Interview 1 with John Makuakane, by Kalei Lum Ho Fall, 2000

Introduction Interview: John Makuakane
Interviewer: Kalei Lum-Ho

KL: This is interview number one, September 16, 2000.
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KL: We can start off with, um, basically, where and when you were born.

JM: I was born 1931, November the 16th, Kapoho.

KL: Not `Opihikao?

JM: Not `Opihikao. I was born in Kapoho a place called Pu`uki.

KL: Puhuki?
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JM: Pu`uki. Yeah, Pu`uki. The name that I grew up with was Peter Kumukahi Makuakane. I was named that because of the lighthouse in Kapoho. And of course, there are many ways Hawaiians may have interpret of kumukahi, the main branch, the number one, but I recall, my mother said because where I was born, you could clearly see the lighthouse and the name of the lighthouse is Kumukahi Lighthouse.
stay Kapoho very long, then we moved here in `Opihikao, where I'm now living is where I started growing up. We moved many many different places. We went down to um, Kama`ili, which is about four miles away from here. Uh, it's, it's near the place that we call Kalanihonua now, it's close by. My, uh, mother's dad was living there so we...build large property those days, all in that area. So I grew up part time there, then we moved next to the church here...and I recall more of that time than of any other time. And growing up we moved all over. I moved in Hilo for awhile, during the second world war, for a short period, and then moved back down here. I went to `Opihikao School which is about three miles up the road, then they closed that school and I moved to Pahoa, um, for my seventh grade year and I graduated from Pahoa in 1949.
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KL: When did the `Opihikao School close?

JM: I would, I would say some time in either early or middle 40s.

KL: Is it still standing now?

JM: No, no. There is

KL: Why don't you tell me a little about your family. Some genealogy, your parents.

JM: My mother was born and raised in Kalapana, um, her name is um, Hattie Keli`iwahineoPuna Makua. Then, in the early days, mothers used to give what they call, night names where a dream tells them, they need to name the child, I mean when they're

pregnant or hapai, yea? [KL: agreeing] And my mother was one of those and all of the names given to my uncle and my aunt along with my mother are all Pele names. And, my grandma had a dream to name her four children; she had twelve only the four that received the name that she received the name of lived. The others all died, at birth. So it's my mom, um, two sisters and one brother. And, of course they all carry their Hawaiian names are all after, um, I can't recall the name of...Keli`iwahinepuaoPele, I think was my aunt's name, I can't really remember, but nevertheless it's all named after the goddess Pele yeah. Um, my uncle I'm not sure because when we were growing up he moved to O`ahu that's why. I lost contact with them. My dad...was Thomas Ka`onohiokala Makuakane. I don't remember their birth dates or anything, um. Didn't get too much because as we were growing up, our parents were still in those times where you are to be seen and not heard. So I didn't get to know much about the family, and usually the Hawaiians or the parents would accept you at the older age that you can sit with them, and you can ask questions. But when you're young, uh, it was not allowed, yeah. So for that reason, I didn't get, uh, too much information about our family. The sad thing is that, we would visit different families, and they would tell this uncle so and so, or this is aunt, but never the connections, yeah. get, uh, too much information about our family. The sad thing is that, we would visit different families, and they would tell this uncle so and so, or this is aunt, but never the connections, yeah. C We never did get the connections. So it's really really hard for us now that we want to find the genealogy. We were never ever told the connections, and I understand from when I was very young, at funerals, they still oli and chant and ue. And um, one who was very knowledgeable about the genealogy of the family would be the one at the funeral to then recite and tell the genealogy as the family walked in yeah. They would wail and tell uncle so and so and tell a brief history yeah, to make that connection the tie to the deceased. But we were too young and because we were never taught the language, we never could follow yeah. and know our genealogy, cause it was all spoken in Hawaiian. It was very interesting. I used to be very afraid to go funerals because of that. Then when I grew older, I under--I understand the reason why that they did that. I was very intrigued.

