

David “Buddy” Nobriga



Buddy’s grandfather, Antone Nobriga, came to Maui from Portugal in 1886 and worked for Wailuku Sugar Company. He later got a lease on 700 acres of territorial land. It was the beginning of Nobriga’s Ranch in Kahakuloa, which continues today. Buddy learned to be a cowboy on the job, working with his grandfather and father and later his uncles. They literally carved their ranch out of some of the roughest land in Kahakuloa, pulling out scrub with their hands when they had to. But hard work doesn’t stop a Nobriga. They even moved their entire ranching operation to Haiku and back. Over the years, Nobriga’s Ranch became a true family operation, with brothers, sons, daughters, aunts, uncles – everybody involved. While always continuing to cull and breed a better brand of cow, the Nobriga’s built a feed lot operation that provided a service for other island ranchers. Buddy wasn’t always the CEO of Nobriga’s Ranch as he is today. He has held positions as stable boy, cowboy, horse breaker, truck and tractor driver. And while he was doing all that, he was also serving his country as an army sergeant and working for Maui Soda Works, becoming its chairman of the board and retiring after 51 years. Over those years Buddy has been president of the Maui Cattlemen’s Association and the Hawaii Cattlemen’s Council and been a member of several water, resource and conservation district agencies and associations. Today, at 75 years young, Buddy Nobriga likes to spend his spare time at Kaupo Ranch, assisting as - you guessed it - a cowboy.

Paniolo Hall of Fame
Oral History Interview

David “Buddy” Nobriga

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By: Anna Ilima Loomis (I)

David “Buddy” Nobriga was born Dec. 7, 1926, in Waihee, Maui. The oldest son of Manuel and Emily Nobriga, he had a brother and a sister, and later the family adopted another boy. He and his wife, Barbara, have four sons and one daughter.

My grandfather was a little boy when he came from Portugal with his parents. And so was my grandmother. I think my grandmother was kind of born on the way here, or something like that. According to my aunt about 1888 is when they first came.

I: Tell me about where you grew up.

At the beginning it was in Waihee. In 1926, that's when they started the ranch out in Kahakuloa. On state-leased land. My grandfather was an overseer in Waihee Village. There was no dairies nor anything of that sort so basically, they, the boys, my Dad and his brothers, did milk cows and bottled milk and delivered milk and butchered cattle and delivered meat to the people that worked for the plantation. So it started from there, and then they started the ranch in 1926. My dad was the oldest son and had 13 brothers and sisters.

Waihee wasn't much of a town. There was only, I can remember, about three stores and that was it. They had a theater at one time. Baseball park and outside of that was horses and that sort of thing that we grew up with. My dad graduated from St. Anthony School at the 10th grade and then went to the university to become a schoolteacher in Honolulu. But he couldn't stand the Honolulu life, even though Waikiki was duck ponds at that time. So he came home and worked for this company, Maui Soda and Ice, from 1922 until he retired in 1971.

The ranching cattle operation was weekends, like we still do it. In 1968 we started a feedlot, we butcher cattle every week and every so often we got to pick up beef and so we do a little bit more than just weekends. But predominantly it's just weekends and holidays that we keep up. So we really don't have any holiday in the year except Christmas and New Year's and Easter, that we take some time off after the cattle is fed.

I: Tell me about how the ranch got started.

Well again, my grandfather and my Dad was the ones that got started on the ranch; being in Waihee, at that time they needed more cattle, so they got started in '26. By 1940 the State decide to close all that land down and put it into conservation. So we bought land in Kokomo. In Kokomo we operated the same way, but we could never increase our herd because everything was stolen. Land's up there, and we living down here in Wailuku, you know, we never had a calf in five years. We would see the cows ready, but we could never find the calves. And so we just waited, bid our time until about 1947 when the homestead lands opened in Kahakuloa, and we came back to Kahakuloa. We didn't get lands at first, we leased it from those that won it in the lottery, it's a lottery system. Later on we bought it from them. So we own about 260 acres but we lease better than a thousand acres from the state and some private owners.

I: Tell me about the early days of homesteading out in Kahakuloa.

Homesteaded basically started in 1947. The roads wasn't paved, was no electricity. So we used to go out there on a Jeep, early evening -- a military Jeep we had so we could travel whether it rains or not. And light up your lanterns and you better take a bath at home if you have to wait out there -- it was cold water, and later on we put a box to heat up the water. But we did that for five years, which is part of the rule on homesteading. You had to live on the place for five years and you had to improve the place from what it was. So, that we did. That went from '47 to 1952. And still doing it.

