

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: John Vegas, 72, retired Pearl Harbor Shipyard worker

"Well, to tell you the truth, I may sound old-fashioned, but I never cared for too much good time. I always had a hobby, woodwork and helping others. Ever since I was a child, I always help my neighbors. People ask me to help 'em make a chicken coop or something like that, I always was there and helping them."

John Vegas, Puerto Rican, the sixth of fifteen children, was born on November 30, 1912, in North Kohala, Hawaii. His parents immigrated to North Kohala from Puerto Rico in 1901. Antone Vegas, John's father, worked as a laborer at Kohala's Union Mill Plantation.

In 1924, the family moved to Honolulu where Antone Vegas worked as a track layer for Honolulu Rapid Transit (HRT). They rented their first home in Honolulu near Middle and Rose Streets in Kalihi. From there, the family moved to different homes in the Kalihi area. John attended Likelike School where he completed the fifth grade.

In 1933, John began his career as a carpenter and boat builder at Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard, where he remained until his retirement in 1967.

Today, John lives in Kalihi Valley with his wife, Nora. They have four children. John has never abandoned his love for woodwork, spending much of his time working on his house. He is also an active member of the United Puerto Rican Association of Hawaii and Our Lady of the Mount Church.

Tape No. 11-45-1-84

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

John Vegas (JV)

March 23, 1984

Kalihi, Oahu

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Mr. John Vegas at his home in Kalihi Valley on March 23, 1984.

Okay, Mr. Vegas, can you first tell me where you were born and when you were born?

JV: I was born 1912, November 30, in North Kohala, Hawaii.

WN: What were your parents doing in North Kohala?

JV: My father was a plantation worker working in the plantation. When he came from Puerto Rico in 1901, they came to the Big Island and they work in the cane field, you know, like the rest of the other people that came along with them.

WN: What plantation was this?

JV: North Kohala in Kohala. The Big Island, they call it, eh?

WN: What do you remember about your father and, you know, the circumstances for why he came over to Hawaii?

JV: Well, at that time, they were in Puerto Rico. According to what he used to tell us, they asked them if they want to come to the islands of Hawaii, you know. When they heard about Hawaii, they wanted to come over and work in the plantations. Because at that time, after they had that problem with some kind of storm they had in Puerto Rico, lot of guys no work, no nothing. So he got together with his brother and two cousins, my mother. And they were engaged, according to what he told me, that's the story. They were engaged and they got married over here in the islands. So they all came through with the gang that (was sent here). I don't know--about three, four thousand of them, they came together at that time. That's in 1901. That's the first group [from Puerto Rico] that came [to Hawaii], you know.

WN: What town was your father from?

JV: Penuelas. But he says when he was single, Penuelas, that's where his dad was. But he used to go to other little towns. Like Caguas, and Ponce, and he'd stay there a week or so, then wandering around here and there. That's why he decided to come this side and see what's on the other side and came as plantation workers.

WN: Were they farmers?

JV: No, no. Just each one, like them days, it's just like people in the country here. They get their little piece of land and they plant their own to upkeep the home. Vegetables, things like that. But not farmers, yeah. Of course, they had farmers at that time, but he said he never did work for any farmers out there.

WN: And was your mother from the same town?

JV: Yes, from the same town.

WN: So they got engaged in Puerto Rico, then . . .

JV: They were engaged up there, then she came with two sisters, two brothers, and two first cousins. There were about ten of them, blood relations. My father's side and my mother's side. Some of them are gone already. And then, they came with another group. Big group that came down to work in the plantations. Then from there, he didn't like it too well. That's when he went to Ewa Mill. You know Ewa Mill? Ewa Plantation? He tried another plantation. You know how they are. Maybe he work there for several years, and then he went to Ewa Mill plantation (to) work. Then he stayed over there several years, and then he went to Maui. Maui, I think, we lived about ten, twelve years.

WN: What part of Maui?

JV: Wailuku, Maui. We stayed in Wailuku Plantation. Worked for the Wailuku Plantation. Same thing. You know, cane, irrigating cane, planting, cutting cane. Then from there, he came to Honolulu in 1924.

WN: Nineteen twenty-four? Why did he come to Honolulu?

JV: Well, he figure he try (to) look for something better. Then he came down here and he got a job with the HRT, you know, Honolulu Rapid Transit. Laying tracks on roads, working for them. And then, he worked for about, I'd say two, three years. After that, he went to shipyard work. He used to handle ammunition in the ammunition dump over at Lualualei. Pearl Harbor, then they moved over to Lualualei area. That's the Nanakuli district. I guess you're familiar with Lualualei?

WN: Right. Lualualei, yeah. So you were twelve years old when you came to Honolulu?

JV: Yeah, about twelve.

WN: What schools did you go to?

JV: Well, in Maui, I stayed in a Catholic school about a year and a half before I leave. Then, over here, I went to Fern School. Then from Fern School, we moved over to School Street and I attended Likelike School. That's where I stayed the most.

WN: Do you remember anything about Kohala?

JV: No. I think I was too small, too young. I don't remember nothing about Kohala except about four years ago--no, five years ago, I went up there. And my brother was staying in Hilo, my older brother, the one that died about two years ago. He took me over to Kohala to see one of my aunties and to see the place where I was born. That's the only time I ever seen Kohala. Yeah, seen the district there.

WN: What were your thoughts? What were your feelings when you went there to see?

JV: Well, I like it because I always feel in my heart that I'm a country boy, you know. I like country. And the open spaces and animals. I like horses, cows. I always did like that. And whenever I go to country, I wish I was living there again. That's the way I feel about it. Because my dad was one of them, too. He used to like animals. When he was in the country, he used to have a couple of horses, cows, goats. And then, at that time it's different from now, in the plantations you have a small area. At that time, you had a big area. You get a home, you get, chee, almost about half acre. You plant all what you want--potatoes, corn, mangoes, papayas. Then you give the neighbors. And the neighbors, they give you something else. You raise pigs, you know. That's the way it's been with my father's life that I know. He kills a pig, he give half away to the neighbors. The neighbors kill cow, they give some to him. You know, two, three pounds each. And then if the neighbor never had enough potatoes to cook for the pig (that) he was raising, my father give him a bag or so. You know, they give each other things. You don't see that anymore nowadays. Yeah.

WN: You talking about in Kohala?

JV: That's in Maui. In Maui, I was a small boy but I remember lot of that. Then from there, we came over here.

WN: What else you remember about Maui?

JV: Well, not too much. Just that, because I go school and come home. You know, we don't roam around here and there. When you come home,

you help your father cut grass for the horses, go with the horses by the cane field, bring grass for them. You go there, you cut--what do you call those potato leaves? You boil 'em, help feed the pigs. Pick up papayas, (and things like that).

WN: Did you help at all in the cane fields with your father?

JV: No, no. Never. Too young. I was too young.

