

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Robert Y.S. "Steamy" Chow

" . . . when I looked across toward the railroad bridge I noticed the railroad station, the railroad depot, was completely gone. So was the warehouse on the makai side of the tracks . . . So I felt it was too dangerous for me to take care traffic there. . . . Then I went down Wailuku Drive and turned around in the back of the [Hilo] Armory. And while I was heading up, the second wave came. That's when people panic. And I mean people didn't care if a car was coming or not, they just kept on running. So the only thing for me to do is just stop and let the people run. Then all of a sudden I noticed the [part of the] bridge that was in the water was floating upstream. It missed the Pu'u'eo Bridge [by] inches. . . . And the same time, water came underneath my car and I was surrounded with water. And had that eerie feeling, you don't know if you going be washed away or not."

Robert "Steamy" Chow, a retired Hilo police officer, was born March 19, 1922. He is the fifth of seven children born to Keong Chow, an immigrant from Canton, China, and Honolulu-born Violet K.F. Fong Chow. Chow spent much of his boyhood selling newspapers and shining shoes on street corners in downtown Hilo, and helping in his father's shoe repair business. He was educated in Hilo schools and graduated from Hilo High School in 1940.

Upon graduation, Chow worked for the *Hilo Tribune-Herald*. After a brief military stint, he returned to Hilo and began his twenty-one-year career in the Hilo Police Department.

An injury forced him to retire from the police force in 1964. Between 1965 and 1983, Chow was an insurance adjuster. Since 1990, Chow has been the manager of the Historic Kress Building, where he oversees an eatery, movie theater complex, and special events held in the former department store building on Kamehameha Avenue. The building survived the 1946 and 1960 tsunamis.

Chow's three oral history interviews were conducted in his downtown Hilo office, where he recalled his eyewitness experiences as a police officer assigned to the downtown beat during the 1946, 1952, 1957, and 1960 tsunamis. Very knowledgeable about Hilo's history and people, Chow is an original steering committee member of the Pacific Tsunami Museum, where he serves as a docent. He is often called on to present talks to students and community organizations about the background and dangers of tsunamis.

He lives in Hilo with his wife, Lily Lui-Aki Chow. The couple raised two sons.

Tape No. 29-1-1-98

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Robert "Steamy" Chow (RC)

Hilo, Hawai'i

February 25, 1998

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Robert ["Steamy"] Chow on February 25, 1998, and we're at his office in downtown Hilo, Hawai'i, in the Kress building. This is for the Pacific Tsunami Museum oral history project. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, good morning Robert. How are you?

RC: Good morning. I'm fine.

WN: Okay, why don't we start. First of all, tell me when and where you were born.

RC: I was born in Hilo on Kīlauea Avenue across the street from the Taishoji [Mission] church. If I recall, the address was 76.

WN: Seventy-six Kīlauea . . .

RC: Kīlauea Avenue.

WN: And the date?

RC: March 19, 1922. In other words now, I was born in the heart of Hilo town. My [father was] Chow Keong. He was an immigrant from China. Came here in 1892. He worked in the sugar fields of Waiākea Mill [Company], later on at the Hilo Sugar [Company]. And in the late 1920s, he opened up his own shoe repair shop, repairing shoes and doing leggings for the sugar companies' employees. In those days, you have to have tight bottoms because there's lots of centipedes around.

My mother was born in Honolulu. Her name is Violet Kam Foong Fong. She's the oldest daughter of eleven children and one of her brother[s] is the former (U.S.) senator [Hiram L.] Fong. I give a little history of hers. She got married when she was only fourteen years old, and she came by boat from Honolulu and landed out at Haina in . . .

WN: Honoka'a.

RC: Honoka'a. She had to come by—there, at the time, they had that sling from the boat to land.

And at the same time she brought her younger sister, (Rose Fong). I don't know, I think maybe they were afraid that they doing matchmaking thing. Her family figured that her future husband would manhandle her, so they brought another family [member], and that aunty stayed with us for quite some time.

I'm one of seven children. My oldest sister, Margaret, was born in Hilo. So in fact, all of us were born at the same residence on Kīlauea Avenue. We all grew up and went to the Hilo Union School and graduated from Hilo High School.

WN: You were what number in the family?

RC: I'm number five of seven. We have three girls older than I am, and four boys.

WN: You were talking about your father's shoe repair shop or shoe shop.

RC: Yes.

WN: Where was that?

RC: Shoe repair shop was located just opposite of the Hilo First Hawaiian Bank. In those days it was called Bishop Bank, and the [site of the] future [Pacific] Tsunami Museum. He and eight other Chinese businessmen owned that whole—almost the whole block—or had the lease of that whole block across First Hawaiian Bank . . .

WN: This is on Kamehameha Avenue?

RC: Kamehameha Avenue . . .

WN: Oh, so *makai* . . .

RC: *Makai* of Kamehameha Avenue, between Kalākaua Street and Waiānuenuē. I feel that he was one of the main shoe repair persons because he imported lots of raw material, and other shoe repair people comes to his shop to purchase. Not one of our family took over the business, so in 1945—end of '45—they sold the business. He had another partner, a Chow Yim. Y-I-M. Both sides don't want to take over so they just close up.

WN: How come nobody wanted to take over?

RC: Hard in those days, it's hard work. Everybody else had different interests. So that's why we didn't take over. You see, my oldest brother was in the [military] service, and I was the only one home taking care of my parents. My other brother just below me was in the merchant marines, and my kid brother worked for the public works for Pearl Harbor. So we weren't interested.

WN: When you say "hard work," you know, what . . .

RC: They . . .

WN: Long hours?

RC: Long hours and everything is manual. There's very little machinery. He have to cut the leather with knife, put just half soles, whole soles, and he does make shoes, too. Because when I graduated from intermediate school, I got homemade shoes by my dad. A white pair. It was a pride and joy for me. Too bad I didn't save it as a souvenir. So all of my brothers had different interests, so we didn't care to do that type of work.

WN: Did you help at all in the store?

RC: I opened up the place. In those days, we open up the store, where the whole front is open. We use a one-by-twelve lumber and put it up with something like, a big board, two-by-four, in the back to block from opening up. And we'd do that almost every day six days a week because it's only two blocks from where we live. We open the place up, then my dad comes down, check out everything, and then we go to school. Our school is about three blocks away, the Hilo Union School. So it's easy. In those days, walking is no problem because they had hardly any cars around.

So my life as a child was very interesting because I sold newspapers for the *Hilo Tribune-Herald*. From Furneaux and Kilauea, I'd walk up a block at the corner of Haili and Kilauea where the Central Christian Church was located, and I sold newspapers only on Sundays. My parents didn't want me to cross the street because [they were] afraid I'll get into accident. But then, after about a year, I moved up, got promoted by going up to Kino'ole and Haili, where the First Foreign Church was located. That's where I sold newspapers for quite some time there. Of course, at that time First Foreign Church was like a *Haole* church, where the plantation managers, the *lunas*, goes to that church.

WN: Was that the name of the church?

RC: First Foreign Church . . .

WN: First Foreign Church?

RC: Yeah. Now it's named First United Protestant Church. It's situated on Waiānuenuē, about 200 yards above the Hilo Medical Center, the old hospital. They changed their name and there's different members of the church now. It's more different ethnic groups goes there. But in the old days, was mostly the Caucasians. In those days you would say "the upper crust" because they were the *lunas* and plantation managers. So for me, selling newspapers there was great because they were buying newspapers.

In later years, I sold newspapers during the week, and my headquarters was at the corner of Waiānuenuē and Kamehameha, the old Hilo Drug [Company, Ltd.] corner. Lots of the old-timers know who I am. The newspaper boy. Even though when I came a policeman, I'm still known as the newspaper boy. (WN laughs.)

But I have a very interesting life. I sold newspapers for a while, and recalling the old days, where, in Hilo, Kamehameha Avenue, the parking is on the middle of the street. And being a juvenile, underaged, selling newspapers at night, in those days they had probation officers. One fellow by the name of Nomahala, when we see his car coming, I run up, up to the parking stalls, and I'm walking on the opposite direction where his car coming, so hiding between the cars. When you come around the other end, I'm going against him going back. So fortunately,

I never did get caught. But then, selling newspapers on Saturday night was big business because you make fifty cents a night. That's lots of money.

WN: How much was one paper?

RC: We buy two for nickel, and we sold nickel apiece, so you make [100] percent. So on a good Saturday night, after that, you make good money, then you go to the Chinese restaurant, Wah Chong, and buy saimin. Or if you make extra money, you buy saimin and wonton because it costs you only fifteen cents. Saimin was only ten cents. I sold newspapers until I delivered newspapers in the late [19]30s, and my route was downtown Hilo, and later on I went deliver up at the Pu'u'eo section, was an exclusive area.

In 1939, I work—still going to school—work part time for the *Hilo Tribune-Herald* when they started the merchant carrier system. While working for *Hilo Tribune-Herald*, one of my (jobs) was to go to every business in Hilo and every home in the city of Hilo. So that's why I have a real broad knowledge of Hilo town.

WN: So when you were selling papers, you actually sold—you didn't deliver it? You weren't a delivery [person] when you first started?

RC: I first started as just sold newspapers, and as I got older, and when there's a position open, I was asked to [deliver].

WN: So how old were you when you first started selling papers?

RC: Selling newspapers only on Sundays, about seven years old.

WN: Ho.

RC: Yeah. And later on, when my parents feel that I could handle traffic, then I could go out and sell newspapers six days a week.

WN: So why did you sell papers? Did you have to sell or you wanted to?

RC: You see, in those days, my parents are real people who wanted us to be somebody, you know, to earn our own living. The only thing to do was to sell newspapers to make money. That's why all of us, in fact, the three of us, sold newspapers. The three small ones.

WN: So, where did your siblings go to sell? You didn't go same area, eh?

RC: No. All over town, you know. So, with me, I had the best deal. This is something I cherish because you meet the general public, and when you meet people and be honest with them, they respect you, and you respect them. This is how the older people now, they still remember me as selling newspapers.

WN: So what kind of family did you grow up in? How would you compare your family with, say, others living in that area?

RC: My parents were real strict. Like a Chinese in a Chinese community. At the time, there was

quite a bit Chinese community here. Lots of stores here. Even my mom worked in a restaurant. Cooking and cleaning, cutting vegetables. During certain periods, we used to go down and help them. Like, the people would chop firewood, we go in after school. So we go and stack up the firewood, and get a free lunch or whatever it is, like stew rice or vegetable soup and crackers.

So, in those days, my parents, more so, my mother, was real conservative. Everything you can work for a meal, [then] work for a meal. You help people. You just do things.

So it was great. We were not afraid to work. I was brought up more so by my dad in a sense that I always pass it on to my children, like it's always free to say "thank-you," "good-morning," respect your elders, because it's all free. Because they love to be acknowledged. So all my children are real friendly—my two boys. They can go anyplace in town, and right off the bat, they says, "Oh, that's Steam Pork's son," because of the attitude they have, eh.

So we did all kind of chores. They want us to grow up to be everything. It's not just doing one thing. So we can do cooking, we can sew clothes, clean house, wash dishes. A good example: when I was in sixth grade, it was my birthday, and I wanted to take lunch to school. My mom told me, "You want to bring chicken? Get up in the morning, you kill the chicken," fresh chicken. I had to cook the chicken and take some chicken to school. In my *bentō*. So this is the kind of things that we're not afraid to work, and every one of us know how to cook and my sisters can cook, bake, sew clothes, do almost anything.

WN: When you work, say, selling papers and the money that you got, was that yours to keep?

RC: Yes. For keep. In 1939, when my parents moved to Pu'u'eo, three of us, three youngest boys, had accumulated over \$400 apiece, and we put that money in for part of the down payment for the house we moved in. The house we built was about \$6,000. The two-story house [with] full basement. We had share in it in a sense that we helped pay for that house. Three of us, that's \$1200 of the \$6000 dollars, pretty good. So it was worth it in saving because you know where it's going to.

WN: So you saved a lot of the money that . . .

RC: Yes, we saved. We make our own things to play with. Seldom do we buy anything for ourselves where we cannot make. Holidays, like Fourth of July, Mo'oheau Park was the center of everything. They have fairgrounds and so then in those days, you eat, buy a slice of watermelon, it's ten cents. Corn on the cob is five cents or ten cents.

And talking about Mo'oheau Park, I shined shoes, too. I never forget the first day I made my shoe box. Being that my dad had a shoe repair shop, had the ink and everything free. So I went down to Mo'oheau Park, you know, proud of myself, going shine shoes. In those days, solid color is ten cents, and two-tone can be fifteen cents. The most we charge is twenty-five cents. But that day, that Saturday, I went to shine shoes. So I went put my shoe box at this Chinese butcher shop. When I came back after lunch, everything was gone except the box. Somebody stole all the ink and everything. I was kind of downhearted, but getting it free from my dad is not too bad. In those days, Donald Marino was shining shoes.

WN: Mm.

RC: Yeah, that's how far back. I remember that, shining shoes. And he was a small little guy.

WN: That's the boxer?

RC: The boxer. The flyweight champion.

WN: So who did you shine shoes for?

RC: Myself.

WN: No, I mean, who would be there on Saturday. . .

RC: Oh, you see, on Saturdays, most on Saturdays, the plantation workers come in town and it's mostly the Filipino. And they were well, you know, good dressers, and they keep their shoes and clothing real spic-and-span. And that's the only day they can come out after working the plantation. So they have to shine their shoes, make nice, and they go to a dance hall. A taxi dance hall. That's where we make money. If you're a good shoe shiner, you get lot of business. With me, I was just a newcomer there, and we make a few cents. When you make a dollar, that's big bucks. So we did all kind of work.

WN: Did you do spit shine?

RC: Yes, spit shine, we did spit shine. (WN laughs.) And the louder you make the noise, the customer feel better that, you know. So you try the best you can to make noise. You flick . . .

WN: Oh, you mean with the cloth?

RC: With the cloth. There's a Filipino fellow, I don't know his name, but he was real good. Plenty people around watching him. So he had a lot of customers stand in line. Nobody else wanted to go with the rookies like us.

WN: So did a lot of people live in that section of Hilo? I mean, seemed like you in more---you were in the business area?

RC: Yes, like today's standards, what we call mom-and-pop type stores. Mamo Street, there were more mom-and-pop restaurants. Almost every other store was a restaurant. They have Japanese restaurant like Ogi noodles [I. Ogi Udon-Ya]. They serve only noodles and sushi. Cone sushi. Not the *makizushi*, only cone sushi. Right next door there's another restaurant. They have noodles and something else. Then the bigger restaurant like the Hilo Grill were mostly the Okinawan. They have a real big type of meals. And they make good business here because most of these plantation workers, they come from the outlying districts, come by train and spend the weekend in town. So Mamo Street was the center of attraction for the plantation workers, the laborers. Like Hilo Drug [Company, Ltd.] was more for the plantation managers, the *lunas*, and all. The Caucasian group.

WN: Hilo Drug?

RC: Hilo Drug. They have a fountain there. And they sell all kind of sundries. So it's two separate areas.

WN: So Mamo Street was the area where more of the plantation . . .

RC: Yeah, plantation . . .

WN: Poorer people . . .

RC: Yeah, but that's where most of the markets are. In those days, they didn't have any supermarket. You buy your meats from the meat market and your vegetables from the vegetable stand. So it's all separate.

WN: So, ethnically, your area was mostly Chinese and Japanese?

RC: Yes. They were working people and store owners.

WN: And the store owners were what?

RC: All kinds.

WN: Chinese?

RC: Chinese. Japanese. Filipino.

WN: Oh, had Filipino stores, too?