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But then I learned that Hawaiians certainly did not have written language It was always passing on the knowledge, yeah. And only I'd wished that I did speak the language so that I could understand all that was said. My really greatest regret is that I do not speak the language at all. I can speak some of 'em...like, like most any language, you learn the kolohe kind real fast [KL: laughter] that was no different for us. It is with joy that someone like you and other young Hawaiians allowed to speak the language it's a joy in my heart and because we were so so westernized, even when my granddaughter went to Kamehameha School, and wanted to pick up Hawaiian language, my wife said no, the language to learn was Japanese because...Japanese own all the business. You want jobs or anything it would be good to know the language. Now, after she graduated from Kamehameha and started to go to UH Hilo, and decided that's what she wanted to pursue, yeah. Even if she had hard time. And I'm very very happy. And I just hope that the language will never ever again die. 'Cause that's our culture. Without it you got nothing. So we need to hang on to it and [unintelligible]. Hawaiians as a whole generous, very respectful, you know, to the alii`is or to the alaka`i. Hawaiians always

never ever did against, go against anything that they asked the people to do. So then when the western world come around, whether right or wrong, still followed, we became followers more than leaders. And that was stereotyping us and when I grew up I always heard the word stupid. It's gonna stay in us for awhile till young adult age when I really realized I was not stupid. And I, I can accomplish a lot. I have the education to do it. And I'm glad that that is no longer the things that are said today about Hawaiians. And I know for sure there are great Hawaiian natives out there. We do have all this. And not just those who are very vocal today. many many more. They just didn't find it in themselves to come out yeah. I pray that the day will come that they will come out.

KL: You wanna pause?

JM: Yeah.

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KL: Your father, your father was from `Ophikao?

JM: Yeah, yeah. My father is from `Opihikao.

KL: Okay. And you were raised by your grandmother you said.

JM: For, for a short time, I was raised by my grandma and the first school that I went to was in elementary, that was Waiakea, Waiakea Waena School. Waena or Uka I think, that's in Waiakea somewhere. I think was Waiakea Waena. Waiakea Uka would be further up.

KL: And then after that you moved back...

JM: Back to `Opihikao, yeah.

KL: Okay. Last time I came you were telling me some of the stuff you guys used to do here, like when you used to after school. You wanna talk about that?

JM: Well, realizing that we lived in an area where there is no conveniences like there's no electricity, there's no water...so basically all of our cooking was done with, um, outside cooking wood, yeah. So a lot of our chores was to make sure that we got a lot of wood because we'd, we would not only use for cooking but we use it to heat hot water, yeah. Everyday we have to get wood to light the fire to heat up the water for bathe in outside of the cooking. It, it becomes a chore when the parents like my father they wanna kalua pig then it's that much more wood that we have to gather. Um, water was all catchment, but for some reason, I have never seen in the old days where, we run out of water and yet we did not have that large kind of catchment that we have today. We had maybe those kinda barrels that were 200 gallons. Some like in that size and the only one that I knew at that time that had large tank was the church. And because the water tank was in our property, then we were allowed to use the water from the water tank. But we never did too often, use that water. We always had sufficient water. And whenever it

gets, uh, pine damage, not really drought, I never heard the word drought when I was growing up but long spell without rain, not even uh a drought condition.
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We have down here a place we called Pohoiki Wai and that is where we would bathe. It's almost fresh the water. Like a well. Uh, it's natural. Was not dug. It's just a big puka in the ground. I would say approximately 8 to 10 feet deep. And then there's that nice, clear, clean water, almost pure...it's just somewhat what we call brackish but the percentage of salt is very low yeah. So that that is where if uh when we were, time our water is running low where that we don't bathe at home, we'd go down there and bathe. And the women of the village uh just few of them do all the wash clothes, washing down in that area and they washed and they dried their clothes all on the stones you know they don't hang it up. Put all on those large stones and sat around I guess. Talk story and when it's dry they just pick it up and go home. Um...

KL: Where was this place in the area, where was the well?

JM: Oh, um, it's just a short distance from the church, right alongside the road.

KL: Okay.

JM: And, now the...I guess the residents mostly haole now refer that to as "keiki pool." But we always refer to it as Pohoiki Wai.
Uh...the part of my life I was raised in uh Puna and I guess we would not consider that `Opihikao yet we would consider as a name uh Kama`ili. That would be approximately, three to four miles from here. And just to go school we needed to get up so early in the morning cause the bus would come jus' at this intersection here the intersection what we call now Kaualeau and Kapoho-Kalapana Road. And that's all, the bus would come to that point and pick up all the kids in the area and being that we lived so far away we would have to walk up here everyday to catch the bus to go to school. And then when the bus drops us off then we walked back, you know, home. So we leave dark, and during the winter months, we get home dark. And a lot of times it's real hard on us because even late in the evening when we get home, we'd still have to go out gather wood because a lot of times, the weekend gathering is not enough yeah to carry us through the whole week. Uh, it did not provide us with ade--adequate time for studies, homework like that. Real real hard. So what we needed to do, during study hall and usually when I was in school yet, the study hall most of the time is what we call, was the last period of the school day yeah and we try to do most of our homework at that time.
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Um...most of the time we never knew money, what money was...uh...only money we had over here's I guess the money the parents give us to go buy lunch. Cause uh those time all the bus rides were free not like today you would have to pay, yeah. But it was all free; uh school transportation was free so all we needed was money to buy lunch. Other than that, we never had money in the pocket. There...there was no need for it. Uh, everything was available. The ocean, the coconut, the mango season, uh...avocado, which we call pear,

