

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Lenore K. Van Gieson

"We were trying to find higher grounds . . . they would use machetes to cut maile pilau, we had lantana, we had lau hala, all kinds of stuff, plus the rocks. . . . So once we got on that road, then we just kept walking. Then when we saw the [FAA] tower, we decided to go there. That's where everybody met. So whatever food they could get from the homes nearby there was brought up there. And those who wanted to eat ate. . . . They were trying to figure out how to feed the children. Somebody had only one baby milk bottle and I don't know how many babies and that bottle went all around to feed all the babies, that one bottle. . . . But we stayed there and the men went out and saw all the destruction and came back and saw that we had no road. We were already disconnected from Hilo. The road was washed out."

Lenore Kumulani Van Gieson was born June 16, 1935 in Hilo, Hawai'i. Her father, Ebenezer Coit Hobron Van Gieson, was from a Honolulu family and educated at Kamehameha Schools; her mother, Victoria Kumulani Todd Van Gieson, a Hilo native.

The oldest of four siblings, Van Gieson grew up on property owned by her mother's side of the family in the Keaukaha section of Hilo. This section, known as Pu'umaile by old-timers, was an area where many of Hilo's elite resided full-time or part-time in beachfront homes and cottages. Van Gieson spent much of her childhood swimming and engaging in other beach-related activities with the neighborhood children.

She attended Riverside School, Hilo Intermediate School, and Hilo High School, graduating in 1953. Van Gieson worked for Aloha Aina Tours before marrying William K. Warren in 1955. She became a homemaker, raising six children, before returning to the work force in 1970 as a clerk and executive housekeeper for Hilo Lagoon Hotel. In 1980, she worked at Hilo Hawaiian Hotel. Van Gieson decided to attend college and received her bachelor of business administration degree from the University of Hawai'i at Hilo in 1995. Since that time to the present, she has been employed at the university.

Van Gieson was interviewed near her office at UH-Hilo, vividly recalling the events of her life and April 1, 1946. That morning, she and her three siblings were waiting outside their home on Kalaniana'ole Street for the bus to take them to school. Seeing water running over the road, they knew something was wrong, and ran up densely-covered brush toward higher ground. Returning to the area later in the day, they found their home completely destroyed and the entire street inundated. They boarded rubber rescue rafts and were transported to Hilo. They were temporarily housed at the Naval Air Station barracks near Hilo Airport.

Van Gieson today lives in Hilo. In addition to raising six children, she has nine grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Tape No. 29-38-1-99

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Lenore K. Van Gieson (LV)

Hilo, Hawai'i

April 21, 1999

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: Okay, let's start. This is an interview with Lenore Kumulani Van Gieson on April 21, 1999. And we're at the UH [University of Hawai'i,] Hilo. And the interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay Lenore, let's start. First can you tell me when and where you were born?

LV: I was born in Hilo on June 16, 1935.

WN: Tell me something about your mother and father.

LV: My dad [Ebenezer Coit Hobron Van Gieson] is originally from Honolulu, a graduate of Kamehameha School. My mom [Victoria Kumulani Todd Van Gieson] is born and raised in Hilo, a graduate of Hilo High School. I guess they met at a football game. And my father moved (to Hilo). Where we lived was actually my grandmother's property and my mother inherited it.

WN: And when did they move to Hilo?

LV: My parents?

WN: Yeah.

LV: Would be---see, they got married in 1933. So my mother was already in Hilo, my father moved to Hilo. And then he worked for Hilo Electric [Light, Company] at that time, right up until his retirement.

WN: What did he do at Hilo Electric?

LV: He was a service assistant. At that time they had appliances (that they sold and serviced). Or he would go into homes, where he would give them advice on their electrical hookups or connections or whatever. And he retired—oh let me see, in the early [19]60s—he had to retire because they felt that he would not live because he had cancer. But he lived to eighty-three [years old]. And my mom just passed away.

WN: When did she pass away?

LV: In December. She didn't work, she just stayed home, raised her children. Mm hmm.

