

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Catherine Dama Campaignha

"That morning [April 1, 1946] . . . I had left home and we were in school. We were playing in the yard and then while we were playing [in the] yard, some of the children started saying, 'Oh, tyto wave. Tyto wave.' There was a tidal wave. I said, 'What's a tyto wave?' We didn't know what that was. Then we went into the classroom. . . . And then while we were having our lessons, parents started coming for their children. . . . Alberta's mom came to pick her up. . . . I walked with Alberta and her mother. We proceeded down Waiānuenu Avenue. And then on Kapi'olani, we turned right to go past Hilo Union School, came down to Haili Street, we were amazed to see the debris and part of a building, it seemed, up the street near Palace Theater. I still recall just looking in amazement, not understanding."

Catherine Dama Campaignha was born to Visayan immigrants, Catalina Buscas Dama and Agapito Dama, in Hilo, Hawai'i on March 28, 1938. She has five brothers and four sisters.

Her father owned and operated Mamo Pool Hall, a billiard parlor located below their living quarters, and rented out rooms to bachelors in a boardinghouse. Her mother leased and ran the Ideal Meat Market until the mid-1940s.

The Dama home on Mamo Street was a gathering place. The streets in the area served as a playground for the Dama children and their neighbors.

She attended English-standard Riverside School and graduated from Hilo High School in 1956. In 1960 she earned a bachelor's degree in speech correction from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. A year later, she received her teaching certificate.

Her career in education began in 1961 at O'ahu's Kahuku High School. She later taught at Waiākea Intermediate School and Waiākea High School. She also taught for a year in Seattle, Washington. Campaignha retired in 1993.

Her father's Mamo Street pool hall sustained some damage but survived the 1946 tsunami. However, the business was destroyed in the 1960 waves. Her father eventually established a new pool hall at Pāpa'ikou, and later, on Ponahawai Street in Hilo.

Catherine Campaignha and her husband, Alwin, have one son, Ray. The couple resides in Hilo.

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Catherine Campaignha (CC)

Hilo, Hawai'i

February 24, 1999

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Catherine Diama Campaignha on February 24, 1999 and we're at the Hilo Pacific Tsunami Museum in Hilo. And the interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Catherine, I'd like to start by asking you, first of all, when and where you were born?

CC: I was born in Hilo on 30 Mamo Street, delivered by a midwife. March 28, 1938.

WN: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

CC: Five brothers and four sisters. However, one (sister) was stillborn, the one right after me, and my mother also took care of two other girls whom we call our sisters. Something like *hānai*.

WN: Yes.

CC: Yes. So she gave birth to (my) five brothers, and four sisters, (one stillborn, and me).

WN: Ten altogether.

CC: Ten, she had ten (biological) children, yes.

WN: And what number were you?

CC: I was number eight.

WN: Number eight.

CC: Yes.

WN: And then the two daughters that were *hānai*, were they older or younger than you?

CC: Older. One---you see, my mother's (former) husband, (Isidro), had been married (twice) before my mom, and he had a daughter (Fedelina) from his second wife. And then this other sister, our *hānai* sister (Winnie), she was really a cousin of my half-brothers and sisters. Her mom had left her and the husband and (my *hānai* sister never saw) her again. So her dad was a

cousin of my mom's (former) husband and then he asked them to take care of her. That's how we have our two sisters, *hānai* sisters. I grew up saying they're my sisters.

WN: Tell me something about your mother.

CC: Oh, my mom [Catalina Buscas Diama] was a very persevering, (determined and brave) woman. After I had been married and I was visiting her with my son, I guess because I was already older and an adult, (while) we were sitting in the living room she just came out and said, "Oh, I married before Idrong and I run away from home." ("Idrong" was a nickname for "Isidro.")

Then I said, "What, Ma?"

(Laughter)

CC: I guess she felt that I was older and she was getting older and she needed to pass this on to someone in the family. And she told me that when she was sixteen years old—you see, she was born in the Philippines. Both my parents were born in the Philippines.

WN: What part of the Philippines?

CC: Cebu.

WN: Cebu.

CC: On the island of Cebu. And she was from Oslob. Oslob, Cebu. She had said that her family was very poor and at that time, when she was sixteen, they were looking for workers in Hawai'i for the [sugar] plantation. So her uncle and aunty asked her to go—to come here to Hawai'i. And the aunty couldn't come because the uncle and the aunty had a family. So the uncle wanted to come to Hawai'i. So they asked my mother, their niece, to come with him to help him in Hawai'i. (Then he would send for his family later.) But they knew that (my mother's) parents would not want her to leave the Philippines so they secretly made a rendezvous. They secretly planned for my mom to leave the Philippines, run away.

I told my mom, "Oh Mama. Mama, you weren't sad to leave, you know?"

And she said oh, but she used to see how her mother used to cry because they were so poor. So I guess she had plans to—when she came, she would send money home. Which she did. After she passed away and we were going through her things, I found so many receipts for money orders. So she faithfully sent money home all through the years, even after her parents died, she would send to her brother or her sisters or nephews and nieces; all kinds of receipts. But anyway, I'm going back.

WN: You said she was married before?

CC: Well, wait, I'm not done with my story.

WN: I'm sorry.

(Laughter)

WN: No, I thought you were just going to talk about. . . .

CC: No, no, no.

WN: I'm sorry.