RC: Yeah. You know, there's about only three Filipino stores, but they cater to the plantation workers that came by. And this Japanese store right next to Mo'oheau Park, Takeuchi Store. They make raincoats. They supply most of the plantation workers. Takeuchi Store. When I do my walking tour, I always mention Takeuchi Store is on the *makai* side of Kamehameha opposite of [S.] Hata [Shoten, Ltd.] building. They paint the linseed oil on the raincoats right on the sidewalk, and they hang them on the awning. So when you pass under it, you get instant waterproof.

(Laughter)

RC: So it's a whole different ball game from what it is today in a sense that people can do all kind of things on the sidewalk. Nobody complain. Like now, you do something on the sidewalk, you get everybody after you. So that's a different thing. I feel, in the old days, it's more friendlier than what it is now. Now, it's everything for money, money, money. Before, you see somebody doing something, you go over there and help 'em. Now, you stay away because you don't want to be sued when something goes wrong.

WN: Mm hmm. You said that you made your own toys and things.

RC: Yes, like my sister know how to sew. We have the Job's tears, the red beads. We put 'em in bean bags. In those days we have Bull Durham bag we stuff with sawdust and we play games with them. We cut broomsticks to play *okamapio*.

WN: *Okamapio*? Is that like *pee wee*?

RC: I don't know what you. . . . It's a---like this. The stick is . . .

WN: About six-inch long stick.

RC: Yeah, then you shave them on both ends to make points. And you have another stick that you hit it [with], and you hit it as far as you can. The person on the other side, if he catch it, you're out. If he doesn't catch it from there, you set it in front of two rocks and you put the stick across this rock and that fellow supposed to throw that stick that you hit. If you knock that stick that's across the rock, you lose.

WN: How far away are you?

RC: You can hit 'em as. . . . You put 'em where you hit. Like the home base, and you put the stick across, and then how far you hit is from there he has to throw it. Pretty accurate sometimes. So if he miss it, then with the pointed stick, you pick it up and you hit that wood with two sides pointed, and you can tap it how many times, [and] times [i.e., multiply] that to the point you come to the base. That's how you count your points.

WN: So you have two sticks actually. One stick is like a longer one.

RC: Longer one. Like a bat. And the other one is like a ball but it's . . .

WN: Six inches long.

RC: . . . a six-inch long stick and shaved on—pointed on both ends. And you hit it [i.e., the shorter stick]. And the opponent, if he catch it, you out. If he doesn't catch it, he has to take that stick and try and knock your stick down over this rock.

WN: Gets two rocks and put the stick?

RC: The stick on, across. So then we play all kind of games.

WN: And you call that *okamapio*?

RC: *Okamapio*.

WN: Because other places . . .

RC: They have a different name.

WN: . . . they call it *pee wee*. Oh interesting. So who were your friends?

RC: The neighborhood's kids. It's fun because you have all kind of ethnic group. You just play. The main thing is that you have a partner to play with. Most our games are played on Sundays because every day we're out selling newspapers, and in between. . . . Selling newspapers, we have to wait at the newspaper plant. *Hilo Tribune-Herald* was located on Shipman [Street] and Keawe Street where the present parking lot is located above the [Hilo] Armory. We play with a tennis ball on the sidewalk, and the sidewalk have all cross-grooves on the sidewalk about four feet blocks, and we use that like playing tennis, hand tennis, on the sidewalk.

So we always have something going. In later years, you start gambling by throwing money on the line. Play with pennies. If you throw it closest to the line, you're the winner.

Then football season, you playing with the tennis ball, like playing football, touch football, on the street. This is during the period where you selling newspapers in between waiting for the newspapers to come out. You cannot keep people idle. So you just do anything. In those days traffic was light so it's easy. So that's what we do.

WN: And what was school like for you?

RC: We walked to school. Was about five blocks, four or five blocks up every morning. Once a week, it's your turn to work in the kitchen. In those days, almost all the students in the fifth and sixth grade work in the cafeteria. And your reward might be a peanut butter sandwich. (Chuckles) It was great. In the cafeteria, in the dining room, the teachers are always closest to where you return your plate. And every student that passes the teacher, the plate is supposed to be almost empty. You have to eat all your food. Not like now, the pigs enjoy all the food that goes through the cafeteria. In those days, you have to eat all your food.

I'll never forget one time, I was called in the office by one of the teachers, that my sister didn't want to eat her food. What she did [was] she took a hair from her head and put it in her lunch. She says, "It's got hair in it." So, they got rid of it and gave her another plate. (WN laughs.) She was forced to eat it. So this is how strict they were in those days. Like now, teachers say, "If you don't eat, you don't eat. It's your tough luck."

WN: Was Hilo Union the only school in town?

RC: It's the closest in the vicinity of---in those days everybody walked. We didn't have school buses, so we walked. The other school was Kapi'olani School, and it's in between. So people walk in between the two schools. So all nine of us graduated from Hilo Union School.

WN: What did you like best in school?

RC: My best subject was math because, I don't know, the Chinamens all good in math. (WN laughs.) In the fifth grade, I was with Miss Scott's class. She's in the dispensary. She's you know, like first aid teacher in the dispensary. I'm more like her pet. I do all the homework on the board for the teacher. She tells me what to do until she comes back maybe half an hour later. So I was lucky, I could do those things.

WN: When you were a kid, what did you want to be when you were growing up?

RC: I don't know, you know what I mean? I sold newspapers, everything. I wanted to be some kind of businessman but nothing in particular. But then after I graduate 1940 from Hilo High School, I had a job already working for the *Hilo Tribune-Herald* in circulation. Then, later on, when the war years, they, the police department, was looking for a person that could speak some Chinese because still had some Chinese immigrants still here. And I was asked to apply. So when I applied, my dad came along, and he knew the captain of the detectives, George Richardson. And he says, "Why didn't you bring your son earlier?" You know, I just made twenty-one in March, and I got hired on the spot in May of 1943 because I could speak Cantonese. In those days, the Cantonese was the language. . . .

WN: How much Cantonese could you speak?

RC: Enough to get by. So, I'm real proud of myself in a sense that after that, after about one year or so, I was called to be the interpreter for this old Chinese man that was working at the Pepe'ekeo [Sugar Company] plantation. He was robbed and beaten. He almost died by this Puerto Rican ex-convict. And he was at the Pepe'ekeo hospital. So I went there to talk to him. I could converse with him to a certain degree where I could get all the information. But then when they get a little more technical, I used to go home and talk to my dad. So you know, he helped me.

So I go back and I talk to the Chinese fellow and get more information. We arrested the fellow, a guy named Pagan, and later on went up the grand jury. And I was asked to be the interpreter. I was scared because I felt like I didn't know enough to be an interpreter, but the prosecutor [said], "No, you gotta go." So I went. And before the grand jury, up there, had two elderly Chinese jurors. One was Mr. Leong from Hakalau Sugar Company. He was the purchasing agent, and I knew that he knew lots of Chinese. And the other fellow was Mr. Lai. He was a salesman.

So I went up there, interpret. And that was the best day of my life. I interpret smoothly right through. No "ah-ah" or so. Afterwards, they convicted the person, and Mr. Lai and Mr. Leong run up to me, what Chinese[-language] school I went to. I went to a regular Chinese school here and that was it. He thought that I graduated from a Chinese school.

WN: Which Chinese[-language] school did you go to?

RC: This was run by Mr. Young, a Chinese herb doctor and he was like a private thing. So it was several families going there. That's it. But I lost most of it now.

WN: Did you talk to your mother and father in Cantonese?

RC: Most, yeah. Because they wanted us to try to maintain the Chinese. But in those days, you want to be American so you don't want to speak Chinese. But now, you regret once you get older because everything is bilingual.

WN: Before we get into your becoming a policeman in '43, tell me a little about the experiences during World War II here in Hilo.

RC: In December 7, 1941, it was a Sunday morning when we heard that Pearl Harbor was bombed. So everybody was listening to the radio, everything. Then there was a blackout. After that--no, before that, the only thing I know of, that we had a National Guard. But the island of Hawai'i was not prepared for invasion because we have a National Guard, that's all. And we had people from Kilauea Military Camp at the time. I knew that there were some soldiers up there because there was MPs [military police] on duty in Hilo. On Haili Street, they had a office space there. And that was it. So I felt that if Japan had invaded this island, they would take it with open arms because we didn't have enough. But then, right after that, the military came, and being that we were living in Pu'u'eo on Wainaku Avenue, that's the traffic that has to go out Hāmākua Coast. Then we see the military coming through. They march in companies going out [to] the country . . .

WN: Where were they stationed?

RC: They were all along the Hāmākua Coast.

WN: Hold it. I'm just going to turn the tape over.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

RC: So they were stationed all over Hāmākua Coast, and in fact they had a unit up 'Amaulu. That's all you see, military all over the place. In those days you have to black out your house. They organized block wardens. Local people. Then they formed home guard. We lived near the Hilo Electric Light Company, Ltd., the power plant on Wainaku Avenue and Wailuku River. They had to stand guard there. So when they see a little light, they yell. Sometimes they fire shot up in the air so you get scared of these things. But when the military came, it got stricter because in Pu'u'eo, on the third block which we call Kāwili and Wainaku Avenue, the high-ranking military people were stationed there in that house. And there was provost marshal and all, their headquarters was the post office building. And you could see them walking down and the staff cars going up and down. And they were real strict in our area. The home guard and now and then, the MPs, come and yell at you, "Turn off your lights!"

WN: At that time, you were working for *Hilo Tribune*[-*Herald*]?

RC: Yes. Then, December 17, about nine o'clock P.M., I heard a loud noise, like somebody was shooting. And from my bedroom, I looked toward downtown, I didn't see anything. Then, the second one went off, I looked around where the action was, nothing. Then, the third one went off, so I assume at the time that somebody must have shelled Hilo but I didn't see any fire or anything. But later on, we heard—you know, news travels fast—that the Japanese submarine was aiming for the gasoline tank, but they hit the first tank, was the molasses tank. They just dismantled that tank, you know.

WN: Oh yeah?

RC: Yeah. They had it . . .

WN: Was it up on the docks?

RC: On the docks. Then they hit one at Pier 1 and one went by the airport. This is the same vicinity. Just beyond the molasses tank was all Standard Oil, Shell Oil Company had all their tanks there. So if they had hit the gas tank, then there would be fire all over the place. But they hit the molasses tank so we were lucky. So that's some of the incidents there.

And then, April 19th, no, April 18, 1942, Mauna Loa erupted. [According to the United States Geological Survey's World Wide Web site, Mauna Loa erupted on April 26, 1942.] And here was Mauna Loa with all the lights out, and yet, the home guard and block warden still screaming at us, "Turn off the lights, your light's showing." Yet, Mauna Loa, full blast. That's

the time when the lava flow was coming closest to Hilo, and the military had bombed the lava flow to divert the lava flow, and after a while [two days] it stopped. I don't know if because of the bomb or what. Then you hear all kind of rumors. Later on, in later years, the paper says that the pilots that dropped the bombs on the lava flow all died. Pele did it.

WN: Oh. Yikes. (Laughs)

RC: Then, in Hilo, all along the coastline, were barbed wire fence. All along. You can't go fishing anymore because the barbed wire is all over. My dad had the shoe repair shop yet, so in the back was his small kitchen. We could look out in the ocean, you could see all the barbed wires on all the rocks.

WN: I'm wondering with the military being stationed on the Big Island, did that help out the businesses around the area?

RC: It helped. Very much. Because they come downtown, they hit the bars, they buy hot dogs, hamburgers, that's their type of food. And then they get used to eating sushi and other Chinese food because we didn't have enough American type of food in Hilo. Was mostly Oriental food. So they get used to. They learn how to use chopstick and they get used to anything. All kind of Oriental food, ethnic group.

WN: Did the businesses change? Were there more bars opening up?

RC: Yeah, had many bars.

WN: Even before? Or because of the war the . . .

RC: Because of the war, many additional bars that came out. Had many MPs and SPs [shore patrol] around, you know, they was stationed almost nearby the bars.

WN: Did your father have more business?

RC: It's just the regular type of business. It didn't improve because of the war, but he worked until 1945, and then he close up. He retired.

WN: What about incidents? Any problems with having all these military personnel?

RC: Yeah, they had all kind of problems. Some of them are real nice. Like [when] we were living on Pu'u'eo on the corner of 'Ōhai and Wainaku Avenue, and the road going up the hill is what we call 'Amauulu Camp One. They had a camp up there and people would come---soldiers would come down to the corner store and talk story with us. One fellow was a acrobat guy. Talk stories, do all kind of acrobat tumbling and stuff. And then [during] those war years, the military have their own band. They have some kind of plays up at the Hilo High School and they play basketball games at the Hilo Armory.

The Hilo Armory is just about two blocks away from where we lived. So we see the good players come down and play. Some of them were real nice, but some of them were real nasty. So you cannot judge. Some of them come from different areas in the Mainland. You hear about the hillbillies and you hear about the Brooklyn accent, and we had lots. In the war years,

we had Twenty-seventh Division, mostly from New York, from Brooklyn, and you get hard time understanding (chuckles) them when they talk.

In 1943, I came a policeman.

- WN: And so how was that? You told me how you, you know, got the job. One is because you could speak Cantonese. But how did you feel about getting a job as a policeman?
- RC: First part, my mother didn't want me to be a policeman because in those days, the policeman had bad credits in a sense that they want you to sign notes. [If] you a new policeman, the [higher-ranking officers] want you to co-sign some notes.
- WN: But why is that?
- RC: To borrow money and then they don't pay, and then the guy that's co-signer gets stuck with it. So I refuse to sign because my parents knew this all along. So from May 1, 1943 to July 1 of 1943, that was during the sheriff period. So when the chief of police took over July 1943, one of the first directives were made so that no policeman could sign notes for money. They have to be approved by the chief of police. That cleared everything. That made my mother happy because during that period, I hear lot of low-ranking officers or even the lieutenants and captains get stuck when the people higher than them made them sign some notes and then they get stuck with thousand [\$1,000], \$2,000 [debt]. And in those days, in the [19]40s, [\$]1,000, \$2,000 [was] big bucks.
- WN: Why is it the policemen were signing notes?
- RC: Because in those days, was politics eh? The sheriff has to be elected by the people and they go out and campaign, and there's lot of money have to be spent. So to get money for campaign, they have to hit their subordinates. So that's what happened. So I was fortunate during that period. I was asked many times, but I says, "No, I cannot." But then when the [appointed] chief of police [system] came in, [replacing the elective sheriff system] there was a directive, that saved me from signing any notes.
- WN: So what is the difference between---you said the sheriff period was up to July of '43 and then from that point on it became chief of police system. So what's the difference?
- RC: In the old days, the sheriff is elected by the people. So he has to go out and campaign for be elected. Then, the legislature passed a bill that we should have chief of police, so July 1, 1943, the chief of police took over.
- WN: Who was appointed?
- RC: He was appointed by a police commission.
- WN: I see.
- RC: He had been screened and he'd been appointed. So Chief George Larsen was appointed. He was a graduate from Northwestern [University], I think, and then his assistant was Anthony Paul. He was [formerly] a lieutenant with the Honolulu Police Department.

WN: And Larsen was—he came from Honolulu, too?

RC: No. I don't know. I don't recall, but from what I recall correctly, he [George Larsen] was a Maui boy. But he had gone to Northwestern and majored in police science.

WN: Oh I see. And then the sheriff? Who was the sheriff?

RC: The sheriff was Henry K. Martin.

WN: Henry Martin.

RC: Yeah.

WN: And he was Big Island boy?

RC: He was a island boy.

WN: Oh I see. So difference is that not only elected but the chief of police and the lieutenant were from off island.

RC: Off island.

WN: Did that make a big difference?

RC: Yes, in a sense that we get more modern, more update in the police profession, but solving the crimes and everything is the same regardless of what. The different method in solving.

WN: So what, were more regulations or anything?

