling program at Pālolo. And that's where I went, you know, to my first exposure to counseling. Yeah, he was training me. And the first time I go to class and he would tell me, "Ernie, how come you so quiet. You don't say anything. I know you know we're talking about because we talk about the disadvantaged." I would know, yeah, but I said, "Dan, it's hard for me to talk." He said, "Why?" I said, "Every time I say something, nobody understands what I'm saying, you know."
- M: Is that true?
- E: Yeah, funny yeah. It's almost like the pidgin language was a different language. You know, you almost gotta. Just like when I went to Saint Martin's. They thought I was foreigner 'cuz I was talking pidgin, eh.
- M: It's not full pidgin what you have, just the intonation.
- E: Yeah, to me, I understood, but, you know, they didn't understand, yeah.
- M: Oh, they did not understand, okay.
- E: So, how you gonna speak for your people? I said, "Ah, I don't know if I can speak for my people. I mean, why should I?" "Somebody has to speak for them," and he said, "somehow the good Lord has chosen you." "What do you mean, me? Go find somebody else." "I'll talk to him. Where is he?"
- M: He said that?
- E: Yeah, he was very holy too, spiritual. So, I tell him, "So that's my challenge. What am I supposed to do in class?" He tell me, "You know what, when you have a thought and you say something, you just talk to me 'cuz I'm the boss." I tell, "You sure?" He tell me, "Yeah, you just talk to me." Sure enough, when I raise my hand, I talk to him. Everybody don't know what I'm talking about. But he understood. Funny how he understood what I said, what I would say.
- M: But your classmates grew up here, so they must understand.
- E: Oh, the Japanese. Japanese and Filipinos different. Try listen Japanese and Chinese. They're all different.
- M: When they speak?

E: Yeah, and their thoughts are all different. Yeah, that's how come, when I went to work at Finance Factors, they always thought Filipinos...the stereotype of Filipinos, as a rule, was don't hire Filipinos 'cuz they're stupid. They don't know what they're doing. They're not smart enough.

M: At that time.

E: Now, there's a little bit of it but not too much because they got married. They found out the women, especially the women, right, they smart. They know how to take money. [laughs] They know how to collect money. They good. After that, yeah, when they hired me, they would hire six months always somebody else. But when they hired me, three years, they didn't hire anybody because I did all the job, yeah, yeah. It was easy compared to coffeeland.

M: Yeah.

E: This kine job, I tell, es too easy.

M: What kind of work did you do?

E: Oh, finance.

M: Finance Factors, yeah, assistant manager.

E: Make loans. Well, I started off collecting, to call people. Eh, Melinda, you owe this amount of money. You gotta pay. I tell, I no more money. Well, how much you get? I get ten dollars. Uh, bring it in. I'll make the adjustment for you, yeah.

M: Why did they hire you if they think, you know, Filipinos are dumb or stupid?

E: Well, my friend, who was my classmate at Saint Martin's, and he was stuck in China during the war. He's the youngest, yeah. So, he was stuck in China, so he learned how to speak Chinese. So, his English was kind of blended, like mine, yeah. But, he said he began to understand the plight of the underdog because people would treat him, you know, eh, you get funny kine accent for Chinese, yeah.

M: Oh, okay, when he went back to his own country.

E: Yeah, he was there 4 years, eh, 4 to 5 years. So, he and I were classmates. And, he and I became very good friends. Somehow, we bonded as brothers, eh, yeah. So, he, his brother, they were all friends with Hiram Fong. If you go to Tripler now, right now, and if you look at the veterans' wall of pictures, Larry Lee, his picture is over there. That's one of the brothers, yeah. Yeah, he was a lieutenant colonel, you know. But Melvin got him into Finance Factors, and when he got into Finance Factors, he got me in because he knew I wasn't stupid.

M: But that's far from...you were just graduating. You were not a counselor yet.

E: No, I'm not a counselor. I was looking for a job. I was a history major.

