

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

**Wilbert Ho**  
**Helen Kam Ho**

August 31, 2009

BY: Arlene Ching (A.C.) (NOTE: NEED MACRONS)

Mr. and Mrs. Ho were interviewed at their home in 'Aiea on Kamehameha Highway about Willy's Market and the Willy's Tavern, a landmark restaurant near Pearl Harbor. Mr. Ho spoke about his childhood on Pearl City Peninsula where his family ran Lehua Market. Mrs. Ho spoke about her childhood in Kalauao near Pearl Harbor shoreline.

A.C.:            Alright. I've already identified our date and time. It would be easier for me if we started where we take turns, and later on, you'll forget that this is on. But Wilbert, can you tell me about your family's background.

**Wilbert's Pearl Harbor Apprenticeship**

Wilbert:        My mom and dad lived down in Waiawa. I was born down in Waiawa. That's behind Leeward Community College. My dad worked at Pearl Harbor. My mom was a housewife, plus working for my grandfather, her father-in-law, at Lehua Market down in Pearl City Peninsula. I was fortunate enough, when I was a youngster; I went to August Ahrens School up to the sixth grade. Then from the sixth grade, I went to Iolani in the seventh grade. Unfortunately I did not graduate with my classmates in 1946 because I went to work at Pearl Harbor. I went to apprenticeship school for two-and-a-half years, and graduated from apprenticeship school on the fast track. I think I got more out of that than finishing high school. Half of the time, going to school, we learned Math up to Trigonometry. We learned English and History. They gave us classes. Then at eighteen, after I got through with the apprenticeship, the war was finishing in 1945, but I had to register for the draft in 1946. My dad told me, "Eh. Why don't you go into the military?" So I said, "What for?" He said, "Well, all the veterans are going back. That's the 442<sup>nd</sup> people, coming back from Europe and they're moving us out because we're non-veterans. " We were there all during the war, frozen to the job. Really it was unfortunate and unfair that these guys came back and moved us out because we served during the war.

**December 7<sup>th</sup> 1941 at Pearl City Peninsula**

On December the 7<sup>th</sup>, we were out hunting down at Waypoint Point. We saw the bombs and everything. We saw shrapnel flying all over, and that's when my dad said, "We'd better go. That's a Japanese airplane." We said, "No, that's just maneuvering." He said, "No. All this burning---the ships on fire. Let's go home." So on the way home, this Japanese Zero, we could see the machine gun marks. Good thing it didn't hit us. Right in front of the car. So we got home, and after we got home, there was no one around. So

my dad said, "Eh. you guys stay here. Stay home. Don't go out." He said, "I'm going to go to Pearl Harbor. Go to work." Okay. He left us. We're down on the Pearl City Peninsula. We rode our bikes. Three of us, Wilbert, Walter and Wallace, three brothers. We rode our bikes down to the pier and stayed under one of the houses, the eaves, so we wouldn't get hit. From there, we looked out on the pier and we saw the people. The whole harbor was on fire because of the oil from the ships. It was on fire. When the fire subsided, everything was black because the oil was covering it. Then they started pulling the dead people out. Two big mounds of black. We thought they were all Negroes but they were covered with oil. Two big mounds of dead sailors. I guess maybe some civilians. Then we said, "Okay. We'd better go home." Then we went home. Nobody was there. Then the police came by. "So what are you kids doing out here?" "Our dad went to work. He left us at home." We turned on the radio and heard we were at war. We couldn't do anything. So the police said, "You know. Your parents are up on the mountains. Up Waimano Home. Right by the reservoir." So he took us up to my mom, my grandma and my aunts. Then, before nightfall came, they transported us to Waipahu. We went to the gym. We all slept at the gym. So many people just side by side on the floor! That particular night, they said B-17s came to Pearl Harbor. Lo and behold, a trigger-happy guy shot down our own planes. They didn't have identification, friend or foe. I think they shot down one or two. I think there's one in 'Aiea Heights. One of the remains.

We stayed up there at the community center for a couple of nights. Then we went home. We all met together. We're so happy to see each other still alive. We went into our kitchen in Waiawa. There was shrapnel right next to our stove. Good thing my mom wasn't cooking at then. She would have been hit on the head. I had that as a souvenir for a long time, but when we moved from Pearl City Peninsula, I don't know what happened to it.

### **Willy's Market on Kamehameha Highway**

We moved here in 1950 from Pearl City. September 1950, my dad opened this market and it was considered one of the supermarkets in the territory. Kam Highway was a two-lane highway. Everybody, defense workers, everybody who lived beyond 'Aiea, they all stopped by Willy's Market. My dad used to get bags of rice. Five pounds was ration. Somehow he made friends with this guy. Kapuniaia at Amfac. That guy used to bring the whole truckload of rice to my dad's place. He'd give rice to everybody who stopped by. This was big draw. You know, when they'd stop by, of course, they'd shop for something else---meat or something else. I was just a youngster then. I used to be a butcher then in the market. I know just about every cut of meat. Those days, we were butchers. They used to deliver us half a carcass of beef. We'd have to carry it from the truck into the chill box and hang it. The whole half of meat. We'd let it hang until the thing turned green. The aging process. Then we'd go in and trim all of the mold off, then carry it out and put it on the butcher block and then cut it up. Sell it. We had some of the best beef. We used to have a gentleman by the name of Choy who worked for us as a butcher. He was also a cook one-time for Jack Burns, the governor. So he used to make corned beef for us. We sold the best corned beef. Everyone would stop by for that. He'd take the

best cuts for Governor Burns. He used to go over and cook over there. He had the best of everything.