WN: That's a lot of work. (Chuckles)

LV: Yeah, that's a lot of work. (Chuckles) But in those days, you know before the '46 tidal wave, it was nothing unusual to have help in the home. So we had help in the home. In other words, we had a woman who did the washing, a woman who did the ironing, a woman who cleaned the house, and you had a yardman. And this was something, every house would share the same workers. So they always had work. And this was another thing, too, where when they worked in the family homes there, the children came down so we all became good friends. After the tidal wave that was not available because everything had to be done all over again.

WN: So when you were born your folks were living in Keaukaha [i.e., Pu'umaile] already?

LV: Yes we were. Yes we were. Mm hmm.

WN: Tell me something about (Pu'umaile), where you lived.

LV: Where we lived?

WN: Yeah.

LV: At that point of time?

WN: What was it like? Yeah.

LV: Okay, at that point of time . . .

WN: I mean as a child, I'm talking about.

LV: As a child, it was more of a resort area. You had---a lot of people had their beach homes there. Lot of *kama'dina* families were there, like you had the Cook family, the Furtados, the Lalakeas, you had the Kamais, you had the Talletts, you had the Kai family, and of course, Carlsmiths. You had a lot of middle class and upper families down there. But that didn't make an impression on any of us children. We just played and had fun.

And then during the war, we were all there. We went to school in the Carlsmiths' home. We didn't go out. They brought the teachers in. And so we also became very close again. Because here we all were coming into one little home so that we would not be taken out of our area. [During World War II], my mom had to learn to use a gun because we lived right on the beach. They were afraid of the enemy coming into the swimming area---this is why I said I'll need to show you (where we lived.) When I look back (during World War II), I go wow, really scary. (Laughs) Could have been worse. You know, could have been worse.

But I mean, we just had a nice group of people, the parents all got along, the children got along, we did a lot of things together. I think we did a lot more than other people had done at that time because of our parents all knowing one another, and their resources were all together, and we just all hung out together.

WN: And it was primarily Hawaiian, part-Hawaiian, and Caucasian.

LV: Yes, and Caucasian, yes. Primary. You did have some Orientals. You did have some, the Tamadas, (the Kozukis), you had the (Saikis), and who else was down there that's on the map? I forget. We did have some Oriental families, also. So it was a mixture of family but—I guess all business people, too. Or just young families growing up. Ludloffs was down there, too.

WN: Who?

LV: Ludloffs. Yeah, had two Ludloffs' properties down there.

WN: And you folks were on the beach side?

LV: Yes, yes, we were on the beach side. We were right outside of what they call the Scout Island. It's a cove-like.

WN: What's over there now?

LV: It's still there.

WN: Oh, the house is still there?

LV: The house is not there, no, it's a condominium [today]. My dad sold the property in '72. And he didn't give us a chance. He didn't even tell us he was going sell. 'Cause we would have tried to buy it. We would have tried to buy it because it was—it is—it was a very nice place. And the yard was big enough, well manicured just so that you can go to the beach and come back and suntan. And my father had barbecue grill, you know. Had lot of conveniences.

WN: Now growing up as a child, I know it was probably during the war [World War II], but what did you do to have fun as a kid growing up over there?

LV: In that area?

WN: Yes.

LV: Oh, we always were on the beach. We always loved to swim. We all owned a bike and we all owned four bathing suits, the girls.

(Laughter)

LV: That was our summer attire. (Laughs) We all did that and we would just swim and play. You knew which homes you could go to, where to go around lunchtime, or like, my mom's house always had food because she didn't work. So if they were hungry all they had to do was walk in the house and say, "Hi Auntie Kumu."

And she goes, "The pot's on the stove." (Chuckles) "Help yourself." Or she would be baking something. But also the Cooks' home was like that. And who was the other? There was another home, I can't recall, that you could just walk in. My mother would feed, they would

feed. Or if they had a misunderstanding with their family, lot of time they ran down to our home. It was just like a gathering place for whatever reason it was.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: Okay, let's continue. (LV laughs.) Why don't you repeat just what you were saying.

LV: Oh, okay. You taping it already?

WN: About---yeah.

LV: Okay, as I was saying, sometimes I really don't like to talk about my upbringing because it was different, being that I'm Hawaiian. Sometimes people don't believe that. So unless you're really interested, I'll talk about it. Other than that, I won't say anything. 'Cause I feel that we were special and we were fortunate. I mean everybody else is special in their own ways, but I felt we were.