M: Yeah, history major

E: Yeah.

M: You're looking for a job and...

E: And he called me.

M: And at that time, you were working at Finance Factors. You were not married yet to Shirley?

E: Yeah, no, I was, no, no.

M: Not yet. You were single.

E: We were all wild that time. Oh, at Finance Factors, you gotta know how to drink. Oh, you bettah know how to drink.

M: To drink...you were drinking.

E: You gotta know how to drink. And you gotta know how to hold your liquor.

M: Oh, not, not pass out.

E: No, no. If you pass out, you dumb. [laughs]

M: You out, you out.

E: And I had just come out of the Marine Corps. So I knew how to drink good, eh.

M: That's what I wanted to know. You were in the Marines, too, you said? When? Marine Corps. Did you sign up?

E: '57, '58, '59...that's when they were drafting.

M: Ah, '58, '59. Marine Corps. One year?

E: No, about 2 years. That was the reserve. You see, Father Canelli was from the board, the drafting board.

M: Father...?

E: Father Canelli, a priest. He was on the drafting board, eh, who they going draft?

M: A priest on the drafting board.

E: Yeah, he would draft, a really respected Father.

M: Okay. He knew you?

E: Yeah, oh, that's the church we go, yeah.

M: Oh, the church you went in...where? Where are you?

E: Oh, that's another priest. Father Canelli.

M: Father Canelli. He saw you?

E: Yeah, he called me. He came up to the house.

M: Where is your house now?

E: Oh, in Kona. Canelli, he came up to the house, "Ernest, I wanna talk to you and your mom and Dad." I say, "Yeah, why, what I did wrong?" He said, "No, no, no, like confession, eh." [laughs] So, he said, "I just came back from the board meeting and they're going to draft you." I said, "What!" He said, "Yeah." "Whoa, how long?" "Six years." I said, "Oh man, we're having hard time. That's why I couldn't go back to Saint Martin's because Mom them, you know, my labor free, eh, hard

work.” I said, “Wow, when they going do that?” He said, “Next week.” I said, “Oh my God, what I gotta do.” He said, “You gotta go volunteer. Go Honolulu, volunteer.”

M: Oh, to avoid being drafted.

E: Yeah, for 6 years, yeah. Or you could be drafted into regular army.

M: And be sent to war, uh huh.

E: Yeah. So, I went to Honolulu and I went to see all the different armed forces. The only one would take me was the Marine Corps. So, he said, son, we’d love to have you. He said, you have a degree? I said, yeah. You know how rare it is for a marine to have a degree?

M: He guessed you have a degree already.

E: Yeah. You know how rare this is? This is like finding diamond. I said, sir, I just wanna serve and go back. He said no, we’re going to find something for you. So that’s how I got drafted into the Marine Corps.

M: But did you do anything on reserve or you just...

E: Yeah, when I got in, they promised everything, yeah, oh, we going do this, send me to school, and all that. I said oh, right on, because they’re competing against the others, eh. But, when I went in, all, all these opportunities went down.

M: How come?

E: I guess they just promise you the rose garden but they didn’t have the rose garden, you know, just for their own record, yeah.

M: Record that they recruited. And you didn’t have to serve or go somewhere to work?

E: No, you had to serve. Otherwise, you going into the regular army.

M: What did you do?

E: I was regular, what they call rifleman. Yeah, that’s why I didn’t like it because the sergeants I know were much dumber than me, and they didn’t know what they were doing and, I said, if we go to war, I said wow, these guys going kill me. And right about then, we were converting to what they call, airborne, that’s when you jump from the airplane, and that was rare. Because airborne was regular army, yeah. But they wanted, they didn’t have enough airborne guys. So, they converted us to airborne. And I said, hey, I don’t wanna jump from no airplane. [laughs] I said hey, I never go four years college for get my brains smashed in. [laughs]

M: So, did you quit? Can you quit, you are on reserve?

