

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Laura Yuen Chock

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Laura Yuen Chock, the fourth of six children, was born July 18, 1927 in Hilo. Her father was Mun Hon Yuen, an immigrant from Canton, China. Her mother was Fannie Yen Tai Loo Yuen, a Honolulu-born Chinese American. Chock's parents owned the Hawaii Chicken Store, a poultry and herb business located on Mamo Street in downtown Hilo.

Chock and her family lived in two-bedroom quarters above the store. When not helping her parents in the store, Chock grew up playing in her downtown Hilo neighborhood.

She attended Hilo Union School, Hilo Intermediate School, and Hilo High School, graduating in 1945. She later obtained her bachelor of education degree from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa and eventually earned her master's degree and fifth-year teaching certificate.

Her first teaching job was at Keaukaha School in 1957. After two years, she moved on to Hilo Union School. In 1963, Chock worked in the teacher-training program under the Department of Education. She completed her teaching career at Waiākea Waena School. Chock retired in 1978.

Chock was interviewed at the Pacific Tsunami Museum in downtown Hilo. Her family's store and home were heavily damaged in both the 1946 and 1960 tsunamis. Chock, her younger siblings, and her parents literally ran uphill for their lives in the 1946 tsunami. In the 1960 tsunami, both of Chock's parents were trapped in their store by the encroaching waters. They were later found and rescued. The business continued until 1966, when Chock's father died.

Chock lives in Hilo with her husband, Tai On Chock, whom she married in 1947. The couple raised four children and currently has four grandchildren.

Tape No. 29-37-1-99

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Laura Yuen Chock (LC)

Hilo, Hawai'i

April 20, 1999

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: Okay, let's start. This is an interview with Laura Chock on April 20, 1999. We're in the [S.H.] Kress [Co.] building in Hilo, Hawai'i. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Laura, I want to start by asking you, first of all, when and where you were born.

LC: Right in Hilo. Hilo Hospital. Living on Mamo Street.

WN: What's the date? (LC laughs.) Oh, okay.

LC: Too old. Too young, too young.

WN: Okay. Never mind, then.

(Laughter)

WN: Okay, well, tell me something about your mom and dad, your parents.

LC: My mom was a Honolulu-born girl and she married my dad, who came from Canton, China. They lived in Honolulu for a couple of years then moved to Hilo after my brother was born in Honolulu. (While living in Hilo) here, they had five daughters.

They operated a store on Mamo Street. It was called Hawai'i Chicken Store. They sold (dressed and) live chickens.

WN: So they sold live chickens and they sold . . .

LC: And herbs. My father was an herbalist.

WN: What kind of herbs?

LC: Chinese herbs. He also did that pulse feeling or whatever it is. You know, we call it *momack*. When you could tell the person whether (a person is) sick or well, and what kind of disease they had by just feeling the pulse. Then he would pick the kind of medicine that they needed and had them brew it into tea.

WN: Do you know where he learned to do that?

LC: All in China.

WN: What was his name?

LC: Mun Hon Yuen.

WN: And your mother was local-born?

LC: My mother, local-born, Honolulu girl.

WN: And her name?

LC: Yen Tai.

WN: Yen Tai. Did she have an English name?

LC: Fannie.

WN: What was her maiden name?

LC: Loo. Fannie Yen Tai Loo.

WN: Okay, so the Hawaii Chicken Store sold live chickens and also dressed chickens?

LC: Dressed chickens (and live ones).

WN: And herbs.

LC: And herbs. And local products brought in from Waipi'o, like taro and *tanishi*, which we call periwinkles or escargot today. The Japanese cook that with that leaf, *shiso*.

WN: *Shiso*, yeah.

LC: But we cooked that with black beans.

WN: Periwinkle?

LC: Periwinkle. Yeah, we just found out the name is periwinkle. (Chuckles)

WN: What did you folks call it?

LC: We called it [in] Chinese: *tinler* and Japanese: *tanishi*.

WN: *Tanishi*?

LC: Uh huh [yes].

- WN: And what number child were you?
- LC: The fourth of a family of six.
- WN: And did you help in the store at all?
- LC: We did, after school.
- WN: What did you do?
- LC: Sold things. Boiled peanuts, *tanishi*, whatever products my father had. Mung beans, (freshwater chestnuts). My father selected different herbs for things, scaling them and everything. I'm proud to say that one granddaughter of his, that's my niece, is a registered nurse at Maui Hospital [i.e., Maui Memorial Medical Center], and she's taking up the Eastern culture, or homeopathic medicine. She's gone into acupuncture, and she also knows [how to] weigh [and prescribe] herbs for different kinds of sicknesses. I think my father would be very proud of her today. So, because of that I gave her—I had inherited my father's—you call that *chung*. You know, that ivory rod that has the brass—I don't know what you call that.
- WN: Is it the scale?
- LC: The scale, right, that's what it is. So I just turned it over to her about last year so that she could use that. It's authentic, you know, the real stuff.
- WN: So what was it like growing up with your father being an herbalist?
- LC: Oh, it's amazing how he and my mother stayed together twenty-four hours a day for forty-seven years. They were married for forty-seven years, being together day and night every day of the year, and they raised us. We're all proud of ourselves because I think we've done very well. All of my parents' grandchildren are all college grads, every one of the nineteen of them, which is remarkable.
- WN: And your father being an herbalist, did you go to the doctor?
- LC: Very, very seldom. He took care of all our medical problems. Everything that we had, illnesses and whatnot, he took care of them. He was the scholar of the Chinese community, writing letters for elderly people who couldn't read or write who asked him to write letters for them. My father paid for all the postage, all the letter-writing papers, and he mailed them to the villages in China. Very altruistic.
- WN: Could he speak, read, and write both languages?
- LC: My father could read English but not well. Very minimal, like basic. But he always wanted us to teach him; he was open to learning.
- WN: So, tell me about your mom.
- LC: My mom went [up] to, I think, the third grade. But that woman was very *akamai*. She could read, she could write, and understand what she read. Comprehension was excellent. And she

