

Winifred Naehu

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Winifred Naehu (WN)

Waiialua, Moloka'i

June 4, 1998

BY: Jeanne Johnston (JJ)

JJ: Okay, this is Jeanne Johnston, and I am interviewing Winifred Naehu. And we are in Waiialua Valley on the Island of Moloka'i. The date is June 4, 1998.

Okay, Winifred, would you tell me where you were born and when you were born?

WN: I was born August 1, 1932 on here, island, in Waiialua.

JJ: You were born right in Waiialua Valley?

WN: Yeah. Waiialua Valley.

JJ: And what was your father's name?

WN: Frederick Tollefson.

JJ: Frederick Tollefson?

WN: Mm hmm [yes].

JJ: And your mother's name?

WN: She was Nani Ka'ahanui. Hawaiian name.

JJ: Okay. Excuse me?

WN: Was Nani Ka'ahanui, yeah? She's a Ka'ahanui. That's a big family.

JJ: Also from the same area?

WN: Some from here, on all different islands, yeah? Some from different islands.

JJ: Okay. What did your father do?

WN: My father was---he used to work on the sampan and work with the Hawaiians in Wailau, Hāka'a'ano, Pelekunu, all those areas on that side of Moloka'i, and harvesting, taking taro to help

the people on the sampans. Taking it to Maui. And that was his—he was doing that.

JJ: Where was your father from?

WN: Honolulu.

JJ: How did he get to Hawai‘i?

WN: You know that, too bad we didn’t talk to our father, yeah? That time how did he come here. I don’t know that part. I know he was here, but worked on that side with the Hawaiians, Japanese people. Spoke fluent Hawaiian.

JJ: Oh, he did?

WN: Fluent Hawaiian.

JJ: So he must have come when he was young then, yeah?

WN: Yes. I believe so.

JJ: Do you know where he met your mother, or how they met?

WN: No.

JJ: But they lived here. . . .

WN: They lived here.

JJ: They were living here?

WN: Uh huh [yes].

JJ: Okay. And did you have any brothers and sisters?

WN: Yes. The reason why I don’t know is I have a older sister, but she has Alzheimer’s. She knows plenty. They were the older ones. I was the young one of Tollefson, and raised, you know, taken away. *Hānai*, yeah, they call those days. My mother was a—the mother that took me—was a mid-mother, midwife whatever. And in exchange, my real mother didn’t have money to pay her. So she asked for a baby. And I was the one to be taken away. So I was raised here as you coming in, in this valley. And my parents on the other side.

JJ: Oh, I see, they. . . .

WN: They close to the beach.

JJ: So, when you were young did you visit your parents and your *hānai* family, or did you just stay with the *hānai* family?

WN: No, no. Was so beautiful. My mother that *hānaied* me taught me who your father is, what your mother, your sister and brothers. You know those *Haoles* they all fair, yeah? And it was so beautiful because it made me feel. . . . Today I watch TV at times, or hear people they looking for

their family. And I was taught who mine's were. So was so easy. So we had fourteen of us, before I came, anyway. Several died. So I think nine of us now. Nine children. But we were taught. And I'm so proud and happy that it was taught right then and there. These are your parents, this your sister and brother. So we came close family. And so my *hānai* side and my real side, so loving. I worked both sides.

JJ: What were your *hānai* parents' names?

WN: One was Mrs. Lamauna. Ekekela Lamauna, yeah. She took me in.

JJ: What was it like living out here, in those days?

WN: Beautiful. We learned to slave, like to work very hard. Good slaving. The knowledge of not just sitting around, learn how to work. So when we left here we not afraid to do things because we were taught by our loved ones, yeah. And they weave *lau hala* mats. So I had to climb the tree, and I can do everything. You know, *kūka'a*, they call those days, the round. But I cannot weave (chuckles). I was just talented for that hard part. But thankful for it. Now I have children. That other daughter, she weaves. But they the one clean *lau hala*.

(Laughter)

JJ: Did you teach them how to weave, how to do it?

WN: No. Yeah, I teach them to clean and everything. And then they start, you know, those needles, they strip the *lau hala*.