E: I volunteered into da kine...the National Guard. I went to see the National Guard. And they said, oh, you get degree? Yeah, yeah, yeah. Oh, we’ll take you. So, they took me into the National Guard and I quit the Marine Corps because two years, I never got promoted. I just was recruited.

M: What did you do?

E: Two years, just follow.

M: You mean marching or...?



- E: Yeah, marching, wash dishes, clean the house.
- M: Where, where?
- E: Oh, Pearl Harbor.
- M: Clean houses?
- E: Yeah. You clean barracks, eh, and you clean the yards, clean up all, and then every now and then, you go out shoot guns, and all that kine stuff, yeah.
- M: And you got paid?
- E: Oh yeah. You were serving.
- M: You're serving, but you're doing gardening work.
- E: Yeah, yeah, was crazy, yeah. This is not right, anyway. I told the sergeant, sergeant, I got one degree. You like me do this kine?
- M: What did the sergeant say?
- E: He said, nothing else for do. The order came down. I gotta follow the order.
- M: Were you the only Filipino in the Marine Corps?
- E: Oh, there were several Filipinos. The other Filipinos in the Marine Corps, they were all smart, too. But they never went college. Yeah, we really got along well. There were very few Japanese.
- M: Very few Japanese in the Marines. Why?
- E: Marines are supposed to be fighters, eh? You just go out fight, kill, and get killed. And the Japanese used their brains, eh and stuff, yeah.
- M: So, that's a little bit, sort of sorting by race there, by occupation.
- E: Absolutely, because when I went into the National Guard, there was that strata, the Japanese commanders, Chinese and haoles. Haoles were the ones you salute to, very few Filipino officers.
- M: Uh huh. You mentioned that in your Kona years, you were saying about good teachers that you wanted to talk about.
- E: I think I wrote 'em. I don't know where I wrote 'em. Clara.
- E: Clara.
- M: Clarol.
- E: Clara. C – L – A – R – A.
- M: Clara. Sorry
- E: Clara Wong
- E: Don't mind me...my pronunciation.
- M: That's all right. Don't mind me...my ears. [laughs]

E: There you go. Ah, see how polite Filipinos. They always like go down. Be humble, be humble. Here's an article in my career way back. I criticized the Catholic Church. I mean, I love Catholics, don't get me wrong. I criticized the Catholic Church because the priest and the Catholic Church taught Filipinos to be subservient. But they never teach 'em. And then, they would cover it up by saying you are humbled. That's the way to be humble. To be humble is to honor the Messiah. You know, da kine, back then.

And I learned that's not right. Sometimes, different nationality may be wrong. But because I'm under the Messiah, I not going say nothing. That's what happened to me at Finance Factors...'cuz you know, you gotta obey the law, eh. Yeah, the race. But then, my friend broke that and then Dan Fullmer broke that mindset. Don't do that. Break that. You gotta teach your people how to do that, yeah.

M: Sometimes, you have to balance, too, isn't it?

E: It's good, too, yeah.

M: Sometimes, your boss is really...if you say something, he might fire you. Some bosses are....

E: Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's true. That's true, gotta be. That's what the Catholic Church gotta teach to people. The value to be humble is to be virtuous. But, if you're using humility as a way of manipulating and sacrificing your gifts, that's not right.

M: You allowed yourself to be abused.

E: Yeah, I got a lot of flak from the Bishop, but that's okay. I told 'em...Bishop you gotta change.

M: So, what does the Bishop say?

E: Because the Filipinos are suffering. Look at the welfare. Look at the chicken fights. All Filipinos. They like get ahead. That's not the way. Education is the way, one way anyway. And hard work. They know how to all work hard, yeah.

M: So, in Kona, you have those teachers. You went to primary school there too.

E: Yeah, I went to fourth grade.

M: Looks like your childhood.

M: You started 4th grade

E: In Kona.

M: in Kona.

E: Before that, we was in Iwilei. I was in Iwilei. I was going school.

M: Oh, Iwilei.