was very good with her hands. In fact, she was a jack-of-all-trades. She could do, like we say, anything that she wanted. When she put her mind to it, she was going to learn it, and she did it. And they were very, very strict with us.

WN: How so?

LC: Homework first before we went out to play, before doing any other things. It was always homework, education was first in their minds.

WN: And your mother, being born and raised in Hawai'i, spoke English?

LC: Fluent English, uh huh [yes]. The thing that surprised us is that you would think in her time she would be speaking pidgin, no? She never spoke pidgin. So all of us were brought up speaking general American English.

WN: And she's from Honolulu?

LC: Honolulu girl.

WN: What part?

LC: Nu'uaniu.

WN: And she helped---she worked in the store?

LC: She worked with my father, side by side, in the store.

WN: So what was it like growing up in that area, Mamo Street?

LC: You know, Mamo Street was one of the most active, interesting, (chuckles) colorful streets in Hilo. We had, I think, eight bars; we had a Japanese *furo* bathhouse. We had two theaters, Mamo Theatre and Yamatoza Theatre. (Pause) Restaurants, we had quite a few, quite a few on that little street. And you know, like Hotel Street [in Honolulu], it was known as—one of those not desirable places to be at night because you had all these drunks and people who frequented the bars and brothel.

But we were always kept off limits from that area. So we kids on Mamo Street [are] proud, proud, proud to say that on the whole, I think just about everybody did well on the street.

We had a reunion about five years ago and we had about 350 people who showed up. Everybody was so proud to be part of Mamo Street. Generations, you know, were at that get-together.

WN: So what was it ethnically, Mamo Street?

LC: Everything. Japanese, Chinese, Portuguese, Filipino.

WN: So, what did you do to have fun as a kid besides movies?

LC: We didn't have money to go movies. We played *okamapio*; we fashioned our own games, you know. We played beanbags, rock piles, where we stole each other's piles. I mean, we made our own games. The whole neighborhood got together and we played. It was not only ourselves, it was other kids in the neighborhood, on the street. The street closed about 4:30, 5:00 in the evening so we were all playing in the street, the road.

(Laughter)

WN: You mean somebody closed it? Or just that no cars . . .

LC: No. No cars, no cars. So we played right in the streets. Side streets and the main streets.

WN: So you—I'm trying to picture Hilo. You think of Hilo as a small town but yet you're saying that there was brothels and . . .

LC: Oh, yes.

WN: . . . bars and . . .

LC: Lots of bars, pool hall. Lot of restaurants. Two cones of sushi, that big, you know, for five cents. And we'd have one each. That's our lunch, you see. You fed two people with five cents. So you have six of us, fifteen cents. And they were huge sushi cones. Didn't have sushi like today. You had shrimps in there, mushroom, black mushroom, carrots, that tofu—what do you call that residue of the tofu?

WN: Oh, *okara*.

LC: *Okara*. All those things were there. And chopped *aburage*, they were all in that. And the cones were huge.

WN: So you didn't just hang around Chinese and eat Chinese food.

LC: We had very few Chinese during those days. Very, very few. Mostly Japanese.

I don't like being taped (chuckles) because I don't feel comfortable.

WN: Oh. Well. . . .

LC: So, anyway, you're making me feel very comfortable by just throwing questions at me.

WN: No, no, just relax, just relax.

LC: No, I guess, just the feeling that I'm being taped.

WN: Yeah, I know.

Where did you folks live? Upstairs?

LC: Upstairs of the store. It was two bedrooms. My mom and dad shared one and six of us stayed

in the other room.

(Laughter)

LC: We managed.

WN: Did you have your own bed?

LC: No. The six kids slept in two beds. We'd make do. We were very happy. We had amateur hour.

WN: What is that?

LC: We had our own amateur hour where we sang, where we had our own judges.

(Laughter)

LC: We danced. My brother usually. And the five girls would sing. We also had a cousin, Hazel. You know Hazel Hasegawa? We sort of adopted her. For twelve years she stayed with us. She was part of us.

WN: So actually seven of you.

LC: Seven of us.

WN: How far apart were you? What was the age differences . . .

LC: Close.

WN: . . . between you and number one?

LC: Number one is seventy-six [years old] today, four years apart. And my---one, two, three, I'm sorry, five years apart between the first and me.

WN: Woo. (Chuckles)

LC: I know. My children were born that way, too. (Chuckles) Four children in six years.

WN: Wow. (LC chuckles.) Get it over with.