RC: Yeah, we had many regulations. In fact, in the month of July when we took over—the chief of police took over—they had a raid. We raid all the pinball machines. The whole city---we called everybody back on duty, we didn't know what's going on. Each detective patrol division was assigned to a certain detective to hit certain place in town. That was the beginning of chief of police. So it was fun doing it in a sense that we had to raid the pinball machines. [Was] all over the place in the police station.

In the war years, during the sheriff days and the police chief, there was curfew so by ten o'clock, nobody was supposed to be on the street. So we patrol. Get up, and all those cars had a small slit. The headlights. And most. . . .

WN: So even in '43 they were having blackouts?

RC: Yes. We had foot patrols at the time checking doors. Very interesting because hardly anybody was on the road. The only people that were on the road was the military [personnel]. The gas station on Haili and Keawe was taking care of most of the military. Small cars, you know, the sedans, jeeps for fill gas there. Was a motor pool there. The post office was the main headquarters for the military. They had communication there. I don't know if you remember WARD [Women's Air Raid Defense group]. W-A-R-D. It's some kind of communication for the military where they have civilian workers being operators.

- WN: I was wondering, too, you grew up selling papers and you knew a lot of people and so forth. And then, now, you're a policeman where you have to sort of enforce certain things. Did that affect you at all?
- RC: First part yes, but then after a while, it's not being a policeman that, "I'm the boss. You follow what I say." It's not so. You have to have more human relationships. You don't have to be a tough guy to be a policeman. You can be a good Joe and still be a policeman. My career, I wasn't a policeman's policeman. I was more a people's policeman. If I stop you for [a] violation, if I feel that I can give you a scolding and let you go and it won't happen again, [instead of] giving you a tag and you pay a fine, [I'd rather do that]. You know, you get different philosophy. So I was more a people's policeman, so that made a difference. But now and then, you know what I mean, I have to do my job. But I look back now, I think I did the right thing in going that route instead of being a policeman's policeman, everything follow the law. The law is made as a guide, not for you to just arrest them because the law says this. That's the difference.
- WN: Do people try to take advantage of you?
- RC: Oh yes, a lot of people try to take advantage because you are a policeman. I learned that after twenty-one years [after] I retired on a disability, I left the police department, most of the people that used to wave at me all of a sudden, they don't know who I am. Because I'm retired. I'm not a policeman. I don't have the authority.
- So it made me think twice. They took advantage of me. So when I became an insurance adjuster, it's another ball game. So I just followed the policy. That's it. Then I knew who my friends were. So it helps, you know. I have a broad experience of dealing with people, from selling newspapers, policeman, being an insurance claims adjuster, and always meeting the general public. So I have a very broad sense of meeting people. Then I can find out who's taking advantage of me.
- WN: Okay, so 1943, the war was still going on. You're a policeman. You know you had to enforce a lot of wartime restrictions. Did the chief of police have a lot of influence or power even though it was under martial law?
- RC: Yeah, they had. The territory law was still in effect yet, even though we had martial law. As long as it not dealing with the military, we follow the territory law. When we come to the military, if it violated the territory law, they get fined like anybody else. But when the military comes into the picture, the military comes into the picture. They take over. So for us, being the lower echelons in the police department, we don't see that many rough things that goes on. But during the martial law, when I went in there, yeah was more on the strict side. But once you become a policeman, little different. When curfew—I know many incidents— with curfew, the military is real strict. Even though we kind of lax off, they still bring in civilian aid for curfew just crossing the street. But being that when the military was in control like anything else, you work with the military, the same people all the time. They not as strict as if you don't know them. If you know them you know it's not that strict. But if you don't know them, they're real strict.

I know an incident where our friend went in the service. He came home on furlough and was curfew yet, and he crossed the street to go home from another house across the street. They

picked him up, they brought him to the police station. Lucky he knew the captain and we knew him. So the fellow was, the civilian, was sharp enough to say, "Oh, I know captain so-and-so." And that captain was a real good Joe. So the military guy went and check, yeah, so they let him go and don't let it happen again. That's it. But nothing criminal about that. It's just that he was crossing the street. So that's the kind of thing that we deal with.

WN: Were there any problems, like on the weekends, when all the plantation people started coming in on the train and then you had all the military guys coming in? Anything like that?

RC: No, wasn't too bad because the civilians stayed away from the military and the military stayed away from the civilians. The parents of girls made sure they stayed away from the military because they don't want that their daughters go with any servicemen. You see, because before the war years, there were hardly any Caucasians or Blacks. In Hilo, before the war, I recall only one Black person. Maybe one was a Puerto Rican, but one Black person. He was a houseboy for a doctor, Doctor [A.T.] Roll, R-O-L-L. And Charlie was a nice fellow. After Doctor Roll died, a fireman took care of him. He was well liked. That's the only Black person we knew. But then when the war came, we had a battalion of Black soldiers. That's something else now. People don't want to mingle with the soldiers because they don't want their children or their daughters to get married and go with them. So that's the difference.

WN: Okay, so in 1945, the war ended. Was that any different?

RC: Okay wait, now we go a little back. Before the war ended, there was a big military training, marine camp in Waimea. The Second Marine [Division] and the Fifth Marine [Division]. When they went to Tarawa, when they came back, most of them were wiped out. They came back [to Hawai'i] for R and R [rest and recreation]. They made sure they had the biggest and tallest MPs. They were all over in town when they were on furlough. They went into stores and they paid the merchants in Japanese money, paper money. The merchants didn't want to say anything. They were afraid, you know, if they complained. But then, after they leave everything, we get called. But we can't do a thing, so we call the MP's and they look at it, check on it, and that was it. So the store owner lose out because they have occupation money from the marines.

You know, you look back, after they come back from the front line, come back for R and R, they do crazy things. If they can survive the war front lines, they can come back and survive anything, and this is what they do. But the military was sharp. They brought all their top boys, military people, and they were strict. So that's the only thing I could think of during—at the time of the military. Yeah, we had a group here. Honoka'a, Kailua-Kona. And they get R and R. So some of them. . . .

We have a good friend who got shell shocked. Now he's retired. He's living in Florida. So he was in the service. He was a good friend of my father-in-law. In 1962, he was living in Michigan. When I went up there to visit him with my wife [Lily Lui-Aki Chow], he still have a little shell shock. The first thing he tells my wife, "I want you to cook the Chinese dinner just like your mother did." You know, so Lily cook chicken and rice. So his wife says, "Don't make too much because our children don't care for Oriental food." After Lily finished cooking the thing—I went to Camp Perry at the time—but when I went back, I didn't have any food to eat because they ate it all. So I had to eat regular barbecue chicken, *Haole* style.

(Laughter)

RC: They didn't know how to eat because mostly in those days, I think, there were mostly canned Chinese food in Michigan. So this is the thing that happen that I can recall.

WN: So did you have any conflicts with the MPs?

RC: Only once with a SP as a policeman on Mamo Street. This sailor was feeling good. He was raising hell with some merchants in downtown. I recall this incident. When I picked him up, run him up to the police station. So this SP wanted to take the sailor away from me. I say, "No. You see my lieutenant. He violated civilian law."

So this SP went up. My lieutenant at the time, he don't take anything from anybody. So he told the SP, "You fool around here, I lock your backside up." So he called his lieutenant. So the lieutenant come up, raise hell, "I lock you up, too." And that was it. So that's the only incident I can recall. With this SP and the lieutenant.

But we had, lot of times, problems with the merchant marines. You see, the merchant marines, they go out to sea with their cargoes and everything, and they spend about four or five months out before they hit land. So one time, this freighter came back to Hilo and they raised hell on Mamo Street. In those days, we had a patrol wagon. So we locked up the whole crew. Throw them all in the patrol wagon. And then the lieutenant came up the station screaming, the same lieutenant. You know, the hard-nosed guy. He ended up in jail, too. (Chuckles) Because they don't have any liquor on the freighter and everything so they have to do all these things. When they hit land, they cut loose. That's the kind of incidents we have during the war.

WN: Okay, what I want to do for this session is to bring you right up to 1946, yeah, to the tsunami. So before we end, I'd like to ask you, again, with the war ending in about 1945, what changes took place in terms of the community of Hilo, if any?

RC: Okay, you see, during '45 or prior to that—or after that—like, the military officers, they have a group of them go down to a private club, the [Hilo] Yacht Club. The [sugar] plantation or big business [elite] down in Hilo, their children go down there to entertain the military officers. But the rest of them, they had USO [United Service Organizations] and other places like the [Hilo] Armory, the Hilo Center, this is now the Boys' [and Girls'] Club [of Hilo], those places. But other than that, the servicemen don't have any recreation other than different spots.

So they go to houses here and there, so some of the girls got married to the servicemen. So we had several incidents where local girls got killed, murdered, from some servicemen. I know one incident down where Francis Wong Stadium [is], that whole area. They call it Ho'olulu Park. Was a race track, baseball field, football field, with a big military camp there for transportation. They worked on the docks. This was a whole Colored company. Right after this lady got raped and killed, this whole troop moved out so the police never did solve that crime.

Right after that, another company came and took over. Another Colored. I almost got killed in that incident. They were down in Waiākea town on Kam[ehameha] Avenue down by the [Wailoa] Bridge, and there were five Colored marines that were raising hell there, so I told the MPs and SPs, "I want them out of town."

On their way back to Ho'olulu Park, they beat up three sailors, White sailors, that was walking. So I jump in my car, I went down. I just stopped. These four, five marines right at the entrance of their barracks, I got their pass. Then the SP and MP came by so I gave the four passes to the SP, and the last one gave me his, I put in my pocket. The whole camp came out. Ho, they swear at me. One of them came with a knife right by my face. I put my back against my car, put my hand by my revolver, I didn't say anything.

Fortunately, a small White lieutenant came by, yell at them to go back to their barracks. Nobody move until his pistol was shot in the air and he says, "This ain't no Fourth of July." The lieutenant stand up and yell, "I want you folks all in your barracks. Anyone out will be AWOL." So they all went back.

So this lieutenant ask me if I could identify them, so I took out the ID pass, and that's the only way I could identify. The rest of them, they gave 'em back to the marines so I couldn't identify. So they pick up one and they threw them back to the police station. But I was that close to being killed. So that's how it is.

WN: Did you have second thoughts about being a policeman at that time? (Laughs)

RC: No. I wasn't because they didn't harm me, they only fighting me. Other than that, nothing. And the town was more in a sense of make sure they take care of the servicemen. Different type of restaurants open up to take care them. Like hamburgers was in demand and hot dogs, and small restaurants pop up. Not the big ones. No, the small ones.

WN: Did some businesses go out of business during the war or stop . . .

RC: Not really. I don't recall any of the businesses went out of business because of the war.

WN: You say that your father stopped in '45?

RC: Yeah.

WN: Why is it that he stopped?

RC: He was getting old, my dad.

WN: Oh. But he did better during the war?

RC: Yeah. He went out of business because he was getting too old.

WN: What was the name of his shoe repair shop?

RC: Wing Wo Chong.

WN: So he sold the business?

RC: Yeah. They sold the business to a fellow by the name of Ike. He's a Hawaiian fellow. He took over January 1. April 1, 1946, the wave came, everything went. So indirectly, or directly, my dad lost the business because he didn't get paid.

WN: Oh, ho!

RC: (Laughs) Because they paid monthly anyway, everything went.

WN: So there was no---the federal government coming in to pay off debts or anything like that?

RC: No.

WN: But he owned the building and he owned the land.

RC: No, I found out later, that land was lease land and was owned by these nine Chinese businessmen. My dad was the treasurer. And what I did was even though I was a young age, I could write receipts for my dad.

And during the summer, we kids used to clean spider webs. Cut long bamboo branches, tie them at the tip, and clean all the bamboo and underneath. . . . You see, that section of the building there, the first floor was equal to the sidewalk. Underneath was all on stilts. And now I know why it's all on stilts because of the high seas. In the back was the railroad and then the ocean, and in that area, there's always high seas. And the water and the sand and rocks goes underneath the building.

WN: So it go over the train tracks too, when they had high, rough water?

RC: Yeah. When they go over, we always go down and watch the railroad people with the carts, you know, the working crew types come out there, throw the big rocks, clean the tracks, so that the trains can come through. So that's how it worked.

WN: So when this Ike took over, he took over the shoe repair shop, too?

RC: Shoe repair and shoe shine.

WN: Oh I see. And he was Chinese?

RC: No, he was Hawaiian. And then had another fellow there, was a Black guy. I forgot his name. He was a shoe shine guy, and you know, the Black people are so colorful yeah. They talk and shine shoes. A well-liked fellow.

WN: This guy came as a military guy?

RC: No. He was a local boy, a local guy, that came, I don't know from where.

WN: Okay, let's stop here okay?

RC: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape Nos. 29-4-2-98 and 29-5-2-98

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Robert "Steamy" Chow (RC)

Hilo, Hawai'i

March 11, 1998

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: Okay, let's begin with the interview with Bob "Steamy" Chow on March 11, 1998 for the tsunami oral history project. We're in Hilo, Hawai'i and the interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, Steamy, let's start. Last time we left off with just ending the war, you were a police officer, and the war ended about 1945. And on April 1, 1946—tell me what happened or how did you start the day?

RC: On April 1, 1946 I was going to work. I was living on Wainaku and 'Ōhai Street in Hilo. While reversing out from my driveway I noticed people walking up. Very unusual, about 6:30 in the morning. So, my friends yell at me, "Steamy, tidal wave!"

So I said, "Yeah, April Fool's."

"No real, real."

So I say, "Yeah, April Fool's." So I drove down 'Ōhai Street then made a right turn into Pu'u'eo Street. Then while crossing the Pu'u'eo Bridge on the Wailuku River, I looked down, I noticed the railroad bridge, there's three spans, the one closest to the Hilo side was in the water [i.e., in the Wailuku River] in the back of the Hilo Armory. Then I knew it was real. So I drove to the police station on Kalākaua Street and put on my uniform. My lieutenant at the time says, "Take care of [the] front street." So I drove down Kalākaua into Keawe and then made a left turn into Haili Street. I had all intentions of making a right turn toward Mo'ohau Park. But, when I came to the stop sign a building blocked my path so the only way was to turn left. While turning left on Kamehameha Avenue most of the buildings were still standing, nothing was disturbed from my observations.

WN: This is the *makai*-side buildings?

RC: *Makai* side. But there was rocks and sand on Kamehameha Avenue. So when I came to the intersection of Kalākaua and Kamehameha there was a grocery store, G. Miyamoto [Cash & Carry general merchandise and] grocery store. And over there had lots of canned goods on the road. Like we always say, during ration days, there's no mayonnaise, Vienna sausage, corned beef, but all of a sudden from that wave was all over the road. So I continue on to Kamehameha and Waiānuenuē. And when I looked across toward the railroad bridge I noticed

the railroad station, the railroad depot, was completely gone. So was the warehouse on the *makai* side of the tracks.

WN: Where was the depot?

RC: At the foot of Waiānuenuē and Kamehameha. Anything from the bridge to Waiānuenuē is the railroad depot. So I felt it was too dangerous for me to take care traffic there. So I moved up to Waiānuenuē, then to Keawe. Then I went down Wailuku Drive and turned around in the back of the armory. And while I was heading up, the second wave came. That's when people panic. And I mean people didn't care if a car was coming or not, they just kept on running. So the only thing for me to do is just stop and let the people run. Then all of a sudden I noticed the [part of the] bridge that was in the water was floating upstream. It missed the Pu'u'eo Bridge [by] inches.

WN: Pu'u'eo Bridge is the concrete bridge?

RC: The concrete bridge. And the same time, water came underneath my car and I was surrounded with water. And had that eerie feeling, you don't know if you going be washed away or not. But I just held on and nothing happened. But in later years someone said, "Your car was moving."