E: Iwilei. You know...Kamuwela.

M: Yes.

E: Yeah, I went to those schools

M: Okay.

E: Those were all. Iwilei was. Later on, if you can find this book, Mamie Stover.

M: Move Over.

E: Mamie Stover. Mamie M – A – M – I – E.

M: Uh huh.

E: Stover. S – T – O – V – E – R.

M: Stover. okay. That's the author.

E: Yeah

M: Okay, okay.

E: She was the queen of the prostitutes. [laughs] And it became a bestseller.

M: Okay, I'll look for it.

E: Yeah, I saw it one time at this bookstore, you know, they were selling used books. I should have bought 'em, but I just didn't have enough money at that time.

M: Why were you in Iwilei? That's the whole family. You were about to go somewhere, you said. Why were you in Iwilei again?

E: Oh, we were living in Kamuela and then, we were living in this converted, Chinese school, and I wrote 'em somewhere. And in the Chinese school, we had one bedroom, seven of us in the bedroom and three. And we had one kitchen. Three of my ninongs<sup>35</sup> would sit there at night.

M: Why did you end up there? You were in Pa'auilo. You moved back to Pa'auilo.

E: No, we were at Hickam first. And then my Dad got fired from Hickam because my mother didn't want him to become a citizen because. If he became a citizen, he gotta renounce Philippines, eh. And she said you're stepping on the Filipino flag.

M: But why did you move from the Big Island to Honolulu?

E: Oh, to get a better job, better wages.

M: So, your grandma also came with you?

E: Yes, Grandma would always lead the way too, yeah.

M: She was always looking for opportunities.

E: Yes, yes. Grandma was like that. Different ways, money, eh. And grandma would also sell...ah, go chicken fights. They would sell food, cooked food, because my Auntie them were all, five girls, yeah, so they would cook, and then ah, they were very attractive so everybody come, like buy from them. And the food was good, they said. That's how grandma made her money.

M: And that's where you were shining shoes, yeah?

E: Yeah, from Iwilei, that was my first job go shine shoes.

M: While going to school.

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<sup>35</sup> Ninong (Tagalog, Ilokano): 'godfather'

E: Kindergarten.

M: Kindergarten.

E: To first grade.

M: First grade to...

E: Third grade.

M: Third grade.

M: And how did you fit in the school? How was it?

E: Oh, I loved it.

M: You loved it.

E: It was for the retards. [laughs] I didn't have to study 'cuz my sister was so smart. She graduated, I told you, yeah, from Saint Francis.

M: Your sister, Lorencia?

E: Yeah, every night, she would teach me. I would read the book. She tell me read this. I said stop. I would get the new book. Okay, read 'em. She would teach me how to read. The next day, I go class. I play dumb. And then the teacher would get time 'cuz get pleny other kids, yeah. So, she said okay, go play. And I would go play all day. That's how I would do.

M: You pretended.

E: Yes.

M: To be retarded or not right.

E: Well, that was part of it, too. I wasn't too sure, but I knew how to read. I knew how to read good, but I didn't want to show 'em I knew how to read 'cuz lot of times, if you become a reader, then you have to go teach somebody else, eh. I rather play than do that, yeah.

M: So, you were there from grade 1 to grade 3?

E: About third grade, I think.

M: Okay. And then, why did the family again move back to Kona?

E: Grandma went back to the Philippines because she made her money, yeah?

M: This is the grandma that took care of everyone?

E: Yeah, great grandma, my mother's side, she went back to the Philippines.

M: Oh, she made money already.

E: Yeah, she made money.

M: From the chicken fights.

E: Chicken fights. They were working at Hickam during the war.

M: She went back alone or...

E: No, the whole family, all nine of them. Only 1 girl stayed back, 'cuz she got married. But the rest of them all went back Philippines.

M: Okay. So, what happened?

E: Grandma wanted to take me, but if she takes me, then mom would follow. But Dad said no, we gonna go with Uncle Pedro, yeah.

