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Interview 8 with James Ahia

by Charles Langlas, 8/19/88 and 8/31/88

(Note: The first interview was accidentally unrecorded, so only handwritten notes are available. The second interview covered much of the same material. These notes are mostly a transcript of the second interview, but notes from the first interview have also been inserted, as noted, where they amplify the transcript.)

I. genealogy

C: I want to ask you to tell me again the names of your parents and your grandparents.

J: My great-grandfather goes under name of Mala'o. And now I find out his last name should be Kalaemakani, no? [James discovered this from a letter signed by his great-grandfather in the book Ka Buke Moololo o Hon. Joseph Nawahi.]

C: Is that the same name that was given to your father?

J: Yes, his middle name was. And down to my brother, and down to his sons. Yes.

C: Would you start with telling me your parents' names?

J: My father's name is William Kalaemakani Ahia. He's senior. And then my mother was Helen Kahou Elderts.

C: And your father's parents?

J: My father's parents, well, he's James Levi Ahia.

C: What about your grandmother?

J: Well, like my grandmother, well, my grandfather really married Annie, but didn't have any child with her, so he married [sic] Jennie...Auihi Mala'o Kalaemakani. And from her grandfather had two sons and a daughter. So my father bein the oldest, then my auntie Julia Nalei Ahia, and then David.

C: Those two grandmothers, they were sisters?

J: They were sisters, yeah. So his married wife didn't bear a child, so. Don't know what happened. Later the sister, and then...that's where I come from. (laughs)

C: You don't think was...you know I've heard of those kind of arrangements, if the wife didn't bear, then a relative might bear. You don't think that was an arranged thing?

J: I think so. Cause even in the Japanese, I know they had a family and then they had a daughter. And that's the only child they had. Their daughter married to a boy, and with the understanding that the boy will change his name to her side. I've seen that, Japanese. So I don know how the nationality, but I know Japanese they do, lot of it.

C: So this might have been a similar way?

J: THAT's what I think, yeah, could be. So I don know how the Hawaiians feel about it, but.

C: Nobody talked about that?

J: No, I don't hear anybody talk about it.

(bit omitted)

C: What about your grandparents on your mother's side?

J: Well, my mother's side is the Elderts. So she came from the

Pe`a family, and then married Elderts.
C: Would you tell me their full names?
J: The father is William Elderts, mother is Kilohana...Pe`a.
C: You also knew I think the father of William Elderts.
J: Oh, what was name Ma? the old man, Elderts, the blind one.
My greatgrandfather...Johannes Elderts.
E: Johannes Emile Elderts.
J: And didn't have his wife's side, no? That's one thing they
didn't have. But I know he lived to 105.
C: Do you know about how old you were when he died?
J: I think I was ten years or something lidat. I know how he
looks like.
C: And then your mother had a brother I think, yeah?
J: Oh, my mother, yes, had a brother...William. He's the
father of Mrs. Minnie Ka`awaloa.
C: Did he have a Hawaiian middle name?
J: I don't remmber.
C: They never called him by that?
J: No. They just called him Willie Elderts, that's all. And
us we just call 'im Uncle Willie, that's all.

[from 9/19/88 interview:

J: My father is William Kalaemakani Ahia, and my father's
father is James Levi Ahia. My father's father married Annie
Kalaemakani. And she didn't have any children, so the one that
bore the children was her sister, Jennie Auihi Kalaemakani. My
father was the oldest child, and after him was my father's
sister, Julia Nalei Chang Akana, and then my father's brother
David Na`ole Ahia.

My mother is Helen Kahou-o-kalani Elderts, and her mother is
Kilohana Pe'a. Her father is William Elderts. My mother was the
oldest. And then William, that's the father of Mrs. Ka`awaloa,
Minnie. And then one other sister, but she died.

Then I was the oldest from my parents, and then my brother
William Kalaemakani, and then Jarrett _____ and then my sister
Helen Kahou o kalani, then my brother Abraham Hoapili and my
sister Annie Hina-ulu-ohi`a.

notes:

--Grandmother Jennie always spent most of her time in town with
Nalei, only came to Kaimu on visits. Grandmother Annie the one
who took care of us.

--Grandfather Ahia was a strong Christian because he was at
Boarding school with the missionaries. His GF wanted James to go
there too and learn carpentry, but it had closed down. He
started Paia`ala church in Kaimu (with others), but before James
was born. He went every year to other islands for church
conferences, and also to the island conference, as delegate from
the Kalapana church.]