mountain apple, rose apple, and most homes plant sugar cane, yeah, Hawaiian kine sugar cane.
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Uh, games of course were totally different from a lot of the things that we have today. [Unintelligible] when I look back, I don't know if I can truthfully say that it was hard times or not. It didn't seem like we worked hard, um, today probably they would call it child abuse, um, we didn't think so at that time, uh, to us it was part of the family function would be our part, yeah, of supporting the family. Discipline most of the time was not necessary. Uh, the children were so different. They were well disciplined from young. And I've, I've never saw, all the days that I was growing up my youth where parents beat up on the kids or um I saw once in awhile pa`i on the `ökole like dat yeah, you know, um. But other than that, I've never witness, um, anything like that.
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Parents were very religious. Uh, there were always `ohana time, family gathering always, always great time for news and everything else, uh, even if we were gonna take a long journey, there's always time uh for pule. Maybe because I come from, a family who was very religious because my great-grandfather, being a kahu of a church, so maybe I'm not to say that everyone was like us, but it seemed like. And I, I think um things were so different at that time we don't have all the distractions that we have today, that Sunday and church was a important part of our life. To us, that was our time we get to meet friends, family, uh, time like, like the Bible teaches us that we must take, take one day off to rest, yeah. And to us, we appreciated that day cause that's the day we didn't have to do anything at all. Cause our parents, uh, respected the fact that the Bible says that on the seventh day, you rest. So we generally, don't even cook on Sundays. Everything would be done on Saturday and Sunday we just ate. {370} And because our basic and our staple was poi, that was very simple, yeah, just get the poi, mix it and eat. Uh, everything else was either dry, yeah, get dry fish, or uh meat or the very simple salt salmon and....so to us, Sunday was a, a day we enjoy a lot, not...I don't know if I can say truthfully that uh religion had to do anything with it. Although we knew what it was about, why we go to church Sunday. We knew all of that. But because everything was done in Hawaiian, most of the time we don't understand, but we accept the fact that we have to go church. That, that was part of family life, yeah. And things you, you accept and don't question. So you know, Sundays, go church, every Saturday pound poi. These are some of the things that we know we have to do. And we just accept it. So that when I look back now and I see the children of today and my time, they're totally different, yeah. They think you killing dem when you ask them to do some of the things that we grew up doing as part of our life and not even thinking twice about abuse or overworked or.... And I don't know if I can truthfully say, again whether this is a better life than the life I grew up in.
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Um, I've seen things that you nor the future will never see, many things. I've seen when `opihi was in abundance, and I've seen when fish was in abundance. When we wanted, my father would know where to get what you want. You want manini, he know where to go. You want `äholehole, he know where to go. Anything that you wanted, you know, we just go and get the net, throw one time take everything home, and that was it. They always in abundance, because there was abundance of everything and almost every family

raised taro. So the poi, we've always had. `Ulu season, we gather the ʻulu and there's a lot of ʻulu and _____ with the taro. So then the planting would, they would know how much taro would be enough to carry us through the ʻulu season, and know that they would have to plant more when there's no ʻulu.
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Some of the things I remember very clearly. Hawaiians down here in Puna never did look for fertile land to plant taro. It was always on the `a`a, underneath lauhala trees. Just take out some stones, get the amau`u, the leaf, put the huli inside, probably cut one or two trees down, and pull here, cover around, and we just let it go and depend on what kind huli we plant, knowing how long before it matures and we just go back and harvest. Uh, I think it's a very akamai method. They just, don't, no care, not too much work, yeah, in raising taro that way. Today, we know that in the Hamakua coast or, wherever there's plenty lepo, when you plant there's, uh, plenty work. You need to go there, pull the grass, then continue pull the grass, then the taro is big enough to, to block off, yeah, the shade, uh, rather the sun, to get to the grass, they won't grow anymore.
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And then even for snacks when we wanted, we'd always take the coconut, we call that, uh, the haku. Inside part of the coconut, there's a small shoot, yeah, there's a round ball like cotton inside. We take that and that's what we would use for snack, yeah.

