

Keola Huevo

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Keola Hueu (KH)

Kahului, Maui

April 22, 1998

BY: Jeanne Johnston (JJ)

JJ: This is an interview with Keola Hueu at Hale Mahaolu in Kahului, Maui and the date is Wednesday, April 22, 1998 and the interviewer is Jeanne Johnston. Let's start out and I'll ask you when and where were you born.

KH: My birth date is July 22, 1914. I was born in Ke'anae, Maui.

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

KH: My mother's maiden name was Nancy Ahee Haina.

JJ: Where was she born?

KH: She was born in Kohala, Hawai'i.

JJ: Were her parents from Kohala also?

KH: Well, her mom all—you know in those days, around the island in Hawai'i, they used to raise cane, individual grower. And they moved, they leave Kohala, they move Pāpa'aloa and all those places. But originally they were from Kohala.

JJ: And what were her parents' names? Your mother's mother's name?

KH: My mother's mother's name was Loika, that's Lois, Haina.

JJ: And she was Hawaiian?

KH: She's pure Hawaiian.

JJ: And your grandfather?

KH: He was Ah Chuck. But he came from China.

(Laughter)

KH: We don't know anything else. This fellow Wayne Davis, and Wayne Davis was a genealogist. So

went all over Maui and we tried to go every grave to find out—we're looking for a person by the name of Davis. Afterward, I'll come to that. We didn't find him. But common sense---my sister lived in Utah and she—that's where all the Mormon genealogists are. But she brought her genealogy and told me. I said, "I won't agree with this."

She say, "Why?"

"I use common sense."

And she looked at me, "What is common sense?"

I said, "Here, this one here." So then we forgot about it but she said that she *wen* look all the . . . But Noe's son. I don't write down anything but they have it in here.

JJ: Tell me about your father. What was your father's name?

KH: My father's name was James Keola Hueu, Sr. He was born and raised in Ke'anae. He was born in 1892. February 6, 1892.

JJ: And his parents, what were his parents' names?

KH: Well, his mom's name was Nellie Halemano.

JJ: And was she born also in Ke'anae area?

KH: Yes, and her dad and mom were born there. So I did see my great-grandma.

JJ: Yes, you did see her? You knew her?

KH: Yeah, yeah.

JJ: That was Nellie?

KH: Nellie's mom. Her name was Mary.

JJ: Mary.

KH: And she was Hawaiian English.

JJ: Tell me about her?

KH: You want to know about her? Well, according to genealogy, she was a daughter of the Papa family. But this missionary Pierce got married to her mom, I don't know how many generations back. But it could have been way back.

JJ: And they all lived out in Ke'anae?

KH: Well, I don't know where. It could have been around here somewhere, maybe Makawao. But according to the way I look, how they named the streets around here.

JJ: So when you were born in Ke'anae, were you born at your house, at your parents' house?

- KH: Yeah, I was born at home because those days we were isolated. We cannot get out to Wailuku or go to Hāna unless we go by boat or walk. And so that's why I tell my children, in those days, when come dinnertime you ate, whatever, at the table—otherwise you go to bed. Because it would be three days before you get to Wailuku and you'd be dead from hunger by then so you might as well go to bed. And there weren't no iceboxes for you to open at night. You just go to bed. So we didn't have much choice, but we were happy. But we were really isolated.
- JJ: What kind of food did you have to eat?
- KH: We eat the—what they raise. They went fishing—and when you go fishing, you don't take a whole bag of fish, you get four or five, enough for the meal. Because there was no icebox to save your fish unless you dry it. So fish was plentiful. If you get rough you no fish. But if you get rough and everything all one time, you only need taro leaf and salt.
- JJ: What did you do when you were a kid?
- KH: When I was a kid, I used to go around and work taro patch, but not with the Hawaiians. I worked with the Chinese. And they pay me ten cents a day but they give you two meals. So ten cents doesn't mean anything, the meal was very important. They give you lunch and dinner.
- JJ: Was that down at Ke'anae?
- KH: In Ke'anae.
- JJ: How many people lived down there? How many families?
- KH: During the early days, I think they had about four or five hundred or more people. And the road got opened and boats would come in and people run away. So they settle in Honolulu and Hau'ula and all those. I think many of them settle in 'Aiea because I go to 'Aiea and I see the street name referring back to where we lived. The street was named all that and I look, the place is Ke'anae.
- JJ: Did you speak Hawaiian or English?
- KH: During our school days, we were forbidden. You cannot speak Hawaiian. When you were at school, you be very careful. My parents didn't speak Hawaiian to me. But I had a grandma, there is no way we can converse, so I learned a little Hawaiian from her. But in those days, Hawaiian is not like today, easy to learn, you have the *kahakō*, and. . . Easy. In those days, we had to read, write, too. That's why I disagree with lot of older Hawaiian. They say today not the way. I say, "How else they going to learn?" We learn because we had lived with them. Otherwise, even my dad and mom, when they want to speak Hawaiian, they were away from—because we might go to school and we use Hawaiian we get punished.
- JJ: What did your house look like? Can you describe your house?
- KH: My house?
- JJ: Yeah, when you were small.
- KH: I never lived in a grass shack. I lived in, you know, our house was made out of lumber. But you can imagine how they got the lumber there. But they have interisland steamship those days. So