WN: You had a pretty big family, yeah?

JV: Yeah. Big family.

WN: How many kids?

JV: Who? My own or my mother them? My mother?

WN: You know, your brothers and sisters.

JV: Oh, yeah, there were fifteen of us. But now, we only have four sisters alive. No, five sisters and two brothers. The rest are all gone already.

WN: So when you moved from Maui to Honolulu, you were twelve years old, yeah? Do you remember how you felt when you left Maui, you know, country place, and having to move to Honolulu?

JV: Well, at first, I felt kind of homesick and I wish I was out in the country. But naturally, I had to get used to because I had to be with my father and my mother. You know, he sent for us after. . . . He came ahead, see, to get a job. And then, we came after. At that time, you come by boat, you know. So we came, and then we settled over here in Honolulu. And he's been working all the time till his retirement from the shipyard, till he died. He was about close to ninety-five years old when he died.

WN: When you moved to Honolulu from Maui, where was your first house?

JV: Oh, when we came, we went to Middle Street. Middle and Rose Street, down here, the [Fort] Shafter side, you know. And like I said, when we lived there for a while, then they sold the place. We had to move down Ahuula Street. No, I mean Hala Drive, on McInerny Tract. Opposite School Street. That's about three, four blocks from School Street up. Well, then, from there, we went to School Street. And that's when I attended Likelike School.

WN: Was this near Lanakila?

JV: Yeah. Close to Lanakila Park, yeah.

WN: You were telling me last time that you lived in a place called Ahina Camp?

JV: That's the one, yeah. Right there on School Street. You know, (where) they have the housing? They had the mental hospital before. And now there's a housing area there. Well, next is Lanakila Park. But right there on School Street where they have a building there for senior citizens?

WN: Oh, Hawaii State Senior Center?

JV: Yeah. They call 'em "kapuna" [kupuna] or something like that? They have a Hawaiian name, the two buildings. Well, that used to be a housing area, camp, you know. That's the one we used to call Ahina Camp. Because the guy who used to come and collect the rent, his name was Ahina. From the Ahina family. Chinese boy.

WN: Chinese?

JV: Yeah. Well, then, we had to move from there, too, 'cause they tore up the whole place (to) build something else.

WN: And then, so from there, where did you move?

JV: Well, from there, we went, like I told you, down Kalihi (district).

WN: Ahuula?

JV: Ahuula Street for a while. From Ahuula we went down to Democrat and Mokauea Streets. I still was at home, you know, with my parents, but I had left school already and I was doing part-time work here and there.

WN: So, all the houses that you lived in was all rentals?

JV: All rental, yeah. All rental. Then from Democrat Street we came to School Street. School and Kam, you know. And that's where we was renting from Mendonca Estate. Portuguese real estate, them days. I don't know if they have it anymore. Mendonca, he used to own that area, so my father rented. Then from there, he start buying this place out here. Right down here, where I told you.

WN: On Noe Street?

JV: Noe Street. So I used to come, in my spare time when I no work, and help him clean up the area until he build his house. So after he build his house I already could go on my own. So I moved to what you call that? That shopping center down Kalihi?

WN: Oh, Yamane? [Kalihi Shopping Center, owned by the Yamane family.]

JV: Yamane Camp, yeah. That's where.

WN: Oh, you lived over there?

JV: Yeah, Yamane Camp. I already had my wife. I had my wife. [Nineteen] forty-one, we get married. So I moved down that way. And I didn't want to stay in the house. I could have stayed there. The boss said, "You can stay in the house, pay the rent." Because you only pay twenty dollar rent at that time. But I didn't want it. Too big. So I helped my daddy move here and get settled. So he only had my younger brother. Only one in the house. He's married already and he lives down now Halemanu. So then, after that, he got married. He went in the Army, got married. And only my father and my mother was alone by themselves there. Then, I moved here [Kalihi Valley] and I always keep an eye on them, watch them. They always ask me to kinda take care them. Of course, I had lot of sisters and brothers but they kinda far away, and I always stayed nearby.

WN: I noticed that all the places that you lived in were all in Kalihi. How come? Why did you folks . . .

JV: Well, that's the district we came live. And that was about the best place to find homes at the time. We had a chance to move up Kaimuki side, but my father didn't like it. Too far, you know. So then we get the house down there from School Street. Somebody got a house up Palolo, way up the heights, but he didn't like it. And then, the next day, one friend of his came. He said, "Oh, we get a house down there. I talked to the boss already. So if you want, you go see him." Then we moved down there (to) Kalihi. So we always did like this district. Because when I first came, we only lived down Middle Street, McInerny Tract, School Street, and back to Kalihi. So I've been practically all my life between Kalihi Uka and Kalihi Kai. The district of Kalihi.

WN: What was your first job?

JV: Well, my first job, I used to shine shoes, you know, and sell paper. Then I got a job with the Burns. You know, Burns Messenger Service? Then, I quit and I went to work in the shipyard. I worked there about three months. And then, messenger service break up, and they had to sell the property already. Then they start building that Kress Store there.

WN: Downtown?

JV: Yeah, the Downtown one. They took the whole area. So, I don't know where Mr. Burns moved to, but I had left already. Then when I got laid off--I worked about three months--when I got laid off again they had the store open. So my first outside job was as a stock boy in Kress Store. I worked there about three years. Then I went back to the shipyard. They called me and I went back to the shipyard (to) work.

WN: So, that's the same Kress Store that just closed not too long ago?

JV: Yeah. They closed most of them. They sold to somebody else, the

Kress Stores, eh? A few years back, I think.

WN: You said you used to shine shoes, deliver paper, like that. Where did you do that?

JV: Over here, in Kalihi. Kalihi district. In town, from Palama district to Fort Shafter. I was attending school, too, and after school I go shine shoes two, three hours. Sell paper, you know.

WN: Did you have a certain place where you shine shoes all the time?

JV: No, not exactly. I just move here and there. And I had a lot of friends. I used to shine their shoes and they pay me on the weekend. Sometimes I shine 'em three times a week, shine their shoes, and they pay me on a weekend. I used to trust them. They trust me. At that time, you know, you could trust everybody, but not now (laughs).

WN: Anybody not pay you?

JV: No, they always did. Even newspaper. I just deliver to them. You know, at the time, was five cents, and then after that, ten cents. And they pay me on a weekend. They say, "Come Saturday, get your money." I just leave the paper there. Saturday, I get my money right there. And I turn my (money), buy the next papers. That time, that's your own money. You buy the paper, then you sell 'em.

WN: What paper?

JV: Star-Bulletin, yeah. We used to go down there, pick it up, you know. Now, it's different. They get delivery boys. At that time, maybe I buy twenty, thirty papers. Well, we get 'em for about half of the price. Then we make the whole ten cents. In other words, we make a nickel for each paper. If you pay five cents. I forget what we used to pay in the start, but then we pay five cents. The paper ten cents. And we used to make a few dollars here and there. Oh, them were the days.