(Laughter)

WN: So, six—seven of you lived in, in essence, one room.

LC: Mm hmm [yes].

WN: Okay, so you were growing up downtown Hilo, lived upstairs, played in the streets, and so forth. Okay, what school did you go to?

- LC: Hilo Union [School].
- WN: For elementary?
- LC: Elementary.
- WN: And then. . . .
- LC: Hilo Intermediate and then Hilo High. We walked to school every morning. Walked home from school. Didn't have car.
- WN: Did your parents tell you to be careful at all?
- LC: At all times. My mother would—up till the time we were in the fifth grade, she would pick us up from school. She was so careful to see that we weren't running around or with other children. She picked us up and we went home with her up till the time we were in the fifth grade. Even Hazel had—she had Hazel up till the fifth grade, when she walked Hazel home. It was a good way of keeping children under control, going home and then getting your homework done, then you play. Help whatever has to be done at home, too, now. We washed dishes, we washed clothes, we ironed. Everything had to be ironed. Nothing was left unironed. And my mother supervised all of us. She didn't do the dishes. She cooked. She said that was her job. She cooked so we did everything else.
- WN: Did you have a set job or. . . .
- LC: No, we took turns. There was a bulletin board and every week we were assigned different jobs. We took turns doing different kinds of things. We knew our place. We all knew our places.
- WN: And there were . . .
- LC: And you know what? I think as much as we say that today's children are raised very differently, I see nothing wrong with the way we were brought up because we turned out to be very respectful of our parents, respectful of our elders. My mother never spanked; my father did the disciplining in the home. She scolded but she never raised her hands. My father did it. And in my family, (chuckles) I'm the disciplinarian. Today they would say it's child neglect, the way I raised my children. I brought them up very strictly. They were spanked. They were yelled at. But I think I raised good children. (Chuckles)
- WN: Well, you got some values from your parents.
- Was there a lot of turnover? I mean, was it a transient kind of a population living on Mamo Street or was it . . .
- LC: No, no, no. We were very stable, stable home families, where we all lived on the same street for years and years and years. I can't remember somebody moving or other families moving out. We were together for years. From the time I knew how to talk till the time I graduated high school, we had the same people living on the street.

WN: So you walked to school.

Tell me what happened on. . . .

LC: April 1.

WN: April 1.

LC: Nineteen forty-six. I was at home sleeping when [I heard] screaming, yelling, all kinds of noise down the street. I looked out of the window, it was a beautiful sunny day. But the street was covered with water. I couldn't believe it because it looked like it was a minor flood and yet there was no rain or anything, no storm. I couldn't understand it. Then I heard a rumbling of noises right in our *lānai*. I found [that] kids who were going to school all landed on our—not all of them, I would say maybe about fifteen of them on the *lānai*. Naturally, I got up and I asked them what happened. They mentioned that there was all water around and they were afraid so they came up the stairs.

So I went downstairs to the store, saw my parents, and as I was trying to help them lift things off the ground, our front door—it's like boards that you put to close your stores, every night you have about eight boards that you put together—came crashing. I was on the other side of the counter. Amazingly, adrenaline kicked in and I just jumped over. No way, no way could I ever have done that [otherwise], because I looked at that [counter] after that and I could have never even climbed over, let alone jumped over it to run out.

WN: How high do you think—how high was it?

LC: Oh, the counter was . . .

WN: Four feet?

LC: A good 4½ feet, maybe. With one leap, I was over that and got my parents to run up the stairs.

WN: Now what were you doing down there at the counter?

LC: Helping them lift things up. We were lifting things all off the ground.

WN: It wasn't open yet?

LC: The store wasn't opened. And then when the boards crashed, with the weight of the water, like, this is not the time to fool around. You're not going to just save things now, you're going to save your life. So I jumped right over. That's unbelievable. And got my parents to go upstairs with me. That's where I told the kids [standing on the *lānai*] that as soon as—I didn't know whether the water's going out or not, but I have another way that we can go [out from], through the back, cut short. We can all go out there together. But when I put my foot down, I found out there was no board there for us to walk on. Apparently, it had been washed away. So I said, "There is no way we can go through here so we have to go through the main Mamo Street."

WN: Main entrance?

LC: Main entrance, yeah.

WN: You mean you had to go back downstairs?

LC: Go back downstairs. Go upstairs again and then go back downstairs through another shortcut way that we were going to go out [from]. And with the water, I didn't know whether it was going to go out or what. I didn't know [about] a tidal wave at that time; I didn't know whether another wave [was] coming in. The water was shallow enough where it seemed to be receding because you could feel the pull of the water. So we said, "All of us run out together." I had carried Hazel. My sisters and my parents [were] by me. All the other kids, like Pied Piper, were all running out through that way. Everybody had to run to the top of, it used to be Akamine Meat Market, at the very top of Mamo Street.

WN: Mamo and what street?

LC: Mamo and Kilauea.

WN: Kilauea?

LC: Mamo and Kilauea.

WN: It's uphill, too, yeah?