when they come, when they pass Ke‘anae, *Kilauea*, the big ship stop outside, they come in the rowboat. And they have the engine there, pull the—lift the material up to swing it around. The Hawaiians have a rope. They only can lift and lower. But they brought all our supplies. And they come once a month. On a Monday come, and they see white water and they blow the whistle. They go to Hāna. You go without for one month. So when they order things, they order by cases. But those days, everything was cheap. Of course, the pay was very low. Imagine, you give one kid ten cents today go in the taro patch, you be gone. (Laughs) Our days, ten cents was plenty.

JJ: So how many people lived in your house when you were growing up?

KH: I think about seven or eight of us.

JJ: And did your grandparents live near you?

KH: Yeah, about a mile away. So when you don’t want to live with your parents, you just go to your grandparents.

JJ: What kind of games did you play when you were a kid?

KH: In those days, we used to play baseball but we made our own baseball out of rags or grass, and wrap it up. Get our bats, we get the *hau* stick. That’s why we had a picture a few weeks ago in the paper about baseball before. For fifty years we didn’t play ball, so the children there of Ke‘anae, they started out. So when they went around look who were the guys left [in] that place. So four of us were left. So we went down the park and then only us.

JJ: What other games did you play?

KH: We had Hawaiian games but I can’t describe it. You know that stone that you roll.

JJ: *Ulumaika?*

KH: Yeah.

JJ: Did you go swimming?

KH: Oh yeah.

JJ: And fishing?

KH: Fishing, yeah. But in those days, you better know how to swim because your friend under water and they take you and throw you in the pool. But not in the ocean, fresh water.

JJ: So then when you went to school, where did you go to school?

KH: At the—Ke‘anae. I went there and in those days, they only had sixth grade. So I got out of the sixth grade, I came to Pu‘unēnē for one semester. But because of our poverty, I can not go school anymore. So education, I have no education. I only can spell my name.

JJ: That’s okay. So then you moved back to Ke‘anae from Pu‘unēnē?

KH: Yeah, I had family living there. During the school time, I came back. But funny, they—I

remember that year in 1927, they had a new test, they call that the Stanford Achievement Test. I, coming from the sticks, I had the—me and one Japanese girl from Pu‘unēnē, a seventh grader, we skipped the eighth grade. We went to go Maui High School. But she went, I didn’t go because poverty.

JJ: Did you have to go to work?

KH: Me?

JJ: Yeah.

KH: I was kind of too young but anyway, I went to. . . .

JJ: So what did you do after that?

KH: I used to work with the Chinese [farmers] until they had the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps], you know, [during] the depression. So I was working there for two years. They give you food, clothing, hospital, and they give you thirty dollars a month. You send home twenty-two dollars, you keep eight dollars. You send twenty-two to your family. But I was just like a *luna* so I had forty-five dollars. I was—they call that the leader. I stayed two years; I went out.

JJ: Where was that?

KH: In Ke‘anae where they have the YMCA [Young Men’s Christian Association] now.

JJ: And you worked for them for two years?

KH: Yeah.

JJ: And then after that?

KH: After that, well, I looked around but I work with the *poi* factory. They had *poi* factory there.

JJ: What did you do at the factory?

KH: Just clean the taro, grind the *poi* and all that. But that’s why I know much about *poi* making. That’s why I went to the Smithsonian [Festival of American Folklife in Washington, D.C.] in 1989. So all these people talking about taro. They don’t have a certificate. I told when I went in 1989, I went to Smithsonian.

JJ: Can you tell us a little about that?