A.C.: You went into the military before that (1950).

Wilbert: Army Air Force. Back in April 3, 1946 and I went in. I was transferred to Lackland. Those days it was called SAACC (San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center) Air Force Base, SAACC Field. Did my training there in Texas, San Antone (San Antonio). (Describes renting a canoe with Charlie Yee on the San Antonio River, electronics training in Boca Raton, and transport to Germany) We were there for security. We used to our C-47s and C-54s from Furstenfelder?? to Wiesbaden to pick up whatever they wanted to send to Berlin to the American sector. We had to fly in the corridor. Fighters flew escorts just in case. I was in the 9<sup>th</sup> Photop, which meant our planes were all black. They had cameras. Every night we'd fly over Russia and take pictures. Fortunately, I didn't have to fly. (Describes the camera and plane weapons.)

A.C.: So this was your first assignment. How long were you there?

Wilbert: I was there in Germany for twenty months. From there, I came back. Went to New Jersey and took the train all across the country and stopped at Hamilton Air Force Base. From Hamilton they flew us back to Hickam in, I think, C-97. I can't remember. I think it was C-97. (Arlene asked if there was a group of them from Hawaii.) There was a group of sixteen from Hawaii. We took basic training together. After that, we all got separated. We went into different fields. I was fortunate enough to be given electronics.

A.C.: Did you feel like a fish out of water when you went to Germany?

Wilbert: When I went to Germany, it was a funny thing. There were a lot of local boys there. As soon as I got there, we had this guy by the name of Eugenio. He was a clerk there. "Eh you're from Hawaii?" He said, "Come by the biergarten this afternoon at 4:30. All the local boys drink there." The first thing they asked "You want a girlfriend?" I said, "Yeah. I don't mind." I'm only eighteen. So okay. This guy says, "I'll have my girlfriend bring my girlfriend." So she brought her girlfriend. Okay. They said, "Wait three days." "Okay." They brought her on base. They gave her---took shots, blood test, made sure she was clean. So after three days, everything came back. "They're okay." Her name was Maria. (Turning to his wife) I tell her all these things. I've got nothing to hide! That was before we married so it's okay. She's not the jealous type. I like to tell her everything I went through, because I might, fall asleep and talk in my sleep. I might call her "Maria" and she'd say "Whoah!" (Everyone laughs) (Tape stops)

A.C.: So you're part-Hawaiian?

Helen: You're Chinese but he has--

Wilbert: We have our Hawaiian cousins. Uncles and aunties. Don Ho was my 2<sup>nd</sup> cousin. Don Ho's dad and my dad were first-cousins. Do Ho's grandfather and my grandfather were brothers. So you know, we're pretty close. I consider myself a little Hawaiian.

Helen: Whenever we see Hawaiians and the Ho name, we ask, "Who's your grandpa?" because we don't know the children.

Wilbert: Yeah, they've got so many Hos down Waimanalo.

Helen: When we see them they say, "Oh! The *Pake* cousins!"

Wilbert: "Oh," we say, "The *Kanaka* cousins!"

A.C.: When you were growing up on the Waiawa side, your mother was Chinese.

Wilbert: Pure Chinese.

A.C.: Was the market Lehua Market?

Wilbert: Lehua Market used to be down on Pearl City Peninsula. That was my granddad's. My grandfather started that, along with the sons, you know. My dad. My uncle Lefty. My uncle Bert. My uncle Ed but he went downtown. He had Max's Market on Montsarrat Avenue. Then, who else? We had three girls. Auntie Alice. Auntie Lily and Auntie Bernice. Now I've got only one auntie living. Auntie Bernice. She lives in---

Helen: Fremont.

Wilbert: Fremont, California. She's in her nineties. But I call her up about once a month. She's able to talk to me.

### **President Roosevelt on Pearl City Peninsula**

A.C.: But down at Lehua Market and the peninsula, that was a different kind of community. That was a different kind of community. They catered more to the local people?

Wilbert: We catered to the local people plus we had a bunch of rich people who lived along the---

A.C.: Shoreline. Then you had the Pan Am---

Wilbert: We had the Pan Am clipper. I saw President Roosevelt. FDR. Got off the

China Clipper, I think it was. His motorcade came right up Ashley Avenue, made a left turn on Lehua Avenue and went all the way up to Kam Highway and went into town. But we had the opportunity to see him.

### **Wilbert and Helen's Wedding**

A.C.: So, how did you meet?

Wilbert: We had this market. She worked for my dad in the market. I saw her and you know (Chuckles) she saw me. And she's Chinese. We had Filipinos and Japanese and all different kinds of nationalities.

Helen: But during those days, they said, "You marry Chinese." They probably wondered about it but you'd better the same.

Wilbert: So she caught me. (All laugh)

Helen: No. Not really! (All laugh)

Wilbert: But anyway, we met downstairs in the market.

A.C.: How old were you?

Helen: Twenty-three and I was twenty-one.

Wilbert: We got married right in our house.

Helen: The reverend was a Kalihi Union Church---what was his name?

Wilbert: We got married right in the house. We had a nine-course dinner.

Helen: Prepared downstairs.

Wilbert: The Wongs. We used to cater in. (Tape stops)

(Arlene asked about a recent Hawaii Lions Club project where Helen and Wilbert helped to stencil storm drains. Helen describes project.)