I says, "No, my car was at a standstill."

"But I noticed your car was floating." But maybe because of the wave action it seems that my car was moving but I knew I was in the same position all the way.

So after that I parked my car across the street, on Wailuku Drive. Then I got out and took care of traffic there. That's when the third wave was coming. Before the third wave came, the Wailuku River from the Pu'u'eo Bridge, toward the ocean, went dry. Had only a trough of water, maybe six to ten inches of water at the bottom of the river. And it's just like a mason did plaster work on all the sides of the embankment or the bottom of the river and everything was real smooth. And I noticed there's a rock wall on the Hāmākua side of the Wailuku River. That rock went right down underneath the bridge and out into the bay. So at the same time that the water had gone out [i.e., receded], all of a sudden you see a big wall of water. Just like a big block of ice moving towards land.

WN: This is the third wave?

RC: This is the third wave.

WN: And where were you standing when you saw that?

RC: I was on the bridge.

WN: On the Pu'u'eo?

RC: Pu'u'eo Bridge.

WN: And then the other bridge, the railroad bridge, was . . .

RC: One was . . .

WN: Part of---was washed away . . .

RC: Was washed away. So, when it came in, the bottom part of the wave had turbulence. But on top was just moving, a mass moving. Then when it hit the [railroad] bridge, just like everything exploded.

WN: So by the time you got into Hilo the railroad bridge was already washed away? That one portion?

RC: Yeah. But then the other portion after the second and third wave it was still standing. Only one section was gone.

WN: Only railroad, not cars can go over that bridge. How did the Hāmākua people in those days go from Hāmākua into Hilo?

RC: To get to Hilo from Hāmākua they traveled on the old, old road. The cars have to go down almost every gulch and come up and go down another gulch. So, to give you an example, Honoli'i Bridge—the present Honoli'i Bridge was the railroad bridge. The old road, you go down the valley then come up and where they go surfing, that's the old road. So you travel all on the old road. And like Laupāhoehoe, to the school, you have to go down the Laupāhoehoe [hoe] gulches and pass the school area and then keep on going up where the present police station is located. But now, because of the landslide, they stopped that. So, the present Highway 19 is mostly where the railroad bridges or railroad tracks were. So in the old days you use the Wainaku Avenue Bridge, and that's the old road. So, you go out the old road until you come to 'Alae Cemetery. Over there you come back into the new section.

WN: The [Hawai'i] Belt Road?

RC: The Belt Road. The Honoli'i Bridge—that's the railroad bridge. So, after the third wave everything had subsided but then there were about a total of about seven waves. But they were getting smaller and smaller. But already it was real hazardous to go down anyway. So, I had chance of going down to Kamehameha Avenue. And I noticed the American Factors [grocery department office] building [on the corner of Kamehameha and Waiānuenuenu avenues], which is Koehnen's building today, was American Factors grocery department [office], there were canned goods all over the road, too. And I for one didn't have breakfast that morning and I asked Mr. Kellner, the manager, that if I could eat one of those [cans of] Vienna sausage that was on the road. He says, "You have to eat 'em here and no place else." So I opened a can and I ate my breakfast. So I never forget that.

WN: This is not Cow Palace?

RC: No, this is right down where Koehnen's is today. That building was built in 1910. I could see that the buildings on the *makai* side of Kamehameha Avenue, the first block that's between Waiānuenuenu and Kalākaua, had just collapsed from its foundation. In that section all the buildings were on stilts because they were too close to the ocean. When high seas the water and sand would go underneath the buildings. In '46 that could be the second or third wave caused the buildings to collapse. It was a drop of about four to five feet. Why I am more

concerned about that area, there were nine Chinamen that had the lease on that property and my dad was the treasurer. And I used to write receipts and during the summer we used to clean [out] spiderwebs. So I am so versed in that area that I knew almost everybody there.

WN: That was where your dad's business was?

RC: Yeah. But he just sold the business in December of '45 and the people that took over January 1 of '46, they were ruined by the [April 1] tidal wave. So, because they were paying monthly my dad lost the whole business because of the tsunami. So, we were victims of the tsunami too. Well, unfortunate it had to happen.

So then—I was still up at the Wailuku [i.e., Pu'u'eo] Bridge. Then later on I was asked to go down to the icehouse, which is the Hilo Electric Light [Company, Inc.] icehouse. It was a temporary morgue in the first locker. I was asked to go down there to try identify bodies. And there, I couldn't identify the bodies but it was real sickening to see small ones, several years old, among the victims. You could smell the decomposed body. I was informed later that the salt water caused it to decompose faster. And up to today I still, while talking to you now, just like I still can smell the decompose smell. I think that will never go away. And watching TV where they have disasters around the world it always bring back that incident, at the temporary morgue.

WN: How many hours after the waves did you go down to the . . .

RC: Ah, might be about three or four hours later. But then the temporary morgue is, you assume that because it's refrigerated it's okay. But look like it's not.

WN: Could you guess today how many bodies there were?

RC: Ah, I would say at the time it could be a little more than twenty bodies. But I didn't go and count them individually but you could see them lined up. And I couldn't identify anyone. There were more men than ladies, more male than female there. But the small ones I couldn't tell the difference anyway. So, after that there were things, different incidents that I recall. Like cleaning up. The Boy Scouts were around, trying to help identify or recover certain things. And the labor union [i.e., International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union] volunteered to work. And the plantations and the big construction companies furnished all the equipment. So they were working, cleaning up mess.

WN: When did they start cleaning up? Did they start cleaning up that day?

RC: They start doing it that day. And the county, the state, use their equipment. They worked continuously. It wasn't just I'm putting eight hours and that's all, they just continue working. Because, most of the workers had families, victims, so they want to help. And there's lot of volunteers wanting to help. And yet, there's a lot of people there looking for bargains. When they moved all that material down to the rubbish dump, there were lots of people there looking for bargains.

WN: By "bargains" you mean . . .

RC: I mean all the salvaged things that they found.

WN: You mean like looting, you mean?

RC: Just like looting but it's not looting because they discard it already. But they go down there and see what they can get. I didn't go down there, but they said there are more people down there than people helping. So, there were a lot of things that were just—with the bulldozer just goes right though, the crane put it in the truck, and off they go down to the rubbish dump.

WN: I was wondering, as a police officer what were your actual duties that day?

RC: Our duty is to control the people from going into that areas. And if you can't show us anything [i.e. identification] and if we know you from a different area you can't get in. Because Hilo was a small town where you know almost everybody and it's easier to know who was supposed to be there and who was not supposed to be there. So it's easier that way. Then later on, after a couple days, then they have to get the pass from the police station.

WN: When you say, "supposed to be there," that's somebody who lived there or had a business there?

RC: Yes. Like, if you come from the volcano and coming down there, you know, "I have business there," but if we don't know who you are, we won't let you in. You go up to the police station and get one pass. Sometimes it's legitimate but we don't know. So we try and control the crowds. At that time, Keawe Street, Kīlauea [Avenue] was the safety zone. But now they move it up to Kino'ole Street because the waves had hit Kīlauea [Avenue] where Cafe 100 was, in that lower area. But, being a policeman you can't control the crowds because got too many side streets and people can go through a backyard to get to another street. So, you have to rely on people to be honest. But now, this age, anything can happen.

WN: Did you actually see people looting, you know, taking merchandise?

RC: Yeah we seen . . .

WN: Before the cleanup now.

RC: Yeah, the cleaning up. People would take some things and say, "Oh, so-and-so told me I could have it." And if you know who they are and who the owner was before, you can put two and two together, you would let 'em go. Because like, in downtown, like in the store, you see these people go there. There's some things that they have to throw away but they could give 'em to their friends, they could use it. We take their word for it. So that's how in those days we control the crowd. Because not like now, it's too many outsiders or people that you don't know. It's hard to control.

WN: What about people in distress, you know people that really needed help. Is that one of your duties too?

RC: Okay, like I give you one good example, Mr. Hashimoto. [That day], he went to work in construction so he left early in the morning. During that day he landed up in the police station. He was in a daze. All he saved was a lunch can, and the clothes he was wearing. Everything else was completely wiped out. He stayed at the police station for about two weeks. We buy him lunch, breakfast, and dinner. He lost his wife and his—I think three or four kids. [See

interviews with Masao Uchima and Ronald and May Goya for other accounts of this incident.] He had just like no place to go. In March of 1995 he died. I talked to his brother and he said, "Yeah, my brother died from a broken heart since that '46 tsunami." They were living in Shinmachi, right in back of the Eagle Laundry [owned by Katsunoshin Uchima]. In the back of Uchima. Uchima and they were neighbors.

- WN: You know, you were saying that from your vantage point on the Pu'u'eo Bridge you could see the river recede. Did you feel safe on that bridge?
- RC: Yes, you safe until when the wave come in, that's when you panic and run back on land. As long as the water receding you not worried. But when the big wave start coming in, more so the first wave because you don't know how big it is and if it's going over the bridge or not. So, you run to the side [i.e., off the bridge]. So, after the third wave hit, after it goes back out you know it's safe, but then after that [there were] many surges. So, when the first impact, yeah you get scared. But afterwards, after the surges, you not afraid. Because it's not coming bigger than what the big wave hit. So, had a lot of people there watching.
- WN: Yeah, were people there? Were there a lot of curious onlookers who just were, you know, wanted to see what a tidal wave looked like?
- RC: That's right. It's there [Pu'u'eo Bridge] and up on the Wainaku Bridge [over the] Wailuku River, there were people there, too. And all along, they watching. In fact there were people on the embankment watching. But when the wave start coming in that's when they panic and they run. Because they don't know how big that wave going to be. When the second wave hit, people were by the embankment so they cross in front of my car. And lucky they ran, because if they didn't run they would get all wet themselves. Because I was on the road and the water went all around me.
- WN: What was the feeling? I mean was it panic, were there people hysterical or were there people just like having fun while looking at this thing?
- RC: I say that anytime you look at something—it's something you want to see. And when it happen you don't know the unknown, so you panic. That's when you run. And in that case when they were running they didn't know where they were running. They didn't care if a car was coming, like when my car was coming up. They didn't care. The main thing was to get away from it. I know how I felt, that all I did was squeeze—hold on to the steering wheel and squeeze. I don't know if did any good but it was there. You know, you have that fear no matter how strong you are. But things like that you cannot control. You just stay there and just squeeze.
- WN: And yet at the same time being a police officer, you couldn't show fear.
- RC: Yeah. That's right. But then afterwards I know I had two people, one was a radio technician and one was a policeman, in my car. He was out of uniform at the time. And the radio tech—the other guy, died now, the technician said he didn't recall being in my car. So I said, "Yeah, you were in my car. You were sitting [in] my front seat with me." But he said he didn't recall. So, might be it wasn't so dramatic.
- WN: I was wondering, after you saw that third wave, what were your thoughts?

- RC: I just wanted to see the town area, how bad it hit. That's when I went down to Shipman [Street] and Kamehameha Avenue. And I looked down and I saw where the buildings had collapsed. And then from there I looked to Kalākaua [Street] and Kamehameha [Avenue]. I saw some buildings that crossed Kamehameha Avenue was [leaning] against some of the buildings on the *mauka* side. I didn't see too many big damages on the *mauka* side of Kamehameha Avenue.
- WN: So, when you went down, the major damage was from the Wailuku River, *makai* side of Kamehameha Avenue down.
- RC: That's right, all the way down to Mo'ohau Park.
- WN: Mo'ohau Park, I see. That area was all businesses before?
- RC: Yeah, all businesses. And apartments on the top floor.
- WN: So that was all---most of it was all wiped out?
- RC: Yes, except the Kuwahara Store that is located on the Hāmākua side of Kamehameha Avenue and Haili Street. And that building was damaged [but its structure was still standing, unlike most of the buildings on the *makai* side of Kamehameha Avenue], but they had it repaired and back for business. All the rest of the buildings were taken down. And they had used that area like off-street parking.
- We heard rumors on [the] Kuwahara [Store] building. You see, Mr. [G.] Kuwahara was a caring person. So, prior to this incident, the '46 tsunami, had an old Hawaiian lady, wanted some food. And he was busy, so he told the lady, "You go out there and sit on the bench." In the old days they had benches out in the front. So he told her, "You wait there, when I finish I come out." So when he was through with his business he came out and gave the lady some food. So she ate it and she told him, "You know, you're a good man. Something real big going to happen but you'll be okay." And it's the only building that withstood all that. So you know, you want to believe or not, but all the rest of that building there all went down. And then [buildings] on Kamehameha Avenue on the *mauka* side, where the farmers' market [operates today], that went down.
- WN: Where the farmers' market is now?
- RC: Yeah, that went down. And going down on Kamehameha Avenue, the American Factors warehouse was still standing, built of concrete. And later on it was called Cow Palace. The county used that place for the bands' practice and all that. And beyond that was the American Factors lumberyard, that all went. And beyond that had several service stations, that was gone. Then comes to the Hilo Theatre.
- WN: That survived?
- RC: That survived. Then beyond that, this is on all the *makai* side [of Kamehameha Avenue], Hawai'i Planing Mill, [Ltd.]. They got damaged. So they relocated later, further down in Shinmachi, on the *mauka* side. And then, later on they got wiped out in the '60. In that section there were many other kind of shops, like repair shops, and open areas, and they had a Sperry

Flour Company. There was a White Star Laundry. But they moved into Hilo, downtown Hilo. So that whole section was gone.

WN: This is still *makai* side.

RC: Yeah, all *makai* side. And then had [H.] Yasukawa tinsmith [blacksmith] and I. Kitagawa [& Co.].

WN: So, from what you could observe, the majority of the damage caused by the waves themselves were on the *makai* side, or the ones that were on the *makai* side of Kamehameha Avenue, facing the ocean actually. And whatever damage occurred on the *mauka* side was mostly because of the buildings being pushed across the street?

RC: Yes, and some water damage.

WN: Some water damage.

RC: Yeah. Oh you see some---there's some area, there's opening. And they used the back portion of their store, that's for parking. So it's a clear field when the waves come, they going find the weakest spot. The weakest spot is this driveway coming right through.

WN: I see, I see. And I was wondering, on Kamehameha Avenue, the *makai* side, there were the storefronts right there.

RC: Yes.

WN: But in the back maybe some had parking. Was it elevated at all?

RC: Ah yes, most of the stores were elevated. But then the parking area were down sea level. In fact all that area was sand. So, it [the parking area] was lower than Kamehameha Avenue, the road. You see, the present Kamehameha Avenue has not changed, [but the area where] the parking lot or the store area has been built up [i.e., raised above sea level]. Like the parking area down there is [now] built up to the level of Kamehameha Avenue. So, like the present bridge, Wailuku Bridge, they had built the [former] railroad bridge up about six to eight feet. So it's that high above now. If you want to know what the level of the railroad bridge is, you can look on Kamehameha Avenue, and straight across. Because they had built that up now like a wall for Highway 19. So that's the difference.

WN: So Highway 19 is the one that goes up the . . .

RC: Up Hāmākua Coast. And Kamehameha Avenue is the original. So you can base it on that.

WN: And was it always four lanes? Kamehameha.

RC: Kamehameha Avenue, yeah. Kamehameha Avenue is sixty feet wide. I could tell that because being a policeman, in those days when you investigate an accident you have to take measurements. So, you know Kamehameha Avenue is sixty feet, so you don't have to take that extra measurement. On the *mauka* side of Kamehameha Avenue, where they have parking now, that's original. The sidewalk and everything, it's original. All the way, all the way down

to [Hilo] Iron Works.

WN: So where we are right now, this Kress Building. Was that considered right along Kamehameha Avenue?

RC: Yes. They had . . .

WN: This building wasn't up at that time or was it?

RC: It was built in 1932.

WN: Okay, so this building was okay?