WN: So you had a paper route? You went house to house?

JV: Yeah. At first, because you don't know many people, then after that, you get to know them and they say, "If you like, you bring me the paper every day, then I pay you Saturday. You come get your money Saturday afternoon." So Saturday afternoon, I delivered the Saturday afternoon paper, they used to pay me for the rest of the week.

WN: Shine shoes was how much, one shine?

JV: Oh, ten cents at that time. But some guys, they give you a quarter. Some guys, they give fifteen cents, you know, when I shine their shoes. As long as they like it, eh? I never did get pay one time ten cents only for a shoe shine. They always give me fifteen. At that time, fifteen cents meant a lot, you know. Even when they give

you a quarter. Boy, you see a quarter in your hand, oh boy, that's a lot of money.

(Laughter)

JV: That's right, you know. Especially when you a kid, you know. Yeah, but it was good fun. I don't mind going back to those days again.
(Laughs)

WN: About mainly where did you hang around to shine shoes?

JV: Mostly in Kalihi district.

WN: On King Street?

JV: Yeah, King Street. And then, when I used to live down Middle Street, I used to go inside Shafter. So my dad had one Filipino friend. He was in the Army there. He baptized one of my brothers. He was a compadre, godfather, to one. So he tell me, "Well, you come over my barracks." He tell me the name of the barracks. I used to go there and I used to shine shoes for about, sometime, eight, ten guys. And then I collect during the weekend. I used to make more money in there than. . . . I used to just go in there. At that time, you know.

WN: Because military, everybody wears shoes, eh?

JV: Yeah. You know, them big boots, you shine. Big boots, you shine, quarter. And this kind [regular] shoe, ten cents. (Laughs)

WN: What did you do with the money?

JV: Bring 'em home, give my mother. Because we had to help a bit on the house (with) only my dad. And that time, it wasn't too much, eh? Only you pay cheap rent, yeah? And then you pay your water, light, and so on. So I used to give my mother all the money. And then, sometimes, I remember this very well. When I needed a pair of shoes, I go see my mother. And she not only give me for the pair of shoes, she give me for a pair of shoes, pair of pants, shirt. And I said, "But Ma, I only want a pair of shoes."

She said, "Well, I save enough of your money. So you need a pair of pants, and you need a good shirt, so go buy 'em." And I go and I buy. 'Cause she used to say. And then, she used to buy the vegetables for the week. It was not like in the country here. At that time, she buy the vegetables, meat for the week, out of the money I bring. I figure I was helping my dad some way.

WN: Did your other brothers shine shoes, too?

JV: Well, they were younger. And my older brother, well, he had a handicapped arm. He didn't work for quite a while, and he was in

the hospital. And there was a bill that my father had to pay and all that. So I was the only one that go around and try get something and bring a few dollars home to help out. And then, my older brother was married already. He stayed back in Maui, see? Then my sisters, they didn't work. They stayed home, you know, girls, until they finally got married.

WN: Some of the money that you made shining shoes, were you allowed to keep or did you keep it . . .

JV: Oh, no, if I wanted, yeah. If I wanted, but I figure, I used to take a dime or twenty-five cents and then I used to spend 'em (at times). All week, I no spend 'em. Because you know, I never had habits of--never took up smoking. I didn't care for smoke. Show, once in a while. Maybe once a week, I take in a show. At that time, we used to pay ten cents.

WN: Where? Where was the show?

JV: Down at Palama Theater. The old Palama Theater. Not the one, the building there. Was another old shack, open air. Some, halfway open. And then, the Palama Theater, the old one on King Street. King and Dillingham, you know that corner there? I used to go there. Yeah.

WN: Where was that open-air one?

JV: Down here, where the Palama Theater is now, along King Street. King and Pua Lane. The building is there. I think it's run by Filipinos. They use 'em for something. 'Cause they closed that theater. It used to be partly open, you know. Open air, you know. And then, the old Palama Theater was a building by itself, all enclosed.

WN: Didn't have other theaters in Kalihi?

JV: They had the Kalihi Theater. The one here. The building is still there. It's run by the Salvation Army. They have old clothes there, they sell. Thrift shop, you know. The building is still there. So, well, when I was married and lived down there, then I attended quite a few shows there. Movies. But I never was crazy for movies, either. I don't know, I used to like watch my baseball, football, boxing, wrestling. And after I got married way back, I just. . . . Then I didn't bother much about it.

WN: Where did you used to watch boxing and wrestling?

JV: Well, them days, shee so far ago, we had one Houston Arena right here by the Kapalāma Canal. They build one there. And we used to go see these local boys. You know, Frankie Fernandez, them days, guys that I knew boxed there. Then the stadium. You know, the Honolulu Stadium? The old stadium? That's where.

WN: This Houston Arena, about how many people did that hold?

JV: Oh, I think, they made it for about a thousand seats, thousand people. But them days, at the most, you lucky if you get 600 people go watch. At that time, they used to have the Filipinos from the Mainland. Nationalista and several other names that I forget. You know, they used to come down here, fight with the local boys. They used to get good matches there.

WN: Houston Arena, was that open air?

JV: It was . . .

WN: Had a roof or . . .

JV: Yeah, but had a high fence right around, you know. Had a partly roof, where you sit. But in the center, open, like the stadium, too. In other words, look more like an old stockade, you know. (Chuckles) Yeah, right across the Kapalama Canal. You know, as you go down King Street? On the other side. Kokea Street. That's where.

WN: Somebody told me had the cane fields near there, too.

JV: Oh, yeah, that. . . . When we lived over at Ahuula Street, they still had that Kalakaua. You know Kalakaua School? That whole area was cane in there.

WN: This was before the war, yeah?

JV: Yeah. Way before the war, yeah. When we first went down into Kalihi, they . . .

WN: Nineteen twenties?

JV: Yeah. Then they build the school, Kalakaua School. That was something like an experiment station, like the one they have in Makiki. They still had a cane there when we lived in Kalihi. Then they did away with it, and they start building the school, Kalakaua School.

WN: When you were young and when you moved to Kalihi, besides movies, what did you do to have a good time as a kid?

JV: Well, to tell you the truth, I may sound old-fashioned, but I never cared for too much good time. I always had a hobby, woodwork and helping others. Ever since I was a child, I always help my neighbors. People ask me to help 'em make a chicken coop or something like that, I always was there and helping them. Because I always did like my woodwork. I always was interested. And I never out too much for good fun. Even dancing. I didn't go to a dance until I was about twenty-two years old. They used to have house dances, you

know, people. You go to their house, they used to dance on Sunday afternoon, and music. Good fun. I used to go once in a while, but never cared much for it. But I never was the kind of guy that liked too much, you know. They say, "Oh, we go down yonder by that park. We going to have good fun," and this and that. I say no. I always had something else to do. At home, if I'm not at home helping my dad do something, or my neighbors--like when I was in School Street, oh, lot of guys come and see me. Make 'em this, make. . . . I used to make little benches for them. You know, in the old days, something like that, you know. That's one of the things I make here for my wife [JV points to a wooden stool]. (Chuckles)

WN: How did you learn woodworking?