JJ: Now, what did your house look like in those days? What was your home like?

WN: Oh, was so warm, beautiful, warm. All *lau hala* work. *Lau hala* cushions, you have *lau hala*---the *pūne'e* they call it, like this. My aunty weaves that. Then she makes shades. You know and there was a man, rich people, well-to-do live in Pu'u O Hoku. So she used to take her things and sell it just to have money. 'Cause we had hard time with money. But they were talented to make things where she could sell.

JJ: Did you grow your vegetables and have chickens and. . .

WN: Vegetables, not too much. Taro's the whole valley here. All taro patches. And we had a big flood, unexpectedly. Didn't rain here. Up there rained and it came so fast it just uproot the taros. Used to go on the bridge, dive for taros in the river.

JJ: (Laughs) They were all down in the river? Oh, my goodness.

WN: Yeah. The floods was so heavy.

JJ: When was that?

WN: I forgot that year. Was quite a long time anyway when we moved in here. We bought this place. 'Cause my husband was from Honolulu.

JJ: What is your husband's name?

WN: Arthur. Arthur Na'ehu. He came from Honolulu, the dad has a ranch. You know, livestock. So we came together. But very nice upbringing. Very---today is, to me, it's so sad. Children don't know how to work. Everything is play, or just have money, yeah? But now it's nice.

(WN addresses her grandson.) Boy, roll it down, please.

JJ: So did you go to school here, also?

WN: Yeah, I went to Kilohana [School]. There was kindergarten to tenth grade then. Now they have, what, sixth grade. You either get married or stay home and work, work, work, work. There's no bus to go high school. Twenty miles. So, but thank God my sisters love me. They took me in Honolulu, and I finished at McKinley[High School] two years.

JJ: Oh, you did?

WN: Yeah. Been civilized, yeah with all the things that was different from here.

JJ: Did you stay there after you were. . . .

WN: Yeah, I worked there. I worked one year. And then I got homesick from Moloka'i. So I came back here and I got operator job. And I stayed then.

JJ: For the telephone company?

WN: Yeah.

JJ: What year was that, that you came back here?

WN: I graduated 1952. That's when I came back here.

JJ: So did you get married on Moloka'i?

WN: Yes, I got married on Moloka'i.

JJ: And then you and your husband, did you move to this valley, then, at that time?

WN: Oh, no, no. I stayed with my in-laws for five years. Then stayed in Kaunakakai and then there was no school bus. Then all of a sudden they had school buses up here. Then we bought this place here. Because then my two children can catch the bus to go high school. From then on we stayed here.

JJ: What does your husband do?

WN: He was a contractor. Construction worker, anyway. And now he's retired. So he's just off and on helping people.

JJ: Okay, so where were you living in 1946?

WN: Right here. Not here, on my father's property. See we have a church up there, yeah? And there was---the old church used to be like if you go out you'd probably spin around there. There's a white house not too far, over the bridge. That white house and the church. Our old church used to

be the next, where the pavilion is, there's a pavilion there. And then we went to school. We going to school, we calling our dad to open the pigs, let the pigs loose. 'Cause we were down here close inside the garage, with all the nets, fishing nets, and my sister and I waiting for the bus. Then all of a sudden, we see this water. First time I see tidal wave. The water going down so dry. And all you can see all the holes, yeah, the deep holes where the fish is in? So it was going constant like that, it was just touching. Then the bus came, we got on the bus. So we went and stopped on the hill and looking again at those waves. Didn't build up yet. When we got to school, someone came rushing down the school and said, "Your folks' house is broken." We had two-story home. And now it's just one story, yeah.

And, "What you mean?"

They say it's broken. So we was saddened. But we came home. The house was like this, and sulfur, or sand, it was so smelly, yeah? When I went to Hilo that's when I knew it was sulfur. And the fishes on the road you pick anything you want, the big kind that we first time see, an octopus. And my father was sitting on this bucket. You know, just sitting and looking what happened. When the church was uprooted and came to my father's fence line, it was all broken. Then we used to pick up all the fishes and we saying, "Where are we going to stay?" We can't stay in the home. All this sands was all, was real smell. Then we came across the church. The church had a hall, the old church, and the hall is there till today. That's where we slept until people start building the home.