I: Tell me what the land was like back there.

Well you know, in 1930 a lot of the land was in pineapple. With the Depression they came out with Haiku Fruit, which was kind of a private operation, cannery; some of the remnants are still up there in Haiku at the crossroads. But a lot of the flat lands was planted into pineapple. And after that, after they left, well it was all barren. So the lantana and guava took over most of everything. So when we first went, if you had cattle, you couldn't find them because it was so thick with rubbish.

We cleaned it, got a little tractor and do what we can. And as times went on we went to a bigger tractor, and first you did all the good places, then you did the rough places. And we've done helicopter spraying even to get rid of guava -- now it's Christmasberry, the holly, that's taken over. But we maintained with a lawnmower. We're still cleaning pastures, we're still replanting pastures -- with the webworm that came in from the orient and start wiping out all the kikuyu grass and then it's the yellow sugarcane aphid. Just as the grasses came back after the rains, now it's all yellow with the yellow sugarcane aphids.

Oh it's a tough game, you know? Droughts and everything that comes with it. But we don't overstock, so we've been able to get through droughts. We feed the cattle a little bit but we can get through droughts. So it hasn't been that bad. But we've lost lands to developers, lands that we leased from different people and they finally get developing rights and so you just move out. Years ago we cleaned it and planted it and made it something worthwhile. But, you know, we've had over twenty years use of some of those lands, so.

I: So how did you feel to see the land that you developed turned into a subdivision?

When the lands was available for sale, that 350 acres that was from Wailuku sugar was 1.2 million. But you couldn't spend 1.2 million for cattle! But I guess even though I was involved with water and everything else, maybe the foresight was we probably could have subdivided some of it and then kept the rest of it for cattle operation. But instead, you have your own home to pay. It's kind of hard to go that route. So, we not happy but moved out.

Some of that subdivision there, the water is available at my place. They drilled and they couldn't find water on that land. So we made a deal to drill water on our land. We allowed it because we were surface water, and surface water you go with the times, right? When it rains, watch out if you drink that water, you know? So

now we have a dual water system, we have surface water for livestock and we have good dyke water, underground water for domestic use. So, it helps, we got something out of it anyway.

I: When your family was living out there, you said the homesteading was just starting up out in that area.

Yeah, those lands came out about 1944, '45, when the state government decided to put out this thing. They had it planned before the war but the war kind of put everything in escrow. Towards the end of the war, they came out with those plans. We got some of those lands back. We sold the lands that we had in Kokomo and we probably sold that too early too because Kokomo bloomed after that. But didn't have any crystal ball to gaze in so you really don't know what's going to happen. But we've had good times in Kahakuloa, cowboy life. Rough country, though.

I: Can you tell me about the country?

Well, it's rocky. The land we owned there's two big gullies in it. And in some of the gullies you can get down and clean the little flats in the area. And the top of the ridges you have some areas where we cleaned and it's all improved grasslands. The other area you try to get rid of the brush, and put in seed. But the cattle roam all those gulches. We also got to roam in it on horseback. Either that or walk, you're following them. The horses get used to it. I also help in Kaupo, rocky land. But I think our land is rougher in the sense of gullies and hills, and all that kind of stuff. On the east side, the lands are not as rough as Kahakuloa.

The lands that we first got in State lease was lands from the village to Hononana Gulch which was about 1,500 acres. But 1,500 acres of guava and lantana. But it was kind of open land because we had a good amount of cattle in there. The lands in Kokomo was almost all flat. But again was different kind of land. The cattle don't produce as well as they did in Kahakuloa.

But as time went on and we got to different areas, we can see there's other areas -- like Kaupo, for example, they go from feast to famine. When it rains, boy, that grass just grows overnight. Our country cannot produce that kind of material like they can. But it's still good land. But a lot of it was pineapple land and pineapple has a tendency of turning soil a bit on the acid side. We've used sand to add calcium to it.

I: I'm curious about why your family picked Kahakuloa to start their homestead.

I guess because we're natives of Waihee. And that was the closest area. 1926, when land was available, we went in and we leased the land and worked it. So, then when we went up in Kokomo the experience wasn't that great, and we lost everything. So, as soon as Kahakuloa was open we went back to Kahakuloa and sold what we had up there. And it was nice land. At that time there was nobody living from Waihee to Kahakuloa Valley. But now there's quite a few houses along the way.

I: At the time that you moved out there, a couple other families were moving out too.

The Mendes, basically -- they got a homestead. They were the first ones to build out in that area, in the six-mile area. And we didn't build until 1978 where I built my place out in Kahakuloa; before that we all lived right in Wailuku, where we was close to work, and weekends is when we headed out that way.