II. mother's early life

C: You told me last time about your mother being raised at
Panau. Could you tell me some more about her life there?
J: Well, she say she enjoyed living there. Cause everything

was there. All you gotta do is to work for it. And then you can grow anything at near where she live. Have onion, watermelons and all kinda vegetables you want, uh? And only the taro patch, well, that the men go way up. That's miles from where they live. Cause you can't grow anything down there like taro, need deep soil. So they do taro way up, then down just sweet potato and all that, vegetables.

- C: So they lived right down...
- J: Near the beach, yeah, near the beach. Get all the fish, and then get all goats for meat. And then, they live on goat milk. If you want goat milk, well they have goats there.
- C: The place where they grew taro, was that Na`ulu or something?
- J: Yeah, above Na`ulu. All National Park now, 'as way up.
- C: Is that the place where the Pe`a house was?
- J: Well, the Pe`a house, they lived near the beach too, way down. They were all community.
- C: I thought there was a Pe'a house up mauka.
- J: Could be I think. I think later one, most likely. Cause the Pe'a's used to get a lotta place, used to go way down near the Waha'ula, around there they used to have their dairy. And that's where they had they corral. They was raisin cows there. They still have the stone walls around. They say that's Pe`a's corral yeah? Pe`a-Elderts corral, something lidat.
- C: Not in Lae`Apuki?
- J: They have I think, for one, Lae `Apuki. And this [the one mentioned before] is right in Kamoamo. That's where that. I think Helen would know more about that. In fact I think most of the land there was all the Pe`a's. Cause when they turned over to the National Park was Pe`a's, so my mother had a share on that. Had some money and all that.
- C: She lived there you think all the time till she got married?
- J: No. I think before she got married, and then they move up to Waiholoku`i.
- C: How did she go to school. Or did she go to school?
- J: I think they had school. I didn't ask here where she went school, but I know she went.
- C: And then you told some story about when the men went up too...
- J: Oh, when they go up to pull taro and all that, they prepare the imu and all, already. My mother used to say that. An' I hear plenty about that too. And then the men go up and get the taro and all, and then before they leave, the taro patch is way up, then they burn a fire, smoke signal, for the ladies to light the imu. By the time they reach down, the imu is ready, the stone is all hot. And then ready for kalua the taro for make poi. Three or four hours in the ground, the taro be cooked and ready to work on, to be made into poi.
- C: Do you think there were lots of people living in Panap^u?
- J: Yeah, there were, lotta people.
- C: Did you ever hear anything about Kealakomo too?
- J: Yeah, Kealakomo used to, I think my wife's side's Kealakomo.

C: That was different.
 J: Yeah. But they all Hawaiians. They know each other. The Makaimoku's [Frances Ahia's grandfather's family] I think used to live there. So they musta had lotta Hawaiians all over. Cause you don't have to worry for meat. You have all the goats, just kill the goats. Dry em up or salt em. Then you have the fish down the ocean. Just go and get it when you want to.
 C: There must have been some canoe ladder down there too I guess.
 J: Yeah. I think the Hawaiians they all had that.
 C: Anything else you remember?
 J: Um. That's all. Cause I know my mother used to tell, oh the onion, leaf onion, used to grow. Oh used to be good. Then they pick up the goats' dropping for fertilizer. Cause...from the pahoehoe or something lidat. Cause mostly when goats meet together, they all bunch up, eh? Then after that scatter around. So they use that.
 C: There's not too much soil down there yeah?
 J: Yeah. No, not much soil. So you have to dig em and bring it in. Get some sand, mix em up. So she used to tell, well, like pumpkin, all that, they just grow. But the regular, like sweet potato, and all that, well, they had to put a stone wall. Cause goats like the sweet potato leaves. So I'm not sure about pumpkin, whether they attack that.
 C: And then you told me a story about watermelons.
 J: Yeah, my mother used to tell about watermelons. Say that just grow on the sand, and you see em all. Growing good, and then the wind blows and then next thing you see, oh, [only] get one lump. Clean around, oh, s'watermelon. And then certain time, when the wind blows [again], you can see all watermelon [again].
 (bit omitted)

[from 9/19/88:

--James grandfather Elderts lived with his wife's people at Panap^w. That's the reason his mother was close to the Pe'a's and always spent time with Helen Lee Hong's mother and father.
 --James thinks they left because there was no more school at Panap^w, and it was too far to the Kalapana school.]