A.C.: Didn't the Lions Club put up bus stops?

Wilbert: One time we were known for bus stops.

Helen: The Lionesses, what we did, when they did that for the Pearlridge and near Anna Miller's---what we did, we furnished them the lunch. We charged them but that's our fundraiser. That's the way we worked together. (Tape stops)

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE

### **Helen Kam's Family in Kalauao**

A.C.: What were you saying?

Helen: You should really preserve this rice bag. What does it say, hundred pounds? When I was growing up, the rice came in hundred pound bags. They never came in smaller bags. My mother bleached that and that's how we had our panties. Right? It was so nice and soft and it was bleached. Once a week, my dad would take the train. We had the train running along the coast. He'd go to Chinatown with his rice bag and come back on the taxi because he had to carry the bag loaded with things. So that's the bag we'd always remember.

A.C.: Oh! So he'd use the bag to carry the things.

Helen: Yeah! You know today how they give you all these plastic bags? I guess we'd better go look for our rice bags! (Chuckles) When he'd go to town, we'd wait for the him. The taxi used to be on Moanalua Road.

Wilbert: We didn't have Kam Highway.

Helen: We didn't have Kam Highway and my brothers would go up. We were called Kalauao. That's how we were referred to. That's where we were born. So we're born and raised in that area. So my brothers would walk up to where Sumida Farm is (now). There was no Sumida Farm at that time. We'd meet the taxi and help my father bring the things home. We always looked forward to that because we'd cherish the orange! Always we had half an orange. It was a treat because we never had fruit you know. As we were growing up, we had our own vegetables. We had the cow. Milk. We didn't have a refrigerator.

Wilbert: No electricity.

Helen: No electricity. So my brothers would be milking the cows before they'd go to work and our refrigerator was our Kalauao stream, trimmed back. We had it in the bottles hanging in the water that would keep it clean, you know. So we'd go to school, we'd have *koko* in the bottles. That was our lunch. We walked to school from there, Kalauao. Takes us about, I would say, a mile. Where 'Aiea Elementary School is now? That was the only school in 'Aiea. I don't know if you read about it. I went to first grade. There was no kindergarten. First grade to ninth grade. Each grade had three classes. I think there was twenty-one in each class. That was growing up. But our lunch, as we're walking up, where all the shopping centers are there now, used to have all these mama-san and papa-san stores---

Wilbert: On the boardwalk.

A.C.: On Kauhale Street?

Helen: One was a laundry. We had the Down Theatre.

Wilbert: Tin can theatre.

Helen: But we always stopped at one little store. It was a little stand. We had snails. You know for our lunch. Can you imagine that was our lunch?

A.C.: (Misunderstanding) Freshwater snails?

Wilbert: (Chuckles) They called it snails.

Helen: You know cinnamon rolls?

Wilbert: From the bakery.

Helen: We called it the snails. We bought them. My brother would buy each of us one.

Wilbert: Five cents for one.

Helen: We all had lunch with our milk. I'll never forget one year. My first grade teacher. You know, we come from a poor family. She offered me her banana. When we left school, my girlfriend Jane and I said, "Let's go see Miss Hermanson and find out where she's teaching." So we go and visit her because we remember her. She was so nice. I'll never forget her. But we walked to school and we didn't have any shoes. Have you ever walked barefoot on a cold morning. Did you ever do that?

A.C.: No.

Wilbert: We'd walk on the track.

Helen: Oh no. We had the road start to come in. No sidewalk. All gravel and it hurts you know. We never had shoes until the fifth grade. I had hand-me-downs....My cousins. They lived in the city...Once in while, my mother would buy some material and my cousin would sew for the year, you know. We wore it two times for a week. You know, today's children take it off every day and change and that's it, wash. We'd jump in the water, in the river, with our clothes on! Until today, I say, "How come my mother never did sew us any swimsuits?" We got in the water with whatever we had. We jumped in the water.

Wilbert: You'd wash your clothes too.

Helen: We wanted to swim right? On top of that, we did our hot water with firewood. We didn't have electricity. We used our water. Everything from the river. We'd boil a big can of water to take a bath. I say, "Why did we take a bath? We always swim!" We'd swim to clean, right? Why did Mom tell us to take a bath? We always took a bath. We always did that. Then my job was everyday---my job was to get the water. I was about ten. We had a barrel. It must have been---how many gallons?

Wilbert: Fifty-gallons.

Helen: I must fill the water in the barrel. With a bucket. Get from the river and put it in the barrel. The other thing, I remember my grandparents came from China. They started the rice field in this area. My youngest brother has done the genealogy on the family and he found the ship they came on. The name. 1883. Came in and a year later brought my grandma and they settled in Kalauao. That's where we were born in 'Aiea. Where 'Aiea Kai is? We were the only family there. Our water was---you know where Sumida watercress farm is? Monterey Bay restaurant? There was nothing there. There was a water pump there. There was a waterfall. There was so much spring water.

Wilbert: The water used to shoot out of there.

Helen: It was a huge thing, you know. It was like a huge waterfall. Spring water. In fact, we had a sort of like right-of-way to that because the Filipinos would come by, with their net. They want to get the shrimp and if they go beyond our side, they'd mess up the water so we'd call the plantation.

Wilbert: The plantation police.