So, at one time we had Kahakuloa and Kokomo and we'd ride horses all the way back and forth. Those days, didn't have fancy trailers and all that sort of thing. So we would make the trip two and a half hours, through the cane and pineapple fields.

I: What was the Kahakuloa community like at that time?

Well, basically the Mendes was located in the six mile area and we were located back from the 11 mile area, so there was a distance. They did their own thing. Mendes family had a bakery in Wailuku, and they did cattle. We were only in cattle. So cattle started as part time but then after a while it gets in your blood and you can't get away from it. So, like tomorrow I'll be headed for Kaupo, we got calves to brand.

I: Why do you think it gets in your blood?

I don't know. I worked at Maui Soda for 52 years before I retired. Working with people is different than working with animals. Working with people is -- it's hard time to satisfy everybody. But I guess everybody knows that, I mean, with people, with neighbors. With animal livestock today, you probably don't even need a horse. We've got our area, intensive grazing system. You come with the four-wheeler and you just call them and you have fifty cows charging after you with their calves and you just open one little string as a gate into another string which is all electrified. And they're contented, they're happy. Can even call them in the corral. So horses is just something with my grandsons and my sons and my nephews that they would die without their horses around the place. So that's why we -- I spend a lot of time in Kaupo where there is really a lot of horse work. It's a reversion of 1,200 acres versus 9,000 acres, so, it's just what it amounts to. But even there in Kaupo, the manager Franco has turned the area around. Most of the herd, you just call them in and because of the intensive grazing system, every time you call them they think they're moving into a new, fresh pasture, so they come charging and it works real well.

I: Can you tell me about how your family got your cattle all the way from Kokomo to Kahakuloa.

You know, in 1926 when they started in Kahakuloa, my dad and his father purchased cattle from Keanae. You drove them across from Keanae. You herd them all the way, right through Kahului, which wasn't much of a

development. All the way to Kahakuloa. That was before my time and they told me it took about five, six days, I guess, to get them all the way to Kahakuloa.

In 1940 the Medeiros family in Kula bought about fifty of our cows to take them up Kula. So we drove them from Kahakuloa to Kapuna, which is Waihee, and from there then the Kula family came in and they drove it all the way up to Pulehu Road, right up to their home in Kula.

And already times was changing. That was about the last of the cattle drives that was driven that far, I think. Some years ago you saw Peter Baldwin created one where he drove cattle from Ulupalakua all the way to Kahikinui, which was quite a distance too. But then they had about two hundred or three hundred cowboys, everybody wanted to get in it, so. One of my sons went, I didn't go. So, it's exciting work, it's hard work but nice. Rewarding work, I think -- I've always loved animals.

Right now I have a few Brangus. If I took you there to see them, immediately they knew a stranger is there and they get kind of skittish. Even when I call them they would be a little skittish coming to the gate. I would have to move you away little bit and then they would come. But even my little grandson when he goes out with me, after they get used to him it's all right. You know, being purebreds, sometimes we go and we have to mark the calves with the numbers for the mothers so we know who they are. And we get some mothers, they come after you as though "this is the end of me!" -- but right up to you and then they stop. I went on vacation one time, my nephew had to go do it and he said, "oh, God!" -- he ran around the Jeep! But they know if you going to run away or stand your ground.

I: So much has changed since you got into this, the cattle business. Can you tell me a little bit about the old way of doing things? Back when you first started.

When I first started, you know, as a kid, my dad would take me. When they go into the mountains, to the real rough sections, I would be out on the plains where it's open. There was a pineapple field up there and most of the time I used to be in that pineapple field. And I remember those cattle up there, the lead cows had bells on them. So we could find them by hearing, not by seeing, you know? Then it was a lot of dog work, a lot of roping.

And you know, in the early days, cattle that they came in for butcher, they would lead him from Kahakuloa, by horse to Waihee, where the slaughterhouse was located. Oh, maybe one or two at a time. Two good horses, two good cowboys. And then we had a Hawaiian fellow that used to work with us. He only rode a mule. Any time we were going to lead the cattle in, and they weren't the real tame stuff, then he would say oh, he wants Tom Mix. Tom Mix was a stud that we cut at one time and we didn't get both testicles so he still acted like a stud. But he stayed in Waikapu where my grandfather use him working on the plantation. But he was fast so he would say, bring Tom Mix, so I would ride him from there all the way to Kahakuloa. Sunday he would put rope on the horns and down they'd come down the road. After the animal got used to that it's not too bad. At the beginning it'll fight, try and gorge the horse. So you get a good horse, they don't let that rope slack on you. They keep that rope taut all the time for 15 miles.