We didn't attend Keaukaha School, which is in the Hawaiian Home [Lands] area. We had a county bus that came to pick us up. A nice little Japanese man was our driver. And we had the little old yellow buses with chicken fence going around for windows. Center seats. He would pick us up first before he went in to the Hawaiian Homes section. We used to always try to get to the back of the bus. But when we'd enter Hawaiian Homes, he'd make us all come to the front and let the Hawaiians—I think because at that time, there was a little bit ill feeling amongst the two areas. But we thought---we wanted to have fun with the Hawaiians.

(Chuckles) We weren't allowed to go in there. We didn't go to school there for whatever reasons. We went to Daly's [Private] School, which was a private school. Or they went to St. Joseph's School, Catholic school. Then from there, those who went to Daly[']s Private] School went to Riverside English Standard School.

WN: What was Daly School?

LV: It was a private school run by a Mrs. Daly.

WN: D-A-L-Y?

LV: Yes. Yes. And amazing, through our reunion, we found out that a lot of us went there. And then we all, after a certain age, we went to the English standard school. That was up to sixth grade, then from there, some went on—I went on to Hilo Intermediate and Hilo High, graduating from Hilo High in '53. My brothers and sisters all attended Kamehameha [School] after seventh grade. I didn't care to go. I don't remember the reason why I didn't care to go. I could only say it was because one of my girlfriends didn't want to go and we decided we would stay home. That was Lei Kealoha. Her dad was the [Hawai'i County] chairman at that time [later known as mayor]. She didn't want to go, and I decided I didn't want to go, too, so we didn't go. We stayed home.

But we swam a lot, we played a lot, we played on the beaches. It was nothing wrong with us running around barefooted, playing master or run tag or going from one area to another. We had our chores to do. We did that. And we just play. If somebody had to baby-sit somebody's children, the younger brother, siblings, that were home, everybody would go and baby-sit.

(Chuckles)

Also, we were fortunate during the summer that we would spent time in Kona, Waimea, Ka'ū, Punalu'u, Volcano, and come back to Hilo. Or Fourth of July would be in Nā'ālehu because they would have the rodeo. But in June we would start out down at Lofty Cook's beach house (in Kona). And there would be about three, four families.

WN: Did your mother tell you things like, "Don't go into the homestead area," things like that?

LV: No, no. It was just something—I don't know whoever told us that we couldn't go in. I think it was more like our fathers, not mothers. I think it was more our fathers didn't want us in there.

We even couldn't ride on the sampan buses because a lot of it at that time, I hate to say this but a lot of it was driven by Filipino men. Our fathers didn't want us riding those buses. And there was one, he's an old Filipino man, he used to shake a lot. His name was "Shake Shake". So we knew we couldn't ride it. But we decided that one weekend that we were not going to do anything special so were going on Shake Shake's bus. 'Cause we knew we got on Shake Shake's bus that means grounded for the weekend, no swimming no nothing. But it was all planned, that's okay if we got caught because we all knew we were all going to be punished the same time.

(Laughter)

LV: Yeah, we would do things like that. We'd plan all our things out. (Laughs)

WN: So the bus you took to Daly School was not . . .

LV: It was a county . . .

WN: . . . a sampan bus?

LV: (No), it was a county-run bus. Our bus driver was Nakanishi, little Japanese man. He knew every one of us and he took good care of us. We tried to get his wife to come to the reunion we had 'cause he is no longer here. She would have a lot of stories but for some reason she decided not to come. And they would have just loved to see her there. Because she didn't come down on the ride but her husband had lots of stories to tell and we would like to know. (Laughs)

WN: What was your house like?

LV: Our house?

WN: Describe your house for me.

LV: It was a two-story home. What I mean, we had a shower, the laundry, a storage room (downstairs on the first floor). 'Cause in those days, they bought a lot of things and they had a storage room. More so during the war. You know, you bought things when you could and you store it because you didn't know how long you would not be able to get that or what's going to happen. On the upper level we had a living room. That living room had what they call

lattice work, screen and lattice work. And we had three bedrooms, we had a big dining room, small kitchen. The dining room could sit fourteen people, the old house. All *koa*. My father and mother had *koa* cabinets, one was with guns that my father had collected and one was china. We were able to save some of the china [after the 1946 tsunami], not the everyday dishes.