JV: I learned on my own. And then, when I went to school at (Likelike) on Friday, we used to have that woodworking. I still have my little coping saw from them days. You know, the coping saw? Yeah. And then, I took this Chappelle correspondence, you know, used to send me books. I get couple of books here, yet. For about six months, how to cut different joints and stuff like that. Then when I went in the shipyard, well, I got in the woodworking trade, I learned quite a bit. That did help me a lot. And was easy to start, because already on the outside on my own, I started to do cutting and woodwork, things like that.

WN: Did you sell any of your things?

JV: No, no. Outside of the church, you see something like that little stand there? Two, three times, when they had some bazaar make money for the church, I make couple of them and give 'em to the church. Donate 'em for they sell it. The church here when I moved up the [Kalihi] Valley.

WN: What grade in school did you go up to?

JV: Fifth grade.

WN: How come you stopped at fifth grade?

JV: Well, I wanted to help my father more. I felt that he needed and went and try get myself a job. But I never gave it up. I keep taking something, so I could, in other words, learn a little more. Because I was interested in doing something, not be a laborer all my life. So, when I went in the shipyard, the first three years I went as a laborer. But then I say, "Well, I'm not going to be a laborer here all my life. I'm going to try get something better." Which I did.

WN: You started in the shipyard in 1933, yeah?

JV: Yeah.

WN: So, you were about twenty-one years old?

JV: Then I went out after eleven months. But before that, I went for those three months, you know. It was temporary. Then I went eleven months. Then after eleven months, I went out, lack of funds. And then, about three months later, they asked me if I wanted a job for about six weeks. So, I said, "Well, I'm doing nothing." I happen to be without a job then. Well, I figure, I might as well go out there for work six weeks. At least, that's something. Well, it's just one of those things. They kept me right through till I retired. But then I worked my way up.

WN: So, you got to use your woodworking skills over in Pearl Harbor?

JV: Yeah.

WN: Doing what?

JV: Then I learned a lot more. Well, we build forms in the drydock. We repair their officer's quarters. Before I get to be a boat builder, I went as a joiner. A joiner is a carpenter. You know, same like a carpenter. I put there about two years in Shop 07. Then I went back to Shop 72, and I became a boat builder. See? And we build boats. During the war, we build several boats. Fifty-footers, forty-footers.

WN: These are wooden boats?

JV: Yeah. We built lifeboats, twenty-six-footers, and so on down the line. And then, sometimes, we go out of the shop and work on tugboats. You know, those tugboats? Repair, planking and caulk the seam. That's all in the same line of wood boat building.

WN: What was your starting pay at the shipyard?

JV: My starting pay was, I think, thirty-something cents an hour. And then we get forty-five cents an hour. Then I made a helper. Made a rate in helper (as) a woodworker. It was paying about sixty cents an hour, something like that. Then, when I made my first step as a mechanic, we was only getting a dollar and a half an hour. And then, you get your second step till you first class. First class was about \$3.60 an hour, them days. When I left there, was getting \$12.60 an hour. Just like GS-11, you know.

WN: You left in '67, yeah?

JV: Mm hmm [yes].

WN: On the day that Pearl Harbor was bombed, were you working?

JV: Yes. Well, you see, I used to live down in Kalihi by the jailhouse on that Hart Street? Hart and Mokauea? And that Sunday, we were

supposed to work overtime, you know. But then, some of the guys, the leadingman said, "Well, I get enough guys. Those who want to stay home, well, it's okay. I picked so many already. But you could come, you could come."

But I said, "Ah, that's okay. I'll stay home." Because we used to work at that time, Saturdays, Sundays, seven days a week, you know. And over there kind of busy. So, when they had the call, right off the bat, I got up and they had the attack. You could see the planes. The first attack. Good thing my wife had the radio on early. So they said they wanted all the shipyard workers to go in. It only take me about ten minutes. I got on my car. I had old Chevy car. Ten minutes from there, I got in the yard and then go to the shop. And then we start making plugs and all that to plug lot of holes from the drydock and all because it start spouting (water).

And after that, for about one hour after we made so many of 'em, the Marines come and pick us up. We went and help them (chuckles) load ammunition. That time, I laugh, because they didn't tell us what we was handling. Then one guy came and I don't know, he was a redhead guy. I never pay much attention. And he said, "Did you men tell these (men what they were handling?)" Because the way we was handling the things, you know, he said, "Loading ammunition, that to be careful?" Oh, yeah, they forgot. And they start telling us. That's when we was cautious, you know, whatever we handle. I don't know where they (were) hauling 'em. I don't know where to. And then you could feel 'em shooting and paah!---blasting. When we was in the shop, oh, one big shrapnel made a big hole, about three feet hole, right through the roof. But none of us got hurt. And you know, that's funny, the way I felt that day, just like you wasn't in no danger at all. Just like you (was) glad to go there 'cause they call you to go and help. But we didn't know. And not until five o'clock in the afternoon, then we all caught on what it was all about. And then we was afraid.

(Laughter)

JV: Then it was kinda scared, you know. Yeah!

WN: You mean, you thought it was an exercise?

JV: Yeah, yeah. And we stayed 'cause Drydock 1, you know, when they blast that destroyer and a couple other boats, they all crumbled up in the drydock. We went down there to take all these wood pieces that we had to make and pass 'em to the shipwrights. 'Cause the shipwrights, they are the ones that work in the drydock.

WN: The shipwrights?

JV: Yeah, shipwright. Shipwright is a different trade from a joiner and a boat builder. But that's all woodwork. But you see, they handle heavy equipment, heavy wood, because that's the ones that lay those

blocks. You know, the ships when they come in the drydocks, so the ship sets on 'em? That's why they call 'em shipwrights. Yeah. That's the different name they have. So, once in a while when we (are) slack in the boat shop, we go with the shipwrights and work so they don't send us home. We don't have to take leave, eh? Save our leaves. Sometimes, two, three weeks, we work with shipwrights. Good all around, you know. You learn different ways. How to lay blocks for submarine. They bring 'em in so they set right there. Like a keel, you know, you lay your boat come right in there. Whatever type of ship, battle wagons and all, they come in the drydock. So we used to go and help put all them blocks. But they have a layout, you know, how to do it. And then when the boat comes in the drydock, you have your stern, you got to watch and then keep it right there. As you go that way, you have to be pulling your ropes to get 'em in the center and keep the bow right there so when she comes down, straight, then she sets on the block. Otherwise, could tip, eh? As the water come down, she comes down. I mean, as the water comes out of the drydock, they pumping 'em out, the boat-- whatever, boat or submarine, comes down, down, until she sets on the blocks. Yeah, very interesting.

