

Eddie Oliveira

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Eddie Oliveira (EO)

Hāna, Maui

April 23, 1998

BY: Jeanne Johnston (JJ)

JJ: This is an interview with Eddie Oliveira, at the Hāna Community Center in Hāna, Maui. The date is Thursday, April 23, 1998, and the interviewer is Jeanne Johnston.

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

EO: I was born in Nāhiku, Hāna, Maui December 1, 1922.

JJ: Okay. And tell me a little bit about your mother. What was your mother's maiden name?

EO: My mother's maiden name was Duarte. My mother's name was Mary, Mary Duarte. And she was born in what is known as H. Poko. It's near Ho'okipa Park. Hāmākua Poko, Maui. Maui High School was formerly located at H. Poko. When they got married I don't know. My dad was born in Kaupakulua, on Maui.

JJ: And what was your father's name?

EO: My father's name was John Oliveira.

JJ: Okay. What about your father's parents? Where were they from?

EO: My father's parents were from the Azores Islands, and maybe Madeira Island. I'm not positive. But they came to Hawai'i on the sailing ship around Cape of Good Hope, South America and across the Pacific. I don't know, it took them couple months to come from there to Hawai'i. And my---well, my grandma's maiden name, I think, was Mary Martins. I'm not sure. That I gotta check on. And then my grandpa was John Oliveira. He is registered as Joao. In Portuguese, Joao is John. J-O-A-O, Joao. He moved---I think he first came to Kaua'i. Worked in the---they came over on contract to different plantations, on different islands as labor for probably pineapple or sugar. Mostly was sugarcane I believe. There was a lot of people that came over from Europe, Japan, Philippines, all over the place. But I think they got here probably 1886, '87 somewhere around there, I'm not sure.

My dad was born 1898, 1896. I'm not positive, somewhere around there. Then he was---I know he was in the army during the First World War. Went to Schofield [Barracks]. In fact, my mom went to Schofield and worked in the commander's office—oh, in the home, commander's home, as a caretaker, so she could be with my dad. When the war was over they came back to Maui, and

got married here.

JJ: I see. Do you have any idea what year that was?

EO: Nineteen eighteen, I believe. Either 1918, maybe they got married in 1919, 'cause the war was over in November of 1918. So they probably got married in early 1919 maybe. 'Cause I know my oldest brother was born in nineteen. . . . They got married in 1918 'cause he was born in 1919.

JJ: And so where did they live on Maui?

EO: My mom and dad lived in Nāhiku. We born and raised in Nāhiku, lived there. My dad lived in one, two, three—three different places that I know of, and then built the house that is still in Nāhiku, the house we were raised in. I think the house was built in 1932 or '33. Somewhere around there. And the old house is still there. (Laughs)

JJ: How many children were there in the family? How many brothers and sisters?

EO: Actually, my mom had ten children. Eight boys, two girls. One of the babies died at a very early age. I'm not sure. Couple of months old or something like that. And, remaining now, there's still eight of us. My oldest brother passed away, so my sister, and then myself, and then the rest is all still here, yeah?

JJ: So you were the third child?

EO: Fourth, actually. Third that survived. From surviving children I was the third. But I was the fourth child that was born.

JJ: And what were your parents doing in Nāhiku? What brought them to Nāhiku?

EO: My grandfather came---my grandfather actually moved to Nāhiku and got homestead land. And then later . . .

JJ: How did he get the homestead land? Do you know, how he got it?

EO: The territory was giving people homestead land at a dollar an acre, and you had to stay on for five years. Build a house and stay on for five years, I believe. I may be wrong but after that you could sell it. And they sold it for a tremendous profit of five dollars an acre.

(Laughter)

EO: Big, big money. And then my---I know they lived up in the mountains. Up what we call Lot 13. 'Cause all the Nāhiku area was all different lots. The lot number—the land were issued in different lots. One through Lot 23 or something, I'm not sure. All the way to Lower Nāhiku, anyway. But he later traded the property up there with East Maui Irrigation [Company], and he moved down closer to the highway. 'Cause they were up in the mountains. The only way you could get up there was by Old Wagon Road and by horseback, or walk.