Then of course we had a speedboat that my father had that sat in the garage. And we had a big roadster (chuckles), 1935. Of course, that all went [in the 1946 tsunami]. My father was also a boat enthusiast. The last boat he had was a sailboat, I remember. Because after I graduated from high school there was nobody to ride with him on the sailboat, so he sold it. It was given to him. He was fortunate. It was about an eighteen- or twenty- footer, complete cabin and everything.

WN: How far away was your house . . .

LV: From the beach? I would say about a hundred—well, a hundred yards is what? Three hundred feet? About that.

WN: Oh. From the actual water?

LV: Yeah, see, the first wave, as the water went over the road, while we were waiting for our bus, our uncle told us to get back in the house, he wanted to know why the water was going over the road. This is April 1, now. Okay. When we went back to the house he went to the beach and he noticed that the water was receding, going out. So he went and he told the Carlsmiths, you know, the water's receding. They had a ten-foot [high] stone wall, went with the wave. We stayed in the house and from the lattice work we were looking at the ocean. Now there's bushes, but we had little stepping stones that came up. We saw the water come up to the house. So when it receded we left the house again. Right next to us was a home that belonged to Wendell Carlsmith's mother. And it was on higher ground. We went there and watched. The second wave already attacked our house and started to knock it down.

WN: Okay, so let me back up a little bit. On that day, April 1, when did you first find out that there was a problem . . .

LV: Little after 7:00 [A.M.]. Little after 7:00 we were waiting . . .

WN: Where were you?

LV: . . . for our bus. We were on the road [i.e., Kalaniana'ole Street] waiting for our bus to pick us up, our county bus. And our uncle was watching us because my father and mother were in Honolulu. My dad was having a major surgery. So he [uncle] was waiting for a sampan bus, which was supposed to start its inaugural ride on that day. Coming down. And he didn't get on the bus and we didn't get on the bus.

WN: Oh, you were going to catch the sampan bus? Not the county bus?

LV: No, we were going to catch the county bus. (Our uncle) was going to catch sampan bus 'cause he didn't have a (driver's) license, so he couldn't drive.

WN: There were four of you? Four children?

LV: Four children.

WN: You're the oldest?

LV: I'm the oldest. So we were out there waiting.

WN: All four of you?

LV: Mm hmm [yes]. And when the water went over the road, our Uncle Eddie went back. Like I said, he told us to get in the house and he went to the beach and he noticed the water receding. So we stayed in the house until the water came up, the first wave. It was all foamy. Then we left. The second wave we went to the next property and it was higher grounds.

WN: How far away was the Carlsmith house?

LV: I would say maybe one hundred feet, not too far. So we got up there and it was higher. And so we stayed there and we watched the second wave knock the house down a little bit.

WN: Whose house?

LV: Our house.

WN: Your house.

LV: Yeah. And after the second wave we came out, we knew already it may get worse and we went out on the road and that's when Jeanne Branch's grandmother saw us running and Jeanne and David came running with us. [See interview with Jeanne Branch Johnston for her recollections.]

WN: Where were you running to?

LV: We were trying to find higher grounds and for some reason they decided to go behind the Saiki home. That's S-A-I-K-I, [who owned] Hilo Rice Mill. And from there we could probably work our way up to what they called the FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] Tower or the navigation tower, some kind of a tower up there. Well, we did, they would use machetes to cut *maile pilau*, we had lantana, we had *lau hala*, all kinds of stuff, plus the rocks. Plus all the different types of rocks. So finally, we came upon what is now the Nene Road. It was there but it was not paved 'cause that was a subdivision. That road was there. So once we got on that road, then we just kept walking. Then when we saw the tower, we decided to go there. That's where everybody met. So whatever food they could get from the homes nearby there was brought up there. And those who wanted to eat ate. Because we all had breakfast by now but this is lunchtime and they were trying to figure out how to feed the children. Somebody had only one baby milk bottle and I don't know how many babies and that bottle went all around (chuckles) to feed all the babies, that one bottle.

WN: How steep---I mean how far upland was that tower?

LV: Oh, I can show you.

WN: I mean was it like you had to climb?