Waihee Dairy had a slaughterhouse that they used to use to slaughter cattle in. And my grandfather somehow was able to use that too.

The last time we did some cattle work in the rough area was 1970, I think. We had some cattle got into some state land, rough land. I had a little Hawaiian mare that I used and she could fly, you didn't have to worry what kind terrain you was running in. She was really sure footed. She wasn't a pure Hawaiian mare but about half of her was -- the Hawaiian blood was there, the mustangs that ran around Molokai. Good little horse, hard to beat them. And you know, through the years, you get some horses get good cow sense, some can never conquer the thing. Like in Kaupo, I got couple of my horses there. But there's one I like to use and he's calico, big tough guy. He can pull cattle all day, and don't seem to stop. But the old life out chasing in the rough country, all that has died. It's not done any more.

I: Can you tell me about some of the adventures that you had with your father and with your relatives when you were up in the rough country?

I remember in the rough country sometimes they chase something and I would see them coming. After they came down to the lower areas I would start going out and meeting with them. And the animal would go all the way up to the ocean and stop with the waves hitting him. And as they approached it, if they got too close it just swim out in the ocean. It knows how to come back in some other valley. But if we went from one valley to the other the thing would swim back to the other valley again.

And if you left it out there swimming too long, the sharks got him. I remember one time I saw the sharks just tear that big steer apart. They'd just grab him and fly him in the air. And that's Kahakuloa, I mean, that's the reason why people fall in the water and we can't find them any more. It's a bad area.

But I remember stories on the other side which was Honolua Ranch, they had some pretty good cowboys. A guy by the name of Manuel Silva, he's long gone, he was kind of a rough guy. I remember my father's bringing cattle from in the mountains, in Waipili. And that's the bogs, you can't even ride the horse, you've got to walk. And to bring an animal down, it's over a ridge and just the trail that's come down on the ridge which drops off on both sides. So you have to have a horse in front, then we put a mule in the back. The mule is to keep that animal from hitting the front horse. I remember seeing the back legs of the mule up in the air -- it's not touching the ground. Only with the front legs they keep control of themselves when you got good mules.

After that we would tie him to a tree, rope around the neck, cut their nose inside and put a rope through. Leave them there, they fight. The next day they kind of soft so they no fight as much as the first day. I remember cutting a bull that wasn't supposed to be a bull so they finally got ahold of him and castrated him and we all got away fast. But my uncle was a little slow getting to his horse so the bull run him up a tree and he was up the tree. He was throwing his shoes and throwing his shirt and the bull wouldn't move. So we had to come back down with the dogs to save him from on top of the tree and get the bull out of there.

They can really get wild. Once they get in that mountain area they can be hard to handle. You going to have to trap them or you're going to have to set *kipukas*. We had four, five dogs, and we had one excellent tracker. I remember he would go up a fallen tree or a big rock and lift up his head and he knew where they were. And then you had those that would grab and hold, so you could get up to the animal. In rough country, you don't have all the time in the world. So they would hang onto them until you got there.

My little dog was Blackie, he was a little black poi dog. Good dog. But we rode horses through Waihee all the time and a lot of times he wouldn't be home for two or three days. And when he comes home he's all broken up but I guess on the way through Waihee he found some girl dog there, and he disappeared after that. But we used to leave them in the mountains. And they would come home. In those days you don't go look for them. Wait, they going come home. And sure enough, they come all the way home. But they knew that area - like we say, they were *ma'a* to the area. Like the horses are *ma'a* to the area. When some of the cattle got into the lantana we would go with our little horses there. When they can't go through, they stand up and they break it with their legs and you better hang on, because they hopping like that.

I: How far up the mountains does your land go, or did it?

In those days there was a forest reserve but nobody made any fences, just open land. You just try to keep the cattle out of there. We did have little fences that we made because you don't **want** them in there, you can't get them out. So there was fences that we would make on the areas that they really went in. Today, they fence all that mountain, to keep the pigs out of the bogs. But mostly it depend on the terrain, where you put fences and where you don't put fences.

I: How often did you go up to chase the cattle out of the rough land?

In those days, you didn't have a tractor to go clean land. You didn't have herbicide to go herbicide land. So, every weekend was looking for cattle. And every so often you came across something that didn't come in on the drive, okay, there it is, let's go. Dogs and everything, you're after that animal. Rope it and if it's a bull, you don't want them inbred so you castrate them or you mark them, at least give them an ear mark so you know it was yours. So the horses used to gain good practice, they didn't have to go to arenas. It takes a lot of practice and work to get a good horse out of it. And we had some good half Hawaiian, half Morgan.