CC: All right. Going back now. Sixteen. So the aunty and uncle told her, "Okay, this night, you wrap up your clothes, tie 'em in a bundle and put them on the back steps. Put 'em out on the steps. And then after your parents and the family go to sleep, you leave." So that's what she did. She left in the night, they took her bundle of clothes and they walked, I don't know how many miles, and then she said that she had walked to her cousin's place, Cresencia's. She said that she remembered walking there and then riding a horse, and then I don't know how far away it was to Cebu City. So from Oslob, they walked and she said something about a horse, and then they got to Cebu City.

And there in Cebu City, at the docks I suppose, she talked about a Mr. Lord, I think that was the name she used, who talked with them. Then all of the workers who were planning to come to Hawai'i had to be examined by a doctor. So her uncle had a physical exam. However, he didn't pass it because she said that previous to that, he'd had an injury on his wrist. So they didn't think that he would be a good worker. He couldn't go, come to Hawai'i, and then my mom said that she still wanted to come on her own. Huh, isn't that brave, no? (Chuckles)

WN: Not too many girls were coming, too.

CC: That's right. But there were other single girls because there was this other, very good friend of our family, other woman who I knew as a very good friend of my mom, who also came on the boat. Now, they were there and they were going to go on the boat, and in the meantime, my grandparents had found out what she had done. And they went I think with their horse and buggy, whatever, and got to the docks and my mom said that my grandmother was crying and wanting her to come back.

However, Mama said that she—Mr. Lord told her, "Oh, you want to go Hawai'i so you wait there." And he talked to my grandparents and I guess they left, but I don't know what were the details about that. My mom made the decision to come to Hawai'i.

I said, "Oh my, Mama. Oh, I would be so sad." But she was sixteen and I guess she was ambitious. She had other—there were a few other young women who were going to come on the boat, too.

Now, when they were going to go on the boat, I guess they gathered them and this man told them, "You know, it's very dangerous for young women to go to Hawai'i alone. You shouldn't go alone. So you folks should get married." (Laughs) And I (said), "(Ma), you was?" So they paired off and she knew this fellow who had been from her village; I suppose, she knew him. So she paired off with him and then her friend paired off with somebody else and then they were married on the ship, wherever, I don't know. And then they came on the boat, I don't know the name of the boat, I never found out. Then she said that she and this fellow, his name was Primo I believe, settled in Pauka'a.

And then I asked her, "Ma, you had any children from Primo?"

She go, "No! No!" (Laughs) So evidently, the marriage had not been, what is that word?

WN: Paper marriage.

CC: Yeah. Never been consummated, is that the word? But she just took care of the house while he worked on the plantation.

WN: Do you know what plantation?

CC: Pauka'a, I don't know.

WN: Is that Honoka'a?

CC: Well, Pauka'a is near Pāpa'ikou, Hilo Sugar, I don't know. Around there. Pauka'a is before you hit Pāpa'ikou, yeah.

WN: Okay, so close to Hilo.

CC: Yeah, maybe by Hilo Sugar. There was also a plantation out in Pāpa'ikou. However, she said that he used to drink a lot so she was not happy with him. And then I guess, I don't know how long she was married to him, then she met Isidro. He was a widower and she therefore, married him. But she said before she married him, she went to get a divorce from Primo and then she said, "At least I get divorce from him because my friend, she never get divorce." Her friend met somebody else and married, but she had never gotten a divorce from that other man.

WN: Do you know what year it was that she came here first?

CC: Oh, sixteen, she was born in 1905. So age sixteen, in 1921.

WN: So her first stop was Pauka'a, over here?

CC: Yeah, yeah. I was glad she shared that with me because she had never told anybody else about her running away and whatever. I guess she realized that I—(now) an adult, I could understand.

WN: How old were you when she told you this?

CC: Oh, I already had my son so I was in my thirties.

WN: Wow.

CC: Yeah. I was in my thirties. I was probably thirty-five, thirty-six years old. So with (Isidro) she had five children. And then that marriage did not work out (for various reasons. After a lot of thought and with the help of friends, especially a family in Pāhoa, the Coleon family, Mama and the children left Isidro.) When she was living with the family in Pāhoa, she (at times) would go to the chicken fights to (set up) her own concession booth so that she could earn

(her own) money. (A teenage daughter of the Coleon family would help her in the booth.) She was very grateful to that family who helped her out in that interim. (She never forgot how they helped her, and later in her life, tried to help them as well. After several months with the family), she met my father.

WN: And when did they get married?

CC: In, I don't know, nineteen thirty-something.

WN: So she had five children with Isidro and ten with. . . .

CC: No, no. Five with Agapito [Diama, CC's father].

WN: Five with Agapito.

CC: So ten in all.

WN: Oh, okay.

CC: Yeah, otherwise she would have fifteen.

WN: I know, that's what I was thinking. Oh, I see. So some of your siblings are step.

CC: Half.

WN: Oh, half, I mean. Oh, okay. Okay.

CC: But my father, when he married Mama, my mother made him adopt (four of her children from Isidro), so (that) we (would) all have the same (last) name, (and I'm sure Mama wanted him to accept them like his own). So he adopted (them). (My half-sister Rebecca was adopted by another family—that adoption is another story which I will not dwell on at this time.) My dad had been working on the plantation, but he was not happy on the plantation so he set up (a) business in Hilo.

WN: Do you know when your dad came over here?

CC: I don't know. I spoke most with my mom. I wish I had spoken more with my dad, but he was from Ronda, Cebu. The Philippines, also.

WN: So both from Cebu.