LV: No, no. You were able to go because there was, again, a cinder type of a road leading to it. The road is still there but it is now chained. It may have been chained at that time, I don't remember. But we stayed there and the men went out and saw all the destruction and came back and saw that we had no road [i.e., Kalaniana'ole Street was inundated]. We were already disconnected from Hilo. The road was washed out. So they were trying to make plans what's going to happen if we stayed there overnight.

WN: Are you talking about Kalaniana'ole?

LV: Yeah.

WN: Was closed.

LV: Yeah, was completely disconnected.

WN: Was washed out. Oh I see.

LV: We had no road to get back to Hilo. Men were also trying to figure out how to get the injured to be more comfortable. Of course, they were already in panic, fright. So they were trying to do that.

Then the military came in and the military was able to bring a bulldozer down, I guess put in big rocks or something to get the military trucks over. 'Cause they needed that to get out the elderly and the sick. See, we were young so we could walk out. So once we walked out and we got to where the Seaside Restaurant is now, we waited there. Because that road was not there. That's the road [today] they put in after the '46. We had to wait there until we got into what they called military ducks, little rubber raft boats. We thought it was good fun. Go ride the boats going across to the other side. (Chuckles)

On the other side they had military trucks waiting for us. Then they took us to the NAS [Naval Air Station] housing, which is the old Hilo Airport. We had to be registered. Once we were registered they fed us something. Then they assigned each family to a barracks, which was Canec barracks, and they gave you one blanket and one pillow. So once you did that and you went into your barracks—you had to find it. They tell you more or less where they were. But you know, you were there and you're trying to sleep but you can still hear the water and the rocks rolling. Maybe it's still in the mind or not, but there are times when we are down the beach and there is a certain smell that came with the tidal wave from the mixture of the sand, the ocean, and debris or whatever, that we can still smell it. Only if you've been through the tidal wave you'll know what that smell is. We'll tell people, "Oh, that's the tidal wave smell."

They look at us, "Tidal wave smell?"

"Oh yes."

So at midnight—back to the housing—meanwhile, my dad had worked for Hilo Electric, the

people he had worked with were looking for us already. They wanted to take us out. They were going to sign us out. They finally found us at midnight. My two brothers went with Uncle Eddie and Aunt Alice to her family, I don't know which one it was, but to her family. And I remember my sister and I went up to Wainaku, that's up in Pu'u'eo, and we stayed with Tutu Kalei Lyman, which was our cousin's grandmother. We stayed there until my parents came home.

WN: When did they come home?

LV: They came home some time in April.

WN: (Chuckles) Boy, they must have been worried.

LV: No, after they knew we were in the homes and we were going to school, they were okay. They knew we were in the homes 'cause the families called to say your children are here and we talked to my mother and then they were okay. So then we went to school.

When they came home we moved up to Volcano. That was because a home was given to us for use until they rebuilt our home, until my parents figured out what they were going to do. We stayed there all summer. Coming down---while school was still in session we'd come down every day. My father would go to work, we would go to school. When he was through with work then we'd go back up to Volcano. My mom stayed up there. Then we moved back, I would say at the end of summer.

WN: To . . .

LV: To the same place. The only thing, the house we stayed in was a lot smaller and not in the same location. It was where the original home landed and fell apart.

WN: Who built the house?

LV: I have no idea.

WN: But they rebuilt the house, put new house on the old lot.

LV: A new house on the old lot, yes. A three-bedroom home, kitchen, living room, and a big garage.

WN: Okay. So when you saw the second wave coming, what did it look like? Can you describe that?

LV: When the second wave came in and we heard the house fall, all we could say was, "Hoo wow." We didn't think that would happen, that the ocean could take our house away or break our house because we were too young. Not knowing what's really happening. I would just say we just went, "Wow." And then we knew we had to run because if it can destroy your home, it can take you, too.

WN: So it was like a wall of water that descended upon the house? Is that what it was like?

LV: I can't recall that. Because all I said---once the house fell, I went, "Wow." Now how do we get out of here? We got to go. And being the oldest, you start thinking, we got to run, we got to go. Just for safety . . .

WN: Did you feel that your life was in danger at that time?

LV: Oh yes, at that point of time, oh yes, oh yes. We did definitely feel that it was in danger.

WN: Then afterwards, when you went down, did you ever go back down to see the damage?

