

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Richard Furtado

"The first wave had hit, yeah. Then while I was driving to our restaurant, I guess that's when the second wave hit the place and I was out where Scout Island is now. And I saw the wave coming, the water coming up the roadway. So I backed up and I saw the Carlsmiths running out of their yard. And I drove down to see the Saikis and they were having breakfast, they knew nothing about the tidal wave. And I said, 'Well, there's a tidal wave, you'd better get prepared for it.' By then, I drove back to where our home was, parked on the road there and the water had receded. The second wave, the water had receded. So I thought I'd run in. I'd left my wallet in the bedroom so I ran back into the house and picked it up and Juliette ran down with me. I said, 'Juliette, go with me,' and I said, 'We'd better get out of here.' Because the next one was coming. . . . Ran across the street. When the third wave hit, I was standing in front of the Cooks' place on a high rock ledge. . . . And that was the wave that picked up the home, Lalakea home [that we rented], and smashed it against the coconut trees and just went to bits."

The third of six children, Richard Furtado, was born in Lahaina, Maui on July 15, 1913 to Lucy Napelakaukau Furtado and Antonio D. Furtado. His mother was Hawaiian-Chinese; his father, a Portuguese immigrant who arrived in the islands at the age of four.

His paternal grandparents from the Azores worked in the sugar industry. Later, his grandfather and father were in the meat business. The Furtados at one time owned the only meat market and slaughterhouse in Lahaina; they made and marketed Portuguese sausages throughout the territory. The Furtados continued to operate the meat business until the 1932 election of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. As the only known Democrat in Lahaina, Antonio Furtado was appointed postmaster.

Richard Furtado attended Kamehameha III School in Lahaina and Punahou School in Honolulu. The 1931 Punahou graduate earned a bachelor's degree in business and accounting from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa in 1936.

Before completing his college degree he married Juliette Simpson with whom he would have and raise four children.

In the 1940s he was employed by Consolidated Amusement Company and American Sanitary Laundry. For more than thirty years, 1945-78, he was a restaurateur in Hilo. He was the proprietor of The Ponds, The Lanai, Bobbie's Steak and Lobster, and The Hibachi.

During the 1946 tsunami both his rented home and business in the Keaukaha district were destroyed. In 1960, his home garage was flooded and walls damaged; his restaurant did not sustain structural damage but furnishings were lost.

Richard Furtado is now retired and resides with his wife, Juliette, on the Big Island. The interview was conducted in his Hilo bayfront home.

Tape Nos. 29-26-1-98 & 29-27-1-98

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Richard Furtado (RF)

Hilo, Hawai'i

September 4, 1998

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

[NOTE: Also present at the interview is Juliette Furtado (JF), RF's wife.]

WN: This is an interview with Richard and Juliette Furtado and we're at their home in Hilo. Today is September 4, 1998 and the interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

First question I want to ask, I guess I'll Richard ask first. When and where were you born?

RF: Lahaina, Maui. Do you want birth date too?

WN: Yup.

RF: July 15, 1913.

WN: Tell me something about your father and mother.

RF: My mother [Lucy Napelakaukau] was a schoolteacher. My father [Antonio D. Furtado] was born in Portugal, came to the islands when he was about four years old and worked in the meat business.

WN: As what?

RF: As a butcher first. And later on, he was able to buy the butcher shop and become its owner. At the time in Lahaina, we had the only meat market. We also had the only slaughterhouse. I grew up in the meat market.

WN: What about your mother?

RF: A schoolteacher as long as I can remember. I think she graduated with the first graduating class of the [Territorial] Normal [and Training] School.

WN: And what was her name?

RF: Lucy Napelakaukau.

WN: K-A-U-K-A-U?

RF: Mm hmm.

WN: Okay, Juliette, what about you? Tell me when and where you were born.

JF: I was born in Honolulu, February 3, 1917.

WN: Tell me something about your mom and dad.

JF: They were just ordinary people. My father used to work on Wai'anae [Sugar] Plantation. My mother was a housewife. We lived down there for many years (then moved to) Honolulu. I don't recall her working anywhere.

WN: So your earliest recollections was Honolulu?

JF: Yes. I recall Wai'anae quite a bit but then I went to school in Honolulu. So I stayed with family and went home during summer.

WN: That's a long way.

JF: By train. We had to go by train. I remember that. My grandfather was a station manager in Wai'anae.

WN: And what was your father's name?

JF: His name was Harold Gordon Simpson, but his nickname was "Kang."

WN: "Kang?"

JF: Kang.

RF: Tell him why.

JF: Because he was born in New Zealand.

WN: Oh. (Laughs) I thought maybe he was part Korean. (Laughs)

JF: His family moved to Hawai'i when he was about three years old. They settled in the islands. One of his nicknames was "Kangaroo." Everybody knows him as Uncle Kang.

WN: And your mother's name?

JF: Sara Colburn Simpson.

WN: And where is she from?

JF: Born on the island.

- RF: She was a descendant of Don [Francisco] de Paula Marín.
- WN: Oh, that's your mother's side, actually?
- JF: Yes, in fact, we just had a gathering in Honolulu, descendants of Marín, my great-great-great-grandfather.
- WN: I see. So your mother is a Colburn. Okay, so you [RF] were born in Lahaina, you [JF] were born in Honolulu. Tell me something about school, Richard.
- RF: I went to Punahou [School] in 1924.
- WN: Prior to Punahou though, you went to . . .
- RF: Kamehameha III School there in Lahaina.
- WN: And what was it like growing up in Lahaina?
- RF: I grew up in a plantation town. All my friends were from the laboring classes. Only Lahaina, being a seaport, we had a few more businesses where the town existed. It was strictly a plantation town. The [plantation] manager was like the mayor.
- WN: Is this Pioneer Mill?
- RF: Pioneer Mill.
- WN: What was your neighborhood like?
- RF: Our home was right across the big banyan tree where the present Burger King is now.
- WN: Gee, I don't know the area so well.
- RF: Don't know Lahaina at all?
- WN: No.
- RF: Well, a big, focal point of Lahaina is the big banyan tree. Covers almost the whole block. We lived right across it. And there were about three other families that lived in our area. The Gannon family, the Freeland family, and the Sanborn family.
- WN: These were *Haole* families?
- RF: Part Hawaiians. Mr. Gannon was manager of the plantation store. The Freelands, perhaps the biggest landowners in Lahaina. His father was called Judge Freeland. I guess he was an attorney. They owned the Pioneer Hotel and most of the surrounding area.
- WN: What did you do to have fun as a kid?
- RF: I played with all the neighborhood kids, I guess. I don't know, played with my sisters a lot. I

think that's why I was sent to Punahou. I guess if my father was still living today, he might have thought it was okay to be gay. But, you know, I have five sisters so if I wasn't playing with the neighborhood kids, I was playing with my sisters all the time.

WN: So you were the only boy out of six, right?

RF: Five sisters, so six in the family. I was right in the middle, third child.

WN: Were you treated any differently because you were the only boy?

RF: Well, my sisters say I was spoiled by my mother.

(Laughter)

WN: What kind of games did you play as a kid?

RF: Oh, all games. Baseball, football. We even used to have little track meets.

JF: Tell him about your camping out with your friends.

RF: Camping out was a hard thing for me. Never camped out. There was a park behind our house and every once in a while, guys used to get together for the long weekend to camp out. And my mother used to check up on me, being that we were right next to the park. And she'd call out, "Richard, are you warm?"

Said, "Yes, Mother."

Another hour. "Richard, you okay?"