Helen: They would come and tell them they can't do that. It was our right. That was our drinking water. It was so clean. Then we had everything as I said. We had our own vegetables. Fish out there. Lot of clams and crabs, and I miss that. I wished today we had Hawaiian crab. In the morning, maybe if we didn't have any food, my mother would tell my brother, "Go out there and get Hawaiian crab." At that time, out in Pearl Harbor, at low tide, you could see the hole. You could go and get the little crab. I wish today, I wish I had the little Hawaiian crab. My mother would peel it and shell it and fry it with egg. I miss that. But you don't see that anymore. Even clams, and all the city people would come during the season. They would come and visit us, right? (All laugh)

A.C.: They want to go clamming!

Helen: They would clam, and we'd have all the clams. My mother would boil the clams, and we'd have chowder! Then Samoan crab. We had a huge fishpond there. You know where 'Aiea Kai is now? Until today, I wonder how 'Aiea Kai went over the fishpond. There is a pond. They covered the pond. They're not supposed to have done it.



Wilbert: It's supposed to be preservation (land.)

Helen: They went over it. Where the river curved around, I didn't know until later when I visited it, how did they do that? They covered our pond up.

A.C.: Your family lived on the shoreline? Or further up? Below the railroad tracks?

Helen: Above. Right above. If you followed the stream, halfway 'Aiea Kai The pond was right there. As it curved to the train tracks.

A.C.: Was there a name for the bridge?

Helen: Twelve Bridge. The next one was Eleven (bridge). But we were close to the Twelve (bridge). My brother had his canoe there. You know, during those times, they made from the tin can roof? They would pound it smooth and we'd tar, we'd make a canoe. What would they make for the rudder.

Wilbert: *Hau* branch. Not the rudder. The outrigger.

Helen: He would go out in Pearl Harbor when it was low tide. He'd make sure he'd come back low tide because high tide, he can't get underneath the bridge. He goes out. He goes fishing. We had all our food off the land. I remember my cousin from the city. He says, "Oh, that red cow. I was so scared by it. I would jump in the river, you know!" Minami. There were some piggeries. So my mother---she helped raised some of the piglets. Minami brought some of them. I don't know how much she got paid. She did all that. In the evening, about four o'clock, when she's free, she's chopping some honohono grass and boiling that for the pigs. So by four-thirty, it's my job was to cook the rice. I must have been ten, twelve years old. My job was to cook the rice with the firewood. Then, when I was about that age, I loved to read. I'm reading and she would scold me because I didn't cook my rice on time! Later on, when my children were growing up, they would always say, "Go and read your book, Mom!" I wanted to read and my mother was scolding me because I was reading and didn't cook my rice. That was my job. We had another job that I was given, in the evening, always light the kerosene lamp. We studied by kerosene lamp. We learned how to chop the wood and gather the wood before it rained. We learned how to cook rice. I miss eating that roasted part, the crusty rice. I've said sometime, let's build a fire and cook rice. Let the children experience that. We don't have that.

Wilbert: The pot would get black all over.

Helen: Yeah! Another part. We used the ashes. That was like using Ajax. Did you ever use that to scrub your pot. It really cleaned your pot. That was what we used growing up. Hard work.

A.C.:           What did your father do?

Helen:           Actually, when my grandparents left, about 1922, they went back to China. My mother always talked about the story where she sewed him a vest, and put all the money in. Many years later, I would ask this lady, when I talked about my grandfather, she said, "Oh! They called him the million dollar man because he carried all his money back to China." Both of them returned. My mom was pregnant with the third child. I was number seven. There were ten in the family. So we had all the rice fields at that time which we never did (work on the rice fields). By the time I grew up, we didn't have the rice fields anymore. But there was a large concrete thing that was covered up. We dug it up. They used it to thresh the rice. But we used it as a skating rink! We knew where it was. We were told where it was. My brothers would always cleaned it up. It would get covered up with red dirt. But we used it. So that was our fun and we learned how to swim in the river. So my dad---once a week, he would come home on a Friday and go back on Sunday evening to Wahiawa. His job was handling the rubbish dump up in Wahiawa. As the years went by, the job wasn't necessary so he started working as a janitor for the police department.

Wilbert:        City and County. Wahiawa.

Helen:           He worked there many years. When he retired, they gave him a watch. He was very happy. So Fridays, he'd come home. That's why on Saturday, he'd take his bag and go shopping and buy the other necessities. We looked forward to it. Another thing.

### **Helen Learns to Cook**

We'd walk to school. My mother always gave me money. On the way home, we'd stop at 'Aiea Store. They had a butcher there. My mother would give me the money to buy the meat to cook with vegetables. We'd never eat steak alone. So the butcher would say, "How many pounds?" Always, how many pounds! I can just see that Filipino butcher back there. I don't know how many pounds. So I would look at the meat and study it. I'd point at the one that I'd want. I think I must have bought usually, round steak. My mother would never tell me what to buy. Just go and buy a piece of meat. I would go shopping and bring it home. Learn how to shop and know the size. I think from that I learned how to cook meals when I got married. My mother-in-law said, "You know how to cook, the quantity, how much to serve." It was always enough for the family. In fact, today, if I knew how many people are coming, and I'd say, "You're bringing a friend? No problem!" I learned how to add more so we'd have enough. In fact, when I was working, after that, they would call me "Mama Ho." After we gave up everything when I was married, we didn't have the business, I went out to work. I worked for a subcontracting firm. I would cook. "Okay, who's coming?" I'd prepared and they'd say, "Oh, Mama Ho, I don't know how she does it!" A good way to adjust is to use, by hand, if you're making anything. You'd say, "Okay. One for you, one fore me. Right?" (Makes a fist or palm) But you throw in a handful extra, you know. That was the way I

cooked. So if you tell me how many pounds? I don't know. But just by looking at it, that's the only way. Just like the old times. Never had measuring cups. How much salt? I don't know. A pinch. Until today.