I: Where did you get your horses?

Started from Napili. The Raymond family had a whole herd of horses. And they roamed all those hills before pineapple came in. My dad sent my uncle Joe, and he rode around the Head side. There was a trail but there wasn't a road. So he went over with \$60, he came back with four horses. I guess they were \$15 apiece. All young horses. Real good working horses. Fast little horses. But in that country they carried you all day. And that little buckskin -- once Manuel Silva roped a steer, rope tied

on the pommel -- not dally, you tie, because you may never see the rope again or the steer again -- and the steer jump over a cliff. That buckskin mare just sat with all fours down, on her backside and she was dragging, because the steer was maybe almost her weight. Dangling, the steer was hanging. So my Dad took his pocket knife and cut the rope. So down the steer went and they started to run again, after him. They went to get the rope out of it.

I: Did you train the horses yourself?

Guys like Joe Kahiki, they trained the horse. My Uncle Joe was a good horse trainer. The only thing is he was left handed so when you took his horse or one he'd trained they'd drive you nuts because you're right handed. Everything -- you go to a gate, it turns around. But in later years when I was about fifteen, sixteen already I was training horses. I would ride them after school. Then when they got little bit broke, we would take them up to the ranch and work them from there. But you could ride all over the place. I would ride them down to Kahului Harbor and take the saddle off and ride them bare back. And they can swim. The only thing, you got to make sure you turn them because it seems that they kind of lose direction, they want to keep going out. But the salt water is good for them.

I: How often did you get new horses?

Well, new horses, some horse will break down, some will have shoulder problems. Then they're not good to work anymore, so it's constantly we would get new horses. We didn't have brood mares in those days. Later when I was breaking the horses we had stallions and brood mares that we kept, so we bred our own.

I: I was curious about how many horses did you have on the ranch at any time?

I would say about twenty horses. After we went to Haiku, we unloaded most of the horses, just kept the good ones. And that was more than sufficient. Today, with all our grandsons and all our nephews, we probably have about fourteen horses, which is too much

I: Can you talk about the business side of the ranch?

I'll start in the old days, when my grandfather was the supervisor. The local people, when they wanted meat, they would see him. They couldn't take a whole lot because there was no freezers to freeze the beef. Either you salt it or you ate it right away. So it was fresh beef and the rest all was salted beef. Same thing we did with pigs. When they killed the pigs, we all came over and even some of the neighbors came and helped. But then you made sausage and every bit of it was used, the fat was boiled to make oil out of it. Then you made pork sausage and the blood sausage. And I guess my family started the cattle business being that they probably had a demand for beef in Waihee days and not very many people had beef in those days. So, that's what got them started in the ranching business.

After I got started in it, we worked like anybody else. You had buyers that came around and, you know, after a while you can see that the buyers would -- if the cattle were real fat they were too fat, so they would have a different price. And if they wasn't fat enough, they're not fat enough, so you get a different price. They started to like ears on them, and if they didn't have long ears that was a different price. They did everything they could to take the price down as low as possible.

So around 1960, I felt, to hell with this, I mean, there must be a better way of getting rid of this cattle than that route. So we created a little feed lot at Kahakuloa and we started to feed some of our cattle out there. And doing that, we went strictly with the freezer sales to homes. Then all of a sudden you've got followers. You went to somebody's house and you ate a steak and you liked it, "where this came from?" "Oh Nobriga." So, you have another call. And until today that goes on. So there's been over forty years that that same process been going on. Although we have a couple markets that we supply with beef. But now the feed lot is in Waikapu. Instead of feeding fifteen head at one time, we can do fifteen hundred. So we do feeding for Ulupalakua, sometimes for Kaupo Ranch.

We get all the pineapple silage out of the cannery. And it's a good feed, it hasn't got the nutrition in it to keep an animal alive, so we add different grains in it, if we going to make them fat. And we sell all of our own cattle here on Maui.

But, you know, back in 1970, Alex Franco and I kind of revived the Maui Cattlemen's Association, we got that going. Then we got involved with the cattlemen's council. So there were feed lots in Honolulu and feed lots in Hamakua and they weren't doing too well. And they weren't doing too well because around that time mainland beef was coming in. Somehow feeding in Honolulu -- that was a 15,000 head lot there -- they couldn't produce enough choice cattle.