KL: That's in the stalk?

JM: No. In the coconut itself.

KL: Oh, okay.

JM: Get the coconut plant, da, da, the coconut itself with the husk around, [KL: uh-huh] then you find the shoot starts coming out, yeah. [KL: oh]. That is the kind that what we call the haku inside. And that is what we break open and we use that. Uh, it's not like cotton candy, because it is firm, but I think it's the closest I can use as an example.

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JM: And for our gum, we used to cut the bark of the `ulu, and we let the sap come out. And then we, we let it harden, and we go back and take it, that's what we used for chewing gum. And the other one is, the method used for paving of roads, were different from the method used today. They used to lay large rocks and they boil the tar, spread the tar, and spread more rocks, different size. Then after they complete, when we walk along the road, we see the tar, we take it, and that's what we chew. Sound gross? [KL: laughter] But it didn't seem that way to us, because every child did that. That was a normal thing.
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When we, when I was growing up here, it was not any more large community as I would see according to my great-grandfather's report. When my great-grandfather was the minister of this church, uh, he started recording from 1855 to 1875 and in part of the report, it shows that he had 500 members in this church. In comparing you know to

today. Today I think I have about 25 members in the church. But at times, uh, more people will attend the service, but they're not necessarily members of the church. I had never had the chance to talk to my mom or my dad as to the size of the village when they were growing up. It is assuming by the report, there must have been quite a large village along the way...and...I also understand that a lot of times, Hawaiians would walk to church from Saturday night, come to church, yeah, and they walk home after church again. So it's not necessarily meaning that the village in at `Opihikao had a larger number of residents, but from other villages, going towards Kalapana side and going towards Kapoho side, there were other, um, there were communities that...but uh, Sunday was an important day for them so they would all gather, that, that's fun time for them. Today, we have fun time go playing baseball, go movie, or do other things, but at that time there was nothing like that so, coming together Sunday was a great day. [long pause]

The one place that I, I'm thinking about now, where we gather almost every Sunday, was a place we call Warm Spring, which is again, it's just a short distance from here. It is now a subdivision. It's uh, a hole in the ground that we go inside, and we need to walk about 75 to 100 feet underground to get to the swimming area. And we spent a lot of time Sunday afternoons in there. Water is real, real warm...clean, clear...but you need light to get inside, it's totally dark, once you get into the cave. And, we didn't have all the, the kind of things that we have today, like flashlights or those gas lanterns and so we'd go get what we call Hawaiian bamboo with joints apart [unintelligible]. We cut one end off and then the other, part on, fill it with kerosene, and put burlap bag on the other end, and that would act as a wick. We dampen it with the kerosene by turning the top upside down and then lighting the torch. And when it goes out, just turn the torch upside down, more kerosene goes on and it brightens again. That's what we used. And kerosene those days was so, so cheap, very, very reasonable. But certainly, going there every Sunday got us into trouble. Because the parents would always tell us, "Don't forget, don't come home po`ele`ele! Don't come home dark time!" But of course, as kids, time don't mean anything to us, yeah. It's a whole bunch of us, we just enjoying each other. Swimming, playing, enjoying ourselves. And certainly nobody own watch. Today, everybody own them. If for even twelve of us was not one of us have watch. So certainly we in the dark all the time. So when we come out, and say well, I think we been here long enough, we've been here couple of hours, not realizing at times, we been there six hours! So when we come out, it's dark...and already, heh, we know what's gonna happen to when we get home. [KL: laughter] But, but, that didn't stop us from going there every Sunday. Laughter.

KL: Could you get lost in there, in the cave?

JM: No, no not really. Uh, we go in there so often, yeah, even in the dark you can go without light, as long as there's somebody in there yeah. So that on the end, there's that light. From outside, uh, the opening of the cave, light shines in, then from the other side, you cannot see the inside, but you so used to...the trail go in is pretty good. Once part you have to climb up. That's the hardest but, when you start climbing up, then you can see

the light from inside, yeah. No, get lost, I don't think so. Maybe if you went there the first time, yes. There is that possibility, that if the lights went out, you would get lost.

KL: Do you know if, the, that was a sacred area before or anything?

JM: No, I don't, I never heard of it to be, um, as such, yeah. All we knew at that time was it, it was a playground for us. That was our Sunday afternoon gathering place.

KL: And today no more?

JM: Well, since they turned it into a subdivision, they closed the mouth of the cave, yeah. But I'm sure the cave is still there, but, I don't think I wanna go swim in there anymore. Not with the subdivision of cesspools. So...can we stop?

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