CC: Yeah. And he only had a third-grade education and my mom had a second-grade education. But they endured and survived and took care of all the children. And he set up his—he did what he could and he opened up a billiard parlor in town and then the family moved into town near the old [S.] Kadota Store near Villa Franca. And then afterwards, eventually they moved to Mamo Street, where I was born.

WN: Mamo Street, I see. So that's where your recollections begin, on Mamo Street.

- CC: Yeah. I was born and raised there.
- WN: This was upstairs? Above the billiard parlor?
- CC: Yes. And then at one time, too, my mother got a lease through a loan from the Salvation Army and they (leased) Ideal Meat Market. Her friend had been leasing Ideal Meat Market and they taught my mother and my older two brothers, (William and Herbert), how to set up the business. So my oldest two brothers helped my mother with that business in (1940) up till (1945). When my oldest brother, William, (got drafted into the U.S. Army) they closed the business. They gave up the lease to someone else.
- WN: Meat market meaning. . . ? What did they have?
- CC: Oh they had—I still remember the big carcasses. What do you call them? Going on those rollers and going into the big refrigerator and my brother sawing or cutting up the meat. It was Ideal Meat Market.
- WN: Was it near—right next to the. . .
- CC: Yeah, right next to the billiard parlor.
- WN: Oh, so your mother and father each had their own businesses?
- CC: Yeah, yeah. And she wasn't afraid, she was so brave. They also sold groceries too. I still remember playing with the small Carnation cream cans on the shelves, soda, bread whatever. But it was called Ideal Meat Market. Some of the older folks tell me they still remember going to the meat market and buying meat from there.
- WN: And what was the name of your father's billiard parlor?
- CC: Mamo Pool Hall.
- WN: Mamo Pool Hall.
- CC: Yeah. He also had a boardinghouse behind the Chinese chicken store across the street. He had a boardinghouse. . .
- WN: That was [Mun Hon] Yuen's chicken store [Hawai'i Chicken Store].
- CC: Yuen's, yeah. He had a boardinghouse there and I still remember he would rent [or] lease small rooms to these men over there. So they did what they could and we never went on welfare. (Laughs) Just survived.
- WN: What was it like as a child growing up there?
- CC: Um, pretty independent. We learned how to be independent because (there were) so many children—the older ones had to take care of the younger ones. I remember playing a lot on the streets and running across the street to Mo'ohau Park. Just playing and doing chores.

I still remember during the [World] War II years, my brothers (helped earn money) by shining shoes, so they would make their (shoe) boxes (out) of (wood with a footrest on the top) for the shining (of) the shoe. (One side of the box was left open for their polish, brushes and polishing cloth. I can still picture my brothers practice giving a "spit shine" to the shoes at home.) They would go out on the streets and ask, "Oh, you want a shoe shine?" They'd ask the soldiers especially.

And then they said, "Sure," (the customer would) just stand on the (sidewalk), put (his) foot on the shoe-shine box and (get a shine. And then my brothers would) come home with their nickels, (dimes) and quarters. (Freda said that when William used to shine shoes he would give some of his money to Mama.)

Us little ones, I remember playing down Mo'ohau Park with my girlfriends and then one of my older brothers and his friends had just finished shining shoes and they had run down to the park and they just stripped and jumped into the ocean over there. (Laughs) And all of us young little girls hiding behind the coconut trees and giggling and looking at them swimming.

Yeah, so we did a lot and my mother sent us to Salvation Army Church, so that's where I got my religious education. They were so helpful to my mother, helping with the loan for the market. I still remember how Captain Mollet would ask my mother for me to go over and play with (his) children, Mignonne and Roger, I still remember. You know where the interim home is now, on Kino'ole Street?

WN: No.

CC: In the back, there's this two-story building which is part of the interim home but that used to be where the Salvation Army officers used to—the captain and (his family)—used to live. They (would) pick me up and I'd go there and play with their children. First Captain Mollet and then after he left, Captain Baptiste came. So I would go over and play with them. And then we'd have our open-air meetings, I think I mentioned that to you earlier. We'd all, on certain days, we'd go and march (from the church on Ponahawai Street) down to Mamo Street and then set up the drums and the big bass drum and I think my brother played the trumpet at one time. And then once, (with Captain Clayton), they set up the open-air preaching sermon meeting right in front of my father's pool hall. (Laughs) My dad was not very happy.

(Laughter)

CC: Because you know how they talk about sinners. Oh, gosh, I remember him coming home and talking to Mama about that. Yeah, that was so funny.

WN: Tell me about your father's pool hall. What was it like?

CC: Well, it was right below our apartment, we'd lived right above. And he had several tables, I can't remember how many tables but it used to be like the social center, especially for the Filipino men because they didn't have much to do. So a lot of weekends, they would come in from the plantation and gather there and play pool. And once in a while, my mom and dad would come upstairs, the apartment, and make sandwiches for them. They just spent a lot of time there. I know going to bed, a lot of times you could hear the cue balls going at night. (Chuckles) It was also a place for some people who were—now we would call homeless,

would come and help my dad take care of the tables and then earn some money. So it was a gathering place and in fact, our home was really like a gathering place because so frequently, our friends from the country would come into town and they needed a place to just rest before they catch the bus back home. We had so many visitors coming in and out. My mother was always so hospitable and would always be cooking for them, feeding them before they would go home. And I remember once telling her, "Ma, you not tired having to cook for all these people coming in?"