LC: It's uphill. All the kids were running. The water was pulling you back but you ran against it. I was thinking about the kids, my own sisters, and Hazel [LC's cousin], and looking back to see if my mother was taking care of my dad because he was in his late [fifties] at that time. So we looked back [and] you could see the onslaught of the second wave coming through. It seemed like the whole thing was black. It was all that soot, the dirt, everything from the ground, the ocean floor, was coming up and it was just a huge wall of black coming toward our direction. I kept thinking of looking at the electric pole, telephone pole, if it was going to [topple] over that it would catch my mom and dad because they were running right before the wave. We screamed and screamed, telling them to hurry up.

WN: How far away were they from you?

LC: We were going faster because she was pulling my dad along with her. And remember now, the water was pulling you back, you were running against the water.

WN: How deep was it, at that time you were running?

LC: Oh, thigh deep.

WN: Thigh deep?

LC: Uh huh [yes].

WN: Wow.

- LC: That's why my kid sisters were all wet. Hazel's the only one who was dry because I was carrying her. They were all wet and I was wearing my pajamas. One side of my shoes was washed away and part of my pajamas was torn off. [We were] really going against the water that's pulling you back, and you're going forward. This is why I was worried about my parents, whether they would make it or not. When you see the height of the telephone pole, whether the wave was going to go over the pole or whether they would go under it. It seemed like it was going to go over. And if it went right over, it would catch my parents. So we kept yelling for them to keep running, running. They made it just before that wave. They made it just before. So we were all up there, we gathered together. Nice family reunion. We were up there together.
- WN: Did the wave break at all?
- LC: No, it just came down. It just enveloped everything in its sight.
- WN: So your whole family was home at the time?
- LC: No, I was the only one with the three other kids.
- WN: What about your other siblings?
- LC: My brother in '46 had just come back from the service, I think. My sister was in Honolulu working [for the] USED [U.S. Engineer Department]. The third one was married and lived in Hilo. She came to check on us.
- WN: So you were the oldest.
- LC: Yeah, at that time, right, I was the oldest at home.
- WN: So, it's hard for me to even imagine a wall of water coming in, as high as telephone poles.
- LC: A wall of black. The ocean floor had come up with the water. All black. The force was so strong that even the people who were watching the wave from the top, up by Mamo Theatre—you had those grates on the street, the grates along the curbing of the sidewalk. A Filipino man was just standing right by the grate. Of course, we've never seen a tidal wave. His trousers were pulled right off him. The water, the force. Because he was right there where the grate was. We heard all these stories after the fact, after everything had happened. We heard this story, [the wave] just pulled it off.
- WN: Wow.
- LC: Yeah, wow. It's scary, it's frightening, and yet these are things that you remember.
- WN: So when you were in the house and you saw the—you said there was a . . .
- LC: Outside. I looked out of the window and saw that.
- WN: Did you know what it was?

LC: No.

WN: Do you remember what went through your mind?

LC: I didn't know what a tidal wave was. It's just something that never happened [to us] before and it was a strange phenomenon that had happened right there in front of us, the street covered with water on a nice clear day. And it was on April Fool's [Day]. (Chuckles)

WN: So then you just saw the water and reacted.

LC: Yeah. You just . . .

WN: You didn't even stop to think, what is this?

LC: You don't stop, you react.

WN: So Hazel was upstairs?

LC: She was upstairs with my two younger sisters.

WN: Were they sleeping?

LC: No, they were ready to go to school.

WN: And you were finished with school by then?

LC: I was out of high school. But during the war days we had evacuation bags: rice bags made so that each one of us, if anything happened, would have our own bags. In our bags we had cans of crackers and staples, where we could use them should we be separated from each other. All of us had our own bags. Well, I grabbed one of the bags, actually I grabbed two bags because I had one on each shoulder, plus carrying Hazel, because in the bag I knew there was going to be saloon pilot [cracker], and there's going to be soda cracker. There's going to be a water. There's going to be packets of chocolate and candy bars. Every bag had those things, we knew that. So I carried it in case there was no place for us to go, at least we'd know that we'd have some kind of staple.

WN: So you were carrying two of those bags. . . .

LC: One on each shoulder.

WN: One on each shoulder. You carried Hazel, who was about what?

LC: She was, I don't know, light enough for me to carry. I knew that no matter how heavy, I would still have to carry her because I had two other—and she couldn't run fast enough for us so we may as well just carry. You were in your prime, you can just run.

WN: You had two sisters holding on to you.

LC: Holding on to me, pulling me.

WN: How much younger were they?

LC: They were in school already. All three of them were in school. So Hazel must have been—let's see, when was she born?

WN: Just to get an idea. Because the two sisters were—like were they like teenagers?

LC: No, no, no, elementary school.

WN: Oh, elementary school.

LC: Uh huh. No, Jan was a teenager. The other two were intermediate and elementary.

WN: So when you first found out about—when you first saw the place flooded, and you saw it receding, that's when you . . .

LC: Made a go for it.

WN: So with the recede—between the waves you actually started going out.

LC: Uh huh [yes]. Not realizing another one was coming.

WN: Wow.

LC: Yeah, wow. (WN chuckles.)

And the '60 wave, that was another one.

WN: Were you here in . . .

LC: Oh yes. Uh huh.

WN: Well, before we . . .

LC: My parents were trapped in that one.

WN: Before we get in to the '60 I just wanted to. . . . So you ran up to the top of Mamo Street. Then you waited until . . .

LC: And my parents ran, came up, you know. The last of the crew that came up to that place where we were.