RC: Oh yes. So Kamehameha Avenue is end of the sidewalk. And that was the level.

WN: Okay, so most of the damage again by the water was on the *makai* side. Yet Shinmachi, which is on the *mauka* side of Kamehameha, was pretty much wiped out. So what happened over there?

RC: Okay, because it was open area.

WN: There was no buildings on the *makai* side?

RC: Had only one or two buildings on the *makai* side. So when the wave came in—and in fact there was a sand beach come right up and then the railroad [tracks]. There was no big stone wall. It was just the railroad track and then it goes right down to the beach, the sand beach. So it was a clear field just coming in. And that whole area was lowland. In fact, all the area from Ponahawai Street to [Hilo] Iron Works was all lowland. In the old days it was swampland.

WN: So it wasn't that the waves were more intense at that point, as opposed to more towards the Wailuku River. It was just because there were less buildings on the *makai* side . . .

RC: That's right.

WN: To shield the . . .

RC: Yes, it was more coming right through.

WN: Okay, so as you went down and you looked at the damage what did you see? Was it all just splintered wood or what?

RC: Some areas, the whole building had moved. And like American Factors, the lumber was all over the place, into the next, across the street. Maybe that saved some of the buildings. And I could tell you this, like the corner of Ponahawai and Kamehameha, that was the old Ruddle Sales [& Service Company, Ltd.], the Ford company. That had damages, they had sand in their garage and everything. Then the next building---no the next there was a railroad and then the next building was Hilo Rice Mill [Company]. And the next building beyond that was the Okino Hotel. And Okino Hotel was hit hard, was completely gone in the '46. And after that had Ben Franklin. The interior of the place was damaged. But right next to them had Pick and

Pay, a grocery store that was saved. Because American Factors warehouse was there, it just blocked the wave from hitting.

WN: Oh I see, American Factors was on the *makai* side?

RC: *Makai* side.

WN: But was it a concrete building?

RC: Yeah, a concrete building. And yet all the way from there to Kumu Street, all the buildings there had damages but very little. Like the Bowling Palace that was on the second floor. Sun Sun Lau [Chop Sui House] had little damage. So was the Chinese temple. So it all depends on how the wave came in and what was in front of them. You know, what obstruct the wave. So, it's not because of '46 [tsunami] hit certain areas, the '52, '57, and the '60 hit certain areas. It's going---that whole area's supposed to be demolished but it's not so. It's just that it all depends what was in the front.

WN: So many of the stores on the *mauka* side that were, in essence, protected by the structures on the *makai* side, many of them were able to stay in business.

RC: Yes. On the *mauka* side of Hilo Theatre was Hilo Center. It was saved. But after that, when the '60 [tsunami] came, everything [in that area] went.

WN: Okay, and what about—you talked about the smell in the icehouse—what about the smell outside on the streets? Can you describe it?

RC: You can smell---well it might be because of my, you know, that incident at the icehouse. When you walking around you can almost smell everything. But you can smell decompose anything. Like fish, animals, was all over the place. But as to try and identify you can't until the object is exposed. So that's what it is. But then the human body smell is different from animal smell. In the old days when you find a body, they call a mortuary to recover the body. So this incident happened where the old Piopio Street is, by the Buddhist Hilo Meishoin church. In the back was the river. I was assigned to that, to check on a body they had recovered from the tidal wave. So I went there . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: Okay, so you went and uh . . .

RC: So I went there . . .

WN: Starting from the Dodo Mortuary . . .

RC: So the old Japanese man says, "I don't want go in the water."

WN: This is the man from Dodo Mortuary?

RC: Yeah. So he knew that there was a prisoner by the name of Frank Gomes. He would do anything. So we call up, so they brought Frank Gomes down there. And he observed the situation and he says, "I'm not going." So he talked to the mortuary guy, so the mortuary said, "I give wine."

"Okay, you give me the wine I go."

So they asked me. I said, "What I don't see I don't know." Because the main thing was to get the body out of the water.

WN: The body was floating?

RC: Floating.

WN: And how many days after the . . .

RC: Oh just about a month, I think, something . . .

WN: Oh a month.

RC: So, Frank gets in the water, about waist deep. And he float the body all the way close to land. He ask for the blanket, you know, rubber blanket. Right there he wrap it around and he hand 'em over to the guy. And you didn't get the smell. Then I found out that if you take the body out of water, the air would cause the decomposing. But Frank had his wine before he went in, he wasn't going to do it until he got his wine. So that's the only time where I have to overlook something. You know, I had to use my judgment. And I think I did the right thing. If not, I might have to go in there and bring the body out. So that's how it is. That's the kind of incident that we have.

WN: So let's talk a little bit about the cleanup now. Cleanup started that day?

RC: Yeah, clean up that day.

WN: Now, who was it? Boy Scouts . . .

RC: Boy Scouts, the union laborers and the business that supplied the equipment. Like the plantation and the big equipment companies. And there was no---I didn't even hear anything, people complaining. They just went there and worked. First they cleaned up all on Kamehameha Avenue. Make sure everything is clear so they could use the road.

WN: Oh, what about military?

RC: Ah, the National Guard came into the picture too. So, they help haul in more of the---people had damage to their homes and to move their furnitures out. Because they had the manpower it was easier for them to do certain things. And, the Boy Scouts were more or less like identify things. Or search for bodies.

WN: So you said that you found a body one month after the 1946 tsunami. When were they---before that how long were they finding bodies? Was it like days after . . .

RC: Oh, days after. Anything, you know when removing debris and everything. So in the '46, like here, there was a liquor warehouse down Shinmachi, [in the] Royal Theatre. And when the '46 came, that whole warehouse, the buildings, was gone. Most of the liquor bottles went into Wailoa Basin. So if you want to know all the drunks you could find 'em there. They would go down there, dive for bottles, put it on land, just like they were playing games. You know like kid days, "This is my pile." "This is my pile." And down the line.

So about a week or so later, as a policeman I was called to go down there in that area because had a body, got flies. So when I approach that area, I recognize that fella, Glenn Fry. He was one of the top salesmen but he was alcoholic. And I watch him, he was breathing. So I gave one kick on his foot. He got up and he opened one bottle. He passed out, I just left him there. Because he was in private property, you cannot do anything. But then I observed the bottles. Had some hard liquor bottle, with the factory seal, the federal seal on it. And there's sand, about half an inch to an inch of sand in the bottle. The seal was not broken now, was still intact. How the sand got in, I don't know.

WN: (Laughs) Is this more than one bottle or . . .

RC: Yeah, many bottles. And then you see the soda water bottles, is about five inches of sand. The cap is still on. Maybe you can say it went through the cap, the soda water bottle. But for the liquor bottle, you can't make out because it's all sealed. If I was to save a bottle now, I think everything would evaporate.

WN: This is hard liquor or wine?

RC: Hard liquor.

WN: Okay, so no more cork.

RC: No.

WN: Cap on it.

RC: Yeah, but then they have a seal around and then they have the manufacturer's seal and then they have the federal seal on it. And all that was still intact. There's a lot of people seen it but I don't know if anybody has saved it. Because all these years I been trying to find one. But, I couldn't find any.

WN: Now, you said this liquor warehouse was part of the Royal Theatre?

RC: Was the Royal Theatre.

WN: Was the Royal Theatre, okay.

RC: The Royal Theatre was no longer in operation so they made it into a warehouse. And that warehouse was next to the old Hatada Bakery, down Shinmachi.

WN: Okay, so what other incidents did you . . .

RC: Oh, I had an occasion to go down to the yacht club, where the present site is.

WN: Hilo Yacht Club?

RC: Hilo Yacht Club. That building was completely demolished. I noticed a log about five feet in diameter and about twenty feet long was, went inside of a house. And it stuck in there and that house at that time belonged to a dentist [Lester P.] Sorensen. And he didn't know what to do. It took me all these years to find out who knew about the log. I finally found someone who actually seen the log in there, was "Charlie" Nakaoka. She was working for the yacht club, at that time. And she remembered she was living downstairs of the yacht club cottage, and the manager, Mr. Kennedy, was living upstairs. And she was told to run for her life. Because a tidal wave. So she ran with another friend. They ran up onto Kalaniana'ole [Street]. And later on when they came back, their cottage and the yacht club was completely gone. But then she went to the neighbor, which was across the street. She saw this log stuck in the building. So at least I can say that somebody else saw it with me. And in fact, all the owners of that building—that building is still standing—nobody seems to know about the log in that building. And I knew many other owners that, about five owners of that house, nobody seems to know about it. But at least I found someone that could vouch for me. So, this is the kind of incident that I come across and I . . .

WN: I was wondering, as far as supplies. Was there a shortage of certain things that people needed, like . . .

RC: Yeah, like rice. And I think had enough available, but it was easier to ship 'em up from Honolulu. So we didn't have any real hard supply of groceries.

WN: I would imagine, though, that the railroad was put out of commission and part of the harbor I would imagine was in bad shape. Were there problems, in terms of getting things to people or to stores?

RC: Yes, but everything was flown in. You see, the railroad [Hilo Transportation Company] was going out of business completely in September of 1946. But then the tsunami came, it forced them to close down a little earlier. Already most of the trucking companies were gearing up for that. And the trucking companies were using the old road, they were complaining, because the old road was too narrow and everything. So they had to put in a new highway. And the first section of the highway was Pāpa'ikou to Pepe'ekeo. So that eliminated most of the big turns. So for your information, like the railroad bridge, Wailuku Bridge, they sold the scrap to someone. Then later on they had to buy back the scrap and they used one of the spans to build the Kolekole Bridge. So if you go down (Kolekole Gulch-River Park and look at the Kolekole Bridge, the frame steel was part of the railroad bridge at Wailuku River).

WN: The railroad built it? The railroad built Kolekole Bridge?

RC: No, that used to be the old railroad (bridge, a train bridge. Later, after the tidal wave the railroad right away was used as a vehicular road, Highway 19). They had to expand it for heavier (vehicular) traffic.

- WN: The road you mean?
- RC: The road. (The railroad right-of-way from Hilo to Pa'auilo was taken over by the state [i.e., territory] to build Highway 19. Some of the railroad bridges were damaged from the tidal wave. The Kolekole RR [Railroad] Bridge was damaged by the tidal wave.) So they bought the scrap from the Wailuku Bridge (railroad). And used it for the Kolekole Bridge.
- WN: So who built that? The county?
- RC: Yeah, the (territorial highway [department] before statehood). That's all state highway. So, certain things for me I could remember. Like when it comes down to history, it stays in me. So another one, this incident which is real interesting. During the '46 tsunami, [S.] Hata [Shoten] dry goods, they were damaged even though they were on the *mauka* side of Kamehameha Avenue. But they had more water damage than anything else. So all their---most of their dry goods, their bolts of material, got saltwater damage. So was Helen's Fabric. They were on Kamehameha Avenue. They were about six doors away from the Hata Dry Goods. What they did, Hata Dry Goods took all their material down Kolekole Gulch (river) fresh water. And they washed the material and hang it up on the guava trees and things for dry. Helen's Fabric went up to Carvalho Park. They did the same thing. And later on, they had a tidal wave sale, to sell their material.
- WN: So they undid the bolts and stretched it out all over the place?
- RC: That's right.
- WN: (Chuckles) Anybody have pictures of that?
- RC: I don't know, I wasn't too keen about taking pictures in those days so. But I seen it so I could talk about it. So, I try and find out someone, a relative to see if they have any. 'Cause this would be good for part of history.
- WN: What about board of health problems? Was that any of your concern in terms of, from the police department's perspective?
- RC: No, it's not our concern. Only when people don't heed to certain things they would call us for assistance. But, the people here would heed to government officials when they talk. They, like now, everything, "You infringe on my rights." In those days, what government people says they go along. So, we have no problems. but now we have problems. Everything is, "You infringe on my rights." So being a policeman during that period it was just like godsend for me. They take your word for it. But now, they challenge you for everything.
- WN: (Laughs) The reason why I asked about the sanitation and board of health was I was reading that the sewage system was damaged because of the '46. The sewage spilled onto the . . .
- RC: You see, the sewage, if I recall correctly, went out across the bridge, on the Hilo side of the Wailuku Bridge. They have a sewer pump there and they go out every so many, about 200 yards, and it's out there. Then afterwards they change the route to go out to Manono Street and out to Puhī Bay. Now they changed the system. Now it goes inside, way inside the airport [area].

In those days, people didn't question government officials like they do now. You know, they feel that they know what they doing. And it's for betterment for themselves. But not now, if they can find a loophole just to delay the project they'll do it.

WN: How long did it take to actually clean up?

RC: Anything from two weeks to a month or longer. But basically the main obstructions had been taken care of. Like, cleaning the roadways to make traffic passable. Lot of places went back into business. The general public was real cooperative. They can't see somebody losing their business and can't be salvaged. People would come and volunteer and do things. It's like the old days, you help your neighbor, someday you need their help. That's how it is. So you see all neighbors and friends and relatives always there to help. And you don't know if they relative until you see them working, "How come you helping them?"

"Oh, we's related." And that's how it is. Like anything else you have to help your relatives. If not, who's going help 'em? So that's how it goes.

WN: So where did people, the ones that were displaced from their homes, where did they go?

RC: Most of them went to what we call NAS, Naval Air Station. That was located in the airport. Right after the war, they used that like a housing. And lots of people moved into that housing, after the tidal wave of '46, until they had relocated to their own places. After the 1960 tsunami, the government came up with a project. Open up a subdivision for all the victims. And they paid about sixteen cents a square foot. And that is on 'Iwalani Street. Every one of 'em were victims. And they had put up a house there.

WN: But there was no such thing set up for the '46?

RC: Nothing was set up for '46. Because the '46 was more businesses than anything else. And then, sure, many people had to be relocated, so they went into NAS. But the '60, there were many homes damaged in the area of Waiākea town. Where the golf course [i.e., Naniloa Country Club] is, on Banyan Drive, they were gone. So after two big major disasters they had to do something.

WN: What about Keaukaha side? People lost homes yeah, over there? In '46. What happened to those people?

RC: Some of the homes were lost but then they had a place to go. And there weren't too many homes lost. I know several houses were gone, but they were vacant anyway. But other homes which were there, the [families] found places to go. You see, they were in a different—they were in a little upper class type of residence there. So if they get ruined they would find a place for rent. They wouldn't be going into the Naval Air Station.

WN: A lot of them, too, were beach houses, vacation houses. . . .

RC: Yeah. So, down there wasn't as bad. In fact the homes down there were homes that were located where they have tall trees and things for shade. And not too many houses got destroyed. Because I know a doctor's [Dr. Leslie A. Weight] home was damaged. But they refused to go anyplace and they cleaned up the place and still stayed in there. Later on they

moved away.

- WN: I just want to ask you a few more questions about '46 yeah, before we get into '52 and '57. Let's see. When did you start to see people actually rebuilding, after '46? Or did you see any at all? And I know the *makai* side, I don't think they ever put buildings over there since the '46, right?
- RC: The only---immediately after the '46, Kuwahara Store, that was on the *makai* side of Kamehameha Avenue, they started to do their renovations and try to bring it back for operation. But all the rest of the buildings were gone. And Hawai'i Planing Mill, after the '46, they built their building in Shinmachi area. I forgot the name of---anyway but the sign it says Wailoa Center, on Kamehameha. In that area they rebuilt a big building there. Then 1960 came, completely gone. That's when they relocated the present site.
- WN: So nobody relocated or nobody rebuilt on the *makai* side.
- RC: Nobody.
- WN: The only one continuing was Kuwahara?
- RC: Yes.
- WN: What about Amfac?
- RC: Amfac was used---the county took over [the building] and used that as a band practice building. The [department of] parks and recreation used that as one of their stations there, office space. And that was it. Hilo Theatre was still in operation. Until later on, the '60 wiped them out. And, Kitagawa moved out, away from down there to Piopio and Kamehameha. Yasukawa, I don't know where they went to. [Hilo] Iron Works, still there until they closed down ten years ago, I think, or something like that. But other than that, very little rebuilt. So, in 1960 when they formed a Hawai'i Redevelopment Agency, HRA, that's when they condemn all the property.
- WN: Seems like '46 things were still not sophisticated. Not to have that much government intervention, yeah.
- RC: You know once in a lifetime, eh.
- WN: Yeah. So, before I get into---what I want to do next time is to get into the 1960 tsunami and have you compare '46 and '60. And before we get into '52, '57 I just want to ask you, how had the '46 tsunami, and this was your first tsunami, right, you didn't have . . .
- RC: (Yes.)
- WN: . . . you weren't exposed to [a tsunami] before that. . . .
- RC: (Yes.)
- WN: Neither was most of the people over there, yeah?