3. grandfather Ahia's family

C: Then we were talking about your grandfather Ahia's parents who went to Micronesia as missionaries.
 J: Yeah, that's what I was told. But I don't know. Trying to look that one. Or unless they changed names. Nobody could find their record, no?
 C: Your grandfather told you about that?
 J: Yeah. So that's why, when he went down under, took his wife. And then she died down there. So my grandfather them more like disowned the father, eh? More like sayin that, why you take our mother down and she had to die?
 C: Oh, he was angry about that.
 J: Angry about that. Then, what, when he went down there, and

then born two daughters down there. And then they came back.

C: And those are the two sisters that you know about?

J: Yeah, I met them.

C: Kekela and Anna?

J: Pekela and Anna.

C: Oh, Pekela.

J: Pikela.

C: Your grandfather, even though he disowned your father, he knew them?

J: Yeah. So I don't know what happened after that.

C: And you mentioned another brother of your grandfather.

J: Yeah, he goes under the name of Ma'alo. I met him.

C: He was adopted by somebody in Honolulu?

J: I don't know. But he was staying with somebody in Honolulu.

C: Do you know whether he was born in Micronesia too?

J: No. He was born in Kohala. He looks all, exactly like my grandfather.

C: So the two of them were left behind.

J: Yeah. When I met him, my grandfather died already. A couple years in back of that. And then went over to Honolulu, they told me, oh that's my grandfather's brother. That was the last time I met him. 1931 I think it was. 'As my first trip to Honolulu. He was small like my grandfather.

C: How come you went to Honolulu that time?

J: Oh, that time was FFA, Future Farmers of America. Chapter 20, Mountain View School. So when I went, I stayed for another week. Had at McKinley High-school. Slept at McKinley High-school.

C: Did your grandfather ever talk about who he stayed with when he was left behind?

J: No. Well, I think he went to Boarding School when his father left.

C: I wonder what age you had to be?

J: I don't know. I think they accept, maybe as long as can take care of yourself. He must be young though, cause he was more like a teacher's pet for Levi Lyman, eh? So that's why he gave him that name, Levi, eh?

4. greatgrandfather Mala`o

C: Maybe we can talk a little more about your other great-grandfather, Mala`o Kalaemakani, cause I think you heard some stories about him.

J: Well. What I know, my father used to tell that, and my grandfather. He used to be a good swimmer, good diver. And, well, he had some superstitions, that shark was his, more like god for him, eh? So, to go dive down, lobsters at how many fathom down, and bring the lobster up. And then my grandmother, Annie, she was a good swimmer. And then she goes and help, go with the father, diving. And he goes out canoe fishing, all that. So, my grandmother was telling, say when she went with him and then one time, diving down

for lobster. And her, she could see they was a shark underneath. And then he just came up. He say, let's go home. And then talkin to the husband [of James' grandmother Annie], all that, well he didn't believe too much, my grandfather. So when they went Kohala, and then my grandfather went along, with family there and friends, on the canoe. And then when he's paddling the canoe and going, and then my grandfather, saw what he 'as doing, he's pickin up 'opelu and, you know, fish, and throwing aside. And he looked, 'e saw one big shark. And right away my great-grandfather says, let's go home. And then they had to come in Mahukona. So all the rest say, 'e say, oh the fish is biting. He say, oh no, go home. Gonna be a storm. They say, oh no, everything is clear. As they comin up by the point, Kohala point and all that, coming in for the landing, Mahukona, oh, they saw all the white waves already. So they tell my [great-]grandfather, oh, you sure know that. But 'e [James' grandfather] say the shark. But he [James' great-grandfather] didn't say anything was the stark. He just keep it to himself.

C: Oh. When he saw it, he didn't say.

J: Yeah. They don't say anything, they just knows.

(bit omitted)

C: So the shark warns him.

J: Yeah, warns him. (bit omitted)

C: That shark had come around from Puna side?

J: From Puna side. All the way to Kohala. I know my father them, always say, well it's only talk. But...My grandfather used to tell, he don't believe that, but...but seeing...what really happened. (laughs) Gee. You would sure like to continue get fish and all that, but, there's a warning, eh?

C: So the other time, when your grandmother saw the shark, that was a warning too?

J: Must be. So, we don't know what was the warning [for], so 'e just say, oh go home. Or maybe, just saying that, oh, you have enough already. And kill the rest for next time.

C: Another time you told me that your great-grandfather had a ku'ula rock.

J: Yeah. They say. Cause my father used to tell, but. They used to tell, don't follow him, eh? So a lotta them, they respect that.

C: During the time he was alive he kept that rock?

J: Yeah. I think he kept the rock.

C: And maybe put fish for it?

J: Yeah, I think the fresh fish or something lidat. He has _____. He has the separate bag, or something like that. Some they say the fresh fish that he pick up from the nets, 'e supposed to take em.

C: So after he died, your father and grandfather got rid of that rock?

J: So I don't know. They usually don't show you where the rock is. That is a secret. (bit omitted)

[Frances shows picture of James with his mother, daughter and granddaughter, taken 9 years ago.]

5. Kaimu now

- C: Then I'd like to ask you to talk about how Kaimu is now compared to how it used to be.
- J: It's entirely, all different. Real different.
- C: Can you describe those differences?
- J: Oh, we had more sand, spread right out, and then had coconut trees. It wasn't much coconut trees, but they were well balanced around.
- C: Not so thick?
- J: Umhm. Not so thick. Thin rows, yeah? and they had all the sand, eh? All slant. It's more like the...and then when get rough seas, and then the ocean take some, and then used to get the bank, about three, four feet, or five feet tall. You can walk by the sand, nobody can see you.
- C: You mean walking on the ocean side?
- J: Yeah, ocean side, yeah. Can't see you. And then my kids and all the neighbors used to play firecrackesrs. Just stick the firecrackers in the sand and light and bang, bang, bang, go right down.
- C: And what about how it seems socially now?
- J: All different. All for themself, individual. Yeah. You paddle you own. Before, everybody together. You need help, they all help. They all get together.

Side 2

- C: How do you feel about the people who've moved in there?
- J: Now? They all different, they all for themselves.
- C: When do you think that changed?
- J: That change after WW2.
- C: Even before outsiders started to move in?
- J: Well, that's when they started move in, eh?, after WW2. And then everybody moving and everybody had all...they were one, two step higher.
- C: They thought they were.
- J: Yeah, they thought they were. They go out entertaining, and USO and all that. So all their lifeway was changed.
- C: Who went out entertaining?
- J: Well, when the GI's get here, they had that USO, eh?
- F: Not at Kaimu.
- J: No, but I mean, they had em at Pahoa, Hilo, and all that. So they all come up. By then, they have all the cars already. Cars, what?, by then. What, about the thirties, and [by then] mostly everybody had cars.
- C: So you think that people going out like that changed things.
- J: Oh yeah, it changed things.

[from the 8/19/88 interview:

--People don't respect anymore--blacks from Jamaica came into his yard at Kaimu to take coconuts. When someone complained, they said it looked like no one lives there. But who's cutting the grass and taking care of the yard then, said James. This problem started with the hippies, in the sixties.

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--James went down after his grandfather died, but not too much until 1933, when his father got a car. (He paid \$250 for a Chevy coupe.) Then they went down Sundays, holidays, sometimes even after work. (Only his uncle was still living down there.) He went down a lot when his children were growing up, but less now.]

miscellaneous--from 8/31/88:

--We talked about the dates that the Star-of-the-Sea church and the Mauna Kea church were built. James says both were built after he moved to Mt. View, and after his grandfather died [1928].

In 1931, he went down to Kaimu during his first vacation, and he thinks the churches were already built. He remembers going in the old gym, by the Catholic church, where they showed movies.

miscellaneous--from 8/19/88:

--The "little shack" they had up mauka for taro work was at Kalewa.

--The Kekahunas in Kalapana, where they went to lu'au's--was Alama's family.

--Taxes included a poll tax on males after 20 yrs. of age of \$5 a year, also property tax. James remembers his grandfather paid Lyman.

--Healing: included pulo'ulo'u (steambath), lua (pressure points for sore muscles), setting bones (using koali, pounded with salt, including leaves, root and flowers), la'au kahea (healing from a distance)

--I asked James about his mother's role, v. his father and grandfather in disciplining. He said yes, she had a strong voice too, along with his father.

Both his mother and grandmother used to dance at lu'au's (hand movements). Besides weaving, his mother also went up to farm mauka, on the donkey.