"Yes, Mother."

The third time, I pack up my belongings, come home. (WN laughs.) So I've never been a camper-outer.

(Laughter)

WN: I guess your mother worried about you a lot.

RF: Yeah, I guess so.

JF: He's the only one who had a bat and ball, so whenever he had to go home he used to take all his toys home.

RF: Take all the toys home. (Laughs)

WN: I guess your friends didn't like that, eh?

RF: Well, that's growing up in a small town. I used to, even when I was a youngster, go with my dad to the meat market and I had to make three deliveries every morning. One to the manager

of the plantation, one to the hospital, and one to the manager of the bank. And then I went home, I cleaned up, had breakfast (at home). And that's before I even was a sixth grader. My dad used to give me five dollars a month. After he worked for so many years (for) the owner of the meat market, the owner left the islands and sold the business to my dad. So he worked even harder. Got up, I would say, four, five o'clock every morning. And weekends, because he closed down earlier, he would get up at about three o'clock. And some of those mornings, I went to work with him as a youngster. So most of my life growing up—lot of it and early mornings—were spent at the meat market.

At the time, I think my grandfather and father were the original people that made Portuguese sausage and marketed it throughout the territory. But you could only make it when you slaughtered pigs because you get your jackets from the pigs. You couldn't buy commercial jackets in those days. And this is way back in the [19]10s. We had a smokehouse, I would say it was about twelve [feet] by twenty [feet], which we smoked all our sausages in. My dad even made bologna and head cheese. So my sisters and I, sometimes we used to hate the holidays because we spent all our nights cleaning chickens, turkeys and pigeons. Those days, you didn't get your poultry from the Mainland. You had to go backdoor and get them from the farmers and then slaughter them and clean them. So before the holidays, people ordered turkeys. We had to find them from the backyard farmers and then we'd have to feather them and clean them up.

WN: That was your job too?

RF: As kids we would take the feathers off. So we were a regular meat market family. We learned to eat every cut of the meat. What my dad couldn't sell, he brought home. Growing up, on weekends, we used to see peddlers going around, different camps and all. The meat peddler went around to the different plantation camps and I'd go with him on weekends and I'd ring the bell and say, "*Niku, niku. Hone nai.*" (Meat, meat. No bones.) That's my first experience with the Japanese language.

WN: Did you do a lot of that stuff? Door-to-door kind of things? Delivery kind of stuff?

RF: Well, they'd come to you. Like a peddler, you go out there and find a spot, ring your bell, and people would come. Meat was packaged in one-pound packages and (we) had to take the bone out. Because the Oriental people didn't want a piece of meat with the bone. So it was hard to sell the real good cuts like roast beef and porterhouse steaks because there were always big bones. So you had the bones, you couldn't wrap it up in one-pound packages. I think then, those days, you sold a pound of meat for twenty-five cents.

JF: Those were the days. Twenty-five cents.

RF: No matter what cut it was.

WN: So I was wondering, the Oriental people didn't like bone in their meat.

RF: Well, I think they stir-fried everything. You know, most of the plantation families, they grew their own vegetables. I think the original teriyaki sauce originated in a plantation town where people grew their vegetables, their ginger. They got free brown sugar from the mill, put it all together, made a gravy so that one pound of meat would last a whole week for the family. Lot

of vegetables with just a lot of teriyaki sauce with the beef.

WN: Did you sell to the more wealthier people too?

RF: Well, they usually called in for their orders or they came in, bought the nice cuts. And even the nice cuts, steak was sold for twenty-five cents a pound. Everything. The beef was slaughtered, Filipino people used to come in to buy the innards. The tripe, the heart, lungs, tongue. In those days, everything you didn't sell, you ground up and made sausage out of it. We used to have a little sausage (machine), I don't know what you call it, not a mill, but a (cylinder with a spout). After you ground up the meat, (peppers, garlic and spices, you filled the cylinders and compressed it through the spout to fill the jackets to make the sausages).

WN: You folks did sausage, you did beef, or cuts of beef?

RF: Slaughterhouse, yeah.

WN: Pork, chicken, turkey, and poultry.

RF: But most of the beef was bought from the ranches and they brought it in already slaughtered. But when we had to buy beef on the hoof, we had a slaughterhouse and we would do that. But we did all our slaughtering of pigs at home in the slaughterhouse. Cleaning pigs is not like today where they can take all the hair off the pig in a minute or two. Then, you'd have to do it with a good, sharp knife. Scrape it off.

WN: Wow.

RF: Yeah, so I know what it was like in the old days when you had to be part of the work force.

WN: Did you ever work in the plantation?

RF: Oh yeah, I did. When we first got married. Gave it up in a hurry, went back to school.

WN: (Laughs) This is where?

RF: At Pioneer [Mill]. When we got married [in 1934], after my sophomore year [at the University of Hawai'i], went back to the plantation. Worked there one summer, said this wasn't for me. I was able to get an athletic scholarship at the University [of Hawai'i]. Of course, wasn't very much in those days. I think they gave us \$150 to pay the tuition. I found me a job. So I used to work three days a week and go to school three days a week, and raise a family.

WN: Okay, before we get into that, Juliette, why don't you tell me what was it like growing up for you?

RF: She was the favorite grandchild!

JF: (I was the oldest grandchild in my mother's family. I spent a lot of time with my mother's family, aunts, et cetera. I lived with an aunt and uncle during my first and second grade in Honolulu, as my family were still living in Wai'anae.)

- WN: So how many brothers and sisters did you have?
- JF: I had one sister and one brother. My sister passed away quite young. My brother passed away about three or four years ago.
- WN: So where in Honolulu did you grow up? Or where did you stay?
- JF: Right in Nu'uaniu, where I went to Valley School, (a small private school). And then my parents moved to (Honolulu), I guess my father retired from his job in the plantation and they moved to Honolulu, lived in Mānoa for many years.
- WN: What part of Mānoa?
- JF: Quite a ways up. Is O'ahu Avenue going up?
- RF: Yeah.
- JF: Off of Mānoa [Road].
- WN: What did you do to have fun as a child? Or what did you do as a child?
- JF: Nothing very exciting (that I can remember). (RF laughs.) I went to school like everybody else. I had my friends. I'd never been to the Mainland until I got married. So that's how dull my life was.
- (Laughter)
- WN: So you said you went to Roosevelt [High School] eventually.
- JF: Uh huh. Twelfth birthday, when (we) moved to Kaimukī. I went to Ali'iōlani School and then to Lincoln and then to Roosevelt.
- WN: So all English-standard schools?
- RF: Yeah, that's what they called them in those days.
- WN: Right. I was wondering, the students that went to these schools, ethnically, were they mostly *Haole* or mixed?
- JF: Some mixed. Because Kaimukī had quite a mix.
- WN: And how did you get from your home in Kaimukī to Roosevelt?
- JF: I think. . . .
- RF: Were there streetcars in those days?
- JF: Streetcar, yeah.