WN: Do they still do that kind today?

JV: Oh, yeah, they still do. Yeah. Any ship that go in the drydock. They have shipwrights, and joiners, boat builders. Yeah, and then after that, gee, we was, oh boy. Then we came home about one o'clock.

WN: One a.m.?

JV: One a.m., they told us we can come home from the shipyard. So then when I got home, I was living down Hart Street, see. Somebody was saying about a bombing right here. You know that lady you talked about last . . .

WN: Oh, Mrs. [Gussie] Ornellas [another interviewee]?

JV: Ornellas? That had a big hole [in her house], you know. Couple of her kids got killed. My father and mother was here already living by that side.

WN: Noe Street, yeah.

JV: Chee, I thought about them. I got home, and I got on my car about 2:30 in the morning, I came. But they were okay. I stayed about fifteen minutes, then went back home because the next day, seven o'clock, I had to be back in the shipyard.

WN: So when you said you found out at five o'clock what really was happening, how did you find out?

JV: Well, we knew what was going on, but, you know, it didn't occur to us. We could see the blasting, the fire, all those. The ships--

the Oglala tip over, you know, on the 1010 Dock, they call it. And then the Arizona. And you could see all, the fire all over. And then, Hickam Field, 'cause we (were) right there. And then, we went to haul the ammunition. Well, it's right on the boundary line, the fence of Hickam Field, and you see all the fire all around. See fire all around and then you could hear. They still were shooting, eh? And then, just like, well, your mind on what you doing. Then, after that, well, what! (Chuckles) Everybody. Not only me. A lot of guys. Say, oh, now we scared. "What if we got killed or something?"

They say, "Well, that's one of the chances you take."

Yeah, I get all that papers from the time I was there from the commanding officer. The shipyard tell, you know. Citation. I got 'em all, keep. That's something, too.

WN: And then, the next day, did you have to go back to work?

JV: Yeah. Next day, go back work and do our routine, you know. Clean up a lot of things around the shop. Lot of shrubs and all that. Kinda busy for the next three, four days. Then we get on our own work. Then, during the war, after that, we repair a lot of them ships. Like, I don't know if you remember when they had that Tarawa (raid)? Lot of guys got killed in there, lot of Americans. And all those . . .

WN: Oh, Tarawa?

JV: Yeah, Tarawa. I guess you read in the paper about that. Well, all those landing crafts, you know, they used to bring 'em to the shipyard (to be repaired). Ten, fifteen of 'em. Sometimes we used to work twenty-four hours right through. Get 'em ready and send 'em back. That's all the landing craft, you know. LCVPs, LCMs. That's the one you go right up to the sand. Then they open the front, you know. There were lot of damage, you know.

WN: So, what, your workload picked up after the war started?

JV: Well, it was before. Even before that, we was kinda busy. Well, there were times when we stayed three days out in the shipyard. On the top deck, we put mattress, we sleep there maybe three, four hours and get on the job the next morning. Sometimes I (didn't) come home three, four days. No sense coming home and going right back--come home for one hour, two hours, and go back. So, we used to stay down there. Lot of the boys in the shop. And when they need 'em they just call 'em in. "We get something coming. We got to do this, we got to do that."

WN: Lot of the guys that worked with you, did they live Kalihi, too?

JV: Yeah, about four, five boys that I knew. Damon Tract. You know Damon Tract when they had the Damon Tract? I knew the Akiu brothers.

They were two brothers that work in my shop. They used to live there. And Cravalho, young boy--Cravalho by Kalihi. And Hawaiian boy, by his name was Akana. About three, four boys. The rest come from Kaimuki, Palama, and different districts.

WN: And at that time, you were living Hart Street, yeah?

JV: Yeah, Hart and Mokauea.

WN: Was that your last residence before you bought this land up here in the valley?

JV: Well, like I think I told you, when I was there, I bought down here on Perry Street. But then, like I say, I found the place little too small--fifty by sixty or sixty-five. So, I sold it. Then I bought this one here.

WN: This is in 1946?

JV: Yeah.

WN: How much did you buy this place for?

JV: I paid \$1800 for the lot at that time. Then I start building my own house. It took me about one year to build 'cause we used to work in the shipyard and you have to be there most of the time. Once in a while, you get a day off and come here and work. Day in, (chuckles) day out, lot of work. Never rested.

WN: Going back little bit, you know when you were young and everything, were there other Puerto Rican families that got together to have parties or anything like that?

JV: Oh, yeah. In their homes, yeah. Their homes. And sometimes they get a hall, you know, and they make a party. They invite the other Puerto Rican families. Not only Puerto Rican families. Outsiders, too. They used to come in. That's why, it's good to see that people start getting together. I used to go to the dances, two, three Japanese boys dancing. They dance Puerto Rican step. Chinese, Hawaiians, Portuguese. Even down here, [Joe] Ayala, when we go now and then, which I don't hardly go at all, but when I used to go more before, a little more, all kind of people, they get together. That's our civic association, Puerto Rican association, we have there.

WN: Puerto Rican step, what you mean? What is that?

JV: Oh, that's, you see, the one-two, one-two.

WN: Is that kachi-kachi?

JV: Yeah, that's what they call kachi-kachi. That's what they refer to

dance. Some people get the wrong impression when they say kachi-kachi. 'Cause they figure that's fight or they going use a knife. There's no such thing as that. That's what lot of guys ask me, but I tell 'em. I know what it's all about. Kachi-kachi means a good time dancing. That's what they refer to. But some people they get their wrong idea.

WN: Does it mean a certain kind of step or certain kind of dance?

JV: No, no. Any step that you dance. It's just a good fun, good time. So, they refer kachi-kachi as the dance, you know. Have a nice time dancing.

WN: Is kachi-kachi just Puerto Rican? Or is that Spanish?

JV: No, that's Spanish, Mexican, and Puerto Rican. Latin, you know. A Latin word. Means good time, good fun. Like you see the Hawaiians say "aloha." Aloha greeting and aloha good-bye. See, that's a welcome. That's what it does. Same thing like the kachi-kachi word. (It is also a Japanese word.) [Commonly used by plantation workers to describe cutting sugar cane.]

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: So Ayala's place, was that like where everybody gathered or met?

JV: Yeah, mm hmm. That's a dance hall there. And upstairs is Ayala's Friendly Tavern, the bar. Well, you get 'em [tape recorder] on?

WN: Yeah, it's on.

JV: You can turn 'em off, then I can explain to you something.

WN: Oh, why? Is it . . .

JV: Then you can turn 'em on. Because if you like to know about Ayala's place and, more or less, how they started and all, eh?

WN: Oh, you don't want to . . .