Times have changed. They used to take a steer in to the feed lot when he was two years or three years old. They grew him in the pasture and it takes longer to grow them in the pasture. And so you couldn't grade a three year old steer, he wouldn't give you choice beef. So the demands of the supermarket was for choice beef. So the choice beef mostly would have to come from the Mainland until they change. Even Parker Ranch was doing it in those days. The steer was three years old before he went to the fattening lot. Today, my animals come as weaned, they come straight into the feed lot. I don't have anything that's going to go for sale that's over sixteen months old. They're all gone by that time. And if you read the books, they do it the same way on the mainland.

So today, 90% of all the calves is all being shipped to the mainland. Some of the ranches will sell it when they get there on auctions. Some of them will put them out to pastures, rent pastures. Some of them will keep them all the way up through the feeding process and see what they get. But it's not anything exceptional.

This newspaper writer wanted to write about cattle. And he felt that if he would ask, he probably wouldn't get all the information that he wanted from the cattlemen. So he went and he bought steer number 534 from a rancher. And it was a good animal and he paid 500 and some-odd dollars for that animal. Then he put him through the process up there. Sent him to the feed lot and everything else, went to visit him when he was there. And he says, lo and behold, he made \$27 profit on it.

When you have to buy cattle, then your profit is not that great. When you raise it I think your profit is a little greater -- if you have set a price at a time of weaning, you know, that's about all we operate with on the feed lots. That's why in the Mainland you have five big, major packing plants. And where DeCoites up here will probably slaughter thirty head maybe at the most per day, maybe one time a week, sometime twice a week. Montfort and some of those other guys in the mainland will be slaughtering a thousand head a day. And most of them would be choice cattle. They got more grains and everything up there, they can do a better job.

And everything comes in box, you don't see cattle any more, it's all box, so. The store that likes chuck loins, he might get a lot of chuck loins. When you slaughter one animal, you only have two chuck loins, one on each side. But you have a market that he may want ten chuck loins. He can't buy ten steers so he just buy chuck loins.

I: You sell all your beef to local.

Yeah, we get - the sad part about it is, once the big chain markets came in, you lost a lot of markets. The chain was so big that they can bring container loads of beef from the mainland and if you bought a container load you get it cheaper. It's hard to compete with them but we get locals like Ah Fook, Haiku Grocery. The rest of it basically is all freezer sales -- the Urahara family takes half and Tavares takes half and Vida takes half and there's two quarters. So you take a half, you cut it and you divide it in quarters. And that's my freezer sales. Then Ah Fook and Haiku Store, four heads. So we took nine head to butcher yesterday, to slaughter. Every Sunday we do that process.

I: Is it possible to make a profit in the cattle business locally today?

We do fairly well with what we're doing, I can tell you that. But again, it's family, and we've turned into a family corporation. They all have shares in the corporation. The feed lot is good because services is always good, when you charge people for services. So, you come out with some profit there. Every afternoon, after work, the crews are split in half. They go out and feed. My sons haul all of the pineapple silage there.

In fact, they got the contract. Right now when the drought was on, the ranchers fought for pineapple silage, just to keep the cattle alive. Today, we're dumping them out in the sugar fields for them to plow it under the ground to add some value to the sand fields. So that's not going to be very profitable this year, just hauling it and dumping it out there.

Maui is not a grass-fat market because of the pineapple silage we have and we, the Jacinthos and Sakagawas do some feeding, but the other islands, if you want local beef, is grass. I can't eat grass beef. I can smell it even before I can even eat it. You get used to the pen fed animal. And it becomes a great difference. When I go to the cattlemen's meetings in the Big Island and what's for dinner? Hamburger. I can smell it when I come in the door. There's an oil smell to it that's very strong. And with the feed lot cattle you don't have it. Same thing with the taste. But then people that have been raised on grass fat animals, that's all they know. Big Island and Kauai, that's what they have. And today they're saying that the grass fat is even better than the pen fed because they're not as fat and everything else. This guy disagrees. He says it's what people like. You sell what's in demand.

I: When did you start up the feed lot?

I started the feed lot in 1968. The idea came from doing it in Kahakuloa, and the cannery used to have pineapple bran. We used to take pineapple bran out there and mix some of the feeds in it, all by hand. But then the cannery stopped making pineapple bran because the cost of fuel was so high. When that closed down, there was a lot of that silage stuff became available. To haul it to Kahakuloa with those big trucks would be a mess. So we got land in Waikapu, which is on Waiko Road. Built pens there and we started from there.