- RF: Yeah, you had to walk from the Makiki fire station house.
- WN: Oh, they let you off at the Makiki fire station area?
- RF: Yeah, and then they became buses, after the streetcars.
- WN: I see. So how did you two meet?
- JF: That's a good question.
- RF: At a dance at University of Hawai'i.
- JF: I had gone to a dance. I was in Roosevelt at that time. And I went to a dance with who turned out to be a cousin of his and he was there and that's where we met. And then I used to . . .
- RF: That was 1931. I remember the time too. (Chuckles)
- JF: I had some real good girlfriends that I—we ran around together, one had a car. About three of us. And then I guess another time, ran into him at a party and I guess we just picked up from there. We'd been together for two years before we were married, right?
- RF: Yeah. We met in '31, we married in '34.
- JF: When I graduated from high school.
- WN: You graduated from high school in '34. So you were only seventeen when you got married.
- JF: That's right. You figured that out.
- WN: (Laughs) Did you go to the university?
- JF: No.
- RF: Stayed home, raised family.
- WN: When you were going to high school, did you have any aspirations in terms of a career?
- JF: Not that I recall.
- RF: But she worked.
- JF: Yes, that's right, I did. I had odd jobs.
- RF: Schuman Carriage.
- JF: As a telephone operator.
- RF: In fact, even during the war.

WN: For Mutual Telephone?

RF: Was Schuman Carriage.

JF: Schuman Carriage and Home Insurance Company. Worked with those telephone operators.

RF: Even during the war in the engineers.

WN: Oh, [U.S. Army] Corps of Engineers at Punahou [School]?

RF: Uh huh [yes].

JF: At night. Drivers came pick me up, take me work, take me home.

WN: And where was home at that time?

JF: We lived in (Wilhemina Rise).

RF: First down at Bingham Tract.

JF: (Tape inaudible.)

RF: And then Wilhemina Rise.

JF: Wilhemina Rise.

WN: Oh, Wilhemina Rise.

Okay, so Richard, let's get to your time when you left Lahaina. Why did you leave Lahaina?

RF: I thought I'd better go back to school.

WN: No, I'm talking about, you came to Punahou first.

RF: Oh yeah, as a sixth grader, my dad sent me. My dad always felt that his kids should have a good education and I had a chance to live with an aunt in Honolulu and go to Punahou. So he sent me there as a sixth grader. In fact, he even sent two of my sisters to live with friends to go to high school in California, in Bakersfield.

WN: How did you feel about leaving Lahaina to go to Punahou?

RF: Well, it was pretty hard!

JF: He was a country jack.

RF: Yeah, I was a real country [jack].

WN: So where did you live? Where did your aunt live?

RF: Kaimukī, 15th Avenue. Two of the guys at Punahou School came up to me and said hello and tried to make me feel at home. One was Woody Katsunuma. His father [Tomizo Katsunuma] was a vet[erinarian]. And the other one was [John] "Jack" Johnson. For the rest of their lives, we were always good friends. Both of them have passed away. Woody, about ten years ago. And Jack was a major with the 100th [Infantry Battalion], was killed in the war.

JF: Then you went in as a boarder, yeah?

RF: Yeah, I first lived with my aunt, then later on, I became a boarder.

WN: At Punahou?

RF: Yeah.

WN: I didn't even know they had boarders.

RF: Yeah, they had a boarding department that was---Punahou took over the [Honolulu] Military Academy in Kaimukī. And they used to bus us to school. And then my senior year, Punahou did away with boarding school so my dad got a house in Bingham Tract, and we lived together. If I tell people this, they don't believe it. But a younger sister of mine, she and I lived together, and a friend of mine, Arthur Lyman. We were just kids [but we lived in] this one house, took care of ourselves, did all our own cooking and things like that. Whenever people came to check up to find out about us, we'd say, "Our parents have gone out for the night."

WN: But your parents were living in Lahaina?

RF: Lahaina.

WN: Wow, you grew up fast, yeah?

RF: Yeah. So when people talk about being on their own, we were on our own when we were youngsters. I don't know, our family must have trusted us a lot.

WN: Tell me a little bit about the sports that you were involved in at Punahou.

RF: Well, I really wasn't involved in very many sports in Punahou. I used to like track, I ran track. I played center at Punahou School on the football team. I just earned three letters. I don't know how I ever got into Punahou's hall of fame. I didn't think the accomplishments were much. But in those days, you know, there was no TV or no real running around so you got involved in different sports. Being that I lived in Bingham Tract, all the kids were very competitive. So I learned to play basketball, play football, swam. I swam on the swimming team at the university with Dr. Pete Okumoto, who's a senior swimmer now. I swam for three years. Played football for four years, ran track for four years.

WN: This is at?

RF: University.

- WN: University, okay. So when you went to the university in nineteen thirty
- RF: [Nineteen] thirty-one, at first.
- WN: What did you major in?
- RF: Well, I thought I was going to take up civil engineering. But competing in sports, it didn't seem to work out. So I gave it up and went into business. But they threw me out after one year because I fussed around too much, didn't go to classes.
- WN: (Chuckles) Did you want to---were you going to take over your father's business or anything like that?
- RF: No, not really, I never had the thought of going back to Lahaina.
- WN: Did your father want you to go back?
- RF: No, not really. He never did talk about it. Eventually, my dad gave up his business. When [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt got elected president [in 1932], my dad was the only known Democrat in Lahaina and he got the most lucrative job which was the postmaster's job. So he went back to work again.
- WN: Oh, okay. That was the ultimate political job.
- RF: Yeah, Lahaina. It was a big town.
- JF: And then he died.
- RF: Oh yeah, he died very young. I think he was about seventy-four when he passed away. Eleven years younger than I am today.
- WN: Did he ever tell you how he got involved in Democratic politics?
- RF: Oh, didn't like, I guess, the way people were being treated. I think the power in those days that the Republicans had---that's how labor unions came about [i.e., in reaction to the Republicans]. He was a good friend of labor. The same thing that the Democrats are doing today, the Republicans did in those days. (Chuckles)
- JF: And I became a staunch Republican then.
- WN: Oh, is that right?
- RF: In fact, one of her uncles was the mayor of Honolulu.
- JF: (He was Charles [N.] Arnold [Republican, 1926-29], who was married to my mother's sister.)
- WN: So how was this union treated, regarded?
- JF: That was all right. They never voted for a Democrat until we got married, and his sister Anna

Kahanamoku was running for senate.

RF: The house first.

JF: So they voted. Good people.

RF: Oh, I think, in the islands, you know, you vote for people you know more than [for the] party.

WN: Well, you know, your sister, Anna, was a long-time Democrat in the [territorial] senate.

RF: Well, actually, my older sister was the real politician, Delores.

WN: Delores Martin.

RF: Yeah. She was head of the Democratic party for so many years. But you're not talking about tidal waves.

WN: Okay, yeah, yeah, we're getting there.

(Laughter)

WN: I just want to bring you—I want to set the stage. But let me just ask you about, let's see . . .

RF: My first tidal wave.

WN: Okay, wait. First of all, you went to UH [University of Hawai'i] for a year, then you . . .

RF: Then I went to a business school.

WN: Then you got out and . . .

RF: And then went back again.

WN: Went back when? In 1934?

RF: [Nineteen] thirty-two, '33.

WN: And then you got married in '34?

RF: Mm hmm.

WN: And then what happened after that, briefly? Did you work? You said you worked for Consolidated [Amusement Company], right?

RF: Well, I worked many jobs. I worked for Benson Smith [& Co.] (a drugstore), part-time jobs, you know? Three days a week, I worked for HC&D [Hawaiian Dredging Company later known as HC&D, Hawaiian Construction and Dredging Company], three times a week. Then finally, I worked for Consolidated Amusement.

WN: What did you do there?

RF: I was a doorman. Pālama Theatre.

WN: That theater's still there, you know.

RF: Oh yeah, beautiful building.

WN: So how many years did you work there?

RF: Well, I worked there for about a year and a half.

WN: And also American Sanitary Laundry.