She said, "No, in the Philippines it's like that, when visitors come from far away you feed them." There was a lot of visiting of friends, (too). I remember when my (oldest) brother William had a car, he would take us and we would go and visit our friends in Pāpa'ikou and Pāhoa and 'Ōla'a. There was a lot of this—drove all the way to Kona once in his Model T Ford and I sat in the rumble seat in the back. Took how many hours to go to Kona but we would stay there and spend the night or two.

WN: These would be like you'd go to plantation areas?

CC: Yeah, yeah, plantation. They all worked in the plantation. So I got to see what the country was like, I guess, as I was growing up. And living out in Kona, too, where they had (a coffee farm and) outhouses and you know, having to use an outhouse and that experience. And no electricity. At night we would have the kerosene lanterns. So I learned, too, from that. What country living was like.

WN: And the people that you visited are . . .

CC: Very close friends and I believe that's how it was in the old days, that you found people who spoke your language and so you became like an extended family. So we had close friends in Pāpa'ikou and 'Ōla'a, they were like extended family. (They could depend on each other and helped each other in a foreign land.)

WN: They had children your age?

CC: Oh, yeah, yeah. Became (very good) friends. Oh and then on Mamo Street, too. I still remember the holidays like Christmas or New Year's. These serenaders would come and we'd be sleeping and we'd hear the banjo going and the singing, the Christmas carols, the Filipino songs. And you'd get up and you'd invite them in and then my mother would always have food cooked to feed them. To feed these people who would come serenade and then (my parents would) give some donation, a contribution.

WN: What was your house like?

CC: You would go up a flight of steps and there was a (small) porch, then another flight of steps and then there was the apartment. There was the bathroom, (the parlor, kitchen) and four bedrooms. (One of the bedrooms was very small.)

(I remember how on special nights we would sit around the radio and listen to programs like "Suspense" or "The Whistler." Sometimes my older brother would turn off the lights to give that spooky effect for those mystery programs and I would squirm deep in the cushion for protection. There was also a lot of music in our home because we had a piano. Some special

memories that I have were when my older sister, Freda, who's musically talented, would play the piano while my brothers Ernest, Ben or Caesar would sing various popular tunes while my parents would sit quietly, listening to them. It was my mother who sent several of us to take piano lessons and would get after us to practice, and when we had guests, would ask us to play some pieces for them—I never liked to perform for them.)

(An interesting thing my brother Herbert recently told me was that one Saturday morning during the early war years, the family was home while Freda was playing the piano. A soldier was passing by, heard the music, and then boldly walked up the stairs to ask to play the piano. Surprised, the family said okay, and he then played several songs for about an hour, entertaining the family with his accomplished playing. Who was he? Eddy Duchin. He was stationed on the Big Island, and must have missed having a piano to play while serving here. If I'm not mistaken, a movie was later made on him, *The Eddy Duchin Story*.)

- WN: You mentioned a lot of the men, bachelor men, would stay around the pool hall and so forth.
- CC: Yeah.
- WN: Was that considered by your mother to be like a safe place for a young girl to be there and things like that?
- CC: She was always concerned about my coming home late and (being safe), but I don't think they ever said, "Don't be over there." I just didn't want to be there because there were so many older men. I guess as you're growing up, you hear, "Oh, be careful." So I don't think she really came out and said don't be there. We just didn't choose to hang around there, us younger ones, because we knew that they were older and they were playing pool. My mom used to help my dad in the pool room. But from what I observed, they were very respectful (to) her. Very respectful (to) her and she was always a lady to me. Very strict and she would always talk about how it was in the Philippines, how they always showed respect to their parents. And then when we used to be belligerent and (sometimes rude), she'd really give it to us. "No respect! No respect! (No mo' manners!)" (Laughs) But thanks to her and the church, we grew up with a conscience and tried to toe the line and watch our ways.
- WN: What type of man was your father?
- CC: He was (a) very busy person. He had a sense of humor and always working. And always trying to think of earning money for the family. And sometimes getting too ambitious and wanting to establish a business here, a business there, a business there, My mom would get kind of, what is that word? Irritated, that he would take so many risks. (Once he sub-leased a barbershop and another time, a restaurant. That didn't last long, though.)
- WN: What language did you speak at home?
- CC: I spoke English, pidgin English.
- WN: Your parents spoke English?
- CC: Yes, they spoke, not very well, it was broken English, pidgin English. When they went to school, they were educated by American teachers. So they had some knowledge of English but

it was so called pidgin English.

WN: Their native language was Visayan?

CC: Their native language was Visayan.

WN: Did you ever learn to speak Visayan?

CC: No, I regret now. I think like many young people growing up, it was really wanting to learn and speak the English language and to put aside what your parents spoke. Which is sad, it's not like the Japanese where they established language schools and they tried to have their children speak it [Japanese language]. But with the Filipinos, we've never had Filipino schools to pass on the language. Although I could understand some of the words when they spoke, I (really) didn't know what was going on. My older sisters knew a little bit and my older brother knew some.

WN: I'm wondering too. The people that your father and mother considered their friends and so forth, were they Visayan? Or were they Ilocano? Or . . .

CC: Visayan, mainly. (The family who took care of her in Pāhoa spoke Tagalog.) You found . . .

WN: Even the men that stayed around the pool hall were Visayan?

CC: Probably. But I'm sure there were Ilocanos, too, but our very good friends that I can recall were Visayan. Another friend, close family friend, in 'Ōla'a, one was married to an Ilocano, though. But they all could speak the language. Oh, and then, that friend, I think that one was Tagalog but somehow you feel comfortable with whoever (is) speaking Filipino and you find the common language that you can communicate (in). But most of them were Visayans.

