

Kingo Gushikuma



Kingo worked for Parker Ranch before joining the army in 1944. After service he worked as an independent contractor for cattle and was in the horse breeding and ranching business in Waiawa and Waihona valleys.

Kingo is best known as a master saddle maker. His saddle craft made him famous as the designer of the "Kingo Slick" and "Kohala Slick" saddles, now being manufactured in Utah and Texas. Kingo still runs his own stable in Pearl City, "the Double Rainbow", where he has shared his secrets and skills with young and old alike.

Series 2, Tape 1

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Kingo Gushikuma (KG)

at Double-Rainbow Ranch

September 13, 2000

BY: Anna Loomis (AL)

Note: There were some difficulties with the tape recorder in the first part of the interview. Some of the questions and a few of the answers are unclear.

AL: Alright, this is an interview with Mr. Kingo Gushikuma at Double-Rainbow Ranch on October 13, 2000. He's being interviewed by Anna [Loomis].

AL: [I just want to ask you about where you grew up.]

KG: I was born in Kohala, grew up in Kohala too. Went school there.

AL: Could you tell me about the house where you grew up? The house you were born in?

KG: I was born in the Camp 18 in Kohala. When I was a little boy, my father made his own house and move out of the plantation camp. And that's when he start raising cattle, and his own sugarcane. As I grew up, I help him with the sugar and the cattle. When I came to nine, ten years old, I wanted to ride horses, but I didn't have my own saddle. So I started fixing some old saddles that he had. I learned the Hawaiian—making the Hawaiian saddle, to fix the saddle first before I made Hawaiian saddle.

AL: About how big was your father's ranch?

KG: The pasture was—we had a lot of pastures, different, maybe twenty-five acres [a] piece. Maybe total of, maybe a hundred acres. That kept us very busy, on part-time basis. Cause, have to check the fence at one time, the water.

AL: Was your father still working at the plantation while he had his ranch?

KG: No, he had his own cane. He was a individual cane grower. And when the plantation needed special help, he went to work for them.

AL: Your father began working with cattle—when he bought his own herd of cows, was that his first experience with cattle?

KG: Well, when he was a—young, in Japan, he help a person who had horses and cattle, and that's where he start playing with horses and learn about some cattle.

AL: Was he a cowboy for the plantation?

KG: No, he was a regular labor, like—Kohala had plantation, they used to put the cane in the flume to reach the mill. And he was the person that lay the flume down. He knew the area very good because he work in the field. And now the flume has to go down to the mill, and always going down hill. That's why the temporary flume plantation put in the field, he was the person that lay the flume down, to raise the flume so the cane would be washed down to the mill.

AL: [When did you get interested in riding horses?]

KG: Actually, I was interested in riding horses when I can walk, but they wouldn't let me ride on my own because I can not handle them. But I used to—they used to lead me around all the time. My father

had mules, and he used to work with the mules, and sometimes on the way he'd pack me, and we ride together. That's how I got riding horses and mules.

When I was nine years old, my father bought a donkey for me, a little donkey. Said, "this is a good size for you." I was a little boy, nine years old. [He] said,

"I think you can handle this donkey." That's how—that's my first donkey. I rode that to school sometimes. The school I attended was about mile and a half away from home, so it helped to ride a donkey to school.

At that age already I can handle the donkey. My father trusted me already, so . . . when I was a kid he leaded me around and I—I kind of control the mule or the horse while he's holding the lead rope. That's how I learned.

AL: Did a lot of kids in your town [own horses?]

KG: No, no, no. I think at that time, my age, I'm the only one had horse. One donkey.

AL: [Were you popular with your friends because you had a donkey?]

KG: Well (laughs) . . . I had friends without the donkey, I had friends. But with the donkey I guess they came closer to me. I packed them once in a while—we were small, and the donkey can handle two of us. I packed them.

AL: So the town that you were in—it was north Kohala, right?

KG: North Kohala . . .

AL: Was that a big ranching town? Did a lot of people around you have cows and horses?

KG: No, no. You see, we live nothing in town. We live off town toward the mountain. And that area is next to Parker Ranch pasture, and close to Kahua Ranch. So that's why, more so, I wanted to play with cattle and horses. Because the ranch was on the mountain side of Parker Ranch and Kahua.

AL: So when you were growing up did you see [cowboys?]

KG: Yeah, once in a while. Well, next to our pasture was the Parker Ranch pastures, so I see them around, driving.