RF: Well, that's afterwards, that's way afterwards. Then when I was graduating, I went to see the manager of Consolidated and said I was graduating from school and if there was a place for me in their business. And he said, well, at the time, the managers worked seven days a week, they didn't have any time off. So he said, "We need a relief manager. So we'll make you the new relief manager." So I worked at Pālama Theatre. Kalihi Theatre on the nights-off for the managers. The Liliha Theatre. I even went out to Waipahu. Pāwa'a Theatre. 'Ewa Theatre few times. Being the youngest, I guess they sent me all over as a relief man. And on vacations, I'd be the relief man too.

WN: Relief man doing what?

RF: Being manager. Then when Consolidated built the Varsity Theatre, I was made manager of it. And some of my ushers there were names like [Ephriam] "Red" Rocha, the famous basketball player [and coach], Unkie Uchima, Warren Higa, I think eventually, he became manager of a branch of one of the banks. But I had mostly university students as my ushers. I was there until, oh, 1942, '43, when I thought I'd get into something where I'd make a few dollars more. So I became a laundry driver. Worked for American Sanitary Laundry for about three years. Then we moved to Hilo.

WN: In 1945, you moved to Hilo. Tell me, how did that come about?

RF: Well, I got into the restaurant business with someone I knew from Honolulu and he didn't like Hilo. So I said I'd come up and thought it was about time for me to make a move.

WN: Had you been to Hilo before?

RF: Oh yeah. During my summer vacations and spent a lot of time. One of my best friends was from Hilo, Rupert Saiki.

WN: Oh, Rupert Saiki?

JF: He lived with us.

RF: Lived with us for about twelve years in Honolulu while growing up.

WN: I see. And Rupert was a Hilo boy.

RF: Yeah.

WN: I see.

JF: So we used to come up here in summer (with the) Saiki family.

WN: So you know him pretty well?

RF: Yeah.

WN: How did you get involved or interested in the restaurant business?

RF: Like I said, being an investor, the guy wanted to give it up, I just learned it.

WN: But why restaurant?

RF: I like to cook, I knew beef. I knew how to handle meat. And during the last year of the war, unless you knew someone, it was hard getting the meat at all. Saiki family had [Hilo] Rice Mill and so they knew a lot of the markets and people who sold beef. And I knew some of the ranchers in Kona. So I (drove) all the way to Kona to get some beef. As long as you can get a steak, you had a business going. So I just stayed with it. Learned the hard way, but kind of knew dollars and cents. So I knew when [we] were making or losing. And just raised my prices accordingly.

JF: And he cooked, I made salads, breads, pies. I did all that.

RF: Yeah, it was a real family operation when we first started.

WN: This is called The Ponds.

RF: It was originally called The Ponds.

WN: In Keaukaha.

RF: Mm hmm [yes]. And that was the first time we really ran into a bad tidal wave. Of course, I had seen one previous to this when I was ten years old. And didn't know it was a tidal wave then.

WN: This is when you were in Lahaina?

RF: Lahaina, [February 3,] 1923. The water seemed to recede off the shoreline area and we just thought it was an unusually low tide. Plus, those days, you didn't have good communication. So we didn't know until about the next day that there was a tidal wave and it had [hit] the town of Kahului [and caused severe damage]. That was my first experience with a tidal wave.

WN: So Lahaina wasn't affected that much.

- RF: No. Just the shoreline looked like an extra low tide. And the water came back.
- WN: Was there any damage at all?
- RF: No, nothing. Nothing.
- WN: So at ten years old, did you actually know what was going on?
- RF: No, we didn't even know it was a tidal wave until the next day. We just thought the receding of water was an unusually low tide and the water just kind of left beachfront area.
- WN: But you were familiar with the term "tidal wave"?
- RF: Well, they said it was a tidal wave and being a ten year old, didn't mean a thing to me.
- WN: Okay, before we get into '46, just tell me a little bit more about the business and what it was like. You weren't in business very long when it hit. But who were your clientele? Who came to the restaurant?
- RF: Lion's Club used to come out there. And people that we knew that liked the place or the atmosphere.
- JF: We met a lot of people.
- RF: Yeah, we even had celebrities come out there to our restaurant. They like being on the water. Like Francis Brown used to come out there. John Wayne was another one, the movie actor.
- WN: Was it considered an upscale restaurant?
- JF: It wasn't a steak and lobster outfit.
- RF: No, it was a full sit-down. Those days, a restaurant was just a place that served meals. There was no such thing as the fancy restaurants of today. What you tried to do is serve a good meal at a fair price.
- WN: What kind of foods?
- RF: Steaks and fried chicken was the main things. And everything was cooked upon order, you know. If you could get beef—the hard thing was to be able to get meat. There was a lot of chicken around. They always get chicken. They always had poultry farms around so you could always get chicken.
- WN: And you were open for lunch and dinner.
- RF: No, mostly dinner. Sometimes lunch on special occasions. But we'd open up a bar in the early part of the day. Because some of the service people were still, what do they call those bureaus that work for the coast guard? Wardens, I think they were stationed close by.
- JF: And we had Renny Brooks.

- RF: Oh yeah, he was an entertainer.
- JF: He was a musician. Very well known. And he moved to Hilo. Almost everybody knew Renny Brooks.
- RF: In the islands. During his time, he was almost as famous as Alfred Apaka. He liked country living, he liked to fish. He was an ocean-(lover). I guess he spent a lot of time in Waikīkī on the ocean. At the time, he was an entertainer in Honolulu and he sold liquor for a local distillery. And I guess he just wanted to get into something different so he moved to Hilo, wanted a job, and he worked for us.
- JF: And he was married but they were living at the time . . .
- RF: Well, they were living across the area.
- JF: And then the tidal wave came.
- RF: They were hit. They climbed a mango tree. He, his wife, and stepson.
- JF: And he just had one waitress.
- RF: She lived there. The waitress, she lived in Kona, she had a little place in Kona. In fact, she worked for us. I can't think of the name.
- JF: Janet?
- RF: No, before Janet. Janet wasn't even working for us.
- WN: You can come up with it later. How many tables you had?
- RF: Oh, for a banquet, we could have accommodated about 125 people.
- WN: Oh, is that right? Wow.
- RF: Yeah, it was a pretty big restaurant. I would say the building was about 400,000 square feet.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

- JF: It overlooked the water so there were all those windows all the way around.
- RF: The ocean, you'd look at the surf.
- WN: Did you design and build it?
- RF: No, it was already built there. I think it was always a restaurant, built by some Japanese

family, and I think they were interned during the war years.

WN: That's Bishop Estate's?

RF: Mm hmm. I think it was a five-acre piece of property.

WN: Was it called The Ponds?

RF: No, I think it was called The Seaside or one of those.

JF: We called it The Ponds.

RF: We called it The Ponds.

JF: I'd like to tell a story about The Ponds. Every night that we worked, we'd close up and had a juke box, you put a quarter in, played "Dream." You know that song?

WN: Yeah.

JF: And we danced to it.

WN: The two of you? Aw.

JF: And then we'd (go) home.

RF: And we'd walk home. It was such a nice area and the people that lived there in Keaukaha, almost all of them had fish ponds. So we'd take the leftover bread with us and throw it in the fish ponds, feed it. Walk home. And the walk was about, maybe about a little over half a mile, about three-quarters of a mile. Especially on moonlight nights, beautiful walk.

WN: From the restaurant to your house.

RF: Mm hmm. Where we lived.

WN: Must have been tough running a business, especially a restaurant business, and having a family too at the same time.

RF: Well, when we first were in it, daytime, we were free. But it was nights. You had to be there by four o'clock and get through at twelve o'clock at night. In the early years, there was blackouts so you'd have to close down early.