### **Willy's Tavern and Restaurant**

A.C.: When did Willy's Tavern open?

Helen: The restaurant? 1955, my daughter was born. So '56. They sent me to school to learn the restaurant business. I didn't know how to be a waitress. So I could train the waitresses. I was going for three months before we opened the restaurant.

A.C.: Did the market close and restaurant open?

Helen: The market didn't close. When I got married, Wilbert's brother Walter had two girls. At the time, we all lived together here. So when we cooked, we had shifts! The first shift was my mother-in-law and others. The grandfather. The dad. We were the second shift. When I married Wilbert in 1951---Barbara was going to school. She must have been fourteen years old. She learned to cook at fourteen. Later on, she said, "I'm so glad that Auntie Daisy taught me how to cook." So in 1956, the restaurant came up. I was shifted there. Then Walter and Leticia took care of the market. They had the hired help. So as I was there, I helped my father-in-law on the restaurant side. He comes in the evening to take care of the bar. During the day, it's already set; he does the scheduling for the bars and I would do the food. The market shift wasn't that long. The market opened at 6:30. The firemen would come down at that time. So until today, when I see them, I say, "What's on the menu?" They used to come shopping! I would go early in the morning. It wasn't busy and later on, I'd come upstairs. The market closed at 9:00 and closed on Sundays. But when I went to the restaurant, it was 9:00 in the morning all the way until 10:00, and on the weekends, 12:00 at night. That was my shift. Work on Sundays.

Wilbert: Sundays was busy.

Helen: Then I never had a regular day off. So he would---he worked for the government, it's different---I can't go out, but Mondays, it was a little slower, he'd say, "Let's go to the movies." But I'm working for his dad! He's not. Everytime, I'm sitting in the theatre and I'm seeing his dad's face! But I never did tell him that.

Wilbert: Now I know how come you used to punch me!

Helen: Because I thought, "Oh my goodness! He must be busy!" He never did scold me but I just go to the movie and then go back to work because---four o'clock, we get busy. During the day, I'm gone. Usually Monday or Tuesday. Sundays, we would pick up my daughter and she'd stay with my mother. We'd take her out and in the evening by four o'clock, I'm back there; I'm working. But I'm thankful for him that he

was working at Hickam, they would send him off to school, right?

Wilbert: Yeah. TDY.

Helen: He'd have a month, maybe two, three months. He'd be away at school and when that was over, my father-in-law would let me join him. Sometimes we'd take two weeks or so. Three?

Wilbert: Never three.

Helen: Two weeks. Or maybe a week. But, we were able to go, in 1962, we were able to go to Europe. When we went to Europe, that was longer, twenty-one days. In fact, I got kinda worried. He had an attack at that time. Kidney stone or some kind of problem. He said it was alright to go. So after that tour in Europe, we got to New York and we were going to Seattle. They had a world's fair. I said to call your dad, to see if he's okay. He was, so we went to Seattle and saw the fair. To this day, I say, "Your dad. He let me go. Right?" Later on, I was able to take care and run the restaurant, and he was off. I'm running the restaurant. Somebody had to be there. I had to have a police---

Wilbert: A badge. A special police badge.

Helen: From the city, to take care because we were selling liquor.

Wilbert: We had a bar.

Helen: We had liquor so somebody had to be on the site. So I would be taking my nap there and I'd tell my two waitresses, when it was four o'clock. I use to set my clock to take short nap. I'm working right through from early morning to one o'clock, two o'clock unless he comes to relieve me. I'd stay there all through. Usually I'm home by twelve. Weekends. So the girls---one day, she didn't wake me up. I said, "Alice, you didn't wake me up." "That's okay. It wasn't busy." So I was lucky that I had good workers. Even today when I eat won ton, I say, "The person who makes won tons must be fat!" (Chuckles) If you're slim, you make it real nice; you make it slim, the won ton. But if you're heavy, you make it a big filling in there. I always say that. That's the same with the waitresses. Lots of "filling" in there. When I'd hire the waitresses, I'd watch how they walk. If they walk, they have that snappy walk, I'd say, "That's the girl I want." (Laughs)

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO

Helen: When they were in the bar, there were these people asking for, like, protection money.

Wilbert: So my dad---

Helen: He said, "We might as well drop the business, so we don't have to work so hard,"

A.C.: So they were trying to extort money?

Both: Yeah.

A.C.: But this has been a fantastic place. Location-wise.

### **Willy's Market**

Wilbert: Oh yeah. It was. You know everybody told my dad, you know, they were making a big mistake. There were no houses around. Right in the middle of nowhere. From the get-go, we started, it was so busy, so busy.

Helen: There was only one market.

Wilbert: (Laughs) From Wahiawa, Wa 'anae, Hauula.

Helen: They all stopped by.

Wilbert: My dad had good connections, I forget what his name was. Started with an "A."

A.C.: Like a wholesaler?

Wilbert: Yeah. Amfac.

A.C.: Oh! Okay. That's a biggie! That's one of the Big Fives!