LV: Oh yeah. On weekends, my dad used to bring us down to try clean it up.

WN: What was it like?

LV: Oh, it was a lot of work.

WN: Was the whole house just totally flattened?

LV: Totally. Totally flattened. The boat totally flattened. No car.

WN: Where did the car go?

LV: Someplace in the ocean.

WN: They ever got it out?

LV: No. Nobody knows where. All the cars was out there. (Chuckles) Everything and even the Carlsmiths' big ten-foot wall. That's why when people says---like one time they had this tidal wave warning and the surfers went out because they going to ride the big wave in. They can ride the big wave in but that be the first and the last big wave they ever rode.

(Laughter)

LV: That's not too bright. I wouldn't chance the ocean. I wouldn't play games with the ocean.

WN: The Carlsmith house was totally gone?

LV: Total. Yeah, yeah. That was a huge six-bedroom home.

WN: So if you stayed in there you would have probably been killed?

LV: See, there was a Carlsmith on the ocean side. Then the Van Giesons', and a Carlsmith this side.

WN: Oh, they had two houses?

LV: Yeah, this was his parents' home. Wendell lives here with the ten-foot stone wall that didn't make it, that was flattened. Then we had here, and then his parents had here. But that time they had it rented to a young couple. And that was up high enough where the house stayed

there until they built the condominium. That house remained because there was no way the wave was going to really touch it. It was above fifty feet. It was high enough.

WN: Was the new house a lot different from the old house?

LV: Oh yeah, smaller, much smaller. But otherwise everything else would be the same. I don't know. (Chuckles) But it was really traumatic when you come down and see you have nothing left, not a home, not clothes, not nothing. And when you look at it, you're not the only ones so you kind of accept it. I felt that I accepted it because there was really nothing we can do as young as we were. That you can't fight it. You had no warning.

WN: So, were most of the houses on the *makai* side damaged?

LV: Not all. We were the butt. We were the one that got it most. You had the Ainas, the Nakagawas, and then you had the Carlsmiths, you had the Van Giesons, and the Masons, the grandma's house went down but they were able to put it up. That was that side. Then you went down where you had Paul Kai's house, just below the Talletts' house.

WN: Paul Kai?

LV: And the Pua family. That house went. So ours was just like in sections. We were the most damaged, and then one in the center, then little bit on that side, and that's about it.

WN: And you said there were a lot of resort-type houses.

LV: Yeah, mm hmm. All beautiful.

WN: Some of them were not occupied at the time?

LV: They were all occupied.

WN: They were occupied?

LV: Yeah, because the Lalakeas' house was another real nice one that went. 'Cause that was in an area that was right below Cook house. So that went. So you got the Willocks. Yeah, you have—let me see, you have the Ainas, the Nakagawas, the Carlsmiths—Wendell Carlsmith, Van Gieson, Carlsmith again, Mason, that house, then you would have Dr. [Leslie A.] Weight. Then you had the Carters' home on the *makai* side that went. Right across from Weights' house had the Kozukis' house but they were okay.

WN: On the . . .

LV: On the mountain, mountain side. They were okay. Mountain side wasn't really bothered until you got down by the Talletts' side. Then after Carters, you had the Ludloff, the Kamais, Willocks, Lalakeas. Those are all ocean road homes that all went. Martins, they went. Then you would come to Pua family, P-U-A family, Pua. And you'd come to Paul Kai.

WN: Paul. . . .

LV: Kai. K-A-I.

WN: K-A-I.

LV: Yeah. He was blind and he would not come out of the house. The Talletts tried to go and get him to bring him out, carry him up to the Talletts' house because they were a little bit high and they were okay. But he would not come. His wife stayed with him and they both died. They were taken out. Their house got completely washed out and they both died in the ocean. Bodies were unfound. That's a sad story. So that house, and I think that's about it. And then Richardsons' in 1946 was okay. That's the end. They're on the end of the curve-like of the area. And that's really known as Lehia Park. L-E-H-I-A Park. That whole area. That's the original name.

WN: Pu'umaile [Home] was okay, yeah?