WN: Oh, so during the war.

RF: Yeah, it was during the last year of the war.

WN: So tell me, what was Keaukaha like? I mean, who lived in Keaukaha, what kind of a community was it?

RF: Well, I would say the better-than-middle-class people lived down in the oceanfront areas

because they were all fee simple lots. You could afford them, even then, was expensive to live on a waterfront. Sanji Abe, an old-time politician, had a big home out there. In fact, eventually, it was converted into a teahouse, I think after the '46 tidal wave. I remember there was a Kai family, the Kennedys, the Carlsmiths, the Saiki family, the Cooks, (the Ludloffs, Pitmans, Willocks, Tallets).

JF: And the house we rented was owned by a very well known Hawaiian family, the Lalakea family.

RF: Perhaps one of the biggest landowners on this island.

WN: Thomas Lalakea, judge?

RF: I don't know if he was a judge, but you know, a lot of them, they knew little bit about the law, were called judges. But I think the family is still big landowners in the plantation area.

JF: Four-bedroom, fully furnished [home]. It had a piano.

RF: Hundred and (seventy)-five dollars [\$175.00] a month. That's all we had to pay for it. Can you imagine? Had their own beach, good fishing, 'opihi ground, seaweed, just about everything, out front. Who else lived in Keaukaha? [William H.] "Doc" Hill, [James] "Jimmie" Kealoha, (Sonny Henderson, Gartleys on Keokeo Loop Road), the Cooks, who else can I think of?

JF: There was a radio station.

RF: One of the first radio stations.

JF: Where we lived, we lived here (till the '46 tidal wave wiped us out).

RF: The editor of the [*Hilo*] *Tribune-Herald*, the Carpenters.

WN: It seemed like the real society people . . .

RF: Well, if they didn't live in Pi'ihonua, that's where most of the, they claimed, the *Haoles* lived, they lived in Keaukaha. In the old days in Honolulu, it was like you lived in Mānoa, you lived in Pi'ihonua in comparison. Otherwise, you lived in Waikīkī then you lived in Keaukaha on the water.

JF: (Tape inaudible.)

RF: Oh yeah. People took care of their yards and you know, they all had fish ponds.

WN: So Keaukaha was pretty much unaffected by World War II?

RF: Well, no, I don't think so too much. Although they had people stationed out here at the pier, at the airport which adjoins Keaukaha.

WN: Okay, well, let's get to 1946, April 1. Can you tell me how did the day begin?

- JF:** It was early in the morning and (a maid) got up to get the children their breakfast because the bus was coming to pick them up. And they noticed that the yard was underwater. So they woke their father up, said they wanted to go swimming. And (Richard) jumped out of bed, looked out the window and recognized (it was a tidal wave). [The yard] was underwater. Got dressed and he started to go to the restaurant. He never did get there. And I got dressed and walked out onto the *lānai* and the garage just collapsed. And then the house next door moved from one spot to the other. Well, now we knew there was something drastically happening. He came back.
- WN:** So by the time you were aware of it, the wave was already coming?
- RF:** The first wave had hit, yeah. Then while I was driving to our restaurant, I guess that's when the second wave hit the place and I was out where Scout Island is now. And I saw the wave coming, the water coming up the roadway. So I backed up and I saw the Carlsmiths running out of their yard. And I drove down to see the Saikis and they were having breakfast, they knew nothing about the tidal wave. And I said, "Well, there's a tidal wave, you'd better get prepared for it." By then, I drove back to where our home was, parked on the road there and the water had receded. The second wave, the water had receded. So I thought I'd run in. I'd left my wallet in the bedroom so I ran back into the house and picked it up and Juliette ran down with me. I said, "Juliette, go with me," and I said, "We'd better get out of here." Because the next one was coming.
- JF:** And we went out the night before. (I dressed and picked up a pearl necklace I had worn.)
- RF:** Ran across the street. When the third wave hit, I was standing in front of the Cooks' place on a high rock ledge.
- JF:** And I had never seen anything like that before.
- RF:** And that was the wave that picked up the home, Lalakea home, and smashed it against the coconut trees and just went to bits.
- WN:** This is your home? I mean the one that you were renting?
- RF:** Yeah. And then so we thought we'd better get together and get out of the area. So the families within the area had all gotten up to the Cooks'. Because that would seem to be the highest lot.
- WN:** The Cooks' lot?
- RF:** Yeah. So we walked back towards the airport and thought we'd better get out of here.
- WN:** So your first inclination was to go to the Cooks'?
- RF:** Well, that was the highest piece of property, high ground.
- WN:** Did you go inside the house at all?
- RF:** No, we were out there. And the Cook family was home so they all came out. Families within the area gathered and so we started walking back through the brush, trying to get to the airport

area.

- JF: There was one lady that asked if we would help her with her bag. She had a bag full of cats, her cats. And we were up there till they came (to) tell us it was all clear.
- RF: We were brought down, by where Scout Island is, and the road was washed away.
- JF: Washed away. (Tape inaudible.)
- RF: They took us in rubber rafts across the road [i.e., Kalaniana'ole Street].
- JF: Pretty soon the Red Cross . . .
- RF: Had located us.
- JF: By that time, our friends were looking for us.
- RF: And then they housed everybody---they were [Naval Air Station] housing in the airport area where I guess military families had moved out or vacated. A lot of the families moved in that were there.
- JF: (Tape inaudible.) Slim Holt (came to get us, so we could stay with them). They were our good friends.
- RF: And then I think it was just two days afterwards that we all flew back to Honolulu. We had a home on Mott-Smith Drive [in Honolulu] that we were renting [out]. So the people moved out and we moved back in.
- JF: They were very nice. We didn't have anyplace we can go. Then I stayed in Honolulu and he came back to Hilo to get back to the business. I stayed there with the children.
- WN: How long were you there?
- RF: For the school year. Finished the school year. The tidal wave was in April.
- WN: So they put 'em in another school?
- JF: They were in Punahou. And I was able to get a job there too. (Tape inaudible.) Until we got settled here again.
- RF: Found a place to rent.
- WN: So when you woke up, it was flooding. Your first inclination first was to go to see the restaurant?
- RF: Yeah, I was worried about the restaurant because I had a caretaker living on the premises.
- WN: So when you went to the restaurant, what did you see?

- RF: I saw the next wave coming in. The restaurant was still standing. Of course, the next day, when I ran into my cook who was living in one of the buildings, he said that he'd seen the first wave and the second wave. He ran to the building to call me about it. And he was in the building with a telephone when all he could remember, he saw the floor of the building hit the ceiling and he was blown out of the building. Otherwise he might have been killed. And so he swam to safety.
- WN: So that was the wave that destroyed the restaurant?
- RF: Uh huh. It was either the second or the third wave. I didn't even have a chance to look up to see it when I saw the wave coming through the area where the Scout Island was. So I thought I'd better get out of there.
- WN: Describe what the wave looked like.
- RF: It was just a wall of water. You know, it's not like a rolling surf. You could see this water, to me, it gives me the idea, it's like tilting a pan of water and this whole mass of water comes at you. Not like a big rolling surf. And as it gets closer to you, it just builds up. The water level seems to rise. And most of the damage seems to be when it's receding because now it's going downhill and it's taking everything with it. When it first comes in, everything that's wood is floating. Buildings that had concrete floors remained in place. I think at the time, mostly the debris in the buildings, or the tables and chairs and furniture that moved around in the water were destructive things that would smash the windows and the doors of concrete-floored buildings. But wooden floor buildings would all float. And until the water pipes and the sewage lines gave way, they would be in place. But once those broke off, then the buildings would just float in the water.
- JF: (Tape inaudible.)
- WN: Like what? Jewelry?
- JF: Mostly dishes, calabashes, things like that.
- WN: So this is in your home? That was in the Lalakea home?
- JF: Yeah.
- WN: So when you say they got lost, it means that they got sucked out?
- JF: Yes.
- RF: Or damaged. In fact, after the tidal wave, when we walked back in the area, the only thing that we recognized was our son's tricycle. We had just gotten it for him.
- JF: He was four years old, (in his pajamas), and cried all the while up in the bushes, crying to put his clothes on. There were no clothes. We didn't have anything but the clothes on our back.
- WN: So your home was smashed, or did it actually move first?