M: Back to?

E: Philippines. Uncle Pedro was the reason why. He gotta go back already. But uncle Pedro had only \$35.00. "I don't wanna go back with only \$35.00 after 40 years," he said, "that's embarrassing." So, Dad said, "What do you want to do, then?" Said, "I go wait one year." So, Daddy waited one year. And at the end of the year, said, "Okay, Pedro, we're ready for go, you ready?" He said, "No." "Why?" "I only made fifteen dollars extra." So, Daddy waited almost 40 years, 50 years. Never went back...until my brothers came back from Vietnam, the two of them, Ron and Herman. Then they brought Dad back to the Philippines – when they came back from Vietnam.

M: But, you went back to Kona, because that's where you finished your high school. yeah

E: After the third grade, we went back to see uncle Pedro. We went back because he was still in Kona.

M: So Uncle Pedro was still in Kona there.

E: Yeah.

M: And Pedro, Uncle Pedro never married?

E: Oh yeah, twice. Uncle Pedro? Hey, alisto<sup>36</sup> that brother.

M: He was a regular guy.

E: Yeah. He was really Visayan, brother, whoa. That's why great grandfather and Daddy assigned to him, to watch him. Oh, he going get killed, he no watch out, you know.

M: So, you went back to...

E: Kona.

M: Kona, the whole family.

E: All the whole family. We waited for Uncle Pedro.

M: In Kona, what did you do there in Kona?

E: Educationally?

M: Okay, education.

E: I think God has a way of, ah, intervening 'cuz the teacher that I had, was a Catholic. She was a single Catholic, Clara Wong. She had her rosary. She had her crucifix on her desk all the time, and she went to the same church we went – Kahului.

M: This is what grade?

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<sup>36</sup> Alisto (Ilokano): 'smart, clever'.

E: Fourth grade

M: Fourth grade, okay. Clara. Married...Miss, Mrs...?

E: No, she was Miss, yeah.

M: Chinese?

E: Chinese, yeah.

M: Catholic

E: Pake<sup>37</sup> yeah.

M: Pake, okay. So, she liked you.

E: Yeah, somehow, you know, we got along. But, she knew I wasn't stupid. I don't know how.

M: You were pretending.

E: Yeah, she saw through the act. She saw me through the act. And then one day at church, she said, "Mrs. Libarios." "Yes, yes, Ms. Wong." "You know that your son is in my class?" "Tell me, yeah." "Did you know that my class is a special class?" "Yes, special. Thank you all. Thank you, you know...for the privilege, eh."

M: Meaning, special class is, ah...

E: Special ed, yeah.

M: Oh

E: And so, she said, "But that special class, Mrs. Libarios, is for the dumb." She said, "The who?" "The dumb." She said, "My boy not dumb." "Yeah, he's in the dumb class. That's why we better get him out of there." "Wait...let me call him." Right in church, yeah. I sit in the front. I said, "Ma, I stay pray." "Come heah." So, I go there. What's this, "Talk to me in Filipino. Ms. Wong said, how come you stay in this kine class?" I said, "Why?" "Es where you not supposed to be...es for the dumb guys." I said, "I not smart." "Don't get stupid." [laughs]

M: Your mom said that?

E: Yeah. [laughs] She knew I was playing, yeah. So, she talked to me. She said you not supposed to, you know, that's not right. I said okay. So, it got to a point where Ms. Wong had to reduce her class by one. And then, Mrs. Ackerman.

M: Ackerman, Mrs. Ackerman

E: She's one of the rich landowners.

M: White?

E: Hawaiian

M: Hawaiian, okay.

E: Yeah, she's Hawaiian but she's married to the...

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37 Pake (Hawaiian English, slang): 'Chinese'

M: Mr. Ackerman

E: That's her husband. She was a teacher in the sixth grade. But she had a strong love for Filipinos and the underdog. She would always help the Filipinos.

M: Why?