RC: Yeah.

WN: How did that change you? Your outlook, everything?

RC: It changed me to a fact that I had more compassion with people. I know how people suffered. People suffered from not their wrongdoings or anything. They suffered from disaster. And where you as an individual, if you can help, help them. Because someday you might be a victim. And people will help. So, it plays a part and later on it showed in my life. When I got into my car accident of '63, January 16, '63, where I was hit by a car running the red light. I landed in the hospital. In fact, I was on duty right [before] the accident. They carried me out from the car and I was still conscious. I told them, in my car got my blankets and things. Bring it out and put it on (me) and everything. And one fella there, I told him, "You call my wife at this number, she's home, I just came from home." I told him, "Tell her I'm fine, I'll be going to the hospital, you don't have to worry."

And you know what the guy did? He call up, told her, "Your husband got into mean accident."

And my wife says, "What, he died?"

He says, "No, but he went to the hospital." And he hung up on my wife. My wife didn't have a car so she ran to the neighbor. And the neighbor was holding down the roof 'cause was the strong winds. That '63 had the strong wind. I had damage at my house too. So the husband didn't want the wife to take my wife to the minister's house, because of the strong wind. But she says, "Naw, I'm going take Lily there." So drove her down to the church and the minister took Lily to the hospital. That's one incident.

When I was going up to hospital in the ambulance, the ambulance driver was blowing his siren and everything because I had a fractured knee cap. Any motion is painful. So I yell at the guy. Later on he's my neighbor, see, and I tell him, "Take it easy, I not going die." So he took his time. When (he) drove in the hospital, there was my mother-in-law and my brother-in-law there. How they knew I don't know. And my doctor was there. And for my doctor to be there is amazing because he take his sweet time anytime.

So I'm in emergency now, I'm still on the gurney, I hear Lily yell out, "You go in." Told my minister, "I don't know if he died or not."

So from in the emergency room I'm yelling out, "I'm still alive!" So my doctor shake his head, see.

So, with all that help I got, my wife got, because of my incident, it changed my life from the time of the tsunami of '46 and it build up all along. And up to today we do a lot of things—people think we crazy, my wife and I—that we do things for people, like beyond the call. But, I don't forget when we had problems they're right there. You know, when we needed help they right there. So how can you turn people down when people need help?

WN: Do you think it affected other people too? You think the tsunami brought people closer?

RC: I think so. All along my life we do things, people think we crazy. Just like one day, after

church we went down Kūhiō Plaza. And this guy here trying to start his car. And we knew him. And he said couldn't start. I said, "Anyway, you need help we drive you home, down Paradise Park."

And he said, "Nah, too far, too far."

I says, "No, it's not too far. You need help, and you not going have your wife come all the way, drive you, take you back down. We'll take you down." So later on, can't get the car start so he left the car there, we drove him down. And, our friend says, "Why you do that?"

"Well, the guy needed help." We can't see him stay there and have to have his wife come all the way from Paradise Park. And they were living way down near the ocean. (Driving him home), that's no problem. It's better to see the guy safe then later on get into an accident and you say, "I wish I had taken him." Would be too late. And this is the things we do. All along, because of the '46. That we seen how people help other people. And in my life after my car accident the things that I did, it paid off. Anything I touch it turned into gold. Anything I did it came out smelling like roses. Till today I feel that way. We do things for almost anybody.

WN: I guess when people are put under pressure and hardship, yeah, to see how the community responds, to each other.

RC: So, with me, when they have all kind of disasters, I'm always there trying to help. But, you can do only so much.

WN: It's 11:20, what time is your appointment?

RC: No. Keep on. . . .

WN: Okay, I wanted to get into the '52 tsunami. Now this is like six years later. What happened that day?

RC: Oh, that tsunami of 1952 and '57, that weren't as a big event in a sense that there were little damages and nobody died. But, because the '46, '52, '57 came from the Aleutians, and you would say it would hit the same place again. [The 1952 tsunami originated in Kamchatka.]

WN: Let me just change the . . .

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 29-5-2-98; SIDE ONE

WN: Okay.

RC: So in the '52, most of the wave hit in the area of Banyan Drive, where the Naniloa Hotel is located today.

WN: What was there back in '52---oh so is that area, Banyan Drive, was that affected by the '46?

- RC: Yes, was affected by the '46, but only water damage. There were no---I would say very little structural damage. Because in that Banyan Drive, Hilo Hawaiian [Hotel] wasn't there yet. So was Uncle Billy [i.e., Hilo Bay Hotel Uncle Billy's], wasn't there.
- WN: Oh, Uncle Billy's Hotel.
- RC: Yeah. And Travel Lodge wasn't there, was only the Naniloa Hotel. So their damage was more like water damage. Why, I don't know.
- WN: Oh, they were probably concrete structures, yeah?
- RC: No, that---you see the Hawai'i Naniloa Hotel, the original building was the Hilo Yacht Club. So that's why outside, in the ocean side, you see a pier there. That's for the yacht club.
- WN: I always thought the yacht club was Keaukaha.
- RC: No, that's the original. So, that area had more water damage. But then, we come to the 1957. The Reeds Bay area, the American Legion Hall.
- WN: The what?
- RC: American Legion. Where Orchid Hotel came up afterwards. There was damage but most of the damage, I would say, was at Hukilau Restaurant [i.e., Hilo Seaside Hotel]. I don't know if you see on the window they have the sign, the '52, '57 . . .
- WN: Oh no, I didn't see.
- RC: Yeah. And they had a stage which is located on the Banyan Drive side entrance to the restaurant. That was a stage there, when before they had nightclub. That whole area was damaged. So was the kitchen in the restaurant. That's the only thing I could observe. Most of the damage, what I mean, big damage. So, the Hukilau Restaurant they emphasize that on their window pane. [A window on the restaurant today contains drawn-in lines which mark the water levels of the 1957 and 1960 tsunamis.] I couldn't see anything other than that.
- WN: I remember reading that the warning system was a lot better in '52 than '46. [Nineteen] forty-six you didn't have any warning, right? So anyway, what was the feeling? I mean, I'm sure---did people take it much more seriously?
- RC: Oh yes. Let me go back. After the '46, being a policeman, they were trying to put up some kind of alert system, alarm system. They came up with one smart idea. They put a gauge down in Pier 1, at the dead end of Pier 1. They would send the police down there anytime when they have an alert. They sent the police down there to go to the end of the pier, get off your car, stand on the apron, and look down in the water. That's where the gauge is. Then when the water goes below the gauge it sounds an alarm. So then we have to jump back in our car, take off, see if you can make it or not. And you have to take off, get off the pier area, go on Silva Street, go toward the airport. But fortunately, we didn't have to use it. Because that's a suicide run then. Because you hear it, you jump in the car, you take off, and you call in the station. So then they came out with a better idea. They came out with the siren and all.

- WN: So if the water went below a certain level, that means the ocean is receding.
- RC: Yeah. So, later years, like I say the last couple years, I saw one of the scientists with the [Pacific] Tsunami Museum. And I told him, "How come you folks put the thing down there?"
- He said, "I have nothing to do---I wasn't around."
- I says, "Boy, the policemen was real cheap."
- And he shake his head and he said, "It's uncalled for, you know, putting someone down there." And you know what really spooked---say, if the wave had hit, if we still had that operation in 1960 and we down there, we goner. You know we would be goner. Because how can we make 'em in time?
- WN: So your job actually was to check that gauge or . . .
- RC: Yeah, we had to stay down there until something, sound the alarm, and then take off.
- WN: You mean you check it every day or you just go down when you hear of an earthquake?
- RC: No, only when there's an earthquake. Not every day. Only when there's a suspected wave. So, when they did that away, that project there, oh we felt real at ease.
- WN: So this was what, before '52, that they did away with it?
- RC: Yeah, before '52.
- WN: I see. So between '46 and '52 that, what you're describing is sort of like the in-between measure of warning.
- RC: That's right.
- WN: Between '46 which had nothing to '52.
- RC: That's right. So, then they improve as we went along.
- WN: But '52 was when the warning---what, was it sirens?
- RC: [Nineteen] fifty-two had sirens. And '52---oh '57 was siren too. [Nineteen] fifty-seven, when the tsunami hit, was raining. Because I was stationed at Hukilau, on Banyan Drive. And because the roof of the stage was still intact I was in there. You know we had roadblock but then I stayed there to get away from the rain. So you can tell, that in '46 was a clear day. And '57 was a rainy day.
- WN: What kind of a difference does that make, if it was a rainy day or sunny day?
- RC: Oh, '46 was a clear day and the decomposure smell was all over the place. But in '57 everything was wet you don't know how bad it is or not. But fortunately nobody lost their life.

WN: In '52 and '57 were there still people going down and trying to look at the wave?

RC: Yeah, because lot of people haven't seen the wave.

WN: Even those that remember what happened in '46?

RC: No, because they didn't see the '46, even though they read about it. But like anybody else they want to see the action. Just like with me, 1994. I was working in the Kress Building. The alarm came out. Construction workers was in the building. I block my window. And that came from Japan. And some of the merchants says, "Ah, no worry, not going come. Came from Japan." But, like anything else, only one time. So, I put up barrier, cost me about say \$500. But I saved my panel, my glass. One sheet cost me over two grand [\$2000]. Why not protect that---what's spending \$500, you can save over \$10,000. They think I was crazy, but I want to play safe. So that's the difference.

So the '52 and the '57 wasn't a great disaster, but was bad enough. But the people don't know how bad it is because they didn't witness one so they still want to go down. So like '58 we had an alert. Like anything else, it ended up one foot to two feet of the tide. So, like anything else they call it false alarm. But you can't---you know when it's one foot to two feet, that's a wave. But it's not false alarm. But the general public, they want to see action before it's real. So when it came to the '60 that's what happened. You know, delay, delay, and then it was too late. Because most of them thought it was false alarm.

WN: Okay, why don't we stop here and then what I'd like to do is continue next time with 1960, okay?

RC: Okay.

WN: All right.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 29-9-3-98

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Robert "Steamy" Chow (RC)

Hilo, Hawai'i

May 20, 1998

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Robert "Steamy" Chow for the tsunami oral history project on May 20, 1998. We're at his office in the historic Kress Building in Hilo, Hawai'i. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay Steamy, why don't we start, last time we left off finishing up talking about the '46 tsunami and a little bit about the '52 tsunami and the '57 tsunami. Why don't we start by having you tell me, on the eve of the 1960 tsunami, what was Hilo like?

RC: Hilo was like, on Kamehameha [Avenue], on the ocean side, there was one wooden building, the Kuwahara Store which is just about a little north of Furneaux [Lane], Haili Street, the rest was all parking lot. Then, beyond Mo'ohau Park on the same side was the old American Factors building warehouse that was used by the county as a recreational office. It was called the Cow Palace. Then beyond that was the Hilo Theatre. That's the only three buildings that was on the east side of Kamehameha Avenue. The rest was all open space. Then on the west side of Kamehameha Avenue, beyond Mamo Street, there was the fish market [Suisan Company, Ltd.], and Kwong See Wo store. Beyond Ponahawai Street on Kamehameha Avenue, there were several stores in that block that includes the Chinese temple next to Sun Sun Lau [Chop Sui House], and the Bowling Palace at the corner of Kumu and Kamehameha. Then the next block was Island Motors, Moto's Inn, the Kimi building [Kimi Brothers Electric & Plumbing Shop], and there were several service stations, like Isa Garage and the Souza Shell Service Station. Then comes the Hilo Boys Club, but at that time, was called Hilo Center, up to Pauahi Street. Then the Crescent City Cracker Company building that's when Pick and Pay was in there.

WN: Crescent City . . .

RC: Crescent City Cracker Company.

WN: [Crescent City] Cracker Company, okay.

RC: That went up to Piopio Street. Now, beyond Piopio Street, going south, was I. Kitagawa [& Company] which was located from across the Hilo Iron Works, they relocated to that area. Next was Motor Supply, Hilo Macaroni [Factory, Ltd.], and Goya Brothers [Service Station]. And beyond that was the old sushi place, I forgot the name, (Mizuguchi Sushi) and the

Hawai'i Candy [Company]. Beyond that was some other stores, one was an automotive supply and other buildings along the way. But in between had lots of empty spaces because of the '46 tsunami. Then comes Hawai'i Planing Mill [Ltd.], they had relocated from the foot of Piopio Street on the east side of Kamehameha Avenue and they relocated on the west side of Kamehameha Avenue. Then comes Hilo Iron Works. In between had some other stores. So that was all at the present time I could recall.

WN: Well, besides Hawai'i Planing Mill, did anybody else relocate between 1946 and 1960?

RC: Not that I recall. That's the only one, big one. So on that Sunday morning or Sunday afternoon, about 2:00 P.M., I was called back to go to work. Went back to work, got instructions from my lieutenant that there's a strong earthquake that happened in Chile and the wave would be hitting the Hawaiian islands about 10:00 P.M. My patrol was in downtown Hilo. So while working, and now it's getting dark, we patrolled, we had evacuated the city of Hilo so we were on the outskirts on Keawe Street and part of Kilauea and up to Kino'ole. But my section was from Ponahawai Street to Wailuku River. So when we were stationed at the Keawe Street bridge, and when 10:00 came, nothing happened; 11:00 nothing happened; after 12:30, nothing happened. Then there was a rumor that there was a wave coming but we didn't know where it came from. So we were on the bridge and all of a sudden, the wave came.

I was in my car, I was heading in the direction of south on Keawe Street. Once the wave hit, I proceeded down on Keawe Street going south. Before I could reach Shipman Street, there was a big flash, blue flash in the sky, in the area of Hilo Electric Light [Co., Ltd.] in Waiākea town. Then the whole city, lights went out, it was pitch dark. So I had to go down on Keawe Street, going, checking all the intersections. Nothing. I could see water about in the area of C. Brewer [&] Company just above Hilo Drug [Co., Ltd.] store. I came to Kalākaua Street, which was just up near the First Hawaiian Bank. I continue on to Haili Street. At the intersection of Haili and Keawe, water had just come over the intersection. Or in other words, the intersection was wet. I couldn't see any damages whatsoever, I didn't see anybody. So I continue on Keawe Street to Furneaux [Lane]. At Furneaux—was very interesting. Furneaux [Lane], down below had a Hualani Hotel, it's a three-story building, wooden building, and someone was on the third floor, screaming for help. However, that whole area was covered with water but because the front street, Kamehameha Avenue, the buildings was still intact, it was safer for him to stay in the building because it would be very difficult for a big wave to knock the building down. I kept on going, but I couldn't go to the intersection of Mamo and Keawe because the place was real flooded and debris. Fom my car light I could see all that. So I reversed back and I went on Furneaux [Lane], going to Kilauea and parked my car where the old Mana Transportation [Company was]. Water had gone over the intersection, and at the intersection get all kind of debris. I had my rubber boots on, I parked my car in the garage and I walked. And the Mamo and Keawe intersection was lot of debris there where cars can't travel already.