- RF: It was picked up, floated with the water, and hit these coconut trees and just went to bits. Watched it just . . .
- WN: Oh, you were actually watching?
- RF: Standing there across the way. Just watched the building come across, hit these row of coconut trees, went to pieces.
- JF: The girls were all dressed. They had shoes, stockings . . .
- RF: Yeah, they were the only ones that were properly dressed.
- JF: They were the only ones dressed.
- WN: Because they were going to go to school?
- JF: Because they were getting on the bus to go to school.
- WN: And your son was too young for school?
- JF: Yes, he was four years old.
- WN: So what about you folks? What were you folks wearing?
- JF: Shorts and whatever we could find.
- RF: I think I just had a slip-on tee-shirt and pair of trousers and pair of shoes.
- WN: So you actually saw your restaurant and your house . . .
- RF: I didn't see the restaurant but I saw the house go to bits.
- WN: Can you remember what was going through your mind when you saw your house being totally demolished?
- JF: I can remember this wave and the house floating on top of it. Just like looking up in the air or something.
- RF: I didn't see rolling surf. It was just like a mass of water coming at you. And as it got closer to you, the water just rose, like filling up a tub of water.
- WN: Did you feel safe at the Cooks'?
- RF: Yeah, it felt like it was high enough, standing there on that rock ledge, I watched. I think it was the third wave, standing there.
- JF: I don't know what we thought.
- RF: But then we thought maybe we should get away to higher ground so we started walking

farther back.

WN: And your house and the restaurant were on the ocean side?

RF: On the ocean side, right.

WN: And the Cooks' house was on the *mauka*?

RF: *Mauka* side of the road [i.e., Kalaniana'ole Street]. Still there. Nothing was touched. I think the water went up the roadway a bit. I don't think even Pete Okumoto was living [in Keaukaha]. He built his house after '46. But most of the houses on the *makai* side of the road were hit by the tidal wave. There's a house there Twigg-Smith lives in. He went through it all. Complex of buildings. The Richardson home is still there and some kind of a university program is being carried on there.

JF: That's beyond where we were.

RF: Yeah. Just before Pu'umaile [Hospital]. Now Pu'umaile itself, some of the buildings were damaged, some were—the main buildings still stood. [Pu'umaile Hospital for tuberculosis patients, was built in 1939 at the end of Kalaniana'ole Street in Keaukaha. Although receiving some damage and its patients were evacuated on April 1, 1946, the building survived the tsunami. A few years later, the entire building was demolished by high surf.]

WN: Take a break here.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: Okay, so you talked about Pu'umaile. When you say the road was washed out, what does that mean?

RF: Oh, completely gone. I mean, that section where the Seaside Restaurant is, to get from one side to the other, we had to be ferried across the middle in boats.

WN: So in other words, it was all underwater?

RF: Yeah, completely gone, the road was. In that one section, where Scout Island is.

WN: It was paved though, paved road?

RF: Oh yeah, it was paved. That was about the only section that I can recall that was washed out. And the people that were beyond that area had to be taken out on boats. But we didn't get out of there till late afternoon.

WN: Try to describe for me what the area looked like. I'm sure there was a lot of lumber?

RF: Everything was pretty well busted up. Lot of debris, the roads were blocked. There was debris on all the streets, the main street especially. The homes on the *mauka* side of the road, I can't recall any that were damaged. But most of the homes on the *makai* side of the road were either washed away, or some of them were still standing. The homes that were up on rock

cliffs and so forth went through it. As long as you were about five or six feet above the average high-tide mark, the buildings seemed to be able to withstand it. And then concrete-floored buildings were able to be in place unless the water rose pretty high, then it smashed the walls and so forth. I would say just about everything on the *makai* side of the road was hit pretty bad. Except maybe where the Twigg-Smiths live now and the old Richardson home, and the Van Gieson home. Those were the only three homes that I know that . . .

WN: The Van Giesons were on the *mauka* side?

RF: They were on the *makai* side.

WN: *Makai* side, oh.

RF: Right across, where the Saikis live.

WN: And of course, the Carlsmith home was gone.

RF: Gone, yeah. That's in the area beyond Scout Island, towards Pu'umaile. Now, at Pu'umaile I think they had one or two cottages that were moved around or destroyed, the main building itself was still standing.

WN: Why was Pu'umaile, why did they escape?

RF: Well, I think the water by then, spread out more. It was out in the peninsula. I think most of the damage was caused by the water piling up along the shoreline along the Hāmākua Coast and as it got closer to Hilo town, it gathered in water height and then spread out. And I think the breakwater also protected a lot of the houses. Broke the force of the wave.

WN: So you both went back to Honolulu, you lived on Mott-Smith, and you came back . . .

RF: I came back.

WN: How soon?

RF: I would say maybe about couple weeks later. Just wondering what I was going to do. Wondering if I was to get back in the business again, rebuild and so forth.

WN: So did you have to come here, clean everything up?

RF: There was nothing to be cleaned up. As far as where our business was and where we lived, there was nothing. It was completely washed away. So I lived with a friend of mine out in Pāhoa. And I had to get some of my accounts straightened out. You know, bills had to be paid. Things like that.

WN: I guess there was no FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] back then. (RF chuckles.) Or insurance. Did you have any . . .

RF: No, no insurance at all. Nothing at all. In fact, the weekend before, I had just gotten twenty-five cases---I had to pull a few strings to get twenty-five cases of Sunnybrook bourbon. And it

was a big deal for me to get that much liquor because it was hard to get in those days. And it was delivered to me on a Friday and I lost it completely in the tidal wave, the Monday morning which was April Fool's Day. But the wholesale company, they forgave that. That we didn't have to pay that.

WN: Was that pretty common that people would . . .

RF: Well, I guess the company was big enough. It wasn't a local company, it was a distributor on the Mainland.

WN: So as far as the restaurant is concerned, what kinds of things did you lose besides the liquor?

RF: Everything, even the safe that had what little cash we had in it. We never found. I'm sure it's someplace in the back in the swamps.

WN: It was never found?

RF: Never found. I think there are quite a few safes in buildings in town that were washed away.

WN: Boy, that's awesome.

RF: Well, I'm only talking to you about what happened in this area. You can imagine that the town, one side of the whole town, the *makai* side of the town was wiped out. So I guess that's the part of the tidal wave that people talked about mostly. It was half of Hilo main street wiped out. There were all kind of shops, stores, and things like that. Completely demolished.

JF: Yeah, we weren't [the] only one. There were those others.

WN: Well, that's why we're doing this project, to get different perspectives on that thing.

RF: People's experiences, huh? And that was fifty years ago. Fifty-two years ago.

WN: So you were living with a friend in Pāhoa?

RF: Mm hmm.

