

Kapua Heuer

Hilo, Hawaii



Kapua Heuer is descended from an old kamaaina ranching family, the Walls of Kona. Wall Ranch and Mahealani Ranch are still family-run. She is of a time when ranches had meat houses, butter houses, saddle houses and mauka camps. Her childhood kitchen was often shared with orphan livestock near the woodstove. She is believed to be the only wahine to swim cattle out the boats in Kona at shipping time. In addition to being a ranch hand and mother to two daughters, she became an active 4-H leader, livestock judge and pa'u rider. A relative of another famous Paniolo, Ikua Purdy, Kapua claimed to be 85 years old several years ago.

Series 1, Tape 8
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
with
Kapua Heuer (KH)
on December 3, 2000

in Hilo

BY: Anna Loomis (AL)

AL: Interview with Kapua Heuer by Anna Loomis at Kapua's home in Hilo on December 3, 2000.

AL: Could you start off by telling me about the ranch where you grew up?

KH: Well, it's in Kona. Mahealani Ranch. And I grew up—because I was born there. Born and raised on the ranch. And my playmates were all animals. I had little chickens, and little cats and dogs around me all day as a little baby—I mean, I was born and raised there. And when I got to be a school age, Alice Ho'opili, [who taught at the school], used to come up on horseback after school hours, when she could, and teach me. Because I was—they just couldn't take me up to Konawaena as a child that young. So one day when Alice came to teach me, I told her that my dog had just “hatched” pups. So she went to my mother and father afterwards, and she told them, “you have to send Kapua to school. You know what she told me this morning?” And she repeated it.

Then the next thing that happened to me—I was seven years old, now—I was sent to Punahou school in Honolulu, and I was in Punahou until I graduated in 1932. I was a little girl, I had my own little horse, I had a lot of animals to play with, but I was sent to Punahou school, and that left all that out. I graduated there in 1932. I came home to Kona to my mother and father, Christmas vacation, and long vacation. Other than that, I didn't see them. And that was my bringing up.

AL: Could you tell me about what you did for fun when you were living on the ranch?

KH: Well, that was it. As soon as I could sit on the horse by myself instead of riding on the saddle in front of my father, or one of the men that worked on the ranch...I had a little horse that they called Peanut. And I rode Peanut, and I was taken on all the cattle drives, _____, and I watched, and as I grew older I got to drive them into the pen and drive them out and drive them where they should go. And that was my growing up—my companions were not too many because I was *mauka*, way *mauka*. But I did have little friends when I had animals—I had a dog, I had a cat, I had a chicken—any kind of animal that I could tame down, “well, that's Kapua's, now don't hurt it.” These animals followed me around. I learned that.

Well, as I went to Punahou I grew older, and I got out of kindergarten to first grade on up. And as I grew older I made more friends, and the men working on the ranch, from my father working on my uncle's ranch, well, they used to say, “come, take Kapua with us, she going to *ho huli pipi* today.” You know what *ho huli pipi* means? Drive cattle. I'd be on my little horse riding along, and as I grew older, got little bigger, I was allowed to go in the branding pen and place the brand on the animal that needed to be branded. I learned all that. I was with them when they drove cattle down to the beach to be shipped to Honolulu. That's why I wore this shirt this morning. (The shirt has a picture of Kapua with several cowboys standing their horses on a beach) I'm the only female you see with all these men here.

AL: So you're in that picture there.

KH: I'm in this picture here.

AL: Yeah I see you.

KH: I drove them from the mountain down, come on down to the Keahou beach. Are you familiar with this island?

AL: I am.

KH: You know where Keahou beach is?

AL: Yes.

KH: We used to ship cattle from Keahou to Honolulu. And you could—I think you can see my picture there.

AL: Yeah, I can see.

KH: Yeah, alright. I'm the only one in this picture that's alive today. And I'm the only female that roped cattle and [took them down through the water] on the horse and took them to the boat.

AL: So could you tell me more about how you did that?

KH: How you did it? Well I was a good rider—by horseback—by the time I was a kid I could ride any horse they gave me. I could chase cattle and do this. You just took them into the water. You taught your horse how to go in too, and that was it. This [shirt] was presented to me.

AL: Did the cattle struggle when they were being led into the ...

KH: Of course they were struggling. You tried to put them in and they didn't want to go—there was always a man that was behind them to whack them, push them and they'd jump into the water, and the horse would swim along and you would bring them on out like this.