WN: I know you mentioned a little bit about this, but what kind of games did you play as a child?

CC: Oh. (Chuckles)

WN: Actually you're like a city girl. You were growing up on city streets.

CC: Yes, I was. Yes. Oh, we (would) play master, play marbles. I remember as children, we'd get the empty Carnation milk cans and then poke holes and (pull) the string (through) and then we'd make stilts out of them, too. We'd make the walkie-talkie kind and then make stilts. We'd play jump rope and what is that? Broad jump? You know, with the sticks. We'd make our own broad jump kind of game. (We also played softball—even on the gravel behind Baker's Building, which was next to our building.)

WN: Did you play *pee wee*?

CC: Did I play?

WN: *Okamapio*?

CC: No, that was a generation before mine. Yeah. My husband's generation. *Kamapio. Kamapio.*

Yeah, he explained to me how they played it and I still don't know how. (Laughs) But I never grew up with that. When we were (in) intermediate school, we'd go down to the park (to play softball), and we'd play with the pocketknife. Yeah, have you ever played that?

WN: Uh, mumblety-peg, is that what it's called? [Mumblety-peg is a game in which the players try to flip a knife such that the blade sticks into the ground.]

CC: I don't know. You play with the knife, the pocketknife, and you start like this and you go like that [i.e., attempt to stick the knife into the ground from different positions].

WN: I remember that.

CC: Yeah, yeah. Oh, and bean bags, you play bean bags. And we played, what do you call that? Tiddly winks? Yeah, with those sticks.

WN: Were you ever allowed to play pool in the pool hall?

CC: Um, I never did. I never wanted to go in there. (Laughs) Yeah, I never played pool but my older brothers used to. But I guess the girls just didn't want to go where (there were) only men, mostly men. So we didn't play.

WN: There's a lot of activities. There's the pool hall and then the meat market next to that.

CC: Yeah, oh and then there's Mamo Theatre and Yamatoza Theatre on Mamo Street. There were two theaters. Yamatoza Theatre later was called Mo'ohau Theatre and that's where they showed a lot of Filipino movies and we used to go there. Oh, and during the war, that used to be a place where they would have shows for the servicemen. USO shows. And that's where I remember seeing Jack Carson 'cause he was entertaining there. And then Mamo Theatre.

WN: Now during the war, did soldiers come to the pool hall?

CC: I'm sure. Yes. They did.

WN: You were pretty young, though, yet.

CC: I was young. Born 1938. So there were a lot of soldiers.

WN: And your playmates were mostly Filipino?

CC: Um, yeah. On Mamo Street, yeah. There was a family that lived behind KTA (before, it was called Taniguchi Store) and there were duplexes there and they were my playmates. And then there was another girl that lived across of Mamo Theatre. She was (part) Filipino. Yeah, that's right. (I remember also playing with the children of the Japanese merchants near our home.) But then when we started school, we had (children of) different races to play with. I still remember—I went to Riverside School and there was . . .

WN: When did you start there?

CC: Riverside?

WN: Is this the English Standard [School]?

CC: Yes, yes. First grade. What year was that? (Chuckles) I forget. Riverside I was age five, yeah? Six, six.

WN: First grade is about six.

CC: Six, yeah. So '38 and six, 1944.

WN: What was that like?

CC: Well, previous to that, my mom sent me to Mrs. Walker's kindergarten and nursery school. I went there two years and I think she sent me there because she was busy with the market and helping my dad. And I remember there meeting children of different races and different economic backgrounds. So there were Chinese, Japanese, (part-Hawaiian) and *Haole*. And then when I went to Riverside, again it was very multiethnic. I had had the two years' experience in nursery school and such. And so, you know, you just adjusted. Riverside School, the standard English school, was (called) Standard School to begin with. And they stressed your speaking standard English, even on the play field. They always corrected our English, always. I guess that's why my speaking is different, maybe from my older brothers and sisters.

WN: Were you the only one that went?

CC: Yeah. I was the only one that went. I remember Mrs. Gibson was my first-grade teacher and oh, I was so afraid of her. (Laughs) She would force us to eat our lunch, we had to take our own home lunches. And we'd have to stand in line and show her that our lunch tin was empty. Everything had (to be) eaten. And oh boy, she would make me feel nauseated every lunch period and I hated to go to school. I would be absent—I would find all kinds of excuses to be absent. I still remember seeing the report card that my mother saved. How many absences I had. The only plus I had was for obedience.

(Laughter)

CC: I remember once she saw that I had hidden a banana under wax paper in my lunch tin and she [Mrs. Gibson] said, "You eat that." So I had to sit and—oh, I wanted to vomit I tell you, but I forced myself to eat it so the next time when I had a tuna sandwich I didn't want to finish, I hid it in the desk next to mine.

She said, "Okay, good Catherine. You ate your lunch."

I sat down and about a day or two afterwards I still remember Wilbert cleaning (the) desk and he said, "Huh, Mrs. Gibson look. Get one sandwich over here, there's a sandwich here and all the ants are at it." I was so frightened.