WN: Okay, so what became of your house?

LC: Well, the family? What became of us? We didn't know what was going to become of us but we knew what we were together. Finally, Mrs. Young and her husband came by and found that we were up there. We didn't know what to do. And my sister's family, they had a car and they picked us up. We stayed with them for just the morning. Later on, at the Ah Mai store [Ah Mai and Company], Mr. and Mrs. Young found that we were over there and said that they

had room for us as a family, a whole family. We could be at their place.

WN: And where was Ah Mai store?

LC: Right on Kam[ehameha] Avenue.

WN: Were they okay?

LC: No. They were heavily, heavily damaged. But they didn't live there, see. The store was there but they lived in [Waiākea] Houselots and they had a big, big home. So they said they could house all of us together and we wouldn't have to be separated. So we stayed with them.

WN: So what was your house and the store like?

LC: The store was damaged but the house upstairs was okay, so we were able to go back after a while.

WN: How far was your store from Kam[ehameha Avenue]?

LC: Kam[ehameha Avenue]? Let's see, about—I would say. . . .

WN: Approximately?

LC: Three hundred feet. Pretty close, you know. About that, 300 feet.

WN: But still far enough so that it wouldn't be totally . . .

LC: Three hundred feet would be like 100 yards, huh?

WN: A football field.

LC: Yeah. No, it would be nearer than that. It would be closer, not a football field. A football field is—what is that? A football field is . . .

WN: Hundred yards.

LC: Hundred yards.

WN: Three hundred feet.

LC: Three hundred feet, 100 yards. No, I think it would be closer than that. Maybe 200 feet.

WN: I was talking to Catherine. . . .

LC: Diama [Campainha]. Yes.

WN: They were right by you folks, yeah?

LC: Right, right, they were across.

- WN: They sustained heavy damage.
- LC: They did. They had a billiard parlor.
- WN: Right. But were they closer than you folks, to the . . .
- LC: To Kam[eameha Avenue]? No, they were just about the same distance as we were.
- WN: Okay. So the store was damaged but your upstairs was . . .
- LC: Intact.
- WN: So your building didn't move at all?
- LC: No.
- WN: So then what did your father do after the wave? What did your family do?
- LC: He had to start a new business. He gave up the chicken business and started going into merchandising. He opened up a general merchandise [store, selling] canned goods and all that.
- WN: Why did he stop chicken?
- LC: We lost our cages, all the live chickens that we had. We lost our cages, we couldn't salvage them.
- WN: So he started general merchandise in the same spot?
- LC: (Yes, the store reopened at the same location. After the 1960 wave, my parents relocated their business directly across the street.)
- WN: On Mamo Street?
- LC: On Mamo Street, uh huh [yes].
- WN: So he did general merchandise.
- LC: Mm hmm [yes]. Although still selling produce from Waipi'o Valley. The only thing they gave up was the chicken business.
- WN: In the meantime, you were going to go university?
- LC: Mmm, yes. Got married, raised four children. Not raised, I was growing along with them when my husband decided I should take the exam and see if I could go to the UH [University of Hawai'i at] Hilo. Passed it, then I started going to Hilo College, which was [where the] Boys' [and Girls'] Club is today. That used to be Hilo College when it first opened. My kids were with me when I went to school. I had crackers, cookies, comic books, and I sat where I could see them right by the door. I could look down and see that they were doing all right and not fighting.

- WN: What made you go back to school?
- LC: I liked what I was doing when I did nine-to-five jobs. But my husband said that the kids after school were by themselves and he didn't like that. I'd drop them off at my mom's but it wasn't the same as if I were with them. So that's why I went back to school.
- WN: What kind of work were you doing before that?
- LC: Clerical work and raising the kids. But it's a different kind of thing. You're doing something [but] your heart and soul isn't there.
- WN: So you went back to major in education?
- LC: Education. So that my kids would be with me after school. They could come to my room and stay with me after school. In fact, I made them work. Because we never had Xerox machines and all that, we had cookie trays with these lips around and we had gelatin in there. And we put them in the oven and my kids did all the Xeroxing for me, duplicating papers for me to have for the kids next morning. Every day we did the same thing. We had several trays. I had maybe about a dozen trays of gel . . .
- WN: What was this again? You had cookie trays. . . .
- LC: You know, with the lip. It's a tray like an actual . . .
- WN: A baking . . .
- LC: Not the flat cookie sheet, it has a lip around. It's like a tray. Okay, I had about a dozen of them and we'd have gelatin.
- WN: Like a thin layer?
- LC: A thin layer, uh huh [yes]. You had to warm it in the oven. I had about four of them in the oven each time. When it came out, as soon as it sort of cooled off, you put your work that you're supposed to duplicate onto that sheet and then you take it off. We had to do that for the class work every day.
- WN: How would it copy?
- LC: All you did was put a clean sheet over—my children were the experts, so they did all that for me. Every day that was their job after school, to go ahead and do that work for me for the kids at school. The gel work.
- WN: You mean, if you wrote something with a pencil . . .
- LC: Yeah, traced whatever work, right.
- WN: You put it on, take it off, then the imprint would be on the gelatin?
- LC: Yes.