But then I could hear people screaming down Mamo Street and I heard someone say, "The old Chinaman, the chicken store man, is pinned under a building." [RC is talking about Mun Hon Yuen, owner of Hawai'i Chicken Store on Mamo Street, who, along with his wife Fannie Yen Tai Yuen, was trapped in the rubble of their store. See interview with the Yuens' daughter, Laura Chock, for an account of this incident.] And he was the one that was screaming for help. In the meantime, some rescue people had come by and went in to try and rescue him. And later on I found out that he was rescued and he was pinned under the building he was

staying. On top of that, the county crew had gone in there with chainsaw to cut him free. And this is something that I always say, that when the civil defense or the police say to get out and don't enter, they should heed to those warnings. But he's one of 'em that wanted to stay in his house and stay in his own bed because the other, '46, '52, '57 didn't cause any damage to his place.

WN: Where was his place?

RC: His place was at the corner of Punahoa and Mamo street. It's on the south side. Southwest corner of [Punahoa] and Mamo.

WN: So pretty much inland, yeah?

RC: Yeah. But all the buildings there was damaged all the way up to Mamo Theatre on that side of the street.

WN: Oh, wow.

RC: And on top of that, the farmer's market on the north side of Mamo and Punahoa Street was damaged too. So like the general public feels that if the '46, nothing happen, the '52, '57, nothing happen in their area, they feel that it's safe. But the '60 was more damaging; it went more inland. So I stayed at that intersection for roughly twenty-four hours and then you could hear rumors, people coming by saying that a policeman died in Waiākea town and they don't know who. In fact, when I left home at 2:00 P.M. Sunday, my wife didn't see me until about 5:00 P.M. Monday afternoon. She heard all these rumors and nobody seemed to know at the station who was stationed where because we were given a broad beat to cover. And after everything hit, they didn't know what station we were stationed at. So when she heard a rumor that a policeman died, she went to almost all over town looking for me, except Mamo and Keawe. Then when she found me at that time, it was more like a relief for her. And at the end, we found out that no policeman died.

So in 1960, I could tell you many stories that I heard and I seen, like on Kumu Street, halfway between Kamehameha and Kilauea Avenue is called Kimiville. During the war, the military had built a military camp in Kimiville, with wooden structures with two-by-four braces and Canec board. There was no window, only screen around.

WN: Who lived in Kimiville?

RC: The low-cost housing. Mr. Kimi owned that place. No paved road, dirt, gravel road and people lived in there. The '46, had only water damage and when came '60, some of them stayed back, which the police didn't know because everybody supposed to be out. But when it came, it wiped out the whole area. Many people died in that area, and in what we call Christina Lane, at the present time in the back of where Central Pacific Bank is located on Kilauea Avenue on the east side. So in these two areas—Christina Lane was a little upper grade type of people stay in there. They have their homes—it's rental units—but individual homes with yards and everything. And in that area, people died too. One fellow went back there to recover, to pick up his money and he got caught and he died. And they [later] recovered his safe.

And why I bring this out is because the people don't heed these warnings. [One survivor] told

me she was living in Waiākea town and [there was] no water [damage in 1946] there; '52, no water there, so she bought a piece of property and built a house in that area. And she built a two-story house and when came '60, she felt she was safe because she was away from Kamehameha Avenue, away from Manono Street. And she was in the area where was covered with tall trees. And most of her friends that stayed with her, they figured everything was safe.

I think that one there in 195[7], there was a warning, a tsunami warning, and it ended up they recorded wave about one or two feet high. [Waves from the 1957 tsunami, which, like the 1946 tsunami, were generated by an earthquake in the Aleutian Islands off Alaska, caused flooding in certain parts of Hilo, such as the wharf and Coconut Island. However, damage was far less than that caused by the 1946 waves, and no lives were lost. According to *Tsunami!* by Walter C. Dudley and Min Lee, wave heights reached approximately nine feet and higher.] But to the general public, it was a false alarm; for the officials, it was a tsunami, but one or two feet. So her friends says, "Ah, going be false alarm, just like ['57]." So they stuck around and then when they went home after 12:30 [in the morning], they got wiped out.

WN: This is in '60.

RC: This is '60. So you cannot say it's safe, it's better to be up on the high hills than to be in town.

WN: Okay, so talking about warning system. Okay, '46, they had no warning whatsoever.

RC: No warning.

WN: And then '52, was there a warning?

RC: There was a warning.

WN: Okay.

RC: And in '57 there was a warning.

WN: Warning in the . . .

RC: In the sense . . .

WN: Siren?

RC: Siren.

WN: Okay, siren.

RC: And the police would go with bullhorn all along the coastline, warning the general public.

WN: Okay, so '60 came, okay? This is what, fourteen years after the '46?

RC: Yes.

- WN: And you said that at two o'clock [Sunday afternoon] you said you heard that there was a tsunami and you were working?
- RC: I was called back to work and then I heard that there was an earthquake down in Chile.
- WN: Was there a siren at that time?
- RC: There was siren at the time. [Walter C. Dudley and Min Lee in their book, *Tsunami!*, write, "In Hilo most people had heard the news that a tsunami was supposed to arrive about midnight. But many people didn't really understand the warning. In fact, just a few months before, the system of warning sirens had been changed. Under the old system there were three separate alarms: the first siren indicated a tsunami warning was in effect; the second meant that it was time to evacuate; and the third was set to go off just prior to the arrival of the first waves. Under the new system, there only one siren—and it meant 'evacuate immediately.' After hearing the 'first' siren, many people began to pack up their belongings in preparation for evacuation. Then they waited for the second siren before leaving their homes. There was to be no second siren that night!"]
- WN: Okay, and then, so what was your assignment when that first siren sounded, was it to evacuate? [The coastal sirens in Hilo sounded at approximately 8:30 P.M., Sunday, May 22, 1960.]
- RC: To evacuate the public downtown.
- WN: Okay, and then, so what were the reactions that, some of the reaction you got?
- RC: The reaction was, "Is real?"
- I says, "Must be real because there's strong earthquake down Chile and from Chile to the Hawaiian Islands, there's nothing there to block 'em. There's no island or whatever to block the waves from coming up." At that time, I didn't know how fast it was coming . . .
- WN: Do you have an idea of what time it would come?
- RC: Yeah, they says, when I got the message, when I went to work, that it would hit Hilo or the Hawaiian Islands about 10:00, 10:30 [P.M.]. So we don't know until it hit. So when 10:30 came, nothing happen, 11:00, 12:00 . . .
- WN: So how do you evacuate people?
- RC: We go and tell them that there's an earthquake in Chile, that you have to pack your things and move out because we don't know how strong it is.
- WN: Did people generally fight?
- RC: Yes, yes. Some of them, had some smart-alecks, you know? "We'll wait for the next warning." But we tell 'em that, "We have orders to move all you folks out and nobody supposed to be in the danger zone."

WN: So danger zone went all the way to . . .

RC: At that time, was up to Keawe Street and then it goes up to Kino'ole Street in the lowland. Like in where Kapi'olani School is because water went over the road in 1946. So they evacuate up to Kino'ole Street. So that's how it came about, but then, later on, when the other siren, gave 'em more, it's coming . . .

WN: You know when the second siren sounded? [See note about sirens above.]

RC: Yes, I don't know about what time it was, but then we evacuate up to Kino'ole Street. But I was down on Keawe Street to check, you know, people still would be coming, sneaking through. And we have to protect, probably at the time, so it was easier for us to see the danger on Keawe Street than Kino'ole Street. And the main point was at the Wailuku Bridge on Keawe Street. But when the wave hit, the whole city went black and what you have to do is shine flashlight and with your carlight, that's the difference.

So another thing that when we heard the rumor that a policeman died, after it was all over, when I had chance of reviewing the damages, a policeman by name of Godfrey Desha, he was on a bridge and his car was smashed like a convertible underneath a house, close to where Walter Victor Baseball Stadium is. And then another one was Danny Ichijo, he's the baker and he was supposed to get married within a month or within a short time and he jumped in his car and he got killed. But Godfrey Desha, what he did, he ran. He ran down Kamehameha Avenue and he cut through the alleyway in the back of the stores and houses toward the (old) railroad depot area. So he got safe, he's here. So it all depends what you do.

WN: Yeah, there were some things, like the Suisan [Company, Ltd.] was where it is now at that time, 1960, and I saw pictures of people waiting around the Suisan . . .

RC: That's right.

WN: . . . waiting for the wave. How did you deal with that kind of situation?

RC: We tell them to move and you know, afterward, your life is more important than their life. That's how I look it. You can tell them to move and they don't move, so you move. Like I was always [concerned about] the Hilo Electric Light plant, the power plant.

WN: Now where was that power plant?

RC: It's the same location, next to, across the street from Suisan.

WN: Okay, by Hilo Iron Works.

RC: No, it's down by Suisan, right across the street, okay, in the [Nanihoa Country Club] golf course area. In 1946, there was a cold storage plant in front of the power plant and they use that as a temporary morgue. But what I was concerned about was, the workers in there, can they get electrocuted? But by talking to Charles Keehne, Chuck, he's in charge of the plant, I interviewed him for the tsunami museum.

WN: Is it K-U-E . . .

- RC: K-E-[E]-, I think, H-N-E, [Keehne, pronounced] "Kini." He says they—he was working in 1960 and one of his men was on the road by Suisan to watch [whether] the water was receding or not. So when the water receded, he ran back to the plant, up to the second floor, second level, and they waited. So I asked him about, "You don't get electrocuted?" He said, "No, because it's insulated in that area so once it hits, everything goes off and they won't get electrocuted." So he was there and he saw the buildings around him disappear in the Waiākea town. And he saw his boss caught by the wave. So he and the construction supervisor saw the big boss, Mr. McKenzie, get washed by the wave. So now it was to decide to call Mr. McKenzie's wife. They waited and waited, but you know, they don't know officially so they couldn't, oh, they didn't want to talk to her. Then all of sudden, I don't know how, they said they had a call and who was on the other line, Mr. McKenzie. (Chuckles) He was up in the Pu'u'eo plant up here and directing people up there, everything. So they didn't question him how he got up there.
- WN: Now you said that there were a few buildings remaining from '46, one was Kuwahara and . . .
- RC: Cow Palace . . .
- WN: Now, what became of that in 1960?
- RC: Kuwahara Building came down, the Cow Palace was still intact, the Hilo Theatre was still intact, but the interior was flooded, was all damage inside, the salt water and. . . . But they salvaged the organ and someone bought the organ. A lady in Honolulu bought the organ, the pipe organ and everything, took it home to Honolulu, had it reconditioned and everything and she played the organ. After she died, her son inherited the organ and he didn't know what to do with it. Then when he heard that the Palace Theater was sold and given to the downtown improvement association [for restoration], he donated that organ. So the organ at the present time is at the Palace there.
- WN: Is it being used at all?
- RC: They reconditioned it.
- WN: Oh. So now, 1960, Waiākea town was hit much more harder than it was in '46, yeah?
- RC: Yes. Waiākea town, which included the Lili'uokalani Park, sustained quite a bit of damage. And it [the waves] went toward the back of the Hilo Electric Light power plant and hit many, many houses, some businesses like Hilo Ikeda [Soda Works & Shoyu Factory], Kaneko Jelly [H. Kaneko Candy Factory] that was on Liholiho Street. It hit Waiākea Kai School and it hit the Waiākea Settlement YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] which is right next to the clock. The clock that says five minutes after one. And on Kilohana [Street], where Waiākea Kai School was located, there was another small mom-and-pop type store, Nagahisa Store, all these stores was gone. In fact, the fire department was on Kainehe Street and Kamehameha Avenue, that was damaged too. In fact, there on Kamehameha Avenue, the Waiākea Theatre was pushed onto the middle of Kamehameha Avenue. It just moved the whole building.
- WN: What about Wailoa River? Was that affected?

RC: Wailoa River, everything was affected. And they---in fact, all the stores on Lihiwai Street, on Kainehe Street and on the east side of Kamehameha Avenue, was all gone. At the present time, it's a golf course. And it was a shambles. There's some pictures that shows all that. And yet, the building on the west side of Kamehameha Avenue, the whole second [floor] had moved but it was still intact but couldn't be renovated. The unfortunate part is, in 1946, at the corner of Manono and Kamehameha, Cafe 100 had their business there. They got wiped out. Nineteen-sixty, they just opened their restaurant on Manono Street, about 100 yards from the intersection of Kamehameha and Manono Street going west. I know, I was there one week before the tsunami hit and they got wiped out.

WN: That is, you know, so far inland when you think about it, yeah?

RC: No, but is right across the street from the Wailoa River.

WN: Oh, I see.

RC: So they got hit hard. And that's why [the Cafe 100 owner] don't want to talk about it, because she got hit twice and the second one right after they had moved in there and less than a month business they got.

WN: So all those businesses that were near the Wailoa River . . .

RC: Got hit.

WN: You mean homes and businesses.

RC: Yes.

WN: So how far is the present Cafe 100 from the one that got wiped out in 1960?

RC: They were on the inland of Wailoa Basin and that area is a lowland too. They were right across from Kapi'olani School, in the back of Cafe 100 is the Wailoa Basin.

WN: That's right.

RC: So anything can happen there too.

WN: And so, comparing '46 and '60, you know, Shinmachi was pretty much wiped out in '46, what was there in 1960, where Shinmachi used to be?

RC: Nothing left.

WN: There was nothing. Was it a park then or . . .

RC: No, it wasn't a---there were stores here and there and they got wiped out, like Hawai'i Planing Mill. They had relocated there and they were gone. So they opened their present store [on Kanoelehua Avenue] immediately after the 1960. Was all temporary, like temporary shade and everything, selling their merchandise until they put up their building. You see, Kanoelehua [Avenue] was part of [land] owned by the railroad [i.e., Hilo Transportation Company]. So,

after that, the state opened up that Hawaiian Home [Lands] area for a light industrial area for the people so they could relocate in that area. And they formed Hawai'i Redevelopment Agency to condemn all the properties down along the [bay]front .

WN: And then they built that industrial area today.

RC: Yes, they had leased the property, Hawaiian Home [Lands] property, to the general public or merchants or merchants downtown. But then they condemned property all along Kīlauea Avenue on the east side and built the land up roughly over sixteen feet high and sold the property back to the owners that wanted to buy it back. So that's why you notice the buildings between Ponahawai Street all the way to Cafe 100 in that section . . .

WN: On Manono Street?

RC: No, Cafe 100 on Kīlauea across from Kapi'olani School, they had under the redevelopment program.

WN: And that's a lot of the [Hawai'i] County buildings are there.

RC: Yeah, the county building and the state building.

WN: And also some people were relocated to other parts like 'Iwalani Street and so forth?

RC: Yeah, then all the people that lost their property down in Waiākea Peninsula—that's what they call the Waiākea area—the company [i.e., Hawai'i Redevelopment Agency] let them, by lottery, have house lots on 'Iwalani Street. Most of them [now residing on 'Iwalani Street are 1960] tsunami victims. And I'm real happy for them because the state sold the property [to them] for about sixteen cents a square foot. So most of them [are now living] in a high area, and it would take a real big tsunami to wipe them out too. And almost the whole city would be wiped out.

WN: So tell me about the cleanup.

RC: Oh, the cleanup. The union people came out to volunteer, all the big companies with heavy equipment loaned their equipment for them to use. But I'd like to let you know, one incident that was real touchy is this Filipino man working on a crane in the area of Kimiville and he was removing—with a crane, lifting up all the trash and wooden building. And when he pick his rubbish up and when he notice a body dangling from the crane, he let it down and he never did come back. He get that funny feeling and he never did come back to work on this (area). I never did find his name but I knew he was a Filipino. And I'm not the only one knew about that. Some other people had talked about it. And most of the supplies or the debris was taken down to the rubbish dump, the city dump. In those days you just throw in a big area and the bulldozer will crush it down. And yet there were many, many workers—not workers, people would go and, scavengers, down there, looking for things to haul away.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: Okay.