(Laughter)

CC: And she said, "Now, who did not eat that sandwich? Who put it there?" Oh my goodness, my heart almost stopped but I didn't say a word. (Laughs)

- WN: But she didn't find out?
- CC: No, because I didn't—I was so afraid, I was so deathly afraid of her. But Standard School was a good school.
- WN: And you said it was multiethnic.
- CC: Multiethnic. Pretty much multiethnic.
- WN: Were there other Filipinos there?
- CC: Yes, there were. I think that (in my grade) there was my good friend, Pauline, and then there was Herman, then there was Nicky. There (were) about three and with myself, four. Then there were Hawaiian (or part-Hawaiian) children, a few came from Keaukaha. And then (Portuguese), Chinese, Japanese, and of course the Caucasian children.
- WN: And then Riverside went up until what grade?
- CC: Sixth grade.
- WN: Sixth grade. There was no English standard after that?
- CC: It became—it was called Standard School up until I think I was in the third or fourth grade. Then the name was changed to Riverside. I don't know the history of that, I'm not sure about why. Previous to that, you had to pass a test to get to Standard School. But because I think I went to Mrs. Walker's kindergarten nursery school where (we always spoke standard English), I can't remember even taking the test. But some of my other friends who did not go (to that kindergarten), they said they remember being tested for it. Being asked questions.
- WN: I'm wondering, do you think that your financial situation was a little bit better than some of the people living in that area?
- CC: Which area? In Mamo Street?
- WN: Yeah, because of your family's businesses.
- CC: Um, to a degree 'cause I remember playing with Rosita and Marie and their mother telling me, "Oh, you folks lucky, you folks rich." And I was thinking, us rich? No way. (Laughs) I never thought we were rich but I guess because there was always income every day, from the billiard parlor and the market, maybe the others thought that we were. But I never thought that.

(We struggled because we had a big family. Mr. Yagi of the nearby Standard Meat Market sometimes would give my mother soup bone to cook for the family meal—when we didn't have the market. Mama never forgot Mr. Yagi's kindness. Many years later, in the mid-[19]70s, I remember taking my mom to Kulana Foods where he worked, to give him *warabi* from Mama's land on Hale Manu Drive. Mama always tried to show appreciation to the people who had helped her.)

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: Okay well, I want to take you back to April 1, 1946. If you can tell me how the day started?

CC: That tidal wave occurred at 7:00, a little after 7:00 right? Seven-ten or so?

WN: Right about then.

CC: I left home early that morning, before that time.

WN: Did you always leave early?

CC: Yeah. I usually left the house early.

WN: For school?

CC: For school. It was about a (little over a) mile away and so from Mamo Street I would walk. I walked all by myself to Riverside School.

WN: So you would walk *mauka*.

CC: I would walk *mauka*. My route usually was, going up Mamo Street, and then sometimes going all the way up top to Kino'ole and then going up Haili. That morning I can't recall whether I went there or I would go up to Mamo then Keawe and then up Haili and then Kapi'olani and then to the school. But I had left home and we were in school. We were playing in the yard and then while we were playing [in the] yard, some of the children started saying, "Oh, tyto wave. Tyto wave."

There was a tidal wave. I said, "What's a tyto wave?" We didn't know what that was. Then we went into the classroom. And then while we were having our lessons, parents started coming for their children. And then some children never came because of it happening at that time. But the few of us who were in school before that occurrence, they were being picked up until there (were) only three of us left in the classroom. I still remember Alberta and Nicky and myself. We just went through our lessons with the teacher and then afterwards, Alberta's mom came to pick her up. And then Nicky walked down by himself. I walked with Alberta and her mother. We proceeded down Waiānuenue Avenue. And then on Kapi'olani, we turned right to go past Hilo Union School, came down Haili Street, and as we were coming down Haili Street, we were amazed to see the debris and part of a building, it seemed, up the street near Palace Theater. I still recall just looking in amazement, not understanding.

And then we turned right on, is that Kino'ole Street? Right up at the top of where Western Auto is. So we walked on that street. And then Alberta's mom left me there at the top of Mamo Street. You know where [Hawai'i] *Tribune-Herald* is now? Well, before that, there was no *Tribune-Herald* there, it was just an empty lot with tall trees. So she left me there and I just was standing there all by myself. It must have been 2:30 or so, after school was out, or

3:00. There were people standing up at the top there, (talking quietly) because they were not allowed to go down. So I looked down at Mamo Street and saw all of the debris and the (black sand), the devastation there. And people were just standing there and talking, I guess not paying attention to this girl with her lunch tin just standing there, looking lost and wondering, "Where's my family?"

But I guess I was so young, I was too young to really feel afraid because before that, I was walking up to school and back home all by myself. So we were pretty independent. So I sat down on the curbing and then I looked up left, up at the top of Mamo Street. And then on this house, there was a porch and on the porch roof, I saw my brother, Ernest, and his friend, on the roof, looking down Mamo Street. (Laughs) Then I stood up and I crossed the street and I said, "Ernest, how come nobody came for me and where's Mama?"

So he climbed down and then he took me in the back (to a friend's home. My brother Caesar said that maybe our parents weren't so worried about looking for us because in that period of time people looked out for each other and helped each other. Since our building was not destroyed, perhaps there was the belief that we were safe and people would eventually direct us to where my parents were.)

WN: How much older was Ernest?

CC: Maybe about six or seven years older than I was. And he took me in the back and my mother was there with my baby sister (Carol). She was a toddler then. And this family, my brother Caesar said, took in some of us and we spent the night at the home. I still remember staying there. Our family was so big, some stayed in 'Ōla'a and then another older brother stayed with his friend. And then my brother, Caesar, said later on he went to Pāpa'ikou and so I went to Pāpa'ikou, too.