KH: Well, it’s not a little—that’s something big. We stayed there ten days and then about half a million people passed by every day. [There were] all kind of folklore programs. But I was close enough to the people who prepare the Hawaiian food so I was okay. I helped them. And afterwards we had the Hawaiian food, the Portuguese food. Maui had [a] Portuguese [group] who went up. They had the Ho‘opi‘i Brothers—all different cultures. But I went as a taro planter and a *poi* pounder.

JJ: What a wonderful experience.

KH: Oh yeah. That's how I met a lot of people. I always thought to myself, here a guy who came from the sticks, what should I do? But I got along with them.

JJ: Good, good. So then, when you were working at the *poi* factory in Ke'anae, how old were you at that time?

KH: I was about seventeen.

JJ: And then what did you do after that?

KH: After that, I got married and [it so] happened the county had job. So I was admitted to work with the county. That was in 1937. And then that year, they had a road opening to Haleakalā. But I was working for the county and they had a grand hotel in Wailuku. They took over the concession. So the chairman asked me, "You want to go to Haleakalā?"

I said, "I don't want to lose my job."

He said, "No, you come back anytime."

So I went there, and I stayed there six months. I was the only person up there. They had an old rest house made out of stone. There were nobody up there. At night by myself. But they had a CC camp, they were living in the old rest house. Did you hear about that? So I had a lot of experience.

JJ: How long were you up in Haleakalā?

KH: Six months. My wife cannot stand the weather.

JJ: She didn't go with you?

KH: She go and then she cannot stand so I came back.

JJ: What was your wife's name?

KH: Margaret Pahukoa and she came from Ke'anae.

JJ: She was from Ke'anae also? So she didn't like Haleakalā?

KH: She cannot stand it. Too cold. But we didn't know that the—you don't have to pile ten blankets and sleep. If you had a blueprint paper, that was enough with one blanket. But other than that, long time after I went to Olinda and live. During the [Second] World War, they shut down the county. So they shipped all us to take care the water of Kula. So we came right down as far as the border of Olinda. We stayed there two weeks and then go back. Then I found out our unit had to sleep with one blanket if you have paper. So I had a lot of experience, all different.

JJ: Did you have any children?

KH: Two boys and five girls. And they all went to Kamehameha School[s]. It was pretty good. Their dad never have education but they all did. But those days, you only pay a hundred. For girl, \$117, for boys, \$123.

JJ: Where were you living at that time when the kids were going to school?

KH: I was living Ke‘anae.

JJ: Ke‘anae. So did they board?

KH: They board there. They were all boarders.

JJ: And you said, this was during the wartime?

KH: It was before. When the war came, some of them were in school during wartime. And wartime, I was working in the county. I had vacation. I went to Honolulu; I worked with the stevedore. And that night I was supposed to come back, they bombed Honolulu.

JJ: Were you in Honolulu when the . . .

KH: Oh yeah. I was just couple thousand feet from the first bomb landed. They went to Hickam [Air Field]. So I figure no communication with my family. I figure they all dead. Maybe they let two Japanese down in Ke‘anae. We never have communication till a month and a half after the war. So I just go to work. I was sitting in the furnace room and my partner, we never see each other for a month. He work on a different shift, I work on a different shift. I seen all what happened.

JJ: In Pearl Harbor?

KH: In Pearl Harbor. That’s where I went to work. Stevedore over there, Pearl Harbor, Ford Island. When I look, they *stay go* to Ford Island on the bridge, we used to go on a ferry.

JJ: That’s right. So then, when did you move back to Ke‘anae from Honolulu?

KH: In 1942. I just run down there at the end for vacation but I got caught, I went work. But I came back ’42, so my boss already told me, “Well, too bad you had to go back to Honolulu.”

So before I leave Maui, I went to the county office. I want my release. So the engineer, “Where you going?”

“I have to go back.”

“No, you go back and work.”

So I went back and worked. They were all surprised because I was a pretty important man. I use to operate the shovel, the power shovel. So that’s why I didn’t go back to Honolulu. Otherwise, I wouldn’t know what I know. If I stayed in Honolulu, I wouldn’t know. When I came back, actually I worked for irrigation company, I learned plenty. Because every day you work a different job. So I know about water, I know about underground. And they send me to other islands. So I was—without the education, I was—I can get along.

Lot of them, “What high school did you [go]?”

I shame. (Laughs) Because I never went to school. But I got along all right.

JJ: So when you were working for them, were you still living in Ke‘anae?

KH: You mean . . .

JJ: This job that you were talking about.

KH: Yeah, I lived in Ke‘anae until I retired. Now, I’m nineteen years retired. And a company when you retire would put you in the pasture and forget about you. But in my case, no. They always look after me so I was happy.