AL: [Why do you think you liked horses so much? (remaining question unclear)]

KG: When you're a kid, you don't think nothing but riding a horse. That's the—as you grow up, then you think what is a good horse. When you own your own horse, then you look for a good bloodline. A good bloodline that time, I went to Parker Ranch, was a Thoroughbred. Rough to break them because they're three to five years old already. And they had their own mind. (Unclear) Break them down the hard way, is rough them up. You know, that's the hard way of breaking horses. At that time, we didn't know any better. We thought that's the only way. That's why [we] took a lot of beatings from horses.

AL: So would you break the horses yourself?

KG: In Parker Ranch there's a breaking pen, and that breaking pen had special riders who break the horse. As soon as you break the horse, he come to the cowboys. Every employee had—they give you a horse. But that's only green-broke, so you don't know when they going to buck. Some of them buck all the time. I grew up with horses from kid days. (Unclear)

AL: [Were you a horse breaker?]

KG: No. I didn't go in that pen.

(Unclear)

AL: [How did your father train horses?]

KG: He wasn't the rough type of breaking a horse. He was the mild type. [He would go] very easy with the horse, pat it, saddle it, pat it, saddle it. Take it off. And in the beginning you just saddle it and lead it around. Saddle and lead it around. Don't ride 'till about a week later. One week he would just saddle and off—take it off. Saddle, off, saddle, off. Then, the second week he start putting weight on. By then wasn't bucking too much, because he get kind of used to the saddle, tame down on that side.

(Unclear)

[That's how I learned to train a horse.]

At Parker Ranch they don't have time to train the horse, play with a horse that way. The fastest way is to get up on the horse, buck it off. Buck it off. That's the fastest way. Before a week you can ride the horse. But, you don't know when he's going to buck. That's the problem with that type of training.

AL: What do you mean [buck off?]

KG: Hang on. Let the horse buck. Then you be pretty good rider. You won't fall down that often.

AL: [When did you go to Parker Ranch?]

KG: When I was seventeen, I went there, first to the Pu'ukikoni dairy. Parker Ranch had a big dairy—hundred, hundred head barn. I think that's the biggest barn in the state of Hawaii today. They already gave up the barn, but that was the biggest barn I seen in these Hawaiian Islands. Hundred head.

AL: Can you tell me about your job? What you did for them?

KG: Well, working for the dairy is milk the cows, twenty-five cows a milking. That's twenty-five in the morning, and twenty-five at night. About fifty cows a day.

AL: Did you work as a cowboy?

KG: I wasn't a real cowboy, but see as a dairy worker—sometimes the cowboy needed help. That's when we go [help] the cowboys to drive and stuff like that. And all the dairy's cattle and stuff we brand. We brand the dairy cows.

AL: Now, [your mom and dad] were born in Japan.

KG: Yes.

AL: Was it common to be a [Japanese cowboy?]

KG: No. A lot of Japanese don't know about animals. My father was lucky, I guess. When he was young, he had the opportunity to help a person that had cattle and horses. He knew a little about these animals.

AL: [After the donkey] did you ever have another horse of your own?

KG: I cannot say that's my own, the other horses, because I had two brothers above me and they older than I, so they took the first choice all the time. I had the slowest horse. That was the family horse. You know, my father had horses, so. . . .

AL: Could you tell me what you did with your family horse? Did you ride it for fun or for work?

KG: Oh, fun and work. When we work weekends—the pasture was about two or three miles from away home, so we get the horse and ride the horse to the pasture. That's how we used the horses, that way. Even in the cane field we used our horses to go and from work . . . check the area.

You know, Kohala is a big place. A lot of trails. Especially the Kohala ditch trail is [full of] things to see. You know, as a boy you want to see what's in the top of this hill and what's in the valley there. So you always go around. And always—not all the time is same; you go twice and see two different times, two different things. When there's wild pig around, things like that. As a boy, you see these animals, you like to get them. (He smiles)

AL: Did you hunt?

KG: Yes, I did hunt.

AL: From horseback?

KG: No. No. I never did shoot from the horse back. I never did try.

AL: [What were some of your favorite places to go?]

KG: Kohala mountain, and the Pololu Valley, that's Pololu Valley, that's the end of the north Kohala road, where the north Kohala road ends, that's Pololu Valley. And beyond this road, you go down the valley with horses or mules, and that area had a lot of pigs

(The subsequent exchange was not picked up clearly by the tape, which was malfunctioning. Essentially, the interviewer asks Mr. Gushikuma to describe where he lived while he was working for the Parker Ranch dairy. He describes a work camp, in which the dairy workers lived together and ate food that was cooked in the camp kitchen. He then mentions that he occasionally volunteered to work at sheep shearing, when the season came around. At this point, the problem with the tape recorder is noticed and corrected.)