I still remember, I believe it was the next day, they allowed people to go into their businesses to clean up, go down the street. So I still recall the smell of the sand and walking through mud. Being there, I can recall seeing my father and three of my older brothers helping him shovel out the mud from his business. And then I remember hearing a whistle and then somebody yelling, "Run, run. Another tidal wave." I guess we were still in that aftershock of what was happening.

WN: This is the next day?

CC: The next day or so. I still recall. I still remember running with my dad up the street and falling down in the mud and I got myself all dirty. There was the cleaning up after and that took a while. I remember my mom having a dog, I think his name was Skippy, and he was still upstairs in Mamo Street and her going upstairs to feed him. But we couldn't stay there because they didn't want us staying there. There was no water, evidently, too. I would think. So it took a while for that to be cleaned up. But after a while, Mrs. Ramos, from Pāpa'ikou came and she picked me up and then I stayed in Pāpa'ikou with that family.

WN: Do you know how long you stayed there?

CC: I can't recall but until they got it all cleaned up. And then I returned. So I spent some time with them.

WN: So you didn't all stay in Pāpa'ikou together then?

CC: No, our family was scattered, there (were) so many of us. I know my older brother (Herbert) said that when they were in the apartment, they were having breakfast or getting ready for school when they heard a rumbling and they looked out and they could see, just like a wave, just like a tide coming on shore. Then afterwards, maybe another wave or whatever, maybe it was the same one, starting to crack the glass of the businesses across. And then my sister said that, even my other brother said that, somebody from across the street was in waist-high water and he was yelling to them, "Get out! Get out! Get away!" My brother, Caesar, said that he ran down the steps and he was in chest-high water and he ran up Mamo Street. And then my sister and her family went up to Kino'ole Street, and found a ride to 'Ōla'a. They stayed with our close friend in 'Ōla'a. So we were scattered all over.

Oh, and then one of my older brothers said that after the wave came, being a teenager, he was curious so he and his friends went down to the shore to see what it was like. And they were exploring, and he was older, he was in high school. He still remembers that they were on Kam[ehameha] Avenue when that big one came. You know that famous picture that you see? That big one came and they just raced up the street to get away from it. But he spoke about how (before the big wave) people were curious and seeing the fish flopping in the park. He even said that he had seen a candy bar and he picked it up and (ate it). (Laughs) Evidently, it wasn't all wet.

WN: I know that there's stories about seeing [sealed liquor and soda] bottles with sand inside.

CC: Yes, yes. So I've heard. Yeah. I've heard too about someone finding some money and returning it—very honest—to wherever. I guess that they knew the business that was close by there, and inquiring (about their money).

WN: So you were very young . . .

CC: I was young.

WN: What do you remember about—did business continue regularly after that?

CC: Oh yes. (And I remember the Civil Defense tidal wave warning sirens that were set up after that. We had so many false warnings that would get us up in the middle of the night and we'd have to evacuate.)

WN: What about your mom's meat—oh, that was gone by then.

CC: It was gone by then. I think it was *pau* by (1945). My oldest brother (got drafted in '45) so around there, because he was such a help to her.

WN: Okay so then, you graduated from Hilo High School in '56.

CC: Yes, yes, 1956.

WN: Maybe you can just tell me what happened after that.

CC: After '56? I went to the University of Hawai'i Hilo branch, it was called. It was a small school at that time. I think there were only about 150 or 200 of us. And it went to—only two years. I went to school there for my freshman and sophomore years. And then I transferred to Mānoa campus and graduated in 1960 with a bachelor's in speech (correction).

And I had had clinical practice at the university there. And then I had a summer's job at Hawai'i Kai as a speech therapist. But I felt that I wasn't trained enough in all the phases of speech therapy because you have to work with aphasics and those who've had strokes and try to help them back with their speech patterns. Because I didn't feel competent (in the medical knowledge needed in speech therapy), I returned for my fifth year to get a professional teaching certificate (in speech). And then after I got that, I went into teaching.

WN: Did your parents encourage you to go to college?

CC: Really, I don't know if they—I don't think they really came out and said, "Go to college." I think it's because when I was in school, I guess I was in classes with those who were going to college and I felt I wanted to. And I was always in the college prep classes and seeing that I got all of the courses needed. But I didn't realize how proud they were. They were very reserved about it but afterwards when I went through my—after my parents had passed away and (I was) going through the things that they (had) kept, (I saw) how my mother kept my report cards and my medals that I (had) won in intermediate school, high school (and the university). And then my father, making a notation in my graduation program—they flew over. And that was after the 1960 tidal wave. Yeah, they flew over after the 1960 tidal wave when they lost their house on Mamo Street. But they found funds and I think Salvation Army helped them to fly over to see me graduate in the amphitheater. There was a program that my father had kept and he made a notation, oh, "Catherine graduated." He was so proud and he circled my name.

WN: That you found later.

CC: Yeah. Of course, I could see the smiles on their faces but I think they were especially proud privately. Later on, when I met a friend after my mom had passed away, my mother's family friend, her friend. She said, "Oh, your mother was so proud of you and your sister. You folks graduated from college."

I said, "Yeah?" 'Cause she never came out to say. She would brag to her friends but I never saw her brag in front of me. I'm sure they were proud about it. But I think, you know, when you grow up in that kind of environment, you want to use your education, right? To improve yourself. And you found so many of the immigrant children striving for the. . . .

WN: What did you learn about their experience in the '60 tidal wave? What did they tell you?