JJ: Well, tell me a little bit about what Ke‘anae was like before the tidal wave in 1946.

KH: Well, it was similar like now but it wasn’t all trees like today. I remember when I was born, even all the hill side, there were no trees. Only a few *kukui* trees and grass. You can see the old Hawaiian trail, the Pi‘ilani trail. You could see that trail. But lot of people didn’t use that trail. But it’s still there. A lot of places, when they rebuild the new road, they cut it out. But the trees in Ke‘anae, even coconut trees, that’s only new. I think 1926, they planted. Before that, there were no trees.

JJ: Were there any military down there during the wartime?

KH: Yeah, yeah. They had a, not a camp, they had an outpost. They dig a hole under the road, fill up with dynamite, then they had the guard guard that. In case the enemy go into the bay and he want to come, they just blow the. . . I know in Hāna side, they had the same thing. It didn’t bother us because the military men over there, they had big cans of corned beef and they just throw them away so they trade with banana or taro. And the natives there, they happy. They like to eat corned beef. So we were around together. Not a whole mob of army people. But they had some marines that camped here and there.

JJ: And were they all gone by the time April 1, 1946 came around—were all the military gone?

KH: Well, in Ke‘anae, they were all gone. But out here, they called it Camp Maui, they had a marine base there. I think they were still there.

JJ: Can you tell me what happened that day, April 1, 1946?

KH: That day I was working at Olinda. I became, not a prisoner, but a prison guard. So early in the morning, I had a phone call, calling me to go back because I lived only about seven or eight feet away from the ocean. About four and a half feet above ocean level.

“You’d better come back.”

“Why?”

“Oh, get tidal wave.”

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

JJ: Okay, so you said you’d got a phone call.

KH: I had a phone call.

JJ: Who called you?

KH: I don't know if it was my wife or somebody from home called. When I got the message, I just went back. When I went, the wave was all down already, but you see, my wife, her sister, and their mother, was out on the beach. And usually at that time, these small fishes, we call that 'ōhua, but it's a small *manini*. And when you go early in the morning, I think the wave throw it out so they put in the bag, and then when the bag hit the rock, they straight out. So they went for those fishes during that month, April, May, June. So they were there. When they look, they seen this wave going back and all the fishes jumping. My mother-in-law, being the elder one, "I think that's tidal wave," so they ran back. And my house was right down by the ocean. So I had a daughter, she was five years old then. I had three other children. One was about two years. And she gathered all them and put them in the house.

So the wave only turned my house, but it smashed everything in the yard. But on the northeastern part the wave went up, hit the bank, the bay hard, cliff. It went through the river. You know where the flume that they have to take the water across the taro patch? They have a flume. The water went right up till there. Now on the way back, was too much water that's why they went on the land. There's an old man by the name of Walter Hardy, he was in the garden, so the wave took him and buried him in the taro patch. And another woman, she ran back to the house so we had some people there. So on her way out, the wave took the home and threw her in the grass. So only two died here. But where I lived, the wave didn't come. That's the northern end. It just came on the land and moved the house. But on the east part, that's where it took all the homes. It took the home away when the wave went back. When it came up, it only went out, hit the cliff. But it followed the river. So actually, I never did see the big wave. I don't know if anyone living today. My son would know, he was about six years old but he went to school. I don't really—my neighbor's house was torn down too, so we—afterwards, I quit my job. I work with the contractor. So we moved our house back.

JJ: What did it look like when you got down there? What did the . . .

KH: It looked really, not right. Something not right. In other words, that gulf they call Honomanū, the wave went right up to the road. But it didn't go on the road or under the bridge. And everything looked so. . . . And you can see fishes all on the ground. But it never look so good. But to my thinking, a tidal wave is better than a high seas. Because high seas, it just come one right after the other. Tidal wave it comes out but it goes down, it takes long time. But those who had seen all those fishes and everything, I think they want to get fish but they can see the fish all no more water. I doubt that anyone living really did see. They all dead by now.

JJ: So when you get down, you saw all the damage there?

KH: Yeah, the damage already there so I took my family and we stayed up where the YMCA is. The most people—when they were—just then the prison had moved out. Because they had prison in there again. Prison went out Nāhiku Rubber [Company]. Did you hear about rubber in Nāhiku?

JJ: No.

KH: They planned a rubbery way in the early 1900s. So lot of people say, "Oh, Nāhiku Rubber come." They went broke. But during the war years, the state tried to go and make the—so happened I was working as a prison guard. So I took the inmates out. So I knew about the rubber. So someone heard they came and interviewed me.