JJ: So your parents rebuilt the house and that. . . .

WN: Dad's friends just taking the up part and do away with the bottom. It's nice, big home. Hardly anybody lives there. It's a family gathering place from off island like that.

JJ: So when you came back down, did you go out towards Hālawā at all, like see any of the damage. . . .

WN: No, you couldn't, because the bridges were broken. Several bridges, you know, like you going Hāna side or whatever those small bridges. Several was broken so we can't go. We couldn't go further. But Hālawā was damaged plenty. They had a swinging bridge there. I mean from---when everything was built, we went to see. There was no more what we saw. And taro patches was way down the beach. All uprooted. People were living there. And that's all.

JJ: Do you know if anybody was killed out in Hālawā in that wave?

WN: No. Never hear of any death. All this tidal didn't have. But you see, the things moving in the ocean. You have barrels, like that, and boards, whatever. 'Cause the homes was broken.

JJ: What did your father think of the tidal wave? Did he. . . .

WN: You know, that was funny. That's funny. But today I think about it. My dad is a *Haole*, like I said, pure Norwegian. But we was working along the Hawaiians, locals and fluent Hawaiian he spoke and he understands. And he always tell me before this thing happen, "You know I dream of—I saw Pele."

I said, "Dad, how can you see Pele, you're not in Hilo?"

“No, she’s riding this horse, this white horse on the road.” And the house and main road right there, yeah? Two times he saw her. Then he said, “You know, Winnie, I feel like something’s going happen. I don’t know what it is.” Can’t do away with that. Forget about it. Then when this came, then dad was right. He foresees, you know, people gifted. I heard mothers can, they foresee. They talk to us about *heiaus* and that. Say, please respect. You go there, do not destroy, do not touch anything, if possible. Because the people—*Menehunes* or whatever—they build. So you know, you don’t believe, yeah? But I believe now. Used to talk about *huaka’i* and all that kind, you know?

And we had outhouse, outside. Maybe half a mile to go to it because was far. So I learned, I mean, I lived with that teaching of a parent. So I teach my children to respect, to respect people. And so I teach my grandchildren not to be sassy to elderly people. Never be sassy. “Oh but, Ma, they old.”

You know, “Your days will come.” And then I said, “You going to see why your children are treating you this way. Remember that. Grandma is living. I love all of you and I want you to respect the elderly.”

“Oh, but grandma you know. . . .”

I said, “If someone need help you go and take them out and help them.” You know, hold their hands, hug them, love them, and keep moving. Because that’s precious. Because it’s coming now, I think not going be too much elderly people, yeah? With this new generation. But I teach them to love, yeah, not to hate. And just to forgive. See when I teach them I feel so good and honored because a lot of ’em have no time for that. Have no more time for that kind of teaching.

JJ: Yeah, that’s true. It was---the community was quite different at that time.

WN: Yeah.

JJ: Yeah. Okay. So the community here was quite different than at that time in the 1940s?

WN: Very, very caring for one another, the community then. Very helpful. We had some ugliness in all that but it was immune in our heart and mind because we learned to love, we learned to share, we learned to help each other. Then we lived good life. The valley was happy.

JJ: Now, what about food and water? Where did you get your food?

WN: We had mountain water. I lived on mountain water. But those days they have this—I don’t know the Durham bag if you remember, you know that small. . . . The bag we used to put it under the pipe? And sometimes we finish we just drain, we find baby *’ōpaes* and the *’o’opus*, you know. But that didn’t matter. The water was clean. It’s just having these things come down in the pipe, yeah? And when the pipe was broken, my parents go out and fix pipeline. So we lived on that and. . . .

JJ: Did you have electricity out here?

WN: No electricity. When Christmas comes, we have—it’s so poor, you know money was not plentiful then—so we had dried trees with this little candle like this to clip it on, small candles. Was so pretty. But we not thinking of fire, but thank God it didn’t happen. (Laughs) You know, but that

was our Christmas. Just simple, yeah? Today you look, you have to buy this, have to buy that like. But the lifestyle changes. But beautiful life. My upbringing I thank my *hānai* mama for bringing me up and teaching me love. And forgiveness.