- WN: Oh, I see what you mean. Wait, how would you make the. . . .
- LC: You know, this was like forty-five years ago. I kind of forgot what we did now.
- WN: So you would make an imprint of . . .
- LC: There was a first one that has whatever ink it is and you put it onto that gel. You take that off and after that, all clean copies, clean sheets of paper would go on and it prints.
- WN: I see. Sort of like a mimeograph machine.
- LC: Like a mimeograph, only it was with gel.
- WN: So actually, then, you would do your work with the paper—I mean you write directly on the gel?
- LC: No, on a piece of paper, it was transposed onto that gel. After it took, because it's warm now, after it took, you take that off and then my children would have to put the clean sheets and get the prints to make copies.
- WN: (Chuckles) That's amazing.
- LC: They did that for me right through because I taught kindergarten for several years.
- WN: I never heard of that.
- LC: (Laughs) When they might want something new again, or the new one to go on, you have to warm it up in the oven again so that the other one would melt off. Leave nothing of the old one. You put the new one on.
- WN: To smooth it out?
- LC: Smooth it out.
- WN: So when did you start teaching kindergarten?
- LC: In '57.
- WN: Nineteen fifty-seven was your first [teaching] job. Where at?
- LC: Keaukaha School. I got my bachelor's [degree] as a preschool primary major, then I went for my professional certificate.
- WN: All at Hilo?
- LC: No, no, partly at [University of Hawai'i at] Mānoa.
- WN: How did you . . .

LC: Summers.

WN: Oh, summers.

LC: Summers. After that, I got my fifth-year [certificate] in elementary education. Professional [certificate] in secondary [education]. Then I went for my master's [degree] in administration and supervision.

WN: You were doing all this in summers?

LC: No, for my master's, I went a year in Honolulu.

WN: Oh. Your kids and family were here?

LC: No, I had two of them with me and two of them with my husband.

WN: Oh, I see. Ooh, rough, huh?

LC: Yeah. Dr. Saks, I don't know if you know him. Gil Saks?

WN: No, I don't know him. How do you spell it, S-A-K-S?

LC: Gilbert. . . . Tests and measurements. Don't you know who the fellow was?

WN: Uh, no, no.

LC: He told me to go for my doctorate because I had just about a year to go before I could get it. He said that I was so heavily in my courses that it went in to my doctoral. So he said, "All you do is the dissertation. I'll be your mentor, but you have to be on campus."

But my husband said, "Either D-R or M-R-S, forget it." It was a hard choice. But naturally, I'm going to forego that [doctorate] and stay with my children.

WN: What was your husband doing at this time?

LC: He was with HT&T. Working as—in '57, I think he was a supervisor of the stevedores.

WN: Hilo Transportation. . . .

LC: And Terminal.

WN: And Terminal. Hmm. So you start . . .

LC: Then after—by the way, after I got my bachelor's, ulterior motives, he said, "Now that you got your bachelor's," he says he wants to go back to school. Because at Hilo College, he had about a year's worth of courses. Then he went to the Mainland for schooling. He had about four years, four summers. He took leave without pay at HT&T and went to Minnesota for his schooling.

WN: You folks all went?

LC: No, we stayed back. I was teaching. I had to support him now. (Chuckles) Then the last year and a half, he went to New York for schooling. He went to CCNY, City College, New York. But his transcripts were acceptable at UH so he was able to get his degree out of UH. His transcripts were accepted at UH.

WN: So you were teaching at Keaukaha School from 1957?

LC: Mm hmm.

WN: Till when?

LC: Just about a year, not quite year and a half. During the semester, fall semester, I transferred to [Hilo] Union School when there was an opening.

WN: Year and a half later?

LC: Not quite a year and a half later, yeah, I went to Union School. Stayed there for three years, I think. Let's see, '57, '58, '59. Yeah, three years because in '63 I got my administration and supervision degree. I went into BTS, Beginning Teacher Supervisor. Probationary teachers for two years would be under this program. In '63 I went into that. So I worked out of the DOE [Department of Education] office.

WN: Until when?

LC: Until three years before my retirement, 1975.

WN: So you retired in '78?

LC: Yeah. The program was discontinued, see, BTS. Because . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

LC: . . . part of our salary was given by UH because we were doing part of their work.

WN: So you were still employed by the state and the university.

LC: Yeah, uh huh. So that was until '75, when the [BTS] program was discontinued. Then I went to Waiākeawaena [School] to teach.

WN: For three years?

LC: For three years.

WN: So, when the 1960 wave hit, where were you?

LC: I was living in our home, back of Hilo Intermediate School. My parents were still at Mamo Street. You know, we were given so many false alarms. Sirens were blowing throughout the week. Each time I went and picked them up. They got so disgusted, my father didn't want to stay at my place because he'd only want to go back home again, back to the store.

So that night that that happened, before the first siren blew already, my youngest son was not feeling well and he was in kindergarten. I told them [parents] that rather than going to drop him off the next morning, I would let him sleep there with them that night. They said okay. Before the sirens even blew, my father called me to tell me that they weren't going to have him for the night because he was yelling and crying right through. He wasn't going to sleep. "Come pick him up. Take him home."

WN: This was a Sunday or a Monday?

LC: This was during a weekday, it was the twenty-third of May. Twenty-third of May. Was that a Monday?