I've got some cows down there right now -- this is cows that have lost their usefulness because of age or because they don't get pregnant -- in the cattle business everything is checked. Mine is on computer sheets. When they come in they're all numbered and we keep track of them. But every cow in pasture costs money. Their job is to produce. So when the young heifers are bred they're tested, and if they don't make it, out they come. Sometimes when we take them up to butcher, they say gee, why you going to butcher this? Well, she had her chance and nothing happened. But you got to stay active, you got to know what your animals are producing. You know, if you raising cattle and you doing a 60 percent calf crop, you might as well get out of it because that's strictly a hobby. We shoot for at least 90 percent and if we can, I have gone up to over 94 percent. Right now we're down to 90 percent. I don't know why.

I'm changing the herd to Angus. So we're going to probably bring them down in size because the markets are changing too. You take a 700 pound carcass and it's too big. The steaks are too big for a customer to buy. How are you going to eat that big steak? So you try to get it more small and more uniform. So it's going to take us a few years before we probably get the herd down to an Angus again, which is what we started from. I think you're going to find that with the Angus you get better calf crops, better conception rates. They seem ready to go at a younger age than the other animals. My Brangus are bred at 15 months. Going that route I think we probably can get a better conception rate on our livestock.

I: To change the subject, you've been very active in the community. How did you start your community involvement?

The company here at Maui Soda and Ice -- Coca Cola, ice cream, we're not necessities on the table. It's impulse items. Being out in the community, making friends and knowing people, it's good for business. If

anybody tell you anything different, it's not. It's good for business because people think of you before they have to grab the telephone book, if they're thinking of ice cream or a party or something like that. So it helps a lot.

And then my involvement in politics. I have never been a politician, but I have worked to support a lot of politicians -- Elmer Carvalho, for one, for many years, and my friend Joe Souki, who was Speaker of the House and all that. And every one that I've been close to, my first thing that I tell them is, don't change. And they say what do you mean, change? I say, well don't change when you get in that mad house down there -- they change because they don't seem to have true friends there. They cut one another's back, you know? A true friend is one you can trust.

So I did get involved because if you stay on the sidelines, you get lost. You don't know what's going on. Things happen so fast. So I got involved with the municipal water system, I served on that for twenty years. And I was chairman of it for twelve.

But it was good experience so -- with cattlemen's associations and Kiwanis and Jaycees and you name them. None of my kids was Boy Scouts, I was never a scouter. And yet, I get involved with the scouts, I was president for four years, and I've helped them a great deal.

I: You've been very active and involved over the years. Did you get that attitude from your family or was it something unique about you?

My dad was a great guy but he wasn't that type of person. When he made friends, they always remembered him, but he wasn't one to go out and get involved. But we had Mr. Burnett here, he was with Kahului railroad, he was with the plantation. Burnett wanted me involved. Before that, you know, I just worked here. I wasn't involved with clubs and everything else. After that I got involved with the Jaycees. It doesn't even exist any more. But by the time I got involved with the Jaycees I was 28 or 29 years old.

And then I got pretty active -- my daughter is, my oldest son is, he's on the Board of Water supply, she's on the hospital board. And the other three of them, not bad. Right now they're raising kids but even during my raising kids, I was involved. So, sometime is hard to remember -- I got to go dig up the paper and see all the different service clubs I've belonged to. So at the present time I am chairman here, I'm chairman of the Farm Credit System in Hawaii.

I: Let me change direction again. As I said before, you've been very successful with Maui Soda, you've had a long background of community involvement. Why did you continue with the ranching through all this. Why has that continued to be an important part of your life?

I don't know. The ranch, the horse, the cattle -- even before I retired, I still would take off to Kaupo. That's my vacation. My vacation is going out to work cattle. And you come home tired and lame and you know, my wife thinks I'm nuts. But every opportunity I have, I'm going.

Even today, I'm 76 years old, I can't spring on a horse like you can. I can't jump off, I've got to find a big stone some place to get off. At 76 years old, you have pains. But I'm going. Because as long as I can, I will. My Dad rode with us until around 80 years old. And he stopped, and at 81 he died. But, you know, even if we had to push him up on the horse, that didn't mean you don't ride -- you ride.

And I've seen a lot of stuff. I've been fortunate that they put my name in for this Hall of Fame and, you know, there's probably a lot more better cowboys than I was or ever will be.

But, I guess, leading the State Cattle Council and leading the Hawaii Cattlemen's Association and right now I'm in the process of trying to solve the problem between Matson and the cattle people, of shipping cattle. They're concerned about their cattle. So, they get down to Matson and Matson don't really care because probably the cattle industry has not really contributed much to their success. And the stevedore -- he doesn't understand an animal. He doesn't want to go near the container because some manure might fly on him and he's going to smell for the rest of the day. To us, I don't enjoy it flying on me but basically it's not that bad.