LV: Pu'umaile was okay in '46. Pu'umaile went down in the high seas in January. (Chuckles) The high seas knocked down the stone wall in front of Pu'umaile and that's how Pu'umaile got off its foundation with all its patients. Yeah, they survived the '46 so they figure the high seas, they would be all right. Lot of them were able to survive.

WN: This is January of the following year?

LV: Yes, in '47. Right, following year. That's what took Pu'umaile, the high seas, not the tidal wave.

WN: And also the Kennedy family was on the *mauka* side.

LV: Yeah, on the *mauka* side. But Mrs. Kennedy lived in a four-story home that's like a castle. And it's still yet---and little bit on an incline. So water would go but it didn't go all the way to her house, yeah.

WN: Because the Cooks, too, was sort of . . .

LV: Yeah, they're up high. Oh yeah, they're high. Their original home is there. That side a lot of the original homes—because you have Kennedy, you have Saiki, you have Kozuki—the homes are still there. You have the Cooks' homes that are still there. Dahlberg's went down because of the fire that had. Then you had the Nelson family, or the Harbottle. Then you had Cooks there, also there. Like with the Nelson, Harbottle family, when they sold, the people had bought a property on the ocean side and moved their house down there and rebuilt the new house, which is Dr. Pete Okamoto. He lives there.

WN: Okay, so tell me what---how did life change in Keaukaha after the '46?

LV: We became closer. We became closer. All those survivors that we met, all these children from the other side, you know, like from the Cooks, we would go up to the Cooks' before '46 but after '46 we would go down to Richardsons'. And we became a very close unit. We would support each other, we would do things together, you know.

WN: Why is that, though?

LV: I don't know. Maybe because we were the same age. But---and still today, we see each other, we still support each other.

WN: But prior to the tsunami you folks didn't . . .

LV: Well, we didn't go too far. I guess because we were younger yet, we were below eleven now. So we would go as far as Cooks' house. Play with the children up to the Cooks' house. Played with the Saikis' grandchildren, all of them. And that was it. But after the tidal wave, now we were bigger. So we used to go with our bikes and we all made friends and we all got along. So the main families there was the Van Giesons, the Cooks, and the Talletts. That's the three families right there, the main families, and then comes Willocks. So we used to all gather. So you didn't go the Willocks' house because they were little bit too prim and proper, I guess. (Chuckles) They weren't really open like the Talletts, the Cooks, and the Van Giesons. You could go there. Like, my grandfather would live with us and every New Years they all knew my grandfather would buy fireworks. So the children would all run down to our house. And their parents finally gave up and said, "We might as well go, too." 'Cause my grandfather was buying fireworks and he would build a big fire and he would throw the fireworks in there.

(Laughter)

LV: I mean, that was great things, you know, not like today. But those days those were great things. Well, everybody has their own stories.

WN: And who moved out from [the area] because of '46?

LV: Wow, who moved out? Carlsmith.

WN: They never came back?

LV: No.

WN: Did they sell the property or. . . .

LV: Yeah. They were kind of upset 'cause my dad wouldn't sell and I guess under pressure he sold. And that upset his children because he didn't give us the chance to buy. Because if we had bought it we would have never sold it and the condominium would have never been there. That would be for all of our friends to enjoy, the same fun that we had.

And let me see, Carlsmiths moved out, who else moved out? The Weights moved out. Carter came back. I would say the Kamais moved out. The Ludloffs moved out. The Furtados moved out. The Lalakeas moved out. The Martins never rebuilt. Lalakea never rebuilt, they sold instead. The Puas never rebuilt. The Kais, that family sold the property.

WN: So, after these people never came back today. So who did they sell to? Did the neighborhood change at all?

LV: No, no. Because we were still our own group and we just hung out with each other. Now, it's a different type of community down there. We don't know too many people down there. But we still stayed in contact with each other, even after we moved away to different places. But

we'll always go back. We'll go back, go swimming, you know. We'll find reasons to go down. But you'll always find us around the beach. And we listen to people when we're down the beach talking about how they did this and they did that. And you go, "Mm hmm. Funny, you weren't there when I was around." (Chuckles) So you just listen, you know. Because everybody sees things in their own time, I guess. If you say, "Oh, you weren't here long."

Then they look at you and say, "No, that's not right, you weren't here. I know you weren't here."

"We used to live here."

WN: So you had your core, still have your core group?