E: I think it was because she was Hawaiian, too, and she knew how the Hawaiians got mistreated, color skin and all that. So, she came and talked to me. She said, "Libarios." Said, "Yeah." "There's two people that we gotta choose: David Aiona and you." "What?" "Cuz we gotta reduce the class and we gotta promote you to the sixth grade, the next step."

M: Promote?

E: Yeah. Promote, she said.

M: Skip one grade?

E: One grade, though, the next level. So, I tell, "I no like go the next level, smart guys, all Japanese." [laughs] She said, "If you don't go, I will promote David." I say, "Yeah." "We know he's not smart because we know he's not that smart." "So? So, be good for your friend. Have compassion." So, after a while, I guess I did. I said, "Okay. I'll go, 'cuz...how many Filipinos in there?" She said, "Only one." And I knew the boy. His name is Dinsay. So, that's why I got promoted into the next level.

M: You didn't want to go? You did not want to be promoted? Why?

E: 'Cuz no more Filipinos, eh. And I had to study. I didn't believe in studying. I only wanted to play and all that. At least, self-concept, it didn't match. For my sister, it matched, though, you know, but for me, it didn't match.

M: She, Lorencia was the one.

E: Yeah, she was the one. She was the brain, yeah, really smart.

M: And they asked, eager to learn already, accelerated, as a young girl.

E: Yeah, yeah. She wanted to become a nun too, yeah. She was. That's why, when she was in Oregon, she was in the, what you call that...nunnery. She was second year to become a nun already.

M: Became a novice?

E: Yeah, yeah. But when we came back Kona, we didn't have enough money so she couldn't go back. So, she said we go work one year, two years, she graduate and she go back, become a nun. But she met my friend and she got married. That's a whole new story.

M: So, did those two teachers encourage you, too? Did you do well in the high school?

E: Half and half, half and half.

M: Half and half?

E: Let me point out. All of my friends remember me as a person that never do, only like play.

M: Always playing.

E: Yeah, and they all remember what they call the thumbtack trial, thumbtack, you know, da kine, thumbtack.

M: Oh, yeah, the thumbtacks.

E: Trial. We had a trial court. The class had a court because what had happened is that, you know, the girls, they all act – all Japanese. Yeah, always look down upon me. So, I told my friend, I'm going to get them, I'm gonna get em. So, I watch how they behave and then, when the bell rings to go out and play, they would run out and play. The bell ring. They would wait until the bell ring, and they would run and sit down on their seat. Yeah, as much as possible, play, eh, come back. So, what I did was that I put all thumbtacks.

M: [Gasps]

E: On their seats.... [laughs]

M: You were mean!

E: Yeah, I know. I wanted to get back at 'em because, you know, if you get rejected by your peers, it hurts. And I got rejected 'cuz I look different. I get different color and all that kine.

M: This is what grade?

E: Sixth grade

M: Sixth grade. So, you put thumbtacks, how many.

E: All girls, the whole class. All the girls.

M: All girls. You the only boy?

E: No, not the boys. The boys would accept me.

M: But the girls did not.

E: Yeah, not the girls, no.

M: So, you put the thumbtacks. What happened?

E: They come running in, running in. The bell ring. They jump to their seats. [laughs] All of them take out the thumbtacks. Who put the...?

M: So, what happened?

E: They reported it to the teacher.

M: Oh wow.

E: The teacher said, there's something wrong in here. Who? Who the only guy that's different would do it, they said, would be me. So, they, we had a thumbtack trial. And, ah...

M: You mean, to find out who was the culprit.

E: Yeah. yeah. And my friend, he didn't wanna get, he knew about it, but he was a part of it, but he squealed on me, yeah.

M: Your friend?



E: Yeah, so, I said okay. That's what they called a thumbtack trial. And even at that class reunion, they all remember. They write about the thumbtack trial.

M: So then, what happened? You got punished?

E: Yes. Suspended.

M: For how many days?

E: Ah, I think, was two weeks, I think, or one week. I think it was one week, maybe, yeah.