AL: Was there ever a danger that the rope could tangle the horse and drown the horse?

KH: Yeah, you had to be careful. You had to know what you're doing—when you rope you had to be quick, take around the pommel quick and bounce your horse in. Get him swimming and then get this animal behind him. Yeah?

AL: Was there a Hawaiian word for shipping cattle?

KH: *Ho au pipi.*

AL: *Ho au pipi.* And how old were you when they first started letting you do that?

KH: Ah, I was about fifteen, sixteen. And I did it—I would go along with them when I was younger, but I was always left behind, "Kapua, get off." But to participate in the work, that was around fifteen, sixteen.

AL: Was it exciting or was it scary?

KH: Well it was exciting to drive cattle, and it was—if you've done it from the time you were a little fry like this, by the time you got in your teens, it wasn't frightening to you. You knew you had to do well and not *maka'u* trying to do it, and fall off your horse or something like that. No.

AL: Did you feel that because you were a woman that you had extra pressure to perform well?

KH: No, it never dawned on me. I knew I was a woman, but I did what the men did, and I could do it as well as they did it.

AL: Tell me more about your cattle drives. When you drove the cattle, how great a distance would you take them?

KH: Depending on where we were going. You see, we lived—our *makai* house—my mother ran a hotel in those days. Wall Hotel, Mahealani Hotel. Wall Hotel. And we lived down—you know where Lanakila Church is in Kona?

AL: Uh ...

KH: You know where Kainaliu town is in Kona?

AL: Yes I do.

KH: Alright. We lived adjacent to Kainaliu Town, going that-a-way toward Kailua. You saw the houses on *mauka* side? That was our *makai* house. Our *mauka* house ranch house was three miles above the road. And that was where Alice Ho'opili used to come up and teach me school after she was *pau* at Kealakekua school, Konawaena School. So that was a three mile trip up, and we took the cattle up there another three miles, so about six, seven miles above the government road. And you had to drive them up. It's just a trail, going through forest, going through grass, going through lava to get there. And they were released, and then you had to drive them in again, drive them to a pen where they were segregated—calves, mother, and dad—and separated. And they were branded. And what you needed to send off to market, you cut them out and then they'd be driven *makai* to go *makai*, down to the *makai* house where there was a big pasture down there. And my daughter Barbara [Nobriga] is over there now, I gave her—I gave her the _____ ranch there. And I have another daughter, Pudding Lassiter, here. Pudding has her land. And so Barbara's still running cattle there. Of course she has modern equipment now. You can drive up in four-wheel drive and go up there. In my day, you had to go on horseback or muleback, and that was it.

AL: How long did it take to ride from your *mauka* house to your *makai* house?

KH: *Makai* house? Oh, it didn't take too long. Maybe half an hour, forty minutes. Horses always knew if we were going *makai* they'd get a little grain or something. They went down fast. Coming up hill they slowed down. But I had no playmates other than my animals. And the cowboys that worked on the place they, "eh, let Kapua come! We'll take care of her." So Kapua went along with them, all the time.

AL: Were there any cowboys that you remember as especially your friends?

KH: Oh, yes. I knew them all. I knew them all. Some of these, couple of these were *ohana* of ours.

AL: Could you talk about those guys a bit?

KH: Well, sure. They helped me in anything. They watched me when I roped and then, "*malama ko kino*," they'd say, "*malama ko lio*." "Take care," "drive." "*A'ole ... hele loko ke kai*." They spoke to me in Hawaiian. So I knew what they were saying.

AL: So from them you learned Hawaiian?

KH: Oh, I learned to speak Hawaiian—I don't speak the **best** Hawaiian, but...I run into people down where I go shopping here at the Wal-Mart or someplace like that, I see a Hawaiian in the store, I say hello to them in Hawaiian. "Eh, you speak the language?" I say, "*Ae, hiki wau wala'au*." (Laughs) So I get big greetings when I go to that store now. They say, "oh here comes that lady, she talks Hawaiian." (Laughter). So my mother, of course—my mother was part Hawaiian.

AL: Could you tell me maybe about your ancestors—how long were you living—your family, living there?

KH: Well, my mother's mother was native. And her—as far as I know, she lived in the Puna section all her life. And her husband came from the mainland, and married her, and then my mother was born, and my mother's sister, Elizabeth (Likapeka). Yeah.

AL: What was your mother's name?

KH: Lilinoe.

AL: Two words.

KH: No, one word: Lilinoe. Christina Lilinoe.