Wilbert: Yeah. That Portuguese man. Almadova. Something like that. Used to give my dad the whole shipment.

A.C.: Of the rice?

Wilbert: Yeah! The truck come right over here and deliver everything. I remember those days when I was young.

Helen: Well, your dad always said---

Wilbert: He pays cash!

Helen: He pays cash. "I don't want to charge," he says, "The point is, I don't want anybody coming back to me and say I owe money. So I have the money, I'll pay." He never charged.

Wilbert: Everything was cash and carry.

A.C.: You know, the old style, the plantation store would give credit and the people would pay. The Japanese style was, they wouldn't pay for a while, right? Did they do that here too?

Helen: We didn't have, yeah? (Asking Wilbert)

Wilbert: No. We had some credit. You remember the books we that used to put the charge?

Helen: Not too many though.

Wilbert: Not too many.

A.C.: So the people paid cash then?

Wilbert: Yeah, we weren't that old that we had the plantation people. We had some good customers.

Helen: You had, when you were down in Pearl City but not here.

Wilbert: Yeah. In fact, I used to deliver and have to --- go up in the morning, deliver the milk. You know, the Standard, and then I'd take their grocery order, come back, pick it up, put them in boxes, paper sacks and boxes, load them on the truck and I'd go deliver.

Helen: See, we didn't do it here.

Wilbert: No, this was not. We never did deliver.

A.C.: It was cash-and-carry. They'd take it out. And then, was the train still running?

Wilbert: No, not when we came here. The train wasn't running.

A.C.: It wasn't even running military. Or cargo then.

Helen: The train ran. 1950. I think it stopped, because I remember in high school, we took the train. I had to go to Waipahu High School. You know we didn't have any school around. We all took the bus. One bus for the girls. One bus for the boys. We took the bus to Waipahu High School... Everything was in Waipahu. The elementary school was only Aiea.

Wilbert: You heard the story about the library?

A.C.: Hmm. No?

Wilbert: You know Waipahu's got the largest library? You know why? Because they have a lot of *buk buks* there! (Everyone laughs)

A.C.: I should have seen that coming! Can I ask you a little about Kam Highway though? When your father had the market here after the Kam Highway was built (widened), was it just a two-lane highway?

Wilbert: It was three lanes.

Helen: Three lanes. Did you know here was a hill?

Wilbert: You know the three lanes was? One coming this way. One going that way, and the middle was for passing lane. Passing right, or even coming the other way for passing, so you got to be very careful when you're driving.

A.C.: And was it always called Kamehameha Highway? Or was it a government road before then?

Wilbert: No. It was always Kamehameha Highway, because Kamehameha Highway runs around the whole O'ahu.

A.C.: But there was a road that connected the train station with 'Aiea town, right?

Wilbert: You know the road by the 76 service station? You know where Wendy's Restaurant is now? Okay. That road used to come out from 'Aiea town.

A.C.: Was that road called the depot road?

Wilbert: I don't think it was called the depot road.

Helen: Lau---Laulima? What street is that?

A.C.: Laulima. It is Laulima and then U'ahi.

Wilbert: But that road used to go, I mean, you know, you could go to the train station.

Helen: Yeah. Right on that corner.

Wilbert: You know where the Admiral's launch (Boathouse) is?

Helen: (On Kauhale Street) Had a Ching store there?

A.C.: Do you remember a Matsuda family that lived, and the Chagami family?

Helen: The Chagami family and the Onishis.

Wilbert: They used to live right in the front.

A.C.: The fishing village.

Both: Yeah.

Wilbert: Right in the front where the Rainbow Park is now. That's where the Onishis lived.

### **December 7<sup>th</sup> in Kalauao**

A.C.: So, December 7<sup>th</sup>, what did your family do?

Helen: Oh my goodness. (Wilbert chuckles) My mother was cooking because we're right by the river. She was cooking. Then we heard all this commotion, so there were three (four) of us. Even my younger sister and my two older brothers above me, we went down to the train track. We saw all this thing going on. We even saw the plane flying. It was so close! You could see the pilot. He's so low. We looked out there. We saw all the ships were aflame, so we said, "Oh my goodness!" We saw that red thing. We got scared. Our kitchen had a huge tree that grew over us. What was that tree? Monkeypod? Not monkeypod.

Wilbert: Banyan.

Helen: Not banyan. The one they used that wood.

Wilbert: Tamarind?

Helen: No. But anyway, it covers our kitchen because the house before, always separated the kitchen. It was separate. So that's another thing. When we went back, nobody was home. My brothers Charles and Robert were supposed to go to town to go shopping. I think their job was to buy feed for the animals, you know, we had all the chickens. The turkeys. So my mother about that time was cooking breakfast for us. With all that, we went down where the train tracks were. We saw all the ships on fire, so we went back home. My older brother was home, so we got into his car. In the meantime, my two brothers were watching all that, right by the bridge by the (U.S.S.) *Arizona*---there's a bridge there. So they saw all the flames there. The ships on fire too. At that time, they used to park the ships. There's always three together, you know, so



there's all that flame there. So that's why, later on, they separated. Anyway, the two brothers came home. We all got into the car. I was eleven at that time.

### **The night of December 7<sup>th</sup> up Waimano Home Road**

We went up Waimano Home too, and we saw his (Wilbert's) family but I didn't know Wilbert at that time, but we knew the family, you know? So they gave us.