M: That's really bad.

E: I know, yeah, was really bad, though. [laughs] But, they knew I was smart, though, after a while. That's why, when they see me....

M: In the reunion.

E: At the reunion, and they see where my achievement level, they cannot believe it 'cuz I have the highest degree, eh, the masters degree of all my classmates.

M: Okay. But in the high school, you were just 50/50.

E: Yeah. I was right in between, yeah. One hundred twenty-five, I think, I started off, the lowest of the first half and the highest of the lower half, yeah.

M: Oh okay, you were all right. But, in Kona, you were doing all kinds of things, too. You said you were also gambling while working at the same time.

E: Yeah, when you don't have dreams because you cannot afford to dream. You don't want to hurt yourself by failing, failing your dreams, you don't dream. Yeah, so, what we did, and also too, stuff like, the highest aspiration we had in Kona, was to be the projectionist in the theater.

M: Oh really.

E: Yeah. Manong Vicente was the projectionist. So, everybody, I going be projectionist. I going be projectionist, you know, hundreds of us, that's the highest level we going be.

M: That's the role model for the Pinoys?

E: For the Pinoys like our age. And the second one was to be collector of tickets.

M: In the theater.

E: Yeah

M: Oh, okay.

E: 'Cuz that's steady job, every night, eh.

M: That was a big deal, uh huh.

E: Yeah. Those are the two big things. The third one was to work in a hotel. But it was hard for us for hotel, because we no more car. Yeah, so we can only stay. And in the stores, they wouldn't hire Filipinos. You cannot trust them.

M: They thought they could not trust Filipinos.

- E: They could not trust Filipinos. They steal, yeah, and all that, which we did eventually.
- M: You stole?
- E: We stole plenny. Yeah, my friends, some of them my friends, my friends, they would let me steal.
- M: Stealing from the stores?
- E: No, from their store, they own the store. My classmates, they would let me steal. So, the reason why they would let me steal is because when they get into trouble, my gang would back them up, yeah.
- E: So, that's the price you pay, yeah.
- M: Oh, so, economics.
- E: So, we worked out our deal often.
- M: So, you had a Filipino gang as your friends.
- E: Oh yeah. We were gamblers, like we raise pig, and my ninongs, they would have a house, we go pick up slop from them, but before we pick up slop, they would teach us how to gamble or to paiute,<sup>38</sup> or play da kine I forget the name of that. They teach us how to cheat and all that. I came really good, very good.
- M: Very good. You got money from it?
- E: They was going to give me money. Couple of times, they let me go, because these are professional gamblers, eh.
- M: But, the gambling will be in Kona in a private house?
- E: Yes. Kona and people from Kohala would come, the plantation would come, you know, certain time of the month. And we, every third month, you guys come, they come, chicken fights. They had chicken fights and all that.
- M: And in this gambling and chicken fight...all Filipinos or other ethnic groups would join, too?
- E: Mostly Filipinos, mostly Filipinos yeah, but the other ethnic groups didn't come until later on.
- M: It's like a big social in a way, isn't it? It's gambling but, ah,...and then, the wives would be selling food also.
- E: Yeah, yeah. The wives and the women sell food, yeah. You still see it now.
- M: I think so.
- E: Try go Waianae
- M: Waianae.
- E: They get that. Whoa, the food good, man.
- M: Good

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<sup>38</sup> Paiute is a Hawaii card game similar to poker.

E: Yeah. They cook. Lot of times, the other nationalities came, and they had different varieties, which we didn't have, 'cuz now they have all different kinds. I don't know if you read in the paper last week, the fusion of Filipino food. Eh, I never heard of this kind of food.

M: They're doing all kinds of things to the adobo now.

E: Yeah. And these two guys won in New York, the cook, holy cow, the Filipinos really good, you know. Somehow, I don't know, my family, they could smell. If you cook, I don't taste...no 'nuff salt, some more salt, too much salt, put some more water.