AL: And you said she ran a hotel.

KH: Yeah. Wall Hotel.

AL: Was that part of the ranch house?

KH: No, the ranch house was Waihou.

(long pause)

AL: Could you tell me more about your mother and what type of a person she was?

KH: Oh, she was a wonderful person. Later I'll show you some pictures. She was a wonderful person, she really was. And—let's see—grandma, her husband came from the mainland, and my father, he also came from the mainland, he met my mother. His name was Allen Serouney Wall. My mother was Christina Lilinoe Roy.

AL: Roy?

KH: Roy, was her last name.

AL: Do you know about how your family acquired that ranch?

KH: Well ... from my mother—my mother got her property from **her** mother. That's how. And then on their own, during the years they were married, they acquired the land on their own. So, W.H. Shipman—have you heard of the Shipman family here?

AL: Yes.

KH: Well, Mary Shipman and my mother were half sisters.

AL: Oh yeah?

KH: Of course there was a very good feeling between uncle Willy Shipman and Allen Wall, and then father acquired some land that belonged to Shipman. _____. Caroline Johnson Robinson was another sister of my mother's. And I lived with Aunt Carrie in Honolulu, when I was growing up. And that's how the sisters acquired a lot of land—you bought some, and I bought some, and later when they wanted to break it up—that's how.

AL: Did you have wild cattle on the property?

KH: We still have wild cattle up there. Yeah, there's plenty. There's still wild cattle. We used to hunt them out, with dogs to help us in the forest, and get them out, chase them out. Oh yeah, there's still wild cattle around.

AL: Could you tell me about who you'd go out with to hunt wild cattle?

KH: Went out with the men that worked on the ranch. Take the dogs along. They'd throw the lasso ... and drag them out.

AL: Did you help rope wild cattle?

KH: I roped anything that came into the pen.

AL: In the pen?

KH: That you got in the pen. Kukaiau Ranch out here for years—I used to go out there and cowboy on that ranch out there. But the rancher that was there is now dead—he died of cancer. I don't know who owns the ranch now.

AL: What is it like up in the hills, up *mauka*, on your place, hunting wild cattle?

KH: Well, you had to be *akamai* on the horse, for one thing. Wild cattle could hide in the bushes and hide in the forest, and when they took off they took off, that's where the dogs came in, to shoo them out. We also, in those days, raised what we called "pin bullocks." You got a mother and little calf, and you ... tamed that calf with the mother, from a milk cow or something like that. And you pin them together, I mean so they—together. Not with a pin now, rope—pinning was with a rope. And they were raised as "pin bullocks." They were tame. They were always with the mother. They—when they were grown up, they always stayed with the mama. She raised them as a calf.

AL: I see.

KH: And you could handle them, you could lead them. They were what we used to call *pipi pine*. And when we went hunting wild cattle, we took the pin bullock along with us. And say you rope one of these wild ones, then you tie them together, like this. Tie them together. Pin bullocks, they were called. When you open the gate let them go, the pin bullock wanted to go home, because he knows when I go home I'm going to get some barley to eat or something. And we got some like that—we had several that we could bring out and drive down. And remember, now, there's big forest here, and guava trees and whatnot. You have to be quick in driving them, drive the tame cattle, otherwise (shhhht!) and they're gone. So they were either led down by rope, and you were on the animal, or they had been let go with the mama, pin bullock—that was it.

AL: So the pin bullock—you would take the wild cow and tie it to the pin bullock.

KH: That's right.

AL: And then the tame cow would lead the wild one home.

KH: Yeah, yeah.

AL: Where did that—where did that technique come from, do you know?

KH: I don't know, I think the natives—the ranch people developed it themselves. Pin bullocks were very popular and common in those days, but now days, with automobiles and four-wheel

automobiles, they can go up and you can bring them down by truck—you don't have to use pinnies any more. They don't.

AL: What other—you said you rode your horses over the lava sometimes.

KH: Had to. _____. There were just trails, just cattle trails, narrow trails. You had to ride the trails—you just didn't go boom on the lava. You'd go through and hurt your horse or something. But there were cattle trails in the lava and you'd drive them out that way. And you get them in a deep forest, sometimes those cattle, they were smarter than you, they heard you coming and they were quiet. They didn't make any move—you didn't see any bushes going like this or hear the cattle on the rocks. But you don't want to do that too much any more, because a lot of fencing has been put in, and animals back and forth all the time.