JV: No, you can have it there, but I mean, if you want me to tell you.

WN: Sure, sure. Yeah.

JV: Well, like Ayala, you see, we get together a group, and we build the association, the Puerto Rican association [United Puerto Rican Association of Hawaii]. It's a benefit association. They give a death benefit. They give so much, you pay so much. So we bought

the land there.

WN: When was this?

JV: Oh, in the '40s, I think, or something like that. Forties or. . . . In the '40s sometime, anyway. So we bought the land and we work on the land. Then we started our own building there. Started make the foundation, the old-timers. 'Cause in our people, we have lot of guys like Mr. Montiho, he's already gone. He's a mason. Carpenters, we got welders, pipe fitters, which is plumbers, painters. Then we started, see? But then, well, kinda run out of money when start the foundation, eh? Then we went around and try sell bricks, you know. Like some people do at the quarter, some people buy ten dollars' worth, so on down the line. Then, well, the officers figure it wasn't enough. So they went ahead and asked the old-timers if they want to make a loan. One hundred, two hundred, three hundred up to whatever they want. And soon as they get started, they start paying the ones who need it first, which that's how they did. They paid all back. So then we got a Filipino contractor to carry on with the building.

Anyway, prior to that, I worked quite a bit on the building, but then it just happened that I had to go overseas when I was working there and I went overseas. So then, when I was overseas, they hired this contractor and they put up the building almost 80 percent. Then he ran out of money, he had hard luck, and I don't know. So then we had to carry on with the rest and finish the building with whatever money come in, loans and all. Some guys make pledge, you know. Two, three hundred dollars, ten dollars a month, and so on down the line until we get the building up. Then we start dancing. Giving dances, benefit dance and all, just to keep the funds going. 'Cause at that time, if someone in the family die, they only used to get about \$300 help until today they get \$1400, and \$1600, and (\$2400). And \$1600 and (\$800). Because we get two types of membership. They get a dual membership. There were two associations when they merged. Like I belong to the two of 'em, so I pay \$7.50 a month (dues).

WN: What's the name of the two?

JV: Well, it's the. . . . Before it was the civic. When they were two separate association, they had the civic association and the independent association. So when they finally merged, that's about eight, nine, ten years ago. Then they call 'em the Puerto Ricans. . . .

WN: Oh, the United Puerto Rican . . .

JV: United Puerto Rican Association, that's right. The hall, they call 'em a social hall, you know. Then they merged, see. After they merged, well, they carried (on). Then the ones who was in one association, they had ninety days from the merger to get in the two

if they wanted, if they could afford the \$7.50. Because at that time, one member pay \$5.00, the other one pay \$7.50. So the one who pay \$7.50 gets--in case something happens to me, my wife get (\$2400) for burial funds. So, if something happen to her, I get \$1400 for her, \$1400. And then the other one is \$800 and (\$1600), the ones who pay the \$5.00. So, that's the way we are today. And they going good. That's where we get the good time. We get together. Then sometimes, if you want to have a party, you rent the hall, you invite your friends, and (so on). But like in the old days, well, the house, dance. You know, you go to the houses. Different individuals. Every month, (or) twice a month. One, maybe one time your house, we have dancing. The next time, the other guy. 'Cause they had lot of Puerto Ricans here, but they were scattered all over the place, eh?

WN: So, Ayala's Tavern was built by the association?

JV: By the association.

WN: And what was Ayala? I mean, you know . . .

JV: Well, Ayala had a tavern down in Kakaako. He's a member of the association, Puerto Rican. And then, we had the upstairs, and then he wanted to rent 'em for bar, you know. So then he got a permit. So as long as he can get the bar there, which he has for many years. He's renting from the association.

WN: Oh, he's renting from the association?

JV: Mm hmm [yes].

WN: Oh, he doesn't own the building?

JV: No, he don't own. That whole building, the whole area, belongs to the Puerto Rican Association. Yeah, the property (and building).

WN: So before the '40s when the Ayala's was built, you folks went to everybody's houses for parties?

JV: Yeah, way back in the old days. Not unless somebody rent a hall. You know, you make a birthday party, a wedding, or a baby baptism. They celebrate. They rent hall, so they send us an invitation. Tell us the location of the hall, and we go there. But in the old days, most in people's houses, you know.

WN: How many people would go to these parties?

JV: Oh, sometimes, you go to a house you get about 150 people. Standing room only. They have to stand outside and come inside dance. They get together that way.

WN: And was mostly Puerto Rican people?

JV: Puerto Rican, but we have other guys mix with us. They come. Always did. Always, you know. You know, one Japanese guy, maybe one Chinese, one Hawaiian. And these come and join us, and have a good time. Dance with us. That's the way it was.

WN: Who supplied the music?

JV: Oh, they had groups, you know. Bunch of boys, about five of them. Some had four, some of them six. They call each other different names and their group. Then you hire them. That time, they come over. Maybe for about twenty-five dollars, they play about six, seven hours. You dance to their music. Like they do now. They get several Puerto Rican orchestras, you know. They go play at Ayala. The club hire them.

WN: So they still have dances over there?

JV: Yeah, they do. They do. The association have maybe about three dances a year for benefit, scholarship. We have a scholarship. We have a building fund, separate fund. And entertainment fund. So that money, they split the difference into these funds, you know. That's why, for the past ten years, we've been giving scholarship to members' children--children or grandchildren--from the members that want to go to (college). Every year we have that.

WN: The people who are members of the association, are they mostly from Oahu or Kalihi, or they from all over?

JV: No, we have even Mainland. We have 'em all around. Maui, Big Island, Kauai. And we have in the Mainland. Like I get two children, they are members. They went to the Mainland. They receive their newsletter there. And then, while I was there, several trips I made. At that time, I was membership committee, the one screen the members, and then approve their application, and interview them, and tell 'em what's what, what to expect until they get their by-law book. Most of their question they want is about paying their dues and how much they going to receive, the most important ones. And then, later on, they have their books. And then, I bring the application down here and I sign it. And by proxy, they could become members. We have in the Mainland, several places in the Mainland, few members. And then, some of them move from here. They living up there and their children became members. So in the Mainland. But mostly local, yeah. Waipahu, Aiea, Pearl City, and Ewa Mill. We have some from Kahuku. Well, they can't come over for meeting, but they get in touch with us. We have a newsletter that every month we send them. Let them know the in and out, the progress of the association and so on.

WN: How did you folks acquire the land?

JV: Chee, that land, Mr. Montiho, that's the guy that acquired the land with a Mr. Belen. But I don't know who they acquired the land from.

And then, we had the land there standing for quite a while. And we figure, at that time, kinda hard to get some guy to build and all, so we decided to start digging the foundation and we got the plans for the building, got the permit. And then, we started working on the foundation.

WN: How many people does that thing hold? The hall hold?