WN: I think so. [May 23, 1960 was a Monday. The tsunami struck Hilo at around 1:00 A.M., Monday.]

LC: He was supposed to be in school but because he wasn't feeling well I said he'd stay with them. He cried so they called me to pick him up. So I picked him up, brought him home, and then the siren blew. They had another alarm. So I said I'd go down for them—the kids were home now—I'd go down for *Po Po* and *Gung Gung*. I brought them home with me. I brought them home at about 11:00. My father said he can't sleep, he wants to go back to the store. My mother insisted that they both stay with me. He insisted on going back to the store because he said this is another false alarm. So my mother said okay, she'll go to the store with him. So I dropped them off.

WN: You dropped your mom and dad . . .

LC: Parents off.

WN: . . . at the store?

LC: At the store, uh huh.

WN: You had Kyle with you?

LC: Yeah, he was home with me. He was fast asleep already. He and my other children were sleeping at home.

WN: Where was home? Where did you live?

LC: Hāla'i Hills.

WN: Okay. And this is 11:00 P.M.?

LC: This is 11:00 P.M. when I took my parents back.

WN: And they were living above the store?

LC: They were living above the store. I thank God for that, too, because it was terrifying what happened afterwards. I think it was a little after twelve-something when the lights went off. But the thunderous sound. I wasn't able to sleep because I had just dropped them off and I didn't go back to sleep yet. That sound was so loud, like a bomb had hit. So I got up my oldest son and I told him that I think that the tidal wave has hit. I said that I'll get the other three kids together. I asked my oldest boy to stay with them. Of all things, I didn't have flashlights. I had only birthday candles. Lorrin's birthday was on May 21 so I had birthday candles. I told Terrill, "You light this only when you have to. There's no light, no nothing but you've got to stay with the kids 'cause I've got to go and check on my parents." So I got into the car and Terrill was—he was like a father, I tell you. So responsible for the kids.

So I went and looked for my parents and you wouldn't believe. The whole Mamo Street was pushed way up over to Kilauea. There was no street. Coming down, there was nothing recognizable. It looked like a war zone. Buildings, everything was piled on each other. There was no way—I told the policeman I have to get my parents because they were down Mamo Street.

He said, "Where?"

I said, "Way down. Way down by the ocean." By the fishmarket, it's really close by the park and the ocean.

He said, "No, this is all pushed up already. No more street."

I didn't know what to do. My sister had just—we had somehow found our place on Mamo Street, the top. We didn't know what to do. So she said she's going to the evacuation centers. My brother from Honoka'a had driven out. I don't know how he did it in record time. Because he had heard about the tidal wave. So we came looking for our parents. He went and checked evacuation centers and my sister was doing the same thing. Both of them were doing that while I was still on Mamo Street trying to see if anybody could locate them. They weren't anywhere. They weren't in the hospital, they weren't at the evacuation centers. So we just stayed up the street. I went back home. My sister went back home. My brother stayed there.

Came morning, he said they mentioned that there's somebody yelling down there. My brother was positive that it was my parents, arguing and fighting. (Chuckles) My mother kept saying that if he [LC's father] didn't [want to] go back [to the store instead of staying at LC's house], they wouldn't be in this predicament. That building had gone on top of two other buildings. They were on the top of them. They were protected but they were [almost] underwater. Both of them were in a small little cubicle, just impossible for two people to be in and yet we were told by the volunteers that they were almost underwater except for their heads.

As my mother said, she had that *futon* over her head. You know that Japanese comforter? She said she had enough strength to break off that material and she picked off all the cotton until there was that air that she could breathe. Because otherwise she'd be smothered. She looked and she saw my father. He had the four-by-four beams, everything, across his legs so he

couldn't move his legs. But the firemen had heard them fighting and yelling and screaming. My mother was scolding him for [wanting to] go back to the store. The [rescue] people with their light, like miner's light, were able to see through and save both of them. They were both saved. They were hospitalized for a few days and then I brought them back with me. Amazing. They were alive.

But during all that cleanup, in Taniguchi's parking lot, we found—me and my sister had flown up from Honolulu, everybody came to help salvage what we could from the store. We found the crib that Kyle slept in in that parking area of KTA [i.e., Taniguchi's store]. And we found his three pandas strewn there. He had the mama panda, papa panda, and the baby panda, they were strewn around. The crib was there, too.

WN: How far away was that?

LC: Taniguchi's parking lot. You know where Taniguchi store [i.e., KTA Super Stores] is right now? That parking lot.

WN: So up above you folks?

LC: We were down. But you see, the surprising thing is that my parents, being on the second floor, you would think that they'd come down this way. They were instead—you had other stores like this. Part of our thing had gone down but they were up there. They were up there. And saved.

WN: So how far did your parents' store and house move actually? I mean you said it was pushed upwards toward Kilauea?

LC: Yeah, towards Kilauea.

WN: So was it about at Kilauea where they found them?

LC: Yes, yes, yes. And both were alive, by the grace of God, yes.

WN: This is going uphill.

LC: Uh huh [yes]. That's why I said it's a saving grace that they were both alive.

WN: How old were they at the time?

LC: Mm, my dad was seventy-two [years old].

WN: In 1960?

LC: In 1960.

WN: So in '46, when they were running, he was in his six. . . . Well fourteen years difference. So he was still—he was fifty-eight then.