JJ: How many children do you have?

WN: I have five. This my oldest son, just retired from the air force. And another one in the service with my grandchildren. Thirteen grandchildren.

JJ: Do you have any great-grandchildren?

WN: No, no, (laughs). Not now. Enjoy the first ones first.

JJ: Okay, now we're here in the nineteen. . . . There were two more tidal waves. . . .

WN: Yeah. Like I said, ten years old, '46 that happened. Now beyond that we did have, but it was at night. And nothing. I don't think anything had happened. The homes was still there. The people live on the beach. Maybe wasn't that bad. You know, certain time from certain country comes in the waves big, yeah? No, I didn't.

JJ: Is there a warning system out here now? Would you

WN: Oh, very poor. Very poor. We had policemen. Some can make it sometime you cannot because the waves coming over. So they end this maybe one mile down. They end this thing in the warning. They had one where we barely can hear it. Yeah. But living here so long, like the old people. Need to respect the clouds, they respect the ocean very much so and also the mountains. We were taught that. But then when you--we live here, like maybe say old-timers, *kama'āinas*, yeah? You can see the difference in the water, and you can see the difference in the mountain, the river. You know it's going to be a flood. You know when the rains going to come heavy or the wind. And this is how we look to things. Our parent's time, look by the moon, certain moon. And the twirl of the wind. You know interesting. Maybe it was foolish. Today it's coming scientists, yeah? It's happening. But we were taught, this is so country, yeah? Even the country.

JJ: And are your children interested in learning those things also? Are they close to the land?

WN: Oh, yes. We teach them what we had, what I was brought up with. And also, the tidal wave. I said, "Please do not go nosy or be inquisitive and go. Always when you hear that tidal wave, go up on high spot."

"Oh, why grandma?"

I said, "It's something that you don't know about, and these things are happening and it's a warning for you not to go among the shorelines." So they respect that. Even when I go to the beach. I love to go beach. And, you know rough areas, but we were taught, like I said, to respect so many counts of waves. So we get to teach our grandchildren, don't go crazy, and they go way at the end and this wave all of a sudden will come and sweep you away.

Said, "Grandma, how did you know that?" But then you tell them because that's how we were raised to respect the ocean, the mountain, the river, and elderly people.

JJ: Did you speak Hawaiian when you were growing up?

WN: Yes, yes. Fluent Hawaiian with my—you see, my mother was fluent Hawaiian, I mean pure Hawaiian, and also her sister was pure Hawaiian, yeah? And they cannot talk English. This one more so, that one raised me. So I had to learn to translate because people come every Sunday, sit on the porch and *talk story* of old things, yeah? And they admired, and we used to make *haku lei* for them to sit down *talk story*. And that's---I had to learn to translate to the people, because they were interested. But they don't know the meaning, you know. But today, I'm, yeah, and I forgot for many years. They've gone. Hardly any Hawaiian was spoken then. Then you get to forget. But now with this Hawaiian coming up the language, oh, memories come back.

JJ: How wonderful.

WN: You know, I know what they talking about.

JJ: Have you taught your children and grandchildren? Do they know Hawaiian?

WN: No, they tell me that's a funny kinda—funny, “Oh grandma you talk funny.” You know, sometime I teach them.

I said, “Well, that's the Hawaiian language, and there's all different kinds of Hawaiian language.” There was some from Ni'ihau, I used to see some Ni'ihau people here. Different from what---today they have the [*o*]k*ina*, whatever they call that, our way of speaking, like I'm speaking to you in Hawaiian just flow. So beautiful. Today, I hear people different, yeah? And they not talking like how our parents did. Everything is a [*o*]k*ina* they pause and they keep, you know, whatever. But I like the other way. The way that I was raised. Just like waves so beautiful, you know. Very nice. Yeah, that's what I learned.

JJ: Oh, my goodness, how wonderful. Is there anything else that you would like to add before we close here?

WN: No, just thank you for coming.

JJ: Well, thank you very much I appreciate you, your allowing me to interview you.

WN: Yeah, yeah. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

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