RC: So there were lots of people down there trying to see what they could find. In fact, even the owners of the damaged buildings, they went out there trying to see if they could recover some of the things that they lost. So it's sort of like a sad situation. But the 1960 tsunami, I recall, it was a clear day, you know, it was clear. It wasn't raining or anything so it wasn't as hard cleaning up the mess.

WN: As opposed to 1946?

RC: Yes. But this ('46), they had lot of areas where they relocated the general public because they had NAS, the Naval Air Station, at the Hilo Airport.

WN: This is '46, but what about '60? Where did the people who lost their homes stay temporarily?

RC: Yeah, they went up there too.

WN: Oh, NAS, too?

RC: Yeah, certain area. So it was---1960 was little easier because after the '46, they could relocate most of the people because they knew, or they planned, like in case of a next disaster, what to do. Like in '46, it was a sudden thing, the general public or the agencies didn't know what to do and how to prepare things.

WN: So between '46 and '60, you know, there was a better awareness of what a tsunami could do . . .

RC: That's right. Now, I'd like to tell you, like in the ('46), after the ('46), there were no warning system and they put a temporary warning system on Pier 1, at the farthest end of Pier 1. And at that time, the police had to go down there to check it out. Anytime there's a warning, tsunami warning, the police goes down, the end of Pier 1 and on the apron, you look down in the water to see if the water goes down below this gauge and the gauge would set an alarm. So you, as a policeman, when you get out of your car, you have to have your engine running, your doors wide open, and ready to move. And we used to call that a suicide run because you don't know if you going make it off the pier. But fortunately, nothing happened until they had a better system. In fact, every time they just have it improve, improve, and improve, which is good. So, I feel, regardless how good the system is, if the general public don't cooperate, you not serving a purpose.

WN: So the awareness was better in 1960 than in '46.

RC: Yes.

WN: What about other things, in terms of let's say, technology? Was it easier to clean up because there were more modern types of equipment?

RC: That's right, and they knew what to do because they had an emergency system through the

civil defense. And I think most of the merchants or the big companies had the equipment and they were aware that if something like that happen, their men would use their equipment to help do the job. The last one, major disaster, was in '60, and yet in 1975, November 29, a local-generated tsunami happened at Halapē. That earthquake shook everybody up but yet there were no alarm, nobody knew until the [resulting] tsunami hit Hilo. People felt that there [wouldn't be] a tsunami because no alarm system was sounded, but it took only fourteen minutes from the time of the earthquake and the tsunami that hit Hilo. And yet the general public think nothing of it because there was no alarm system went through. So if an alarm system goes through, then might be there's little excitement, but after the damage done. But because no one died during this 1975 tsunami in downtown Hilo, it's not a big thing. [Two men died in the tsunami while camping at Halapē, near Punalu'u. See interview with Richard Furtado for details.] And like human nature, they have to see excitement and some fatalities before they recognize it as something serious.

WN: So the Halapē, 1975 tsunami was generated, as you said, by a local earthquake.

RC: Local earthquake.

WN: There was really no time for . . .

RC: No time.

WN: Okay. So the one tsunami that really, you had ample warning, really was the 1960.

RC: Nineteen sixty.

WN: And yet that was the biggest one and caused probably the most damage.

RC: That's right. Because people felt that the previous tsunami didn't hit their area and they felt it was safe. But the general public has to remember that the tsunami that hits, you don't know how big the tsunami. Could be one foot, can be twenty, might be fifty feet. And this is an area that nobody can predict but yet, you as an individual should heed to it and go a few feet further away. But like, since the 1960, we talking about thirty-eight years ago and you have to be in your late forties to remember. So all the young people now, they'll be nosy when there's an alarm, they want to see and this is the danger part of it. They'll be crowding the streets, just like the one in Honolulu, when they had an alert [on May 7, 1986, when O'ahu streets and highways were jammed after a Pacific-wide tsunami alert].

WN: So okay, so when 1960 was hit, okay, there was a lot less buildings on the east side of Kamehameha Avenue downtown, right?

RC: Yes.

WN: And lot of it is because of the destruction of '46 but probably also too, one reason is because of the tsunami they didn't build on that side, they couldn't build because it was condemned, right?

RC: Right.

WN: But yet, at the same time, Waiākea, which wasn't hit in '46, you know, it was pretty much a crowded area, right? A peninsula.

RC: That's right.

WN: Okay, so let's look at today now. It's been thirty-eight years since the last major tidal wave and you look at downtown now, you have these safe zones, you have open space, you don't have Waiākea town anymore, you don't have businesses and homes on the east side of Kamehameha Avenue. And then, what do you think now, when a tsunami hits again, what's going to be some of the major problems?

RC: The major problem would be trying to get the people out of the place.

WN: Okay, so in other words, you're saying that Hilo is doing what it can to minimize property damage but yet now we're talking about education, right?

RC: Educating. Because like, I read in news releases, things, that that's why they planted many coconut trees on the bay front. It's kind of a false protection of the downtown businesses. But yet the buildup, the coconut trees there would at least protect or stop those big boulders from coming through and crashing through the present stores. That's why [in future tsunamis] there might be water damage but not as severe like the '46. Because the '46, that whole area was, had a railroad track there and the buildings were old, some buildings were on stilts and downtown, it was wide open. And yet, '52 and '57, it didn't damage or have major damage on the present site. Even 1960, what, we look back now, 1946, '52, '57, it came from the [north]. And [the tsunamis] hit Hilo, but there's different parts of Hilo. So like '60 came from Chile and the damages were down in Waiākea area. So it all depends where the earthquake generated to more or less figure [whether] it might hit this area or that area. But you cannot predict what area it's going hit until it comes.

But I think the general public, the older people understand how serious it is. But the young blood, they want to see it because they haven't seen one. Just like Albert Yasuhara, the poster boy [Yasuhara is one of many Hilo residents fleeing the 1946 tsunami in a famous historical photograph], he remembered that his mother says when there's a tsunami, it comes in threes. So he ran away from the first one, the second one, he missed it because he went back to his car, so the third one, he wanted to see in a worst way. That's when he sat on the curbside by the Ponahawai and Kamehameha [intersection]. But when he saw the wave climbing the coconut tree, that's when he ran. And he ran all the way to Lincoln Park, it's two blocks up. He didn't get wet.

WN: And while he was running, that's when somebody took that picture?

RC: Yeah, and he thought the guy, the Filipino man, was taking the picture of the wave. So this is the thing that he wanted to see because he didn't see one. He was little too young to see the 1923 tsunami. He was twenty-seven years old in '46. So he wanted to see because he didn't see one. So if he can think that way, you can see the general public now, they want to see one because they never see one. That's the difference, yeah?

WN: Well, you know, in my own experience, living in Honolulu, they had a tsunami warning, okay?

RC: Warning.

WN: And what they did was they [state government] sent everybody home. So here we are in a safe university building, made of concrete, up in the *mauka* area, getting out of that safe building, getting in our cars, picking up our children who are in a safe school and driving right along the waterfront to try to get home to 'Aiea. That to me shows that there's really a lack of public knowledge and awareness of tsunami.

RC: So until such time as they find a better system, in fact, when the '94, I was working in the building, yeah? That's the one that generated in Japan [Kurile Islands, on October 4, 1994]. The construction crew was still here and we had the material and I blocked my window pane, the showcase. Everybody look at me and they kind of laugh. And all downtown they packed their things and they left, you know, they left, whatever is there is there, if the damage is there. But with me, I covered because I felt that the safety glass, one panel cost close to \$3,000 and if I can protect that by, you know, just cost me about \$500, it was worth it. But thank goodness nothing happened. But they look at me just like, oh, they were laughing at me, but I felt if I can protect some of my property. And after that I left.

I went up Ponahawai Hill, my whole family was there and we were looking down toward the ocean, [so] we could see [the tsunami]. And this is what everybody would do, you know, they going to get nosy and go down. In fact, all over the place, we do the same thing because I'm a retired policeman, but I don't have access going there but you stand in the background and do all the watching too. Because when it comes to excitement, everybody want to see the excitement, regardless of if dangerous or not. So until such time that they find a good system to evacuate everybody, there will always be jam, traffic jam.

WN: Has there been any movement toward coming up with a better system?

RC: Not that I know [of] with [Hawai'i island civil defense director] Harry Kim. But in 1997, I think it was October or November, Harry Kim came over the air, announcing to the general public that if you in the lowlands and if you feel a strong earthquake, head for the hills because I knew what was, why that, because Lō'ihī, the submerged volcano down South Point was causing over 400 earthquakes a day. And with that, Harry Kim knew that he won't have enough time to warn the general public because of the [1975] Halapē incident. So he had to announce it over the PA [public address] radio during the day so the general public is aware of that. But fortunately, nothing happened. So when I do my talks with the school kids, I always bring that up to make them aware of these things. And yet, some of them heard that warning and they didn't know what it was. In fact, most of the schoolteachers didn't know about it. So I feel strongly that the Department of Education should put some emphasis on the warning system because it's happening right here in Hawai'i.

WN: So when you talk to school children, what kinds of things do you tell them?

RC: You see, they're not interested in the buildings, they interested in excitement. So I tell them all these other incidents. I tell them that I was a policeman at that time. Now I'm here as an observer, I have interviewed many survivors and I'm a survivor myself and then I go into all these incidents. Then my last speech is about Halapē.

And then comes to the warning by Harry Kim. I says, "It [can] take only [a few] minutes [for

a tsunami to arrive, so] Harry Kim doesn't have enough time to warn you because he has to go to the civil defense office to sound the siren. It'll be too late." They work twenty-four hours and when they record an earthquake, they map it out to find out where it is and they call that area to find out if it generated a tsunami or not. And then they check the warning (at Midway Island), there's an automatic station there, then they notify the civil defense to sound the siren. So when the '75 one hit in Hilo from the local earthquake, they didn't have enough time to warn Harry Kim. When they warn Harry Kim, it's happened already. So that's why I emphasize to them that it's very important to listen to the radio.

So I feel strongly that the DOE, the Department of Education, should educate the school children and they should start 'em young because most of them don't know how to read the telephone directory maps or they don't have the time to go look at that. But they should have some kind of education. I had some school kids, third graders from Laupāhoehoe School sitting there and I start talking to them about the tsunami that hit Hilo. And one hand came up, you know, trying to attract my attention but I was still talking and then after a while I asked him, "Your question?"

He says, "I thought only Laupāhoehoe School had the tsunami. I didn't know Hilo had tsunami." So in other words, they didn't teach them in school. All they knew was Laupāhoehoe. So the rest of the public here, you can imagine what goes on among the other school kids. I volunteer, I never did turn down any lecture for school kids. I make it a point that, because they need the education, I do it all voluntarily because I want to see that they know what's going on. I don't want to see them on a plaque, one of those deceased. Because if I can save one life, I'm happy.

WN: So, the reason for so many deaths in 1960, would you say then it was because of this lack of awareness? People didn't take it seriously enough?

RC: They didn't take it seriously and secondly, they felt the area they stayed in was safe because water didn't hit that area [in previous tsunamis]. Like anything else, they say, if you read the newspaper, it says, "Hilo got struck by a tsunami." So you figure Hilo, but they forget that Hilo hit in different places. So like the '46 is downtown Hilo, Shinmachi. [Nineteen] fifty-two, it went to Naniloa area, Banyan Drive. [Nineteen] fifty-seven is in town, Hukilau Restaurant, because Hukilau had the [water] mark [on one of its windows]. And Hukilau stayed out of business for about a month. So '60, the areas that water didn't hit [previously], like Waiākea Kai School, Waiākea Settlement, the clock area, so they felt they was safe, it was quite a bit inland. But that whole area got wiped out. So this is the thing that people assume that it's safe and yet it's dangerous. Another area I feel strongly [about] is Waiākea House Lots. They have a danger zone quite a distance inland because that area is low, and up to now no water went in that area. And I know that people living in that area not going evacuate. But never can tell, one going come right through and going hit them in the area. So . . .

WN: So you look at the difference between '46 and '60, '46 was just unfortunate because there was no warning.

RC: No warning.

WN: Nineteen sixty there was the warning. So it became more of an education kind of a thing.

RC: That's right. So this is what came about.

WN: Few more questions. The museum, Pacific Tsunami Museum, I know you've been pretty active in it and so forth. What were some of the reasons why the museum is being started?

RC: You see, first started, it's twelve of us. Jeanne [Branch] Johnston, her grandfather [Charles Mason] was a chemist [who invented] Canec. She was away so she wanted to know a little more of her roots. She was here in '46 as a young school kid, maybe in grade school and she wanted to know some of her neighbors [See Jeanne Johnston interview for details]. So when she asked me if I knew her [Keaukaha] neighbors, whether are they around, like the Van Gieson girls. And I traced them down and then she wanted to know about her grandfather, Charles Mason. So she got hold of the Van Gieson girls and she wanted to talk about the tsunami. So they called me and about twelve of us got together once a month, reminiscing about the tsunami, about all our incidents and everything.

And every month we had about say, seven to eight people at Naniloa and then she says, "We should talk to Walt[er C.] Dudley. Walt Dudley [and Min Lee] wrote the book [*Tsunami!*] about the tsunami." And Walt Dudley was in France at that time. When he came back, he came to one of the meetings—I can still picture him, sitting right by the door. And when we were talking, reminiscing, and his eyes was getting bigger and bigger. So they asked him what he can talk about, because he wrote the book. First thing he says, "You folks' story here are better than my book. I just covered the surface. We should start a museum because we have many scientists around the world that come to Hilo to learn more about the tsunami. So we should start a museum. There's lots of money out there."

And then from there we had many meetings, Walt Dudley, Jeanne Johnston, myself, and some others. And we talked; we were going all over the place to meet. We had no set place. Jim Wilson came into the picture too. Then after getting all these things together, that's when we needed to have fund-raising. So the only way to get fund-raising, we had to get one corporate board. So I suggested that you should [contact] all the businesses that were involved in the tsunami, and that means like Barry Taniguchi of KTA [Super Stores], Tom Okuyama from Sure Save, they were in the tsunami area. I wanted to get Mrs. Miyashiro from Cafe 100, but she said she doesn't want any part of it and we respected her. So we had others, I couldn't recall right off. Oh, Bobby Fujimoto, Hawai'i Planing Mill and others. So now we have Jim Wilson as the president and we got Donna Saiki as the vice-president, she represents the Saiki family and being a retired school principal was perfect.

So that's how it went about. And then we couldn't raise money because we had too many fund-raisers, so they told us to hold it up. And that's how we stand. Then here comes a godsend from First Hawaiian Bank, Mr. [Walter] Dods. First Hawaiian Bank gave that building on the corner of Kamehameha [Avenue] and Kalākaua Street [former site of First Hawaiian Bank and present site of the Pacific Tsunami Museum] in November 23, 1997, he gave the building to us. It's worth over \$800,000.

WN: Beautiful building.

RC: Yes, it's a historic building. And they tried to put the things together. We have pictures from the Bishop Museum, and it's given to our tsunami museum so they putting it together over there. Hopefully before the end of the month the building will be open, yeah? The temporary

type until we have the funds to put in a permanent. So that's how it stands.

WN: So one major goal is to educate the public.

RC: Yeah, this is the thing that we have to educate the public and until then, it's not serving a purpose. Another tsunami come, more people would die because we're not heeding to the warning. Because I went through it so I should know.

WN: Well, okay. I think that's it, thank you very much.

RC: You're quite 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
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