AL: Where did the wild cattle come from?

KH: Well, the wild cattle came from tame cattle that disappeared from the pasture or something and got into the forest there and made their own little lives. And they grew up.

AL: So they were wild because they had never seen men before?

KH: They were wild because they had freedom that they hadn't had before. See, when they had grown up you had them as tame cattle in the pastures. They'd escape and get into the outside. They'd meet a bull and then they were mated, and their kids grew up like that.

AL: I'd like to ask you more about some of the men who worked on the ranch. Was there any one person in particular who really helped you when you were learning the ways of ranching?

KH: Oh yes, yes. The men that worked for my father, they helped me right along, they told me whatnot, and I had a father who always checked to see if my saddle's alright, horse had shoes on. Oh, yes. And I rode along—I rode along with them, watched them, everything. I could take the branding iron and brand them and it was alright. For beef—sometimes we'd shoot one. And I could help skin down. As I grew older I grew more *akamai* in what I could do.

AL: Aside from branding, driving the cattle, and helping ship the cattle, what other ranch work did you participate in?

KH: (Laughs) Well, building stone walls.

AL: Oh, yeah?

KH: (Long pause) Who are you taking this information for?

AL: For the Paniolo Hall of Fame.

KH: Oh! I have a Hall of Fame placard here, you know?

AL: Yeah?

KH: Come, I'll show you.

Tape is turned off as they go into the house.

AL: What I wanted to ask you more about was what it was like to live up in your ranch so far away from everything else.

KH: What it was like about ... ?

AL: What it was like to live in such an isolated place when you were a kid.

KH: Well—since you—you were brought up with animals, you were happy with them. As I said, I had a pet sheep, I had a goat, and the dogs were told, “no!” because they used to hunt sheep and goats, the dogs. And I had my horse, and father had—he had chickens and he had turkeys, and mother had a lot of nene geese—a big part of the yard was fenced so the nene couldn’t take off. She just took care of those nene geese. So I had livestock animals to play with, where I didn’t have other children to play with. Because we were *mauka*. And I had cousins and friends—they were all *makai*. They had a automobile that they could go to and from, and my to and from was going on the horse until I came *makai* and there was an automobile. So I wasn’t lonely—I grew up with animals. And when I was sent to Punahou, I used to cry a lot for a long time, cause I had no animals.

AL: You missed the animals.

KH: Yeah. But then I made friends with other little kids there, and their parents were good to me—they’d ask the school, you know, “we’d like to take Kapua with us for... .” And that was alright; mother knew them—that was alright. But as I grew older, well, my friends grew older too. Some didn’t stay there, some were in Punahou temporarily, their parents went away. And I got new ones—other ones came in, new. I used to invite them to come to Kona. I recall, I think I only had two, all the years that I stayed over there, came to Kona as my guest. But then I had plenty of livestock. And in the hotel business, I met a lot of people that came to mother’s hotel.

So I didn’t—I grew up a active person. I always was doing something. I learned how to do things. I learned how to do *lauhala* work. When a mat on the floor got a *puka* I learned how to patch it. And I used to help my father when he was ... cutting up meat—we butchered our own cattle—and I used to watch him. And I learned how to do that. I learned how to make corned beef. I learned how to cut up meat. Cause with the hotel you always had to cut up meat, and I learned how to do some of it. So today, if you gave me a butchered animal out there I could tell you how to cut it, how to clean it. Barbara, my daughter over in Kona, she still—she learned from me, I taught them that, they know how. So when you grow up on the ranch, an active ranch, you learn things. At sixteen years old, my father put a gun in my hands and said, “why don’t you learn how to shoot?” And I did. I went out to hunt wild sheep; I have my own gun—I still have it in here. I knew how to shoot. So my life, well it was different, was active.

AL: Where did you get your supplies?

KH: American Factors—American Factors in Kailua-Kona. That was where you could buy your supplies--canned goods, building materials. For beef, you either slaughtered your own, or Ackerman’s had a butcher shop not too far. You could buy beef. And the Greenwell’s had—you could buy beef from them. Clothing you came to Honolulu and Liberty House, or you came into Hilo for Holmes Store, was down in Hilo. Or you did your own sewing—the Japanese were great, and *kokua*, and sew things for you. At the stores you could buy rice, and sugar, and flour—but other things you can get in the stores now, you wouldn’t find them there. Because they sold only what people would buy. You used to take newspapers and cut them. That was toilet paper. You could buy toilet paper, but for us, out on the ranch there, we cut our own toilet paper up. That was it. We had outside houses to go to. Still have an

outside house at Waihou. So I said, “don’t knock that old house down. Father built that I don’t know how many years ago,” I said, “still good.” And Fusa Kimura, who used to be a playmate of mine, she was a cook for my auntie there, (laughing) Fusa fell in the toilet one time, (laughing) and had to be fished out. I don’t know what happened—she sat down on the seat—there was a seat that had a hole here to sit on, and here to put the paper down, and here’s another handle. Well, she fell in. (Laughing) And she was fished out, and she had to be washed down.