LC: Late fifties then. Late fifties. I thought he was about sixty. You know, he cheated on his way

over. (Chuckles) That's all I have to say about the age. To say he died when he was seventy-four but actually he came as a student from China and in order to come in you had to be that certain age. But he was actually in his twenties when he came over, you see. So he cheated on his age.

(Laughter)

LC: Let's see, so he actually died when he was about seventy-eight, eighty.

WN: That's amazing. (Chuckles)

LC: Good things come to good people and I would say they were really very, very generous of their heart. Whatever they had, not materialistic, they gave, they gave, they gave. God saw that and he saved them. 'Cause they're really good people.

WN: Did they find other people in that . . .

LC: They found them dead. We had casualties in the water. So the young couple that went back died when they ran out. A neighbor of my parents. Harriet works for Kushi's office. She was the older [daughter] of the young couple that died in that wave. I don't know if she recalled her experience because she was quite young. I think she was in elementary school. I don't know whether she remembers much but she's today employed at Kushi's office.

WN: Hazel remembers.

LC: Hazel remembers? (Chuckles)

WN: She's the one who told me about you.

LC: Oh, Hazel is something else.

WN: She said, "You have to interview this person who saved my life." That's what she said.

LC: (Chuckles) Because I carried her. (Chuckles)

WN: Yeah, yeah.

LC: I carried her. I didn't carry my sisters but I carried her because she was the younger of the three.

WN: So the 1960, in your case, was a lot more stronger and serious than the 1946.

LC: Right, '46 is when I had the three kids [i.e., younger siblings]. But '60 my parents were trapped. That's the part.

WN: Now, I read different accounts about the sirens. There are some---the one that I read said that there was only one siren early in the day and nothing after that.

LC: Yeah, but then during the week prior to that there were false alarms.

WN: Oh were there?

LC: There were. That's why my father wanted to go back because he said, "Oh, it's another one of those. And it's not going to happen."

WN: When you dropped your parents off, did you feel anything? Like . . .

LC: No. No premonition.

WN: You thought that . . .

LC: Everything was okay. Right.

So, it was totally unexpected that the wave would be hitting. And after the '46 you would think that things were going to be a lot easier to detect a tsunami coming and not having these false alarms. This is why in the '60 we had quite a few deaths, too.

WN: So, after the '60, what became of your parents? What did they do? Did they retire?

LC: No, he did go back to the store. He started the same business again. He did the same business again.

WN: Really? (Chuckles)

LC: Yup, grocery store.

WN: Where?

LC: Same place, same spot.

WN: (Chuckles) Wow.

LC: Until he passed away.

WN: Which was not too long after.

LC: Six years after. And then my mother came to live with me. Actually, my father was staying with me for about almost a year off and on, because he wasn't well then, at that time. He was with me off and on for about a year. But after he passed away [in 1966] we just sold the store and my mother lived with me. So that's the story.

WN: That's your story.

LC: True story.

WN: Well, okay. What a story.

(Laughter)

WN: Thank you very much.

LC: Scary story but very, very, very—this is why I'd like to have my children realize the forces of the wave. You know, you respect the ocean, you respect the water because it can be so deadly. It can just turn on you. It's frightening because my son loves to surf. Kyle is a surfer and he surfs any chance he can get. I'm always telling him you respect the water. It's dangerous. It's beautiful, it's fun, but it can turn on you.

WN: So you retired in nineteen seventy. . . .

LC: Eight.

WN: [Nineteen seventy]-eight. What have you been doing?

LC: Busy, busy, busy, busy. Since 1970, I'm glad to say that I've been on boards and commissions for the state and the county from '70 till now. Right now with the pension board at the county level and with the optometry on the state level. But it's been right through from '70 till now. And enjoying it. I think I learn---in fact, I'm not really serving or doing any community work, I feel I'm learning and getting so much more out of the whole thing. Because it's really, really interesting. And then raising my grandchildren. I had Lorrin's until they went to school. I baby-sat for two of his children until they went to school.

WN: You have four children and the oldest is Terrill. Now what is he doing?

LC: He's an executive senior vice-president for Bank of Honolulu.

WN: Bank of Honolulu?

LC: Mm hmm [yes].

WN: He was with Hawai'i National Bank before?

LC: He was.

WN: Oh. So he lives in Honolulu.

LC: Uh huh [yes].

WN: And number two is. . . .

LC: Lorrin.

WN: Lorrin. And what does he do?

LC: Lorrin teaches at Hilo High. Married to Naomi, Honolulu girl. Two children. Theone, who's teaching at Kamehameha School, married, she adopted a child. And Kyle, who has his practice here on Ululani Street. Have you seen his building?

WN: No.

LC: On Ululani, kitty-corner from McDonald's. That gray building.

WN: What kind of practice?

LC: He's a dentist.

WN: What was your daughter's name?

LC: Theone.

WN: Theone? How do you spell that?

LC: T-H-E-O-N-E, "the one."

(Laughter)

WN: The one girl?

LC: The one and only girl.

(Laughter)

WN: Well, thank you very much for your time, I appreciate it very much.

LC: All right. I just hope it can be of some value to you.

WN: Oh, I'm sure it will. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

**TSUNAMIS REMEMBERED:
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Volume I

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

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