AL: Ok, sorry about that. I think we were talking about where you lived when you worked at Parker Ranch, and the sheep shearing that you volunteered to do in May?

KG: Yes—every year in May, that's the shearing season for the Parker Ranch. And that takes about a month to complete the sheep. So—this is all contract. Eight hours a day, shearing sheep. Had twelve shearers.

AL: You said you worked with twelve guys?

KG: Yes, at the shearing station.

AL: And while you were working there, where did you live?

KG: In that station there.

AL: In the camp.

KG: Yes. That's up in Humuula, in the—right now there's saddle road, they call it the saddle road. At that time, no saddle road.

AL: Who was in charge—was there a supervisor?

KG: Yeah, this—see the year before I went, had a different supervisor. And he made a mistake. You see, once a year they dip the sheep. And I heard that they put too much chemical in the—I don't know what kind of chemical they use to dip the sheep. There's a long trench, and about four feet deep by about two feet wide, filled with water. And about fifty feet long, this—this water. From one end, the sheep has to swim across, and same time getting dipped in this water with chemical in it. And that purify all the bugs and whatever they had. But I heard that he made the mistake by adding too much chemical. Lost a lot of sheep that year.

AL: From poison?

KG: Yes. So, I wasn't there, only I heard that. But the year I went, had a new supervisor. And he was born in Kona, the Greenwell ranch, one of the boys there. And he was a good supervisor.

AL: What made him a good supervisor?

KG: He really cooperate with the workers, yeah? He always teach them nicely. Always really a helpful person. Like I was—a few of the boys was first-time like me. So—you know? Always come there and teaches us.

AL: Was that unusual for him to be so helpful?

KG: In those days, yes. Those days, if you don't know your job you get good scolding all the time, yelling at. He wasn't that way, he was a really nice person.

AL: Did you say that the sheep shearing was piece work?

KG: Yes.

AL: So you were paid by the piece.

KG: By the piece. Eight cents a sheep. The—the good shearers, in eight hours they shear hundred sheeps. I was below average, I guess. Would shear seventy to eighty sheeps in eight hours.

AL: How many days did you spend?

KG: Bout thirty five days, shearing sheep. Yeah.

AL: Why did you volunteer for that?

KG: Well, you know, as a youngster, you want to try everything. Something new, eh? You don't know what—sometimes you don't know what you going into. But for the experience, I said it's worth it. But it's not that easy either, because a lot of people cannot take it—the food. You know, 'bout thirty, thirty-four, thirty-five days, you eat three meals a day: sheep. You smell like a **sheep**. You work with a **sheep**. Come back . . . eat sheep. Back to work, and dinner time, **sheep** again. You know, for many years after that, I didn't want to see no mutton. No lamb chop or anything. 'Cause I had it. Everybody had it.

You see, that area at that time, from Waimea and Parker Ranch headquarters to that—Humuula was about three hour with the truck. And we don't come out from that area after we reach there, we don't come out till we all through with all the shearing, yeah. That's why the food is. The first beginning is very good, very good. But you, if day after day you start eating the same thing—of course they make stew, they make curry, they make roast, they make anything, but they still the same. You smell like a sheep. And you eating the sheep. Wow—no choice.

AL: Did you go back and do it again?

KG: Yes, uh—because the money is there: eight cents a sheep! You know, at those days, forty-five dollars a month now, working eight cents a sheep, the guys doing eight dollars a day they making. For the money, I—not today, but...yesterday I'll do it! (laughs) The money was there.

AL: And they had you camping, is that right? They had you living in a camp?

KG: Yes, over there. They had—you see, Parker Ranch, whole area get they own camp, now. Every place, Parker Ranch had their own camp. All the camp had one kitchen, the whole camp can go eat at that kitchen. They had the cook there, Parker Ranch hired they own cook for the camp.

AL: Was it mostly single guys living there?

KG: Yes, yes. If you married, your wife don't go. Only—only—only the men go.

AL: How did you like living together with so many other guys?

KG: Oh, if they—if he doesn't snore, that's ok. [How can you get problem?] (Laughs). But, the thing is, Parker Ranch was really strict with drinking'. You—you get caught drinking on the job, any time, and making trouble after drinking, you know, in the area, you out. That—that part was very good, because no trouble.

AL: In about 1941 you came to Oahu.

KG: Yes. No—forty.

AL: 1940?

KG: Yes.

AL: Why did you decide to move over here?