AL: Oh, my God! How did they fish her out?

KH: Sort of put a rope down, and put around her wrist, and they pulled her out. She still lives in Kona. (Laughing) She tells people, “my playmate was Kapua.” That was it. We didn’t have movies or anything like that to go to. We had a phonograph.

AL: What did you do when someone got sick?

KH: Well, if someone got sick, if they were pretty sick, you asked the doctor to come on up and you waited down on the road for them with a horse. You had a saddled horse, because those days, you didn’t have a car that you could just take off and go up the mountain. Or if they were not too sick you took them *makai*, to the *makai* house—that’s where the hotel was—and the doctors had transportation, their own car. But in some cases, you saddled a horse for them and rode them up to where the ill people were. You tried to keep well and not get sick. Cause our water was strictly tank water—we had no water to turn on a pipe like you do here, now. Tank water—you filled a bucket full of water and put it on the stove, all wood stove, and heated it up and used that ... for washing the sick.

AL: What did you do in times of drought?

KH: Well you were very careful with the water. Very, very careful with the water. Sometimes the water holes, natural water holes, dried up in dry weather. And the cattle were hanging around the gate looking for water. We limited what they could swallow. Living in the old days taught you a lot of caution, what you could do and what you couldn’t do. What you could be extravagant with and what you had to save. It was very touching when you see animals hanging over the fence [lowing], looking for a drink. And of course, we all had tanks, still have tanks over there, water tanks, to get the rain from off the roof, but Kona hasn’t had any rain for a long time. So Barbara was telling me, she and Edwin, that’s her husband, have taken 10,000 gallons of water by vehicle up to the ranch.

AL: But in the old days you didn’t have those options.

KH: In the old days you depended entirely on what you could save, catching on the tin roof, going into a tank. You didn’t waste the water. Just had to be cautious because they couldn’t live without water.

AL: Was there any spring water in the mountains?

KH: Not really. Not really. There were big holes that were hole water, if it rains. I was talking to Barbara, she says—I asked her about it, she says, “oh, they dried up, mom, there’s no water there.”

It’s sad, you know, you go on up there, and the animals see you coming, and they come over to the paddock, (sniff, sniff) sniff around, look-see if you dragging water up there. But you limit

them, you just don't let them drink their full, because a horse at a trough drinks about four, five gallons of water. And there's not that much. You don't have the modern things that you have today, in those days ... you just have to make everything go around. And shower baths, I didn't know what a shower was until—oh, I guess it was almost fifteen. [You] emptied the water bucket, put in the bathtub. You *'au'au*. You didn't just turn the water on and let it run. No. And when you emptied that bucket you went out and watered the plants.

AL: With the bathwater.

KH: With the bathwater that you used, the water.

AL: Could you tell me about after you returned from school, after you graduated Punahou? You went back and lived with your mother and father again?

KH: When I graduated from Punahou, I went to work for Hawaii Meat Company. And in 1934, I was married.

AL: Where did you meet your husband?

KH: I met him through a friend in Honolulu.

AL: After you were married, did you still live in Kona?

KH: No, came to Hilo, lived here in Hilo. This is where he died, here in Hilo.

AL: Why did you decide to move out to Hilo?

KH: Move back to Hilo? Did you say, "why did we decide to come back to Hilo?"

AL: Yeah, after you were married.

KH: Cause he get a job here. That's why.

AL: And, when you were living here, did you continue to be involved with cattle?

KH: Oh, driving out, cattle going on in Kona, oh yes. Get called, and go on over. Yes. My husband knew nothing about cattle. He was a mainland *haole*. (Long pause) I guess I've told you all I **can** tell you about me (laughs).

AL: If you don't have anything else you want to add, then I'll finish up.

KH: No, I don't think I can add anything else. I think you've got pretty much ... much history about me.

(Taping is stopped).