And so we're trying to do things. We're trying to get a piece of land on Sand Island which is close to Matson. We've already got the ten-acre site that Matson was using temporarily. So we can space the containers out. Even put shade cloth over where those containers stay waiting for shipment. Even trying to get money to put wind tunnels where you can blow some artificial air. The cattle traveling to the mainland has a stock tender, men that go along and they're supposed to take care of the cowtainers. But when they're in Honolulu, they hook up the water and they throw some feed on it and they're down Waikiki or something, having a good time.

Well I'm saying it's different. We're going to have this area, we're going to provide some containers they can live in. But when that container that he's assigned to is there, he stays with that cattle 24 hours like he stays with them on the ship going across. You know -- otherwise the water's going to overflow. And Matson has to live with the new regulations, water quality. And we're trying to solve that. To have a better relation with Matson, good public relation with, even with the union that handles the containers.

And that's not hard to do -- it's the easiest thing to do. They get Christmas parties, once a year -- send them a damn good steer and let them enjoy it! It'll change their opinion of what the hell this is all about. And you're not only just giving something away, I think you're promoting something. Because, well, that's sales. You promote something and if people like it, they're going to look for it after that. So I have that job. I'm retired, I'm supposed to be spending more time in Kaupo.

I: About how many cattle are being shipped out of Honolulu to the mainland these days?

Okay, there is 70,000 brood cows in the State of Hawaii. And if you took 70% of that, just for figure sakes, that would be some 49-50,000 head of cattle is being shipped out a year.

Some of them are in Nebraska, some of them in Texas, California, Oregon. They're all over the country. From here they get shipped out to grass and they get shipped to feed lots and all different scenarios. The difference

up there is that there's so many investment bankers that when you ship cattle in, you don't worry, a banker is waiting for you. He wants to take care of the costs up there – you going to pay it back with interest. And of course he takes it off the top when animal is sold. He takes his and you get your return. When I buy cattle, I probably come out with about \$35-\$40 profit per head. But when it's your own that you raised, it's going to show bigger because you don't have that purchase price on him.

I: Before we finish up, I want to go back to what you were saying about going out to Kaupo and how it's almost like your vacation, that's your retirement. Why do you find that work so satisfying, why do you love it so much?

I don't know, that's why I said it gets in your blood. I mean, you try it. Once you get to like it, you can't leave it alone. And same thing with the kids, I mean, the grandsons and look at them all. They all want to ride a horse, they all want to work with cattle. So, what is it? I don't know. I take it as though it's easier to handle cattle than people. They don't talk back. You treat them fair, I think they're going to be fair to you. So, I may be deadly wrong, but that's the way I feel about it.

I: Anything else you want to say before we finish?

I guess I have always admired (Ikua) Purdy that went all the way to the Mainland – imagine, they went up there, they broke in a horse and then he'd take the world championship away from all the experts up there. That's a feat that is tremendous. He's buried at Ulupalakua. But I've never gone to the circuits. I was selected as the Makawao Grand Marshall one year and that's that picture there. With my oldest grandson at four years old. So I borrowed a horse from Kaupo for him to ride, Baby Doll, and she was an excellent little horse.

But that's the way it goes. This is why rodeos are so popular. You don't have that type of work going on on a ranch any more. But you know, we did it in my days, when we were younger, chasing something, and you miss the first throw, you miss the second throw, the third throw you jump on him and got him by his head, which is called bull-dogging you know? And hang on to him. But not any more, can't do it any more -- my back is off, I got thrown by a colt, breaking it in, right down on the main road. That hurt. I had to go get surgery for it.

I: But you still love it.

Yeah, I have another fellow that goes with me, Eddie Yu. He's older than I am, he's 78. And the doctor told him, I think you'd better start slowing down. Maybe this business of riding horse. He told the doctor, I'll ride a horse until I die. If I can die on a horse, I'll be happy. (laughs)

The foreman that we -- I started to help out there in Kaupo, he's younger than we are, excellent cowboy. He came from the Ka'u country, big country, lot of wild cattle. And came to the job there at Kaupo. He's around 70 but he has a heart condition. So he can't ride any more and he comes try but his legs are giving up and he has tears in his eyes that are, "how I wish I could ride." The last time we were riding and the young guys were talking, I said, "look at this, we have 200 years right back here. Don't you young guys tell us what to do!"
(laughs)

But that's the way it is. The guy all his life, in his case, was all he did, was a cowboy. And he can't do it any more and he still feel real bad about it. So you tell me what's in it. I don't know. I don't know.