Wilbert: We furnished you guys all food. We went to Waipahu.

Helen: But how come they didn't take us? We stayed there overnight.

A.C.: Could have been because you were 'Aiea and they were Pearl City.

Helen: But we were all in the same place. Waimano Home.

A.C.: Are you talking about a couple hundred people were up there too? If you're talking about people from Pearl City, Kalauao, Waiau?

Wilbert: Yeah! A lot of people.

Helen: We didn't want to stay near there.

Wilbert: Not close to the Pearl Harbor.

A.C.: Weren't there people, I don't want to call them, the pupule people (at Waimano Home.) Is that how far you went up? How far up did you go?

Wilbert: No. Not quite. There was a reservoir on the left-hand side going up.

A.C.: Okay. So the reservoir.

Helen: We stayed there. We saw where the plane was attacked and later on, we heard that it was our plane that was shot down.

A.C.: I heard that one of the planes crashed too, in Peninsula. On the hotel side.

Wilbert: Pearl City Peninsula on the left side.

A.C.: (Arlene mentions some people talk about taking wreckage) In some of the crashes, some of the American pilots died.

### **During World War II in Pearl City Peninsula and 'Aiea**

Helen: You see, we weren't allowed to go home. We were right there. The

military had taken over because we were so close to Pearl Harbor.

A.C.: Did they take anything from your house?

Helen: Well, what had happened, we went all the way to Kaimuki and stayed with my father's youngest brother. They had three children. So we all stayed with Uncle Raymond for several weeks. Later on, when we got back, my older brother went back. I stayed for a while with them. But the family had gone back. I came back later. But all the poultry, all of them died because nobody was there. But we had radio. That's the only way we heard about all of this communication was by radio. Then, another thing, because we used wood stove. That has a lot of lights... We had to make a black-out. All of the windows had to be shaded down, so the light doesn't shine. From that time, my brother, my older brother had purchased a kerosene stove so it wouldn't be so bright. Later on, we cooked with that. All the windows had the thing on that so the windows wouldn't shine.

Wilbert: We sort of had a canopy over the windows.

Helen: Even the cars.

Wilbert: The cars had the blinders. There's a small slit so that you can see when you drive.

Helen: Then we would go to school... We had gas masks. We had trench. At 'Aiea School, we always had a drill. We all go into the trench.

Wilbert: Everybody had a bomb shelters.

Helen: Ours was near the pond. When high tide, the water comes in a little bit on the bottom. When the air raid signal, you hear it. Even the dog. My youngest brother Kenneth must have been about five years old and always held the dog. Even the dog suspected. He was so quiet. He just stayed there. But when we went into there, wow, it was so bad; there were some mosquitoes. And you're afraid, right? But you wonder, if the bombs came, I wonder how we'd be protected if you think about it! But we all had that. That's when we all started wearing---my mother made slacks for us. So most of the girls at that time wore slacks. (Wilbert thinks it was a precaution with so many military men around.)

A.C.: With thousands of people moving in, and I understand there were different camps set up.

Wilbert: We had military all over. Pearl City Peninsula. All in the *kiawe*. It was set up.

A.C.: Yeah. Was there an Italian camp too? Prisoner-of-war?

Wilbert: That's up in the valley.

A.C.: Waiawa?

Wilbert: Waiawa.

Helen: We had one right where, you know where 'Aiea Kai is? The army was there too. Of course, the other army (camp) was in 'Aiea.

Wilbert: We had army all over.

Helen: That's why my mother had someone deliver their leftover food.

Wilbert: Their slop.

Helen: That was for the pigs. There was a Chinese soldier. He was one of the cooks and he knew that we were poor so he always packed some food in there for us! I never forget that.

A.C.: Yeah, with rationing, was there enough food during the war?

Wilbert: There was enough food.

Helen: We had our vegetables. But it was only meat.

Wilbert: The only thing that was really rationed was gas.

Helen: And liquor. They cut that out.

Wilbert: What my grand-uncle used to do, was get all the ration coupons and buy all the liquor from the stores. Then he'd sell it, by the half-pints, to the sailor that come up all the time. They made big money.

A.C.: So, after the bombing, was the pier that was down here, by the navy pumphouse and the depot, was that used quite actively for unloading? Did sailors still go to that?

Helen: We couldn't get over in there. They kept everybody out too.

### **Hospital Point at McGrew Point**

Wilbert: But there was a pier by McGrew Point. This was Hospital Point. They used to call it Hospital Point. There's where hospital ships used to come in. They get unloaded. They had a whole bunch of Quonset huts.

Helen: All in there.

Wilbert: The real bad ones, they took them up to Tripler. The ones, not so bad, injured, they kept them down here in Quonset huts. They got fixed up and back home. So that's why they call it Hospital Point.

A.C.: You mean, the naval hospital where Camp Smith is?

Wilbert: The naval hospital. Tripler came way after.

A.C.: I had read somewhere that the naval hospital had treated a lot of people in the different Pacific battles, but especially Iwo Jima.

Wilbert: The bad ones went up there. Not so much injured, they kept them down here.

Helen: Did someone tell you about Stable Camp here? The hills.

Wilbert: This hill over here used to go all the way down to McGrew. This section right here, used to all high. Okay. During the war, when they built Kamehameha Highway? They cut this hill. That's where a lot of the dirt came from. The rocks.

A.C.: This was a full hill. This went down. Hmm.