JV: Well, to tell you the true fact, actually, it's about 250 people in the hall to 300. But then when we get a luau, sometimes we put a luau or some special occasion for benefit if we don't put a dance. Then outside, on the back, big area, put a tent. That's about 150 people can be outside there sitting down. The rest in the hall. But actually, when dancing, about 250 people fill the place up. It's not very, very big.

WN: So the association does own the land?

JV: The association.

WN: Any particular reason why it was in Kalihi?

JV: Well, at that time, they looked for land down Kalihi side, and that's the first piece of land available at that time. Mr. Montiho was the one looking. He was the president at that time. The membership gave him okay to go ahead and look for a piece of land. And they wanted on this side. We had a chance of buying up Kaimuki, but the people down here, majority, down here, they don't want. Too far. So I don't know how they acquired the land. And then we went down there and start working on the land. Lot of shrub, clean up the area there, and worked on it until we put up the building. It wasn't easy, but we got it built.

WN: So when you moved up here [JV's present residence] in 1946 you acquired the land and everything to move here. And then, all that time before, you were renting and moving back and forth all over the place. How did you feel when you finally were able to buy land and build up . . .

JV: Well, I always wanted to buy a piece of land and own my land. You know, build my own place. Well, to tell you the truth, it was just one of those hard lucks. I rented three places outside of Yamane, but the place was a little too congested there. I moved down Kalihi with my brother on Kalani Street. So then, my brother was alone, so he said, "You can stay here with me if you don't like that place there." I had my first child, my little girl. Then I moved with my brother. And then he moved out, because he was single. He say, "But you stay in the house." They sold the place. I had to get out. I went (to) Republican Street, like I told you. I stayed there about two years, they sold that place. I was evicted. Then, three different times. We even, one time, had to go to court and all that. But then they told the guy, "You guys give these people

chance. They paying the rent. As long as they paying the rent."

"Oh, I want to tear a certain time."

So the judge told him, "Oh, no, I'm sorry. You can't."

And then, one mistake the guy made. Because one of the houses, he said, wasn't fit to live in. And he was moving two of his houses down Waimalu to put 'em up for somebody else rent 'em. So the judge tell him, "How come you just told me you going move two of those houses to Waimalu, and you tell these people the homes are not fit to live in?" The homes out there, at first (needed fixing). I used to repair my own, and I don't charge 'em. They never deduct. I just fix the place up. And then I told, "Your honor, you go to my house. You see. You can tell me if you look at my place (if) it's not worth living."

So, the guy say, "Well, sorry. You got to give these people another thirty days. So another thirty days." So (chuckles) another thirty days for about sixty days. And then, I figure, I'm going to build. Then my dad, you know, his house, he went to Maui. He bought in Makawao. He wanted to go up there close to my oldest brother. He bought a piece of land up there with a house (at) Makawao. And then, he told me to move in his house. So I moved there for a while and I start building here. When I bought the land, I start building. And then, chee, I figure, you got to go Maui all the time, go see my father, if he get some trouble. And they kinda old, so I tell them, "Daddy, you should come back to your house." Because up there, he had no family, just friends, people that he knew. "And that's no good for the two of you. You guys are getting old. It's best that you come home." So I only had this house, chee about 90 percent finished and I move in. And then I start finishing the rest and I made my father and my mother come back home. And then, they came home to live there. Took me quite a long time to build, about one year, 'cause besides being busy in the shipyard and all that, you know.

WN: About that time, what was this area like?

JV: Well, to tell you the truth, this street here, they only had one, two, about four, five houses. And this one, not the one below. Well, the roads, they pave 'em little bit but they kinda rough up to here. But we had no road here. We built our own, like I told you the last time. We had to build our own. We was the second one that put up this road to go up to the last house. And then, Noe Street was next, and then Pahulu Street. And then, one down below, by Murphy Street, I think. Everybody dig up so much (to) get a contractor. And there was nothing but empty lots. Lot of empty lots. Nothing but guava and that California grass--cow grass, you know. Just like this lot here. Nothing but guava trees. I had to come yank them out, clear the land. And then, California grass. And then I started building. Make my foundation. Little by little,

you know.

WN: You told me had some cattle up here, too?

JV: Yeah. They had a guy, Portuguese guy. And the Puerto Rican guy, he had about two, three (cows). He let 'em run around. And that time, they let 'em loose. When people were coming in, they complain. So he had to get rid of his (cow). He didn't have too much. He had about a dozen or so at that time. And then, they used to come around. When you start building trestles, when they come around--the cows, you know, running loose--they knock 'em down for you. The next day, you got to come and stand 'em all up (again). And then, lot of hoof (prints) you know. Water, that's bad, you know, where your cattle is, horses. The water stays (in the prints), won't go. Place all around the edge of the house there, lot of mud. So lot of people wen complain. Then, he got rid of his cattle.

WN: What nationalities lived up here?

JV: Well, at that time, up here, we had Portuguese. Mostly Portuguese. Then after that, the Hawaiians start coming in. Up here, now, (we) get Japanese, Chinese, (up) Kamaikai Tract.

WN: Oh, that new subdivision?

JV: The new tract, yeah. Then from this next street over, my brother's house, three houses up there. From there on, was all empty. Now, I don't think you find an empty lot. Maybe just about half a mile up, you find one or two empty lots way up close to the end. But the rest all built.

WN: So, who lives in your father's house now?

JV: Well, that house, it's been sold. You see, my sister, the one in Long Beach, took care him. He told (her) to take over the (place). You know, he left them the house to take over. And anything that he owed or something, she took care everything. The rest, she gave the sisters and brothers a few dollars from the money that she had. 'Cause she took care him so she got the rights to own the place. 'Cause after my mother died, I think about five years later, six years later, he died. So my sister took him to the Mainland, he stayed there two, three years, then he come back. Went back again. Then he come back. When (he was at home) , well, my wife and I used to take care him. Go there, and clean, and do some cooking for him because he was getting already (sick). The eyes bad. But he was strong all the way up till he died. Walking straight. Upright, you know.

WN: He was in his nineties, yeah?

JV: Close to ninety-five when he died, I (believe).

WN: How was his English?

JV: Well, not so good. Not so good. Of course, when they came here, they worked. They never went to school. But he learned little bit here and there, too. Everywhere he went, he managed on his own. Outside, like when he adopted one of my nieces, well that's different. I went with him, go check with the lawyer and go all through the process of adoption papers. Take my mother and him. They adopted one child from my sister. She's married already. And then they was alone by themselves there. But anything that get to do with the office or something, I go with him. I take him, or my sister, the one up there, take 'em. 'Cause he understood a lot, but as far as writing and signing things. . . . So we explain to him before he signs anything.

WN: So, most of your life was spent in Kalihi, yeah? Kalihi Kai, Kalihi Valley. As you look back at your life, what you did and everything, would you have done anything different?