JJ: Is that where you grew up?

EO: No, I grew up down on the main highway, already. And then my---after my dad got married, I don't know exactly where they stayed. But I know later on I remembered him working for a Mr.

Frank Stark, who was the owner of Nāhiku Ranch. My dad was cowboy. That was when I remember things. Small enough but old enough to remember that my dad was a cowboy. And there was a lot of cattle in Nāhiku. Stark had quite a large ranch. He had probably close to five hundred acres. And as we grew up, we worked on the ranch, clearing ranch land, you know, with my dad. Well, my dad and the older people, the uncles, the older cousins all, they were the cowboys, And then we would help round up cattle. And that was the fun time, round up cattle time (chuckles).

JJ: So that's what you did when you were a kid?

EO: Yeah, work. Then, I, of course, came. There was, long ago, there was a school in Ka'elekū, which is about, let's see one, two, three, about four miles west of Hāna on the road where near—you know by the Hāna Garden land is? Okay, about a quarter of a mile Hāna side of that, on the left side of the road was Ka'elekū School. We attended Ka'elekū School. The first, second, third, fourth, grade, I think, yeah. Then the fifth grade then you came to Hāna School.

JJ: Can you describe the house you grew up in?

EO: Describe it? How do you describe it? Old wooden house. Large house, large family. We had three bedrooms, a large living room, dining room, a kitchen in the back. What we call the wash house or laundry room in back of that. A back porch, front porch. It was quite a large house. And it's there today, it's beginning to fall apart but it's still there.

JJ: How far from the ocean was the house?

EO: Mile and a half, probably. Yeah. We weren't on the ocean. We were up on the main highway, away from the ocean. That's—our house is, I would say, just about seven miles from Hāna proper or Hāna. Where we are right now, the community center, our house is about seven miles west of Hāna on the Hāna Highway. We call it the Old Nāhiku Road, that's what we called it. But now it's known as the Hāna Highway. Had a lot of fun. Fun, fun time, a lot of cousins and grew up with native Hawaiian people around the place. We spent quite a bit of time during the summer vacations. We used to go down and spend a lot of time with Hawaiian families down on the beach. Right---they old houses, down there. And we just stayed down the ocean. swimming, fishing, cleaning, land planting, whatever. Swimming and just playing around kids. Just having a lot of fun, Hawaiian style. (Chuckles)

JJ: What else did you do when you were staying down at those old Hawaiian houses?

EO: I don't know, just listen to the old Hawaiian people talking about fishing, and mostly a bunch of kids just having fun. That's what I remember mostly, just down there just enjoying having fun. And that was during the summer vacations. Then, of course, as we got a little older, then we had to start working. So we---that's when we started cleaning pasture land for Stark and helping round up cattle and all that. At Hāna School, I left after the tenth grade 'cause at that time it was 1939, 1939 that I had left school. Went to the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] camp, Ke'anae, which is now the Ke'anae Y [YMCA] That was the old CCC camp. Then where'd I go? After I got through with that, I went to Wailuku, had couple odd jobs, and then I went to Hawaiian Commercial & Sugar Company[HC&S]. And was there the morning that the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, Sunday morning. I was at the single boys' quarters at HC&S.

JJ: Where was that located?

EO: At Pu'unēnē. So then I worked there for five months, went to O'ahu. Lived up in Kalihi Uka, Kalihi Valley. Worked at Hickam Field at that time. Now it's known as Hickam Air Force Base, Honolulu, near Pearl Harbor. Worked there for a little over four years. Then went into the service. This was while I went into the service. When we got through with basic training, we were stationed at Fort Kamehameha near Hickam Field awaiting shipment to go out. Was supposed to go to Europe, but we went to North Carolina. That's as close as I got to Europe, North Carolina. But it was during the stay at Fort Kam[ehameha] that we were given two weeks pre-embarkation furlough. And that's when I was home in Nāhiku with a friend from O'ahu, John. That was when the tidal wave or the tsunami as it's known now, happened. It was the morning of April Fools' Day, 1946. Yeah.

JJ: Were you married by this time?

EO: Oh, no. Just a young man.

JJ: How old were you then?

EO: Oh, I was twenty-two.