WN: And when did you decide that you're going to continue, go on?

RF: I was with my friend. I guess I came back to Hilo within the week after the tidal wave, after my family was back in Honolulu. Because with my friend, we drove down to Herbert Shipman's home, area. There, I ran into Herbert Wong. Herbert Wong worked for the health department and he had a five-acre fish pond in Hilo and he was raising mullets there. And the wall was broken and the mullets all got away. So he wasn't interested in repairing and getting back in the mullet business. And so he said that he was going to sell his lease.

And I asked him, "How much do you want, Herbert?"

And he says, "Five hundred dollars."

And I still had a little money in the bank so I said, "Yeah, I'll buy that lease from you."

WN: Where was this?

RF: Right in the middle of town.

WN: Kīlauea?

RF: Yeah, where the Green Onion Restaurant is. So family friends told me that we had a following here in Hilo, that we should get back into the business and get involved in restaurant again. So I researched the area, found out that we could do some landfill and put up a building there. And being a tidal wave victim, I was able to buy—you know, lumber was frozen but I was able to buy things. They allowed us.

WN: Because you were a tidal wave victim?

RF: And roof iron was so hard to get. And things like that. So through friends and pulling a string here and there, I was able to find myself a carpenter, got a draftsman to draw plans for me, what I wanted to do, and started building a restaurant. So by '48, we had a restaurant, couple years after the tidal wave. But there was no land. We had to fill in the area. Put walls up to retain the fill. And the big problem was there was no sewage system of any kind. So we had to put in a septic tank. And it was one of the first, I think, septic tanks ever put up, especially in that area. I think it's still operating.

WN: Yeah, after I saw you folks last week, I went down and I visited that area. There is that pond right there.

RF: Yeah, that was Bishop Estate too.

WN: This restaurant was called The Lanai.

RF: That's right.

WN: Didn't you want to name it The Ponds again because you had a following?

RF: No, not really. We just thought because [it was a] wide-open restaurant. Couldn't really close it down. Only could close the kitchen and the bar area but the dining room . . .

JF: Kitchen is closed, now. But (tape inaudible).

RF: Big lanai. So we called it The Lanai.

WN: Same kind of food?

RF: No, we got more involved with fish meals.

JF: It was more fine dining. That's what it was.

RF: Yeah. Tourism was being built up, and thing was, you had to cater to the traveler. More than

the local person.

WN: So Juliette, what was your reaction when Richard said, "You know, we're going to open up another restaurant?"

JF: I never did have much to say about anything.

(Laughter)

WN: Well, what did you think? (Laughs)

JF: It was all right with me.

RF: Hard work. Was hard work. But I mean, we all worked. And even our girls, you know? Growing up, being that I went to Punahou School, I always felt, well, that's where my kids should go to. So we sent them to Punahou, it was hard work, keep them in good school. They were boarders. So when they came home they had to work.

JF: Waited on tables.

RF: Yeah. Washed dishes, everything. Yeah, it was a real family operation. And they're in it but they've had their ups and downs in the restaurant business.

WN: So you had that restaurant starting in 1948?

RF: Well, '49 actually.

WN: Tell me about the '52 [tsunami] if you remember.

RF: Well, the '52 tidal wave wasn't that bad. We got flooded out where we lived. We lived on Banyan Drive. The water came up in the yard. No real damage that I would say.

JF: One thing about it, we had warnings to get out.

RF: Yeah, had warning system.

WN: Oh, by '52.

RF: Yeah.

WN: Oh, is that right?

JF: We had to evacuate.

RF: Yeah, in '52. Now, '52, my brother-in-law was living next to us and he'd never seen a tidal wave so I said, "Well, we get the family out of there and we can watch this, but we have to get out." And we watched the water recede out of the parts of the harbor. We looked across from where we were living to the pier and you could see the low spots where outcropping of rock and sand appeared. So I said, "It's coming back so we'd better get out of this area." So

we left and the water came in. Flooded the Lili'uokalani Park area. Our home was on a high knoll so nothing happened to it then. But I can't recall any real damage at the time in '52.

WN: And what about '57?

RF: Now, '57, we were in Honolulu. I don't know why, but were in Honolulu and we were driving along, out to Portlock way. I don't know why we were going around the island?

WN: Were you visiting there or were you living there?

JF: Did the kids and I live there?

RF: No, I don't think in '57. Did she live there? No, I don't think so. I think we were driving around the island to get to your mother and father out there. Anyway, we were out, you know, that Maunalua Bay, they call it.

WN: Oh, Hawai'i Kai?

JF: Yeah, Hawai'i Kai area.

RF: I think on the radio it said it was a tidal wave. So we were right about in the middle of that road where the Maunalua Bay is when we saw the water leave Maunalua Bay. There was no water in it. And people running out to pick up the fish that were left there in that little pond area. So I got out, honked the horn, and yelled to them, "Get out of there! The water's coming up, get out of there." And we didn't wait so we drove off because we felt, well, never knowing how big the next rise would be. So we thought we'd better get out of there. Then when we came home, there was no damage to the place at all.

WN: So '57, you don't remember any warning?

RF: Like I said, we were in Honolulu and over the radio they said.

WN: You were still driving around Maunalua. (Chuckles.)

RF: Yeah. And in '57 we had The Lanai restaurant and wasn't damaged or anything like that. We had the motel, the water came in, no problem.

WN: How about 1960?

RF: Well, 1960, we were with a friend up in his home in Pi'ihonua, Jimmy Reid and he was Matson's harbor captain. And he got word, I think it was about 12:30 in the afternoon that there was a tidal wave down in South America someplace [Chile] and it would hit Hilo about 12:15, 12:30 (at night).

WN: Twelve . . .

RF: At night.

WN: So you had a twelve-hour warning?

- RF: Yeah, so we knew about it. We had some reservations for dinner that night at our steak house so we went down, served the dinner and told everybody to get out by nine o'clock, the tidal wave was going to hit. We took our cash box with us. I opened all the doors and we left.
- WN: Now you're not in The Lanai anymore, you're . . .
- RF: We're at Harrington's, they call it Harrington's now.
- WN: This was [called] Bobbie's Steak and Lobster?
- RF: Bobbie's Steak and Lobster.
- WN: Which is right along Keaukaha.
- RF: Right on the water, yeah. Right there.
- WN: So you went back to Keaukaha?
- RF: Well, I stood there, was right here. You know, it's part of Hilo town. I stood there with a friend and he hadn't seen a tidal wave [before]. It was enough light so we could see the water receding from Ice Pond. And when most of the water was out of that Ice Pond we could see that rock outcropping, I said, "We'd better get out of here. This water's coming back." So we ran up to the old airport entrance way and the water was following us up there, got up to there.
- WN: Wow. Where were you living at the time?
- RF: We were living out here in Keaukaha, where I showed you, the house we built. So I was kind of worried. I said, "Gee, this is kind of a big wave now. We'd better go and check our house out here in Keaukaha." So we drove through the backroads and when we got to where our house was, there was a cop there on the road and the house across the road had been washed—came right across the road, this the second time that it'd been washed across the road. First time in '46 and this time in 1960. And it was wedged against the little house there that we built and we had sold. And there was somebody up in the building.
- So I said to (my friend and the cop), "I hear somebody up in that building."
- He said, "Well, if you want to go up and help him, you go up and help him!"
- So my friend and I, we went and helped. Got him out of the building. Was a Dr. Wong. I don't know what he was doing, sleeping there in his building, because people had been warned. So we got him out of the building and then watched the next wave come into our area and didn't touch our home that we lived in. It was up high on a high plateau and never had any damage there. But our garage got flooded and some of the walls busted in.
- WN: And Waiākea town was pretty much . . .
- RF: Well, demolished completely.