JV: No. I get no complaint. I like it and wish I was back in the same old days. 'Cause when we came, that's Shafter side anyway, Middle Street. School and Middle, you know, the Patch Gate through Shafter? Right there, we used to live (nearby). Then from there, we came this side, School Street. And School Street (near) Kapalama, you know, between Kalihi. I never live up town way, no nothing, just this district here.

WN: What are your feelings about Kalihi?

JV: Well, I feel good about Kalihi. Not only Kalihi the place, the people. The people that I know, the people that I get along with, and no complaint, you know. Nice people. No matter who they are. Black or White, I get along with anybody. Just like I say, I live the way that, I like to live and let live. And when I can do something for my neighbor and he calls on me, I try to do what I can 'cause all my life I been that way. In other words, I been told by many people, "Shee, you always doing something for others. Anybody do anything for you?"

I say, "Oh, yes, they do. They do." When the time come, they offer me. They do. 'Cause it's true, you know. But you know how it is. We have a phrase that we say, I believe, in the old days. I'm going to say it to you now. I'm the kinda guy, that if you come to my house now and you ask me a cracker--I know, you (are) hungry, you ask me a cracker--I give you a cracker. But I don't expect a barrel full the next day from you. You know what that mean? You know the definition of that? Well, that's the way I feel. That's the way I been all my life. 'Cause some people, they do you a favor, but they do that favor wishing that you do a double favor to them the next day, which is not right. And I don't live that way. 'Cause before I do anybody anything, I look up there, and I ask the guy permission to help me. And there isn't one time that I told anybody

I'd be there next week certain day at your place--I might be there ten minutes late or fifteen minutes early, but I'm there. And if I can't, I do my darndest to get him on the phone if something happen before then and let him know why I can't be there. But I never did just let it go and forget about it. 'Cause I don't know. That's the way my folks brought me up, taught me. Not only me, my sisters and my brothers. And that's the way my daddy was, always. He always felt that way. That's why, when I used to go around, and "Hey, who's your father?" You know, people who don't know me at get-together.

"Oh, my father is Antonio Vegas."

"Oh, Antonio Vegas? That's a great man. That's a good friend of mine. I like him very much. You have a nice, nice father." I always heard that. Makes me proud of my father. See? 'Cause places they don't know. They don't know me, who I am. And when they ask me, I tell them. But they know my father. They remember. See? So, that's, I guess, people, when they live in this world, feeling that way, I think, they (are) on the right track. Regardless who we are. Can be Hawaiian, Portuguese, Black, White, doesn't matter. We're all God's children. And that's the way we should feel with each other here while we (are) here. Because we (are) only here on borrowed time. We not going be here for all our life. Because no matter how much money you get in this world, they not going to keep you here, too. You going to go. So, that's why I say, when you have that in your mind and you have God on your side and you ask him, you have everything in the world. That's all you need. But outside of that, for our support and all, we got to work, you know, like anybody else, and earn our living. That's why, sometimes I read, I see the news, I get really upset.

WN: See the what?

JV: News. On TV, you know. What going on. Like last night, that case over at the . . . Barroom [rape] case and all. I can't stomach that. It makes me real sick how people can be that way. But that's the way it is.

WN: You have a really good philosophy, I think.

JV: Yeah, that's been my philosophy of my life. That's the way I am. Even over here, when I first move here. The guy next door, he tell, "Gee, Vegas, you building your house, you let your job go, and you up there helping that guy?"

I say, "Well, maybe someday, he help me." And I'm not in a rush. I'm not going to kill myself. I'm going to take my time. Put this house up. Put the foundation, put the plate, little by little. And then, my two kids, you know, they small, they come help me. Hold one piece of board and all. Nobody helped me. Nobody. Just myself. Even the Jensen kids when they was here [i.e., JV's former neighbors].

One day I attended his show, down at the [Hilton Hawaiian Village] Dome. The Jensen, you know, entertainer?

WN: Oh, Dick Jensen? Yeah.

JV: He comes up to me and tell his friend, "Oh, everytime I see Mr. Vegas, I remember (chuckles) he used to scold us." You know, that time, I kid 'em. "But you know, I seen this man building his house by himself and I say, 'I wonder how he do it,' because (chuckles) he's not a big guy." You know, not this big guy, he tell me. "Small guy, you'd be surprised the way the guy (works)." Because they were here when I was building this house.

WN: Right next door?

JV: Yeah, yeah. I watch them all grow up there. And the Johnson across here. And the Chang up here, boy and a girl, they had. Yeah. And that's about all the houses. And then, one here, two up there. At that time, lot of room up here. Now it's getting little packed, yeah? But lot of people been moving out, you know. Before, majority up here Portuguese. Now they have Samoans, Filipinos, Hawaiians, Chinese, Japanese, (and so on).

WN: What do you think of the changes that have taken place in Kalihi over the years?

JV: Well, I tell you the true fact, the changes, it's good. But the improvements, that's the ones that are very bad. You know, improvement of roads, outside of sewage that we get now, but you know. Then, the roads, and the valuation of your land, they bring it so high. It's not worth that. Because they don't come around and look at the conditions. At one time, when we was willing to pay so much assessment for roads and all, they didn't want to do it. That's the reason why we had to make our own roads. But as far as conditions, I mean the area, the atmosphere, and things like that, it's all right. But we need little improvement. Streets over here, we need a piece of sidewalk at least and some good driveway, you know. 'Cause like one time, when we had the meeting. I came up, I said, "Well, you know, the people from here up, they don't pay no taxes, that's why they don't care about us." If you pay taxes, maybe they look into our streets and try to fix it up a little bit, little more. (Chuckles) They look at me.

WN: What kind meeting?

JV: At the school. The (road) improvement. One time, we had that Wong. You know, used to come around. They come around, just talk to you and tell you they doing this, they doing that, and nothing done.

WN: The city?

JV: Yeah, da kine (road) improvement, you know. We used to go hold meetings in the school there. So anytime they have a meeting, we go down. But then, I hardly go anymore. I don't bother. 'Cause they come and they say this and that. 'Cause this place, like Palolo, you remember Palolo. Over there, finally. It's about time, I feel. We been living here so many years, and I think that it's about time that they should improve this place, you know. Do something about it.

WN: Are they going to?

JV: Nothing. They said the money they had, they use 'em from the church down, you know. And for this section here, no more money now, see?

WN: Well, before I turn off this tape recorder, you have any last things you want to say?

JV: No, that's about all I have to say. Except I'm glad you came and I could be of some assistance, some help. And maybe you're pleased with the interview I gave you.

WN: Well, thank you very much for taking your time.

JV: That's okay.

END OF INTERVIEW

KALIHI:
Place of Transition

Vol. I

**ETHNIC STUDIES ORAL
HISTORY PROJECT**

**Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawaii at Manoa**

JUNE 1984