JJ: And then when did you get married?

EO: I got married after I got out of the service. I was in the service for three years. I got out in February of '49. Then I got married in January of 1950. And got married in Ke'anae, St. Gabriel's Church. Father Joseph was the priest. St. Gabriel's Church Ke'anae. Got married there.

JJ: And your wife's name?

EO: Evelyn. She was Evelyn Rivera.

JJ: And then where did you live?

EO: We lived in Hāna for a while, about a year or so, then moved to Wailuku. Stayed there for a few months. Then moved up to Makawao. Worked at Haleakalā Dairy. And stayed there for close to two years. Then left and went to Southern California. Lived in Hawthorne, well went to LA first. Stayed in Los Angeles, upper, off of Vermont Avenue. And stayed there for about a year. And then bought a house in Hawthorne and stayed there for twenty-six more years. And then got tired of work and then came home.

(Laughter)

JJ: Did you and your wife have any children?

EO: Yeah, we had four. The two older ones, Damien and Paula were born in Hāna. And then after we left, the third one son, Glen, who was number three, he was born at LA County General Hospital. And then the fourth child, Diane, she was born at Centinela Valley Community Hospital, in Inglewood.

JJ: Okay, so when did you come back to Hawai'i, this . . . ?

EO: After twenty-seven years at Northrup, I came back to Hawai'i in March of 1981. So been back and forth, vacation and stuff, but been here ever since.

JJ: Living in Nāhiku?

EO: Yeah. Very close to where I grew up.

JJ: Can you describe that area, what it was like prior to the tsunami? Nāhiku?

EO: Nāhiku? It was---well, the tsunami didn't affect Nāhiku, because it was away from the ocean. It's quite a way from the ocean, so. Nāhiku is, where we lived was strictly country. There was I would say, within two miles, I'm talking two miles, there was probably ten, probably no more than a dozen homes in a two-mile (stretch). Maybe a dozen homes. So it was strictly country when we was there. Lot of playing around. In fact, our playground was the road in front of the house. We played ball on the road, we played—where we ever learned it, I don't know, maybe watching a movie or something, but we played hockey. We played what they call stick hockey. I don't know, you guys ever did that?

JJ: Yeah.

EO: Yeah, stick hockey? Get a piece of guava stick and, you know. We played stick hockey. We played a game called *peewee*. Ever played *peewee*?

JJ: No, tell me about *peewee*.

EO: Ah, God, *peewee* involved three—two for sure—two different segments in a game. One of you had to take a like a broom handle is what we use and cut it maybe six inches, bevel it on one side. And then the broom, another part of the broomstick was your bat. And you would put this on an angle and you would tap the side that was beveled off and the thing come up in the air. And then you would hit it. And then as far as that, then you would measure off how many feet you got. And then somebody could pick that up, and you'd lay the handle on the ground and they would throw or slide that back on the road. And if it would hit that then you wouldn't have any points. So it would bounce over then you had all these points. I don't know. (Laughs) It was crazy, if somebody caught it in the air you were out. I don't know where that game came from. Nobody plays it anymore. We talk about it once in a while when, you know, we get together and reminisce about good old days in Nāhiku. We talk about *peewee* and nobody plays that. Nobody knows what it is. I wish we could do it again, show somebody.

JJ: Yes, that'd be a good idea.

EO: And then we had, of course we had our hopscotch court right on the road. (Chuckles) That was fun, playing hopscotch. And there was another game we played, we called it "steal eggs." Rocks, we used little rocks as—all the rocks had to approximately the same size. And you'd have a large circle. You'd choose up teams. Four or five, whatever was. And one team would have to try to get into the other team's circle before you were tagged. You had to kind of slide on the road or whatever, you know, get your feet in before you were tagged. You could put two people out, and then three would have to guard the nest. The circle was the nest. And you have to, when you'd pick up—once you got into the circle—you'd pick up a rock. That was the egg. And then you would try by diversion, or have somebody come over there and get away, get away from the nest without being tagged, and then run back to your nest and on to home. More fights, "I tagged you!"

"No, you never!"

“I tagged. . . .” (Chuckles) That was fun games too.