WN: But not Keaukaha?

RF: No. Not that I know of, but I think the reason for this wave being in this area was the roadway that was built. You know, the oceanfront road forced the water to come down into this Lili'uokalani [Park] area and hitting the area out here. Especially where Ice Pond is. Now where Ice Pond is, this is where Harrington's is now. And the building remained there. When we built it, I put in, oh, somewhere around six to eight inches of flooring. I thought, well, we'd better really anchor this down. If we get high seas, the building would hold. Which it did. So we didn't have any real building damage but all the furniture was sucked out. Scattered all over the harbor.

WN: By 1960, did you have any kind of insurance?

RF: No, we still didn't have insurance yet. The legislature passed some laws that forgave a lot of people on their losses. So you could waive (sales tax). If you got back into business, [you could] get your (sales) tax (waived).

WN: This is '60.

RF: Yeah, after '60. And our losses weren't that great but we were able to use it against our gross income tax. Whereas some of the big markets like Sure Save that had bigger businesses were able to recover a lot. Especially being in that kind of business where 1 or 2 percent is a big savings. Meant a lot. I think this is why Hilo recovered so fast from the second big tidal wave.

WN: So 1960, Keaukaha was not affected?

RF: Not really.

WN: I know you told me this while we were driving around this morning in Keaukaha, but can you tell me how Keaukaha has changed because of the '46 tidal wave?

RF: Well, I think that Keaukaha really died after the '46 tidal wave. Nobody wanted to get back in there and rebuild along the shoreline. They didn't build nice homes. No one really got out there to take care of the yards like they used to. And it hasn't changed, even till today. You look at the areas and it always looks run down. There's some people on the *mauka* side of the road that have taken real good care of their yards and homes. But not everybody, the *makai* side of the road, very little rebuilding. One or two or three condos have gone up. And outside of that . . .

JF: It always used to be nice yards, you look out there now, run down.

RF: Hasn't changed since '46.

WN: Is the population different?

RF: There's more people because you have condos so the population growth is bigger.

WN: Is it more of a transient type of a population?

RF: No, people that like condo living and like living on the water. One of the condos, medium-income people live in. And then there's a couple more luxury condos. The one close to the Pu'umaile area is more like a luxury condo. But outside of that, I don't know, Keaukaha area has deteriorated. Previous to that, was just such a beautiful area. I think the Hawaiian home [land] state areas have improved.

Then I think the other big drawback was when we had a sewage treatment plant put up there in the area. The stench was pretty bad and some people didn't like moving in the area. Now we don't have it so we might see growth again.

WN: Then you were in the restaurant business until what year?

RF: That was twenty years ago I retired, when I got my social security check.

WN: Nineteen seventy-eight?

RF: Yup, twenty years ago.

WN: And I noticed, starting from '46, all the way, you've always lived near the ocean.

RF: Well, I love the ocean.

WN: Yet today, here we are, in your home, overlooking Hilo Bay and last week I was over at your house in Pāpa'ikou, overlooking the ocean.

RF: I would say that because I come from a town like Lahaina, we were very conscious of the water.

JF: They lived right on the water.

RF: We lived right on the water. But then, with Hilo, they don't have beaches here. So I don't think people are that conscious of the water. My dad always says, if you get a good waterfront site, especially for business, don't sell it, keep it. We were one of the fortunate families that do have business sites in Lahaina on the water. And I feel that one of the best sites in Hilo, as far as being on the water, is where the Harrington's restaurant is. We have 16,000 square feet there in fee. And it's an unusual spot. It's on the water, you have lot of atmosphere. And for that type of business, I think it makes a big difference. There's a lot of people that love the water. When it's a holiday go down to Lili'uokalani Park and you swear that everybody who lives in Hilo town is there, on the water, enjoying it. Yet we take it for granted because we've always lived on the water. We've lost a lot in the water, but I don't know, we still like it.

WN: Do you fear the next one?

RF: Oh, I always fear the next tidal wave, I'd get out in a hurry. But at least we have a warning system now and it's a little better than before.

WN: What about you, Juliette? How do you feel about the next one?

JF: Oh, I'm scared to death. I don't move as fast anymore.

RF: But you know, take for instance, this building here. It's gone through all the tidal waves. It's still here. So you have a little safety—I don't say you're safe, completely, you have a little safety factor but you would have to get out in a hurry. Don't you think it's beautiful here?

WN: Oh, of course it's beautiful.

RF: This is, to me, what Hawai'i is all about. I'm not an environmentalist but I think that's all we have in Hawai'i right now is our environment. And if we don't protect it, our tourist industry will suffer. And that's what we've got to protect, tourism. We've got to protect what we have now and not worry about new businesses.

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 29-26-1-98; SIDE ONE

RF: We have to protect what we have now and not worry about new businesses.

JF: Did you read in our paper this morning about the sidewalks in Hilo have gotten bad?

RF: Oh yeah, how bad they are.

JF: Bad, broken up. People are spraining their ankles. Right in town. It was in the newspaper this morning. I can't believe it. Why this should happen, why has this been neglected? That's what I want to know.

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

RF: Oh, we've enjoyed this. We laugh about, every time somebody talks about tidal wave, we always say, "Well, we have our stories. We've been through it all." And I can say, "Well, which one do you want to know about?" And when I say, "We can start with 1923," they look at me.

WN: (Laughs) Well, you're the first one I've met that really has knowledge of all five.

RF: Well, you know, there's always the one that [hit] Ka'ū. We lost a doctor friend of ours. [On Thanksgiving Day, November 9, 1975, Dr. James Mitchell and another man, fisherman Michael Cruz, died on a beach in Halapē when an earthquake offshore of Ka'ū measuring 7.2 on the Richter scale generated a tsunami that almost immediately struck Ka'ū.]

WN: Halapē, yeah?

RF: At the time, my wife had a family reunion here, and there were about seventy of us in the Hilo Hawaiian Hotel. And we felt the earthquake and looked out to Coconut Island, we saw the water receding and coming back. But we felt safe that we were in this concrete building. The water didn't rise to any floor level. But we got [out] of there eventually. We got everybody out of the buildings. But I feel as warning systems improve, we can get out of there. And besides that, gee, we're in our eighties so you can't expect to be around too much

longer. (Chuckles) So might as well enjoy what we have. And I think we have one of the nicest (spots). Like my neighbor down the road says, we have a hidden treasure in this area that lot of people have never seen.

JF: Guess you know we've been married sixty-four years.

WN: Well, I'm doing the math. (JF laughs.) Congratulations.

JF: He figured it out by himself.

RF: My friends say we should be in a museum. (WN laughs.)

WN: After this interview, you probably will be.

(Laughter)

RF: But you see, I can remember Lahaina town when there was a beachfront right in the middle of town and as the town grew, the county would put up retaining walls along the beachfront area and the sand would be washed away. And so before you know it, there was no beach at all. I used to run down to some of my dad's buildings and there was a beachfront over there. And the buildings all extended out in the water because nobody had any sewage system. There were outhouses and there were just holes and the people just went and did their job and fell in the ocean. Low tide, there was a sandy beach. Friend of mine used to run along the beach and throw rocks. My dad's butcher shop was the only place that had a cesspool and was down on the beach. (When it was high tide, he would put a sign outside the door, "Do not flush toilet. It's high tide.")

END OF INTERVIEW

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**Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
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