LV: Oh yeah, we still have our core group. In fact, we're planning a neighborhood reunion next year. Where we won't be involved in a tsunami reunion, we just going to do a neighborhood reunion. So that would probably be another wonderful time.

WN: What about your parents, did they say anything about how the community had changed?

LV: No.

WN; No?

LV: No. My mother never worked. I think she tried once but she didn't stay too long. So she didn't really work and she normally just stayed by herself. It was my father who would really go out and join clubs and be with everybody. My mother knew certain people in the neighborhood and that was it. The children came to the house, she made an effort to know the parents so that they would know her. But other than that, no, she didn't really go out. She really just stayed home.

WN: Okay. Let's see, if you can just tell me, since that time, what have you been doing? (LV chuckles.)

Oh, first of all, the '60 tidal wave, you weren't . . .

LV: No, I was not in Keaukaha. I was married and I had moved out.

WN: Okay, you got married in. . . .

LV: [Nineteen] fifty-five.

WN: In '55. Moved out of Keaukaha at that time.

LV: Yeah, yeah.

WN: Where did you move to?

LV: I moved up here close to Kīlauea and Kino'ole. Piece of property between Kīlauea and Kino'ole, lived there. And that '60 one my grandfather used to live in Waiākea town. So what

I did is go get him and brought him to stay with me.

WN: What was your grandfather's name?

LV: George Taboon, T-A-B-O-O-N, Todd. So he lived with me during the (1960) tidal wave. And then my sister—did you get a chance to talk to her?

WN: No, not yet.

LV: Yeah, she did, too. She did '46 and she did '60.

WN: Martha?

LV: Yeah.

WN: Martha was down Keaukaha?

LV: No, she was right by Lili'uokalani Park. She was staying with her boyfriend's sisters. And they went through that. She has an amazing story because she says she had left her Bible on her bed, on the mattress on the bed. And through all the tsunami and everything, she found her Bible still on the bed. Yeah. (Chuckles)

WN: Oh. That's in the book, yeah? The Dudley book [*Tsunami!* by Walter C. Dudley and Min Lee].

LV: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

WN: Martha McNicholl is your sister.

LV: Yes, and the only thing is that when Martha them went through that, whatever clothes they had salvaged, then they would bring it to me and I would wash it all. Throw it--because I had a downstairs shower so I would put it all in the shower, run the shower to get rid of the sand before I put it in my washing machine. Because I didn't want to put it with the washing. Then from the shower go into a bucket, rinse, rinse, rinse, (chuckles) put it in the washing machine, then into the dryer.

WN: And your parents were still Keaukaha in 1960?

LV: Yeah. Mm hmm.

WN: So how did they do?

LV: They did okay. Of course, my father would complain about staying down there and have to run away from the tidal wave and all that. Because you see, it didn't affect them.

WN: Yeah, Keaukaha wasn't affected.

LV: They just evacuated, then they went back. See, it depends where the earthquake is and from what direction the waves are coming and how strong the earthquakes are. So the 1960, if I'm

not—I can be corrected, it's from Chile. The '46 is from the Aleutian Islands.

WN: Right.

LV: That's correct, yeah? But it does come in with great force when you know it can break a ten-foot stone wall. Flatten that. You just see the power. And there are times when we can hear the rocks rolling. If we're down the beach, the sounds of the tidal wave, you could hear that even at the tower. And as you're running you hear all these rocks rolling and things. And you can hear the wood breaking, the damage. You go down the beach and when it gets rough it comes—the memories come back. I feel that I was fortunate from then. So I value life differently than those that have not been in something like that. I value it much differently. 'Cause you have that experience. But it's interesting. You talk to children or students nowadays, they don't believe something like that has happened. They can't visualize that.

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

LV: So if you want, I can show you where [the Keaukaha property] is.

WN: Yeah, I have to go to somebody's place at 11:00.

LV: Oh, okay. What time is it now?

WN: Ten o'clock.

LV: So you have somebody now? Between now and 11:00?

WN: No.

LV: So we can take a fast trip down?

WN: Okay.

LV: Yeah, half hour. I'll drive you down because if I drive we'll go there faster because I know where I'm going. And I'll bring you right back.

WN: Oh, okay, thank you very much.

LV: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW

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