JJ: (Chuckles) Oh, gosh. All right, then let’s see. Was there any agriculture or anything in the Nāhiku area or was it all just farming?

EO: Just cattle.

JJ: Cattle?

EO: Nāhiku, yeah basically all cattle. My dad later on worked for the county. This was during the depression days, the [19]30s, the “terrible thirties” they called it. But my dad worked for the county and also later on, I think, worked for WPA [Works Progress Administration]. That’s when, when he was working for WPA, I was in CCC camp at that time.

JJ: What does CCC stand for?

EO: Civilian Conservation Corps. The triple C’s. They had those camps all over. Big Island, O’ahu, Maui, Kaua’i. I know we used to go to play ball on O’ahu. Softball, softball teams we had. And we went to Wahiawā. Stayed at Camp Wahiawā. They had a CCC camp in Wahiawā and we stayed there and played. That’s where they had the baseball tournament. Then some of the guys in—Camp Ke’anae had a very, very good basketball team. They played, they went all through all the islands and played all the different camps. It was nice, we had a lot of fun. Dollar a day. You got your three meals, you got all your clothes. They gave you work clothes, boots, everything to go to work, all you needed, and a bunk. And there was a small little store. Candy, soft drinks, a toothbrush, whatever, there was a little commissary store. And they had a real nice gym. The building that the gym is still there at the Y[MCA] camp. Look at the Ke’anae Y camp, the large building? That’s the only building that’s still there from the camp days. That was our gym. Now it’s like a—I don’t know, it’s a big old hall right now. I don’t know what they use it for. Meetings and stuff. Yeah, that was the good old CCC days. I stayed in camp from 1939 to 1941.

JJ: Was there much military presence on Maui, during the [19]40s?

EO: Before the war, very, very little. I think all they had was the National Guard, I believe. I’m not sure, but as far as I know, there wasn’t any really, you know, real military on Maui. They might have had a few in office or something, you know, few people. But I wasn’t aware of it because we were here in Hāna. I know Hāna didn’t have anything. But then when the war started, then whole military just invaded the place (laughs).

JJ: And what do you remember about the military?

EO: I left Maui before they really got here. ’Cause they came, you know, later on. The military, I think they, where the Kahului Airport is now, was the Kahului Naval Air Station. And they had a marine corps base up in Kokomo, near Makawao, somewheres up in there. They had a large military—Marine Corps base up there. But that is all, you know after the fact. I found out about that later on because I wasn’t on Maui. I left Maui right after the war started. [Nineteen] forty-two, April—when was? November, December, January, February, March, April. I think I went to O’ahu in April of ’42. Worked at Hickam Field. And from there I got—it was kind of strange, ’cause I got my draft notice and I wanted to go in ’cause I had two brothers in the war, in the Pacific. And I felt kinda like I wasn’t doing anything. What am I doing, you know? But anyhow, they said that I couldn’t go in. We were drafted, took us up to the training center in Wahiawā, the

13th Replacement Depot. Then we were all called off to one side. And they said, "Okay, all of you guys, go home."

And I said, "Why I don't want to go home, I want to go in the army."

"No, you can't. You go home."

Got this notice in the mail, said we were vital to the war effort, 'cause I was working on a military base at Hickam Field. So we were classed as vital to the war effort. I said, "Okay, fine." Then after the war was over, then they took us in. We got redrafted. (Chuckles) So when we went in, we were given the option of being in the regular army for a year and a half at least, and not more than two years, and they would send you to the Pacific area for cleanup. And you know just gather dead bodies, clean up the islands, destroy different things, you know and stuff like this. I thought that would be real cruddy. So you were given that option, or you could pick your branch of service, and theater of service, and sign up for three years. So I signed up air force, Europe, three years. Well, I got to North Carolina (laughs), never got to Europe. So was in North Carolina, Kansas, Texas, Alaska, California. Had temporary duty, went up to Colorado for a while, and just had fun. Really fun, fun time. Three years in the air force, all fun. Glorious days.

JJ: Well, let's get back to the 1946 tidal wave. Tell me what you were doing just prior, the day prior to, the days prior. . . .