### **Stable Camp near McGrew Point**

Helen: We used to walk and had the Stable Camp.

Wilbert: Up here used to be Stable Camp.

Helen: Then all these houses came up. And Southshore. It's a hospital.

Wilbert: We're lucky we came over here. There's this guy. Filipino guy. Taxi driver. He had this property and sold it to Dad. That's how we got the property. From this taxi driver. He owned it. Just this section right here. Burgess had this service station. Then, when the other parking lot came, Dad bought that. He only had half. So we kept on buying.

A.C.: And this is after Kam Highway was built and this was already been hollowed out.

Helen: And that's how I met Bert here, and we married.

### Ho Family

A.C.: Fantastic. My last question is, what do you want people to especially--- people like your family, to know about growing up and being in 'Aiea? Do you have any---this is like closing thoughts?

Wilbert: I'm just fortunate to live here. I'm fortunate that they kicked us out of Pearl City Peninsula, otherwise I'd never be here. (Chuckles) The good part. But I always liked Pearl City Peninsula. Dad had so many homes that we rented, and you know, that's how we got to go to Iolani (School) and all that. Not from where he worked at Pearl Harbor. That was minor stuff. My dad was the first Oriental that graduated from apprenticeship school.

A.C.: Really! He broke the color barrier, you know.

Wilbert: He was in the first apprentice class. He was a machinist in Shop 31.

A.C.: Your dad's name?

Wilbert: William Kok Wong Ho.

Helen: And your Uncle Lefty?

Wilbert: My Uncle Lefty was higher than my dad, because he was a politician. He drank. My dad didn't drink. So he hung out with all these admirals, and when the ships come into drydock, he was a drydock boss. So through association, he got promoted to foreman. But he was smart. Big! Nobody fooled around with him. The stories I heard, was that people would pick on my dad because he was small. Then my dad would tell my uncle...My dad would say, "Meet me down at the parking lot!" And my uncle would come and beat them up. (Everyone laughs)

Helen: I didn't hear that!

Wilbert: A matter of fact, my uncle used to save me when I was bouncing. He and I used to be the night bouncers. He saved my life one time. This guy (knocked) me out and I fell into the planter box...I was groggy. My uncle put him in a headlock and then "Hey Wilbert! Come on! Hit him!" (Smacking sound) I remember. Three times. I grabbed him from the *okole* and threw him out. We called the police on him.

Helen: But he never did tell me what happened.

Wilbert: The following morning he came in and he apologized. Pulled up his shirt. All black and blue. Found out that he was a prison guard. Prison guard. Big guy. Oh God! My uncle and I beat him up.

A.C.: (Laughs) Well, maybe that's not exactly what you want people to remember about 'Aiea.

Wilbert: No, no.

A.C.: But you took care of business. You knew how to take care of yourselves. What about you Helen?

Helen: For me, you know what the funny thing is? We had the money, you know. But because I was brought up, the way I was brought up, I won't spoil my children with money. So we had Uncle Walter and his two girls, and then I had my two girls and my two boys...If they want something, I'd say sometimes we don't have the money. "Well, how come Deedee has?" "Well, if you want your Uncle Walter to be your daddy or Auntie Leticia to be your mommy, then you can go with them!" Of course, they don't want that! So that was it. They never questioned it. In later life, they said--you know, Wilton told me this, "Mom, I really thought we were poor!"

Wilbert: We were! (Everyone laughs)

Helen: When we were growing up we'd make our own things! You know those shingles on the roof? I used to cut them. You know how you make paper dolls? They're all connected? They're folded up? I would make a shape of my doll with that. When you plant the head cabbage, you'd have the stem, the root? I would shape that to make a foot? I think, oh my goodness, that was my toy! We make our things. Today, everything is bought, right? (Helen discusses shopping if she won money in Las Vegas) So expensive. All these things. We spend so much, you know today's children? We spend a lot. But today, we talked about spending it because what are we going to do with it? (The Ho family took the family to China to the family village and some were reluctant) Never mind. Go. This is once in a lifetime. We're going to China. We took them to China. We started off with Beijing. We started all the way down. We had another family of ten, but we split after Shengzhen. We're going to take the children to our village to show them what it was. As we were traveling, we had these five-star hotels, very nice. When we got to the village, because the five-star, four-star hotels are about an hour from the village, so we told the children, "We're going back to the village where Dr. Sun Yat-Sen's area, because that's where the Ho's village is." We want them to see what it's all about. Of course, it's grown now but we want them see something there. We're not going to be in a four-star hotel. We're going to be in a---

Wilbert: No-star. (Everyone laughs)

A.C.: You warned them!

Helen: It was at one time, an army rest camp. Today it's more like a business type (hotel). Downstairs is a restaurant and the relative's nearby. It's walking distance from here to the shopping center. Very close. So we stayed there. We took the bus, because

the other family had gone to Hong Kong, and we took our bus with our children because we're going to the village. So my daughter says, "Is it really no star?" The guide said, "Everyone has a star. It has two stars!" But it's different, right! But you want them to have that feeling that you don't have everything is five-star, four-star! You have to sometimes have to see what it's all about. So this is why we took them to the village to see. To visit. To have that experience. (Shares some anecdotes about their observations) They kind of accepted it. We only stayed two nights and off we went. Met the family. We were there on a Sunday. They all came out. But they didn't know we were coming. I wrote a letter but they didn't get the letter! But when they knew we were there, they met us.

END OF TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE