

# Barbara Kamilipua Nobriga Mahealani Ranch, Hawai`i



They say she is one of the few women in Hawai`i who is capable of shoeing her own horse. As the owner and manager of her own ranch, Barbara's capabilities go far beyond horse-shoeing. As a 4th generation family member to live, ranch and raise a family on the family land in Kona, Barbara, like her mother, Paniolo Hall of Fame member Kapua Heuer, carries a lifetime of paniolo culture and tradition, inherited and learned. Her exposure to ranching goes back to her grandmother, Noenoe Wall of Kawainui, North Kona, and she remains committed to preserving the paniolo heritage passed on to her.

Barbara has kept paniolo traditions alive by using the Hawaiian language and teaching the "old way" of making rawhide, tanning hides, braiding and caring for tack, livestock and the land. She also maintains efforts to preserve the historic cattle pen, Pa Nui, on lands adjoining hers, that was built by Kamehameha the Great.

As a rancher, Barbara is also committed to her stewardship of the land. Over the past ten years she and her family have been fencing 20 – 50 acre plots on their land in an effort to promote re-growth of the native forest. For her conservation efforts, Barbara was recognized as Rancher of the Year by the Kona Soil and Water Conservation district in 1999.

Barbara says that "challenging" is a good word for ranching today, with weather being the number one hurdle. Her beloved Kona has been in perpetual drought. Undaunted, she is developing a drought-resistant strain of cattle. It's this "can do" attitude as well as her capability, initiative and passion for the paniolo lifestyle she is perpetuating, that has earned Barbara the respect of her fellow paniolo.

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*Hawaii Cattlemen's Association*

*Paniolo Hall of Fame*  
with Barbara Nobriga

by **La'i Mitchell**  
on July 15, 2004

at Mahealani Ranch

LM: So I'm going to start with basically the basics. Were you born here in Kona?

BN: I was born in Hilo.

LM: Can you describe your childhood home did you grow up here in this house at Mahealani Ranch?

BN: I spent as much time as I could here. I had to go to school in Hilo but I spent all my vacations over here and I made up my mind early on that this was what I was gonna be doing. Um and I think people seldom make a dream that young and follow through with it but I did.

LM: That's good. Which school did you go to?

BN: Riverside, the Hilo standard school. At the Union School they could still speak the different languages....but Riverside School was the English standard school. And then from there to Hilo Intermediate then to Hilo High then on to Punahou. Then on to Fresno State then on to Cal Poly.

LM: Oh gee...Well you made up your mind early on that you wanted to live here and live on a ranch. What was your idea of fun as a youngster around here?

BN: Oh sliding in the mud. And if we didn't have mud we made mud. And my grandmother had a hibiscus switch and boy she'd whip us. Especially if we went down her driveway and made a mud slide in her driveway.

LM: Oh geez.

BN: That was not her idea of fun. Swimming in the water tanks. We used to ride horse back like Indians... we saw too many movies where the Indians rode bare back and they just put a rope through the mouth? We rode all over like that. Cheetah had a pinto she thought she was the Indian we were the cowboys and the pinto was running away with her so she'd grab the

neck...and she didn't want us to shoot her because cowboys shot the Indians and she went under as she was riding. She still has the horseshoe marks on her chest from that... [laughs]

LM: My God. [laughs] That is crazy. Do you think your love of the lifestyle was inherited?

BN: It's gotta be in the genes. Because you know in today's world ranching is not a lucrative business. What we're doing is preserving the lifestyle for the next generation.

LM: Yeah. It's pretty neat. And who were your mentors that you grew up with and look up to?

BN: Well Pila was a cowboy next door and I kinda became his tail end. And you know just about everything I ever learned I learned from him.

LM: Pila?

BN: Pila Kelii. He started working here when he was a teenager. Born right over here next to where Kainaliu Gardens is. That was all the Kelii homestead down there and he was one of [pause] thirteen kids. He died when he was seventy-six years old. .. maybe six years ago. And he lived right next door to us the whole time all of my life growing up. Except for the stint in the army um he was always here. And I learned everything from him I learned to train, I learned to milk cows, I learned to [pause] to shoe I learned to castrate, I... anything he always took the time to show you the right way.

LM: Was he the only cowboy that worked here?

BN: No we had old man Naluahine. He only spoke to us in Hawaiian. And then there was Noboru Sugai. Um now there was a few that went through here. Raphael Gomes. We used to call him Rayfield. We got *ukus* from his kids.

LM: [laughs] That's your memory of him... [chuckles]

BN: Yeah having to lean over a tub of kerosene with a fine comb they combed my hair and you could see all the [chuckles] *ukus* falling in the tub. [chuckles]

**LM: Ho ho ho [chuckles] kerosene was that the old remedy?**

BN: Yeah kerosene. [chuckles]

LM: Um tell me a little bit about Mahealani Ranch- how it came to be. How did it start?

BN: Well this land actually this whole tract of land um and that includes Paris' and Wall's and us my great grandmother Eliza Roy was granted the right to purchase land from Lot Lunalilo. Ah and that was after the Mahele. And at one time she controlled the land from about 4500 foot elevation all the way to the ocean.

LM: Wow.

BN: And then it got divided up amongst us. We may have divided ownership but the land is still intact. And we are still doing the same things on the land that they were doing back as far as the 1800s. Your methods have changed a bit but actually your style of handling your horses and your cattle hasn't changed much. And this is one area where you cannot resort to 4-wheelers to go out and round up your livestock. You have to depend on the horse or go on foot... it's a rocky land. In 1793 when the cattle were first brought in by Captain Vancouver they were brought here and the original wall still encompasses about 460 acres of land where the cattle were kept. Then in the 1860s my great grand parents built Waihou, their home in Lehuula adjacent to the first cattle pen. And that's the ranch house that we have given to Kona Historical...to rebuild. Um [pause] my my grandmother's brother used to rope with Ikua Purdy and Eben Low and rodeo's were held just up there outside of the Waihou home.

LM: Really?

BN: Well there is a large pen called *Pa Kuni*. Back then the cattle were kind of out in community pasture. A couple times a year ranchers in the area got together and drove the cattle into the *Pa Kuni* where they would separate and brand....and you know how cowboys will fool around after a branding? And that was their rodeo. According to my mother they held a 4<sup>th</sup> of July rodeo every year on her grandmother's birthday.

LM: So that would be the time of Ikua Purdy and all of them and?

BN: Ikua Purdy was a relative. He was the grandson of my great grandfather [pause] um John Davis.

LM: When you talk about the wall is that the wall that they say King Kamehameha built?

BN: The Kamehemeha wall right. Which in some places it could be five to nine feet tall and....wide enough to drive a jeep down the top. Um over the years with rain and run off the soil has built up to shorten the wall. Earthquakes over the years have done damage as well.

LM: Um they say it was built in a day.

BN: If it was built in a week, or it was built in a month, I don't know. You know he was a king he could amass his troops. And I have no doubt that if he got ten thousand men up there that they probably could build it in a month's time um who knows. That part we'll never know but it's still there it's still a boundary wall parts of it are still intact. The greatest predators are the pigs and the Christmas berry trees that grow on it.

LM: You guys actively poison and all of that or pull...

BN: You have to. Yeah you know this has been a wonderful year for us. Our average rainfall here runs between 60 and 80 inches a year. It's been many years since we've had that. This year so far it's probably pushing 50 and this is July. And *mauka* our average rainfall used to be about 45 inches a year and we have not gone over twelve inches in the last eight years. I think our last best year was in 1982 we had 22 inches. We're already over 26 inches. And we were *mauka* driving cattle a couple of weeks ago with Allen and I said to ah to my grandsons Kala'i and Sam, "In your lifetime you have never seen the mountain look like this." And Roy and Chance looked at me kind of surprised....you know they're in their thirties pushing forty and said, "Neither have we." But that's how I remembered it as a kid. Lush and green...I look into the forest and there's grass and it's green when you look in there. So many years we've been looking in and it's rocks and dead wood and depressing and dry. This kind of year it's just, "Wow look at the cattle!" [chuckles]

LM: *Momona.*

BN: Oh yeah! It's wonderful.

LM: What was the main thing you had to do during that dry period? Cause eight years is kind of a long time. You can't just ride that one out doing the same thing.

BN: We had to haul water. We had to supplement um in fact we resorted to bringing feed in by the container. We cooped with a whole bunch of other people and every five weeks I have a forty footer coming in from Washington State and it's just chock-o-block full of feed. I bring hay ah I can custom order whenever I want and I get those big ah tubs of the molasses that you can put out for all stock.

LM: So what are you going to do now to change... now that it's raining again? Is there a major change that you have to make?

BN: Ah in some areas where we have been over grazed it's gonna take a little bit longer for the grass to recover. It's wonderful to have all this rain. The down side are the weeds and mosquitoes. [pause] So now we're out with the poison pump trying to catch those weeds.

LM: Right [pause] there's always something.

BN: Yeah yeah we've always got a crisis of some sort in this business. But you know it's really nice we have not had to haul water since December.

LM: Can you tell me a little bit about this area- the Kainaliu, Honalo area when the family ranching lifestyle was at it's peak and everybody was in it and that was the thing to do?

BN: I think that was a pretty neat era. Probably one we'll never see again. Um [pause] you know it's hard to make money in ranching when you hire a manager from outside and you check in now and then. And you have high overhead with hired employees. There goes all your profit. The old way was everybody get together and help each other. And that's still true in this area today. Where everybody if you've got something really big everybody gets together and helps each other out. And to me that's that's your main source of survival if this is what you're gonna do. Um in it's heyday this was quite a place. Waihou is well known and it was kind of a cross roads to all the people going to their different *mauka* lands in this part of Kona. The old cook

up there always had a pot of coffee or a pot of stew or something on the stove. Oh there's the characters that lived up on the mountain. There was one that lived up at Paleinaaina his name was Moma. Now Moma lived up there for 32 years he never came *makai*.

## LM: Ho. [chuckles] Hawaiian?

BN: Japanese guy small little Japanese guy. Thirty-two years he outlived all of my grandmother's brothers and she was the baby of the family. So she felt it was her duty to take care of Moma when he couldn't work any longer. But Moma had a wonderful vegetable garden up there and they could trap pigs or birds. When he came down he was shocked. Thirty-two years on the mountain...

LM: Oh...

BN: ...he came down there was electric lights...there were cars there's a telephone. Yeah. I think he finally passed away in the sixties....I think he went before or after my grandmother. She died in 1961 and he was just shortly before or shortly thereafter. And we had the old hotel. My great grandparents built their home right where Kuulani's house is here. And she passed on she was the last to go in nineteen seven she was eighty-six years old. And in 1913 they opened up the Mahealani Hotel in Kona and people came from all over we've got the guest register it's about three or four inches thick this great big book. It's amazing people came from China from England all over the world. Ah the Queen of Sweden came....I think in 1917. She was the Crown Princess and Prince Gus the Crown Prince Gustaf her brother. They stayed here. Ah it took three days to get here by touring car from Hilo.

LM: Wow.

BN: They'd go to the Volcano they'd stop over there I think they stopped in Waiohinu and then they'd come on to Kona. And this place operated as a hotel until around 1929 when the Kona Inn opened up and they took the overflow. This house here my grandparents built in 1904 so it's 100 years old this year. And it kind of sprawls and wanders because as they had money they added on. And this house it caught the overflow from the hotel. They were the original B & B! Because they were homes with bedrooms and a kitchen service. And the old hotel kitchen was really neat it's a great big kitchen it had a big wood stove in it and there was a pantry where all the food stuff was and there was the butter room the slaughter room that was all screened. And the separators they used to milk cows every morning and then put it in

these big separators and separate the cream. And you had those churns to churn the butter. Now we'd go down from here in the morning or in the evening anytime we ate all our meals down there. We'd go down there for our meals we ate off of Lokelani china. I used to have my chocolate with my Saloon Pilots loaded with butter....all broken up *pokiwai* in my chocolate. And bowls of Cream of Wheat.

LM: And the building is now your daughter's house ...

BN: Ah. she built on the site. My mother decided to tear it down in the sixties. You know I objected but she was bound and determined to. I would have saved it cause it was a neat old house it was a big old house. The kitchen was huge and well it had five bedrooms and two bathrooms and a shower under the house.

LM: And where did the name Mahealani come from? Cause there was the hotel and the ranch.

BN: My grandparents named it um when we took over here then we named the ranch Mahealani Ranch.

LM: Do you know why they used that name? Was it somebody's name?

BN: No. It was just...

LM: [Giggles] One of those things.

BN: Yeah. And this was Mahealani and Waihou and thats how they referred to their homes...

LM: What were the big events that all the ranching families and kids used to look forward to back then?

BN: The brandings in July and August. The plums! You could always pick plums by the Fourth of July.



LM: [chuckles] Huh so all the brandings were at the same...

BN: Yeah all in the summer and actually they're still pretty much like that.

LM: Oh! So you just help everybody and...

BN: Yeah. We're everybody's cowboy crew.

LM: Right. [laughs]

BN: [chuckles] We go to McCandless we go to...Hoomau...

LM: ....travelling branders. [laughs]

BN: Yeah! Have irons will travel. [laughs]

LM: Did you ever go towards Waimea side at all or mostly just around here?

BN: No from here to Hoomau.

LM: Did you guys used to ship out um from the beaches too?

BN: Yeah. Yeah during my mothers time.

LM: What beach would be used from here? Kainaliu Beach?

BN: No Keauhou. They'd drive the cattle straight down to Kainaliu and then go across....and ship out where the pier is now. And also out on the point um Spalding's house then we built a house right next to Spalding's and there's a cove over there. They'd ship out from there too.

LM: So did you guys kind of move residences during that time?

BN: Well that shipping stopped before I can remember that...

LM: Okay.

BN: ....ah but the ones at Kailua yeah. That shipping day was a big event. That was when everybody went to town everybody was all dressed up...And we could go to Kim Chong Store and buy ice cream strawberry, vanilla, or chocolate five cents a scoop. And soda. Orange, root beer, strawberry, and cream oh God cream was yucky. And the tall skinny bottles.

LM: [laughs] So everybody dressed up...

BN: Yeah! That was good fun. Then after they'd shipped all the cattle we'd go out on the pier on the boom. There was a big rope and we could swing out and dive in the water. Oh that was good fun. [chuckles]

LM: How many times a year did that happen? Just once?

BN: Oh no um God it had to be several times during the year the ranches would all get together whenever they had cattle to ship.

LM: Did you go with the cattle a lot? Did people always go with the cattle to Honolulu?

BN: Quite a bit. Quite a bit. Well that was your only means of transportation. Whenever the ship came in whether you had shipped cattle....or not. A friend of ours worked the midship um he eventually got his master pilot's license and he used to run the ships because he had an international license he could bring all those...

LM: Yeah.

BN: ....ships into our ports where some of the skippers only could come so far and they couldn't come into port. So he would go out but he worked the Humuula. And he said ah the stevedores are pretty smart you know they'd put the cattle in the sling and they'd bring 'em up and they could turn that sling if they were real wise ass guys on the ship...

LM: That's so funny.

BN: ....and then they'd give 'em a jerk and the cattle would let loose. They thought that was great sport!

LM: Is your husband from a ranching family too?

BN: Well he came from a ranching family too um and after we started dating I used to go up to Keauhou Ranch and drive cattle with them and they had ranching land in Hanaipoe. And a dairy out in Kalopa. So he came from a ranching background too.

LM: So you could keep up?

BN: No he has to keep up.

LM: [laughs] What do you think is the most difficult thing you've come across working with animals?

BN: [pause] Well have you ever tried to get a old cow to go someplace that she didn't want to go? Or get a mule to go through a gate he didn't want to go through? [laughs] You know one thing about working with animals is they teach you patience. Yeah animals and kids.

LM: What was the best thing that you've experienced with this ranching lifestyle?

BN: Ah you know it's a rewarding lifestyle um when you sit back in the evening and look at what you accomplished during the day. Or look at what you've done with the kids and where the kids are today and those are your rewards that these kids aren't in jail they're not on probation

um they have an appreciation of the land they have a heart for the animal um the rewards don't come immediately but you see them down the line.

LM: Um hum. Are there things that you had to give up consciously when you made your decision to live this life?

BN: Oh yeah oh yeah but without any regrets. Yeah you know I could have sold out taken that money I could have traveled the world but I don't have any longing to do that. I'm satisfied where I am. I think we've probably got the best possible lifestyle for our kids to grow up in. And those other things are material things that you don't need.

LM: I was just thinking as we talk ...listen to the rain... the rain is just [laughs] pouring....pouring down.

BN: You know when I first went away to the mainland I really missed the rain on the tin roof. There's something soothing about going to bed at night and making it really cozy to hear the rain on the tin roof.

LM: Is this a working water tank?

BN: It was until a couple of years ago and the bottom rotted out over here. I want to turn it into an office that's why I haven't taken it down. If I can only convince the rest of the family that they should do that.

LM: [laughs]

BN: [laughs] Hey we have built so many water tanks *mauka* you know years ago they depended on water holes but that's when it rained like this all the time.

LM: Right.

BN: You could always have water but you know we got pretty proficient at building water tanks.

LM: [Rain pouring down] Listen to it.

BN: Isn't that great?

LM: So when they had the big flooding a couple months ago how was the land- the fact that after eight years of drought and then all of a sudden flooding...

BN: Well of course it ran. It ran and then it got saturated and then it ran again. [laughs] And if this keeps on my garage will get flooded tonight.

LM: Really.

BN: In the beginning I'd go in there and hose it out and clean it all out. I haven't cleaned that garage in the last couple of months because it's just on the inside so the cement floor has turned to dirt. [laughs] Yeah you know it's fine and it'll pass if this is running true to Kona this will probably last through September.

LM: Um hum.

BN: And then come November we'll have thunder storms and flash floods and then we'll go into dry until around March um and this is great this is how it was when I was a kid growing up. If you go back into the weather patterns they started taking weather history around 1901, April of this year was the wettest month in any reported year.

LM: Since then? Really? I believe it...

BN: If you study your weather reports we go through twenty years of dry and twenty years of wet.

LM: Um hum.

BN: Now we went more than twenty years of dry this time I think this last drought started around 1973. And we got really bad. So that was almost thirty years before it turned around so hopefully we're going back to our wet season.

LM: Hm. How long will the green hold before it starts to get dry again?

BN: Well if we go true to form and we run through September, October may be completely dry. If it rains in November ah we'll stay green and generally we'll have two to three good winter storms that will keep us green and carry us through. But we in the last few years have gone three to four months without a drop of rain here. And the years have gone back to back so you never have a recovery period. But Kona is so thankful for every drop that we get [snaps fingers] that she responds like that. And you get a couple of days of rain and and everything's turning green and growing again.

LM: I know you're very fond of your white horses but do you have a certain breed of horse that you'd consider to be your favorite?

BN: No favorite breed you know. So we call my horses RMS.

LM: What does that stand for?

BN: Registered Mountain Scrub.

LM: [laughs]

BN: Registration does not mean good. It's a false thought that people have that you gotta have a registered horse. Does not mean good.

LM: Oh...

BN: So you get yourself a good horse and you breed it to something decent and you get a good baby and that's your foundation and I don't care what the breed is. I don't fancy Arabians.

LM: Mm.

BN: Ah they've got a screw loose for sure. My horses are.. they've got Morgan, quarter horse, and thoroughbred in them. I like the thoroughbred because it gives them a lot of stamina a lot of get up and go. Quarter horse has a nice temperament. Morgan has the best feet of all of them. I had to go to Texas to see that money flowed there and to see that the price of horses really was so that they are extremely expensive. And I looked at those horses that performed for two and a half minutes in the ring and thought, I need my horses to perform for two and a half days. So you look at what performs for you in your situation. [chuckles]

LM: Especially in Kona because they tease Waimea that it's carpet you know and the horses are used to carpet there with the grass...

BN: The first time we took our Texas friends *mauka* driving cattle the cattle were really wild and and they took off in every direction and we were roping them and tying them up and and pretty soon they were drawing their ropes out and roping too and they just shook their heads and they said, "We cannot believe what you folks are doing here. We can't believe you ride your horses in this kind of country let alone you're running them."

LM: [laughs]

BN: And this other guy he was a big time roper and we were about a couple hundred yards away from the corral going down the road he said, "If this was my horse it would have been lame fifty yards down the road. The only rocks we have in Texas are in my driveway." [laughs]

LM: [laughs]

BN: So it's been an eye opener for those people that come up and see what kind of country these horses run in and you have to have sturdy stock. I raised my colts up there from the time they're weaned until I bring 'em down to ride 'em. They take care of their own meals they fix their own beds.

LM: [giggles]

BN: And if they get scraped knees they take care of that too. And when they come down we get on them for the first time you know exactly where their feet are. They've got strong legs, they have brains.

LM: Yeah.

BN: It makes a big difference when you get on a horse off the mountain versus one that's been raised at home with a stall.

LM: [laughs]

BN: And there's no comparing them.

LM: Well like when you folks go down to help ah Auntie Cynda and Auntie Cynnie at Mc Candless and stuff you can't take any horse into those paddocks or they'd be eaten alive!

BN: That's right. That's right. Yeah.

LM: But that's Kona.

BN: That's Kona. Yeah. So you get a horse from Kona one that's been working on one of these Kona ranches you probably have a pretty sturdy mount under your.

LM: Oh. Yeah that's true. Who breaks the horses here? Did you used to break 'em or do you still break 'em?

BN: Now I've got my grandsons to do it too...

LM: Oh...



BN: ....Ziggy and Kala'i. Yeah and the both of them have real good hands. So I let them do that now and I break them saddle break them when they're colts. I'll saddle break them, teach 'em to tie, teach 'em to lead, handle all their feet, and then throw 'em out and let 'em grow up and when they're ready to ride bring 'em back. Saddle them up and lunge 'em around a bit and let the kids ride 'em. I don't need to ride those kind of horses anymore.

LM: What kind of breed of cattle are you running?

BN: Again chop suey.

LM: [laughs]

BN: I'm raising a drought resistant cow yeah they eat rocks and they poop dirt and they don't drink water! [laughs]

LM: [laughs] The finest breed ever made!

BN: [laughs] That's right.

LM: Do you have any of the original bloodlines of horses or cattle still going?

BN: Actually from Edwin's side of the family... um that was our foundation herd. I brought three horses over from Kalopa. The blood line there was that Keawe bloodline that thoroughbred racing bloodline that my father-in-law had. He used to raise horses too. In fact Edwin and I used to race on the Hoolulu Park in Hilo. Cowboy relay races.

LM: Did you beat him a lot? Did you...

BN: We were on the same team.

LM: Oh O.K. Good thing. [laughs]

BN: Yeah. Yeah. But we used to run against guys like John DeSilva. Ah that was good fun we had a good time.

LM: Were there a lot of women running races at that time?

BN: No I was the only one. [laughs] I was the only one doing all of these things for years. But you know it was ah um a matter of survival. I couldn't afford to go and hire people to do all this stuff...

LM: Um hum.

BN: ....um necessity breeds ingenuity. And I learned to do a lot of it by myself. It was in the blood.

LM: Oh yeah. And it still is. I can see it in your daughters.

BN: I got to tell you a story. Ah I don't know which one I think Ku'ulani was riding my big horse Ginger but ah Nahe rode her in the parade.

LM: Oh O.K.

BN: Then and Ginger was probably eight or ten years old at the time she's eighteen now. And we [laughs] were driving cattle *mauka* and [pause] this bull wouldn't go with the herd. I didn't know where these girls were for a while because we had everything in and these girls didn't come in. This bull stayed behind he wasn't going. So Ku'ulani said, "Well let's rope it." So she roped it. Of course the bull started taking the horse and everything with it. She got around a tree and held on until he choked and gave up fight. They tied 'em up. Now what are they gonna do there's two girls there. But fortunately they realized that this bull was two tons and we're not gonna get him back to the corral because he doesn't want to go there. [laughs] So they come back and get their brother and a truck. [laughs] He tied the bull to the truck and dragged the bull down the road into the corral...into the trailer and off to market!

LM: [laughs] Wow was that up here?

BN: Yeah. [laughs] A big black angus bull. Full grown and you know full grown angus bull gets pretty good size.

LM: Yeah! What was your feeling at that time? Were you proud did you want to kill...

BN: I just shook my head I just thought they were completely nuts. [laughs]

LM: [laughs] When are you most happy with your horses?

BN: When they listen to me and pay attention. [laughs] I think it's just the way that you work with them. If you go in there and you're all wired and nervous and your horse is gonna be like that too but if you in there and you're quiet and you work with them they'll be quiet.

LM: Yeah. I did notice in your corral when you had about I don't know fifteen of them in there at the same time they were all calm no biting, kicking and...

BN: No and the stud is real quiet we can ride him right in there with them and tie him up alongside of 'em and they're they're quiet.

LM: What do what do you think is the best use for a horse?

BN: Work. And pleasure. Yeah pleasure um it depends on what kind of pleasure I don't believe in making hot house plants out of them and spoiling them. I think they're a beast of burden and they should live outside and take care of themselves.

LM: [laughs] Yeah.

BN: You take care of the maintenance you make sure that they've got the feed and the minerals that they need but beyond that they're not puppy dogs.

LM: Right.

BN: And the love is not reciprocal.

LM: [laughs] I know!

BN: They're definitely loyal to the bucket.

LM: [laughs] That's a hard lesson to learn.

BN: No you know and yeah people want to get a young horse to grow with the child and bond with the child that's the worst situation you can get into. You can do that with a puppy. But you're not going to do that with a colt.

LM: Right. Yeah. It's good to know that from the get go.

BN: It's never ceased to amaze me that discipline is a fact of life.

LM: Um hum. Are your grandsons pretty disciplined with their training?

BN: They're very disciplined. Oh yes. Very disciplined. Every horse that they have touched has really good manners.

LM: Mm. Are all your grandchildren into the ranching lifestyle?

BN: All but two. Yeah um one will ride say if you're gonna go hunting or something he'll tell you, "Give me a a gentle horse." [tea cup placed on saucer] And the other one doesn't even want to get in the pen and hold the horse. He'll go play soccer or something like that.

LM: Uh huh.

BN: And that's fine you know and if the kids aren't geared that way don't force them. Support what they're interested in.

LM: Right.

BN: Don't try to make them do something that you want them to do and that's a mistake that a lot of parents make cause I want my kid to play football. He doesn't want to but he better get out there and do it because that's what I want him to do. You don't do that.

LM: Um hum.

BN: If they want to play the piano help them in that direction. But don't try to mold them into your personality. I see a lot of that because I teach a lot of kids.

LM: Um hum.

BN: And I see a lot of parents trying to live their dreams through these kids and that doesn't work.

LM: Yeah. But on the flipside, I know I've heard some ah old time ranchers tell their grandchildren not to get attached to the ranching lifestyle because it's dying. What do you think about that?

BN: Well ranching is in its sunset years here. And we are trying to preserve a lifestyle. It's a lifestyle we're comfortable in and I would like to see the kids perpetuate. Once it's lost it's gone forever.

LM: Um hum.

BN: And I think you'll find that in your family too. Your family is trying to perpetuate that too. Um and that's the only way you're gonna be able to do it is working together as a unit.

LM: Absolutely. You have a pretty good unit going huh?

BN: Yeah you know I can foresee this going through the next two generations. Um and beyond that who can say? Time will tell. But I have an idea that the interest will be strong enough and deep enough that they will continue to perpetuate it.

LM: Yeah. If you have any advice to leave with the young kids like Kalai's age and Nahe's and kids that age trying to keep it alive and keep it going, what would you tell them?

BN: Work hard. That's the only way you're gonna achieve. Get an outside job so you can support your lifestyle.

LM: Um hum. Yeah. [laughs] And it's always wonderful to come to your home and see it. It's kind of like stepping back in time cause the ti leaf plants are really really old and everything the landscape is old and...

BN: Look at the size of that plumeria tree behind you.

LM: [laughs] I know!

BN: And the halapepe tree look at that halapepe tree.

LM: It's it's amazing. What's a typical day here for...

BN: Chaos.

LM: [laughs]

BN: Well you start by feeding everything in the morning and depending on what you're doing you know if you're not doing any ranch work you're doing outside work then you just feed, check water and then you go on with your day.

LM: Um hum.

BN: But if you're actually doing something out there the afternoons are usually busy. That's when I have my lessons come in or the kids start roping um or working their horses or whatever they need to do. We had an interesting situation last week. We're trying to get all these animals taken care of before the kids go away to mainland. So we had about two dozen calves to brand and I just finished with my lessons and the kids were waiting for their mother to pick 'em up so I thought come and look come watch see what's going on. And it's all foreign to them. Well this one calf came out and they knocked him down and these kids were standing far away and I was on the other side of the chute. Well we were out of the way this calf got up threw everybody off he got up he ran around [pause] spun no I guess the horse must have spun around anyway this guy [chuckles] clothes-lined this little girl and me but I stood up....and grabbed the chute and when I turned in all this commotion cause I heard the gas cans flying I thought he was going right into the forge she's upside down on the ground and these eyes just huge...

LM: [laughs]

BN: ....oh my God! So then they knocked him down right near the fence and I started to castrate him he got his back leg loose and he nailed me in the knee.

LM: God!

BN: So I had a cut one off and he was up chasing everybody and the other one is hanging out had to knock him down again this poor girl is just completely grossed out...

LM: [laughs]

BN: ....she never knew what hit her. [laughs] God I thought too bad somebody didn't have a video on this.

LM: Geez. What kind of lessons do you do here?

BN: I teach the kids basic riding. You know when my kids were growing up they wanted to do all English stuff. Jumping and all that kind of stuff so that's what we did.

LM: Did you ever compete in rodeos or shows?

BN: No you know I was raising my kids and I couldn't afford to do that kind of stuff. I had to feed my kids and clothe my kids and...um when they started growing up then I would follow around with them and try to support them but they didn't get full on into the rodeos like they are now. And now they're really into it.

LM: Yeah. Did you play, did anybody play polo or?

BN: Oh I played a little bit. Not competitively and just good fun kind of stuff. And you know I I did a lot of jumping and all kinds of stuff but right here on my own. And then as my kids were growing up I did it with them.

LM: So who's feeding all the animals now?

BN: Well Nahe's up on the hill by herself. Um just before you came I'd just come in I'd just been out feeding everything. Everybody pitches in.

LM: That's great. I'm glad that the young kids are doing it cause it's our whole generation coming up trying to be like um your generation really. And it's a whole new set of challenges that we're facing. [laughs]

BN: It is a challenge. I started my 4-H club in 1971. And I started working with kids and I boarded horses. I do lessons and I'm the cheapest one on this whole island but only because I'm looking at that little kid who's peering through the bushes and over the fence and wishing that I could do that. So I started with the 4-H group because there are a lot of those kids around. Kona wasn't like it is today. We were scattered and there weren't a lot of young kids around or



kids that lived close enough to get together. So I started that so that my kids would have playmates. And it just grew...

LM: Can you tell me about some of the cross-island riding trips that you guys have gone on?

BN: Well once we were riding out on the Saddle Road and we got corralled by the MPs. These guys are popping up out of the bushes and all their guerilla warfare and...they're pointing guns at us. Wow. [laughs] Pretty soon here comes the helicopter. [laughs] And then one of the horses took off and ran away down the road. "Who's in charge here?" Nobody's talking. They escorted us all the way to the Girl Scout. We left our horses at the Girl Scout Camp and we stayed at the cabins in Mauna Kea State Park.

LM: Oh God. [chuckles]

BN: They followed us all the way down there they followed us all the way to the cabins. Early in the morning the helicopters are circling around the cabins watching us. They followed us down to the Girl Scout Camp to retrieve our horses. They followed us all the way down to Waikii.

LM: [laughs] You had a military escort. [laughs]

BN: Yeah yeah it was really funny and what we didn't know was the colonels were sitting up on the hill with binoculars wondering who the hell these yellow slickers were. When they corralled us down the Saddle Road they said, "Where did you come from?" "Kona". "Kona?!" [laughs] That was really pretty funny. It was George and Henrietta Gouveia, the Salleys, Rus and Ann Johnson, ah who else was with us? Ourselves well there were about a dozen of us. It was really funny though.

LM: [laughs] That is fantastic.

BN: Yeah. And we got a little ipu and we filled it with water at South Point and George Koike carried it all the way across the mountain and we got to Upolu Point and he dumped it at Upolu Point.

LM: That is great! Did you know everybody whose pastures you went through?

BN: We came across all the way across um from Kahuku to McCandless to Pulehua. We changed horses at Pulehua and we went all the way across the Saddle Road we stayed there we went down I know we stayed at the Bergins place down there by Waikii. And then we went straight down by that Holoholoku Hill...We crossed over by the Puuopelu and went across the road and up behind HPA we stayed at Keawewai.

LM: Oh nice.

BN: Then from there we went all the way across the top of Kahua and came down the Cannery Road all the way down to Upolu Point. And we ended we came back and ended up at Puuhue and from there we trucked everything home.

LM: That is so cool.

BN: It was a great ride. If I were to do it again, I would do it in seven or eight days instead of five and a half cause we really pushed you know 88 miles in two days is...

LM: Yeah... [laughs] That's amazing. But like you said you're what do you call your horses?

BN: [chuckles] Registered Mountain Scrub.

LM: Yeah. RMS. [laughs] The RMSes got put to work. Could you still do that today do you think with all the land changing hands and how long ago was that? Not too long?

BN: [pause] In the Eighties.

LM: Oh. Not too long ago.

BN: Oh maybe we could still do it. Speaking of which one of the funniest stories- I was coming through Kahuku one time. Kahuku's a pretty place to ride it's a very clean ranch and the roads are really nice. Ah Soot guaranteed us that they'd opened all the gates for us so we had

whatever keys we needed. So we've gone through Kahuku we're on the border now and we're gonna go across the top of Ocean View Estates and there's this big pipe gate and it's locked.

No cell phones at that time. We didn't have any. We took that gate all a part. And we all went through.

LM: And you put it back?

BN: And we put it just as we were tightening up the last bolt he comes barreling down the road he'd remembered that he didn't unlock that gate. We were already on the other side! [laughs]

LM: [laughs] "Oh!" Right you just take your tools and you've got a bunch of ranchers with you it's just...

BN: You couldn't keep us out of any place everybody knew we were on the move cause I would call ahead I always set things up. My main concern was that [pause] wherever we stayed at night we had water and a corral for the horses. The people I didn't care they could sleep anyplace.

LM: They can handle it.

BN: But we just had to have a place for the horses. Well Hale Laau does not have any facility as such there's about a three thousand gallon water tank there isn't a blade of grass out there it's all cinders, dead trees and actually no corral space. So. This one night we stayed out there and one of the horses the first thing it did in the middle of the night was to pull the tree down [chuckles] on top of somebody's tent. [laughs] And the other two horses um I finally said you know , "Just let 'em go they'll stick around and if they don't that's all right don't worry about it." Well come morning the two horses were gone no where to be found.

LM: Oh my. [chuckles]

BN: And they belonged to me but I had other people riding them and these people were just in a complete stew. You know just crying, "Where's the horse," and everything I said, "Don't worry about it." We found those two horses oh let's see it that's ah it was almost a full day's ride coming back from Hale Laau cause that's five miles from Hale Laau to Umi, five miles from

Umi to Pulehua, and then so that's about twelve miles, fifteen miles later we found them waiting at the the Paleinaaina gate and they couldn't get through because the gate's locked.

LM: So you started riding without them?

BN: Yeah. We met the horses they were waiting at the gate for us. [chuckles]

LM: [laughs]

BN: [chuckles] They were going home. [laughs] I thought that was pretty fun.

LM: [laughs] You know your horses. So you find any other mishaps happen on the trek across the island? [laughs]

BN: Oh we had a lot...Yeah you know I had a hard and fast rule. You know how kids are- this is the only 4-H ride in the whole world I think that we took more beer than soda. And the kids always managed to find the fish box and...I didn't care. We were up on the top of the mountain. Where are they gonna go? If you're gonna learn to drink go ahead and drink, "Here's your beer. You want some wine here drink." But come morning...You had your horse and I would rotate riders every hour we'd stop and rotate riders so everybody had a chance to ride and nobody was a basket case cause some of those people who don't ride all year and then you put 'em on a horse for eight hours in one day you just kill 'em.

LM: [laughs]

BN: So every hour we would go through and everybody had a chance. But those guys who had sat and drank all night and partied all night got their horse all day. They didn't rotate. And they rode bareback.

LM: [laughs] Oh geez.

BN: I had this one guy tell me we had come across from McCandless to Pulehua. That's about twenty miles. He told me the Chinese never heard of such torture. [laughs] But you know that way I could keep 'em in line...because the first night they just got out of hand and after that they were like babies cause they were so sore and tired that they [chuckles] couldn't do anything. [laughs]

LM: Discipline!

BN: Yeah well then they thought oh yeah macho you know they could ride the horse. O.K. Here you go.

LM: Oh my gosh. Do you think you'll ever do it again?

BN: ....I haven't done it but it was getting too big the last one was up to 142 people. And it was hard to... it got so that I just told key people what the dates were and said don't say anything but then everybody finds out. So it was really hard to get it under control. Yeah we did it for about twenty-eight years and we would do it again but just small family kind.

LM: It's a cool thing though because it's not something ah that can be done too much anymore. Like even in Waimea theres a lot of locked gates and...

BN: Yeah. Well in Waimea you can go all the way around the Mana Road... and that's a nice ride. We've done that a lot and stayed down at Waipunalei. The kids love to go down and swim their horses in the ponds down there. That was always good fun and pick plums at this time of the year.

LM: I'm glad ah we got to do the King Kamehameha Day parade for the Daughters of Hawaii unit because I got to get together with the girls... we're keeping the old families together...

BN: Keeping the old traditions together. Get all old ranching families together. Yeah I thought that was pretty neat too.

LM: I thought it was pretty cool. Lot's of white horses and it's an old unit. And where else in the world? [chuckles] We're in our *paus* and we're going down on horseback and there's a

carriage and everything and then you look to your left and there's Kona Bay and canoe races in front of the palace...

BN: Yeah it's pretty neat it was very cultural..

LM: It's phenomenal. Yeah it's good. I'm always happy to see ah Nahe's name in the paper when she's doing her rodeo stuff because it keeps it going. And it was nice to brand with the boys at McCandless.

BN: Um hum. There's Kalai and Sam coming along. It will keep rolling. But it's your generation that's gonna keep it rolling.

LM: We're gonna do our best.

BN: Yeah. We've pushed it as far as we can and and now it's up to you guys to keep it going.

LM: Wonderful.

BN: And driving those cattle down the...I love closing up that Mamalahoa Highway and the Hookena Road.... The funniest one two two times were really funny. One was the hidden intersection. Instead of turning right the cattle turned left and they were going back towards Kailua through all the cars. The cattle were down by Hookena School before they finally got stopped and turned around.

LM: Oh my God!

BN: And the other one was last year a half a dozen or so just when we got by the the bend where that makai gate is about six of them turned around and went back. Kala'i roped one right by the intersection by the water spigot. He was dragging it and back there were about fifty cars lined up and he was dragging it back [chuckles] and his little horse the first time it had ever done that. [laughs] That was a full grown cow that was pretty funny. People were jumping out of the car and taking pictures and when it would turn and run back towards them they'd jump back in their cars and lock the doors. That was pretty funny.

LM: Oh that's a wonder yeah that's a great tradition to just you stop the cars take the cattle across...

BN: You know they always did it like that. Always. Paris' used to do it we used to do it here but we can't do it anymore. And Paris' cattle took off and went through Kainaliu town [chuckles] couple of times. [laughs] Because we used to go right across by Aloha Theater go right down across the road and go *makai* or come back up. And you have to go out in the road to stop the cars. Well sometimes they'd come out and you'd have one man on either side of the road stopping cars but then the cow came out and took a turn which he didn't care if you're on the road or not she's going and down to the village they went.

LM: Yeah right to Oshima's.

BN: Yeah. [laughs]

LM: You so you still move 'em across the ah...

BN: Yeah but by trailer now. [chuckles] Oh you know they bang somebody's car and then you gotta pay for the damages.

LM: Yeah. And I hear they um they've complained a few times about the the cow pies splattering...

BN: Yeah yeah. That's Kona you get used to the lifestyle. Unfortunately probably seventy percent of the people who live here think that Kona is fishing, coconut trees, ocean and coffee.

BN: They never get above the coffee belt to see that Kona is primarily Ag.

LM: Yeah. It's true.

BN: Kona's boundaries are eighty-six miles apart – north and south. From the mountain to the ocean.

LM: [laughs] [inaudible]

BN: Oh yeah. Yeah learn your landmarks. That's really important when you're out riding any place that you pick up your landmarks if you ever get lost.

LM: Um hum.

BN: Of course if it gets foggy then um [laughs] common sense.

LM: Yeah. Go down hill.

BN: Yeah. Pick up a pipeline some place.

LM: Yeah. [laughs] Like follow the wall.

BN: Follow the wall you'll find a trough or a gate or something.

LM: Have you ever gotten lost up here?

BN: No. Actually I haven't gotten lost anyplace on this mountain. I've gotten tangled up a couple of times but I've never gotten outright lost.

LM: What's the worst tangle?



BN: Oh we had one. Kelly Greenwell was with us on Palani Ranch. And I was picking up the old Kaukahoku Trail that went from here all the way across to Mahoney Camp. We had stayed at Mahoney Camp and we were gonna come out and go down the Donkey Mill Road. So I told Kelly, "Well let's go and pick up the old trail then we'll come down." [chuckles] Kelly was packing his little boy and he had him on a pillow so we had about fifty riders with us and I said, "Well you guys stay here and wait for us and we'll find the trail and then we'll come back and get you." So we went up we found the trail I told Kelly, "I'll go back and get the bunch." The two of us went back to get the bunch. They were gone! [pause] So I said, "O.K. I'll go down and find them I'll go this way and find them you go that way." Well I came back up and I found the trail and I saw the horse prints went across. So I thought, "Well they've gone." So I went and that's maybe a mile before you hit the Donkey Mill Road. I went buzzing through there came out on the road and there's Kelly sitting on the rock holding his pillow holding his son. And he looks at me he said, "Where's your gang?" I said, "I thought you had 'em." [laughs] We just cracked up. We just cracked up. So we went back in and we found them and it was getting late now and my mother was in a complete snit. My mother thought for sure I had fallen in a hole someplace and I was never coming back. And they were looking for a place to get down that night and they were just .....Well they chewed us up one side and down the other. [laughs] So we got them and we went back out on the road [laughs] and Kelly left his pillow on the road. So that the cars would know that we went down. And we started down the road ...cause the cars had to go all the way around the other side they couldn't go down that trail and they had to go way out of the way to come down. We're taking a short cut. [chuckles] So cars are coming down the road they see the pillow [pause] Lou Greenwell looks at the pillow and thinks, "That looks like Kelly's pillow but somebody must have dropped it cause it wasn't one of our cars that," you know and they find us down by the locked gate and Kelly says, "Where's my pillow?" [laughs]

LM: [laughs] Oh no. [laughs]

BN: Oh God that was it was just hysterical. We've had such good fun times like that. Ah so we've had really some really good fun times they're just good fun. Then when you come into these mountain camps and people haven't been there forever and there's nothing but rat *kukai*... [laughs]

LM: What was your favorite camp?

BN: Oh we had lotta good fun camps. Good fun camps um I think Waipunalei was probably the kids' most favorite. Just cause it was so entertaining.

LM: Yeah. [chuckles] It's like a magic land.

BN: Yeah oh yeah Komakawai was always good fun too but it was cold up there. Probably one of the hardest and longest rides we ever did was from Kahuku um across the top um what do they call that place where the well is? Hao springs.

LM: Mm.

BN: Hao Springs all the way to Kapapala. And that's a long haul.

LM: Yeah that's really far! How many miles did you guys...

BN: Twelve hours of riding. That was a long haul. Ah to Kapapala up to Ainapo over to Keawewai.

LM: Wow.

BN: Um across...to the Saddle Road going above the prison on the old Puuoo Trail. You can't do that anymore because the lava took care of that. You can go across the trail. They did open the road they did bulldoze it but it's I wouldn't want to ride a horse across there now...

LM: Yeah it's kinda rough.

BN: ....real real sharp lava and you're just you know you're on that. Not too bad if you're only going for a mile or so but you go for a couple of miles and you're gonna shred their feet.

LM: That's a long way to go. That twelve hour hitch over. Do you guys ever take a spare horse or one horse all the way?

BN: Oh yeah. Yeah we take extra horses.

LM: Well you always had a car right following you or a jeep?

BN: We always had a convoy of cars with us um we were only moving fifty to a hundred people. We had the cook car and the beer car and the kitchen car going...Yeah and that's what it was. Put the fish box on somebody's truck and [pause]...

LM: Just doing one of those a year two years three years is enough to keep [inaudible]...

BN: Every year every July the last weekend of July. And it gave the kids a chance to see their island. You don't realize how big it is especially when you're up on the top above Kau. Up above Waiohinu, Naalehu and riding across and looking down at that huge expanse of land...It just goes forever.

LM: What an experience. Most kids just know the sights along the road.

BN: Yeah. Never learn their island. For the next generation's sake you should just keep going.