EO: Well, it was kinda strange, 'cause the day prior to the tidal wave, we—my friend from O'ahu, John Tavares, and my brothers—had planned on going fishing down a place called 'Ula'ino. And in the morning, I got up, went down the road, went, walked up the road a little bit, around a curve and looked up the mountains, and the mountains was just absolutely beautiful. So I took off home and I just told everyone, I said, "Forget fishing. We're going hunting. It's too beautiful." 'Cause John wanted to go hunting. He hunted on O'ahu.

JJ: What time in the morning was that?

EO: Probably about six. Maybe about six o'clock, I would think. Maybe even earlier than that. So we just grabbed the dogs, and jumped in my dad's old car. I drove up the road and two of my brothers, John and I went hunting. And we caught a couple pigs, very close to the road. Put the pigs in the backpack took off, came down. When we got out to the road, the old Nāhiku school bus was coming up the road and they stopped and I jokingly said, "What's a matter, no school, today? Everybody play hooky?"

And the driver—I forgot who it was—he said, "No," he said, "We taking everybody home, there was a big tidal wave in Hāna and lot of people got killed."

JJ: What time was that?

EO: By then when we found out about it, it probably about 8:30 maybe, in the morning. 'Cause we were already coming home with the pig. So we brought the pigs home, and cleaned up, and came down to the Hāna area, Hāmoa, and surveyed all the damage. But the real irony about the whole thing is, had we gone fishing, we were going to a place called Alapapa. That's quite a ways along the shoreline. You just---you have to walk quite a way to get there and back out. And it's all sheer cliff. There was no way you can climb up those cliffs. It's near a place called Blue Pond. Down at 'Ula'ino. Everybody knows Blue Pond. So had we not gone hunting, I definitely would not be

here today doing this interview. That's just, I don't know, call it a miracle, call it whatever you want to call it. It's very strange that I guess it was not our time to go. So the Lord made the mountains beautiful and told us to go hunting.

JJ: Can you describe what you saw when you got to Hāna?

EO: We didn't stop in Hāna, we went directly to Hāmoa.

JJ: Why was that?

EO: I don't know. Because I guess the guy in the school bus, I remember he saying, people got killed down Hāmoa, and I guess Hāmoa was. . . . Down Hāna, Hāna Bay was the only place to go with the car and it was blocked off. The police wouldn't let us down there. So we went up, past Hāna and went to Hāmoa, and got down there and just parked the car. And noticed that you could—there was still water all over the place. Hāmoa—the older people would remember—Hāmoa had a dirt airport. The original Hāna Airport was at Hāmoa. And that's where most of the people in Hāna died from the tidal wave. And we got down there and just stood there in awe. Just you know, look at the devastation. Everything was just leveled. Trees, large coconut trees, houses in just bits and pieces. And I remember seeing an old trunk, a real beautiful trunk. And there was—I don't know exactly what you'd call it, but beautiful cloth-like material. Beautiful colors, I remember that. And there was a lid that—the lid was up and open. There was like a tray that fits in the typical trunk and that was up. And I remember seeing gold coins and jewelry and stuff in it. And we didn't touch it. 'Cause I just thought that the owners would come and get it or somebody would get it. So I, till today, never—I don't know whatever happened to it. I always thought to myself, maybe I should have picked it up and brought it to the police station or something. Then I thought well, if we would start touching, somebody would come over there and have us arrested or something. So we just left it alone. That friend of mine, John Tavares, he said, "No, just leave it alone and nobody can say that we touched anything." So we just walked away. And then we just walked along the beach, and seen all the devastation. I know the waves went—it must have been you know quite a large wave 'cause it went all the way across the airport. The old landing, the old dirt field down there.

JJ: Can you describe what you saw?

EO: It's really hard. It's just, everything was just leveled. I remember seeing trees, large trees flat on the ground. Grass, everything was just flat. And just rubbish, debris, parts of houses. Rocks, huge rocks on the road. That's why we couldn't drive. We had to park near what is now known as Koki Beach. We had to park near Koki Beach and walk in, 'cause there was debris all over the place. And I remember there was a house near where the trunk was and that house was closer to the ocean. I think it was Venduizen. Venduizen or something like that. That was their house, and it wasn't there anymore. The house wasn't there. That, I remember.