CC: Oh, I was at Mānoa campus. Again, I missed the tidal wave because I was. . . . In both tidal waves, I was away. (In 1960) I was a senior at the University of Hawai'i. And that morning, getting up early in the morning, the phone rang and then my roommate answered and it was her friend, her boyfriend, calling from Hilo. And then when she hung up, she said, "Catherine. There was a tidal wave. And Leslie said that Mamo Street is gone."

I said, "What?" Ho, and I was devastated, I said, "What happened to my family?"

Then my other roommate, Alberta, her friend had a television and we went to the house there to see the news. And oh, I was so worried and frightened about what had happened to my family. You couldn't call the street there because our home was devastated, it was destroyed. And then, I waited a day or two and then (a) special delivery letter came from my sister, Carol. And she described what had happened. In fact, downstairs, did you see her picture? The interview, Carol Brown, Carol Diama Brown.

WN: I'll go down and look at it again.

CC: Yeah. One of the students interviewed her, she teaches at Hilo Union School. And it describes what had happened that day. So afterwards, I made arrangements to fly over and when I got in to Hilo, my father met me at the airport with my brother. Oh, he was so sad because he lost his livelihood, he lost his business. And we went to Pāpa'ikou to stay with our (married) older sister. He was really sad. Everything was destroyed and we had to just clean up. However, he went on and he established a pool hall in Pāpa'ikou. And then later on, he went to Ponahawai Street and established his business again. So he just carried on.

WN: When you say it was destroyed was the entire building . . .

CC: The building was gone. It was knocked out.

WN: Was he ever able to salvage anything? Like the tables?

CC: Oh yeah we---no. No, I think he bought one second-hand from somebody. So we were in Pāpa'ikou. But then I had to come back [to Honolulu to] go back to school and then they had to carry on. And then afterwards, they had that lottery, the tidal wave victims could (be able to purchase) lots (at reasonable rates from the state).

WN: Iwalani Street?

CC: Kawaiiani [Street].

WN: Kawaiiani.

CC: Yeah, yeah. So they were able to get a lot there. And my brother, my second oldest brother, built a home there. And then the family stayed there. So that's how you just carry on.

WN: Your parents were remarkable, though, yeah? They just bounced right back and started a business again.

CC: Yes, yes. You have to survive. And then after Ponahawai Street, they moved to Mamo Street again. There was that old [S.] Miyao Store, right next to Mamo Theatre and that's where they established a business again and lived upstairs, as well as commute between there and Kawaiiani Street. Until their retirement.

WN: And when did they retire?

CC: In the [19]60s I think. [Nineteen] sixty-six, '67. Wait. Maybe '69 or '70. But my dad passed away in '71. He was ill. So around that time, when he was getting ill, then they gave up

the . . .

WN: I see. When did your mom pass away?

CC: Nineteen eighty---what did I tell you? Earlier, did I not tell you? June 2, 1981 or '82. June 1, 1982. And my dad died on January 17, 1971.

WN: At age sixty-nine, you said.

CC: Yeah, almost seventy. His birthday is in March. And my mother died at age seventy-seven.

WN: And your first teaching job was at Kahuku?

CC: Yeah.

WN: In 1961.

CC: Yeah, 1961 to '63. And then after that, I came to Waiākea Intermediate. Nineteen sixty-three, up until Waiākea High opened up. However, in September '66 to June '67, I taught at Asa Mercer Junior High in Seattle. And then I came home and I got married.

WN: You got married in '67.

CC: Yeah. And then I retired from Waiākea High in 1993.

WN: So you were on the first staff of Waiākea High School.

CC: Yes. We opened up the school.

WN: Must have been nice, yeah? To teach high school.

CC: Yeah. But at the beginning, it was hard because our office was in a portable and they didn't have a cafeteria. So they had to bring brown-bag lunches.

WN: Brand-new school.

CC: Yes, but in increments, building by building. Just lately, the new administration building was completed. And in 1988, the gym was completed. It's not like some of the schools in O'ahu where they get everything. (WN laughs.) They got political clout. (Chuckles)

WN: So you retired in 1993?

CC: Yes.

WN: What have you been doing since retirement?

CC: Oh, I've been doing various things. Volunteer work and taking classes at the senior center. Traveling. So today, I had a feather *lei* class and then I came [here] after the class. And then I do volunteer work, I'm on the Hospice of Hilo Board of Directors. And helping at the police

station at the information desk, people come in and (ask), "Where's officer so-and-so" and whatever. (Sometimes I help my counselor friend at Waiakea High.) So I'm kind of busy, and trying to clean house in between. (Laughs)

WN: You know, you told me—when I first met you, you told me you have a son, right?

CC: Yes.

WN: And then you were saying that the lifestyle that they have are so much different from what you've experienced.

CC: Yeah.

WN: So what would you want him to learn from your experience?

CC: I'd want him to learn (to) remember his roots. I always remind him how Mama and Papa had to struggle. With very little education, they survived and endured and took care of their family without going for government aid. I would hope that he would remember that with life, you have your ups and downs. So I would like for him to remember to keep on striving and persevering through the hard times. And to appreciate the blessings that he has. To also try to make a difference in his own life, helping others and showing compassion to others. So he's a pretty good kid. (Laughs)

WN: Just like his mom.

CC: Oh well. And his dad. (Laughs)

WN: Well, thank you very much.

CC: Oh, you're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW

**TSUNAMIS REMEMBERED:
Oral Histories of Survivors
and Observers in Hawai'i**

Volume I

**Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa**

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