I say, "Yeah. Not around all they talking about. I don't know what kind rubber."

JJ: Well tell me, after the tidal wave, did your neighbors build their houses back? Did they rebuild there?

KH: Most of them had help from the Red Cross. They had about \$1,200. But they gave me only [\$]850. I cannot build house but they give you an old army building. What do they call that? A portable, something like Quonset . . .

JJ: Oh, a Quonset hut.

KH: Yeah. That's why you call. That's what they give the tidal wave victims. So that helped. For some they were better off, but for me I had to go find money to pay my—I was not too qualified.

JJ: And how did you feel about the ocean after that? Did it change your attitude?

KH: Well, to me, it kind of changed but to me, lot of people after a while, they didn't pay attention. I say, "You better." Might be twenty times they going tell you tidal wave and it don't happen, but one time, I say, "You already seen what happened so be careful."

So it happened couple times afterward but the place that was hit the most was in Hāmoa, past Hāna. That, they found a grandma with two grandchild about three or four miles away and they were sitting there. But of course they were dead. A man, the wave took him out from the coconut tree, he hang on to the coconut tree. The wave took all his clothing off, he came down, he was safe. But his wife was gone. Over there had the most hard hit in Hilo.

JJ: And what about your grandparents? What happened to—or your parents . . .

KH: Well they were all gone. Only old man Hardy. His wife was my aunt. But she survived. She wasn't at home. When she came back, everything was gone.

JJ: So what do you think—how did it change the life there in Ke'anae before and after the tidal wave? Did things change very much?

KH: You mean after the tidal wave? No, it didn't change. Only long time afterward, well, it kind of changed because those who really had lived the Hawaiian style, they only pretending to be Hawaiian. They greedy and that's nothing to them. They can tell you, "Well, the rights of fishing and going to the forest, all Hawaiian."

I let them, "Providing you don't go sell those things. You go in and use it." But lot of them, they get 'ōpae and 'opihi and they just sell them off. For me, because I'm old age, if I want to eat 'opihi, I got to pay. So it didn't--the lifestyle—they only going to tell you. . . . The Hawaiian lifestyle, they know lifestyle but they don't really practice the lifestyle. For me, I know I never did pay rent in my life and then I moved here.

They say, "Hey how come you—why you go over there? Why don't you sell 'em? No more yard over there."

I say, "When you going be [old] age, what is the yard? The yard won't take care you." And I found out that was right. Last year I got ill. I didn't get to clean my yard. My neighbor *wen* come clean. They refused to take money. They pay me. So I say, "Hey, life different." The only thing I gotta pay rent. I never did pay rent in my life. But life was very interesting to me.

- JJ: Where were you during the 1960 tidal wave?
- KH: Nineteen sixty I was around. But it wasn't really—it didn't—I think some other island, but around Ke'anae it didn't.
- JJ: You didn't get any . . .
- KH: It came higher, just like high seas.
- JJ: Was there any damage there in 1960?
- KH: No, no.
- JJ: No, not at all. What would you say—do you have any advice to anybody if they hear a tidal wave warning?
- KH: If they hear the warning they better get up high ground. Some they are immune already. Ah, never mind that warning. But see, one time I say even they never know that was real, then after the tidal wave then they know. But you'd better pay heed.
- JJ: Is there anything else you'd like to add?
- KH: Right now, I think I'm okay. What I want to see, the people to get together. That's the whole trouble with our little village. They cannot get together. That's why we had a trust, we rededicated our trust. See, during the overthrow of the government, the trusts that were built before 1893 they somehow—they had some kind of money to refund. So I went back way, so they came out about [\$]28,000 for our trust down the ground.
- JJ: In Ke'anae?
- KH: Yes, so many Hawaiian trusts/treasures they brought money back. The apology bill they had. So the government, I told them, "The president, he doesn't know. So why do you folks fight about Hawaiian land? Go to the president, he knows there's a law but you fella fighting the wrong people." That's why I belong to some of these—but I just know about it. I wouldn't. . . . Because the person know. He going give you little bit, like I said, Hawaiians call that *palu*. He only return but he know. Now, he return some money to the treasury. Of course, not as much as what the Japanese had but . . .
- JJ: Well, thank you very, very much for letting me interview you today.

END OF INTERVIEW

**TSUNAMIS IN MAUI COUNTY:
Oral Histories**

**Center for Oral History
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