And then farther on down, where I think the Kahula family lived, just nothing. There were few coconut trees, the sturdy ones were still standing. But it was just really sad just to stand there and look at all the devastation. And used to be, you know we used to go riding down there, and play around with the kids down there. Go to the old airport and stuff and then go down there and see just, everything was just gone. And we just stood there and just—just stood there and just wondered, you know, why. You wonder why and then you think, well you learn later on it's just nature and it happens. It just comes around.

JJ: And what about the cleanup?

EO: I had to go back to O‘ahu ‘cause we only had five days here in Hāna. And I think this was, probably happened the third day we were here. So we had to go back and get the airplane and go back to O‘ahu, ‘cause we were shipping out. You know, our man—we were going to go to Pearl Harbor and get a ship and go to the Mainland, San Francisco. So the cleanup I wasn’t around for it. I would like to have been but you had an obligation to the army, so, you can’t go AWOL [absent without leave].

(Laughter)

JJ: Did that change your attitude towards the ocean?

EO: I don’t think so, no. The ocean, you know, you respect the ocean. The ocean is what we knew, what we were taught by the Hawaiians, the ocean is something you respect. And the ocean is something that gives you food. And you always treat the ocean. You don’t mess around per se. When you’re in the ocean you go swimming, you be nice. You don’t curse, you never curse the ocean because it’s there for everybody. And it’s beautiful to look at and everything. So what happened the tidal wave—tsunamis—come when nature makes it come. And that’s it. Like today, they have so many warning systems that people don’t get killed like they used to before. Or get hurt, you know.

JJ: How would you compare life before and after in Hāna? Do you see any differences before and after the tidal wave?

EO: I’m not really sure, because. . . . Gee, I don’t know how to explain that. Really I don’t. Maybe because we lived—well, in Nāhiku, it was still basically the same. But I would think after a few months, after all the cleanups and the. . . . After having everybody get together and maybe saying their prayers and stuff, then things got back to normal. And I don’t think Hāna changed that much after the tidal wave. People went back to doing what they normally did before. That’s what I would think. But I wasn’t—I would like to have stayed and, you know, see more. I wanted to go Waikoloa, Hāna, ‘Ula‘ino, I didn’t even go down to ‘Ula‘ino, ‘cause we didn’t have time to go down there. I really would like to have seen that.

My brothers went later, and they said it was just leveled. They said that it seemed like ‘Ula‘ino had—it seemed from their description—they said they think that the wave was bigger down ‘Ula‘ino than in Hāna. And I think this wave came from the northwest. That’s what I remember people saying. The wave was coming out of the northwest. ‘Cause I talked to this lady that now lives down in Hāmoa. And I said, well, I asked her if they were living down Hāmoa when the wave came. And she said no, they were out in Maka‘alae. And where they are now, I would think that the wave came in there. And she said, no, it didn’t. The land juts out a little bit right at that corner and it’s a little higher than where all the damage was done. And then she said like the wave was coming this way more than straight in. Had it come straight in, it probably would have gone up where they live now. But you see, it didn’t. Kinda strange the way the wave came in.

JJ: Is there anything else you’d like to add?

EO: I don’t know, I’m back in Hāna now, and people still talk about the wave. Still talk about the loss of families, you know family members. And there’s always something funny happens during that time. And I wasn’t here, but you hear stories about some things that people do and say right at the

time or after. And there's always some funny things go on. But since I had to leave, I wasn't, you know, I didn't know that much then what happened after the earthquake.

JJ: Do you know how many lives were lost in Hāna?

EO: You know, I've never known for sure. Island was what? Somebody died in Hāna, Ke'anae had some, Hāna had some and—I wonder if Kaupō had any? No, I don't so. Where else? Ke'anae and Hāna I think had loss of life. I don't know if it was a dozen or less. I'm not sure. I heard eight and nine. But I've never really known how many people died in that. Somebody here in Hāna would know.

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

EO: Well, thank you a lot. Really nice.

END OF INTERVIEW

TSUNAMIS IN MAUI COUNTY: Oral Histories

**Center for Oral History
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