KG: Well, you see, at that time, I had the—all this time, working Parker Ranch, had one person, my supervisor. Then, just before I moved, they had a person come from the University of Hawaii, and above this supervisor. And he didn't know how to run the area—the dairy—because the hours. . . . You see the dairy, you work two-clock in the mor—if you—twice in twenty-four hours. You milk twice in twenty-four hours. If you milk two-clock in the morning, the second milking goes two-clock afternoon.

But the—this supervisor from the University came, he didn't do it that way. He made one milking was longer than the next. You know, I thought maybe that's not right. How come a person come like that and run everybody a different way? So that's why, the reason why I didn't like the idea was, if they going change that fast—I came down here.

When I came Honolulu, I thought I came here it [would be] easy. At that time, there's no work. This is before World War II, now. A job was very hard to get. Lot of beggars around. But luckily, when I came here, I caught a taxi. And this taxi [driver] question me, where I'm from. And I told him where. I told him I'm born and raised in Kohala, and just came from Parker Ranch. And then he said, "Kohala? What's your family name?" I told him, "Gushikuma." Oh, he—he named my father's name, so he knew

my father. He say he used to work for him. So, he said, “what you here for?” I said, “looking for work.” “What can you do?” The only thing I can do is work with cows, milk the cow, whatever. And they had dairies in Honolulu at that time. So he took me to dairies, looking for job.

The second dairy I went to, they hired me. The first one didn't have room. That was Hind Clark Dairy. They didn't—they had all filled there, space for milkers. But the next dairy I went, Niu Valley Dairy, was owned by _____ Olivera. And they say they can hire me. But when I start working there, was—what hour they had?—oh yeah, in the morning was six-o'clock. At six-o'clock in the morning start. And I was surprised. I have to milk fifty cows a milking. In other words, in twenty-four-hours I milk hundred cows. That's almost double the other dairies. But can't help it—no job, I got to take it. So I didn't work there too long. Then, for a few days I went to Moanalua Dairy. They said they're looking for milkers. I went—I think a week, I think, I stayed there.

Then a friend of my family came looking for me, he said, “there's a dairy down Kailua, Maunawili Dairy. You want to go down there?” Said, “all the working conditions are good. Good.” He said, “there's a person there, they know, that works there.” I said I would take a chance, go, I went there. Was good. One milking was ten cows. In twenty-four hours, twenty cows. Was very good, because this person [that] owned the dairy, he wasn't going for the milk, he was going for the butter-fat. See, the cattle he bring in for milking was, he going for butter-fat. That's why don't have to go so much with cattle, they go with the butter-fat. He used to take—I don't know—he used to take first place in butter-fat all the time because he feed the cattle good and, uh, take care the cattle. He let us massage the—the milk-bag everyday. You know? Cause really he'd take care the milking-cow. And that was Charles Montague Cook. He was terrific man, that. That's why I went over there work—I was almost two years over there. No, a year and a half, maybe. Then I came in town and work for Dairymen's, in the cold storage, loading, loading delivery trucks. Milk.

AL: Why did you leave Maunawili?

KG: That I can not tell you why—I don't know. I have no idea why. I think I got enough of dairies, I guess. When I came in town, no more job but—milk. But not with animals. Loading milk in the delivery trucks.

AL: Were you riding horses at the time?

KG: No, no horses.

AL: You had stopped . . .

KG: I didn't ride horse till . . . nineteen . . . in the late sixty or something. I didn't even think of horses till my friend tell me he's looking for a saddle. Then I said—and he's looking for a Hawaiian saddle. I said, "no worry. When I go back Big Island, there's a lot of them, I know, and a lot of them has saddles." You see, I didn't realize that was so long ago I left there, and I didn't know what was going on. Come to find out the Hawaiian saddle was very scarce. There's no Hawaiian saddle a person sell you, no. Because they cannot find the Hawaiian saddle no more. And they're not making. So. . .

That's the reason why, same time, I came close to horse. In nineteen . . . I think, nineteen-sev—sixty-nine or seventy. I went into—I went to Parker Ranch in the horse auction. I bought two mares. I bought two thoroughbred mares. Then I left it with my friend on Big Island, breeding, breed them two mares. That wasn't broken for riding these mares—strictly for breeding. That's the way I started to—what you call—go in horses. And same time, you know, I need the saddle and stuff like that.

AL: Why did you want a Hawaiian saddle?

KG: Well, at that time, I don't know, in the thirties, I didn't like the stock saddle. Because when I sit in them, between my legs—the stock saddle was made differently from the Hawaiian saddle. And used to bother my bone between the legs, because the way is made is like this (he shows the shape with his hands) round. He hit the bone under there. So that's the reason why I didn't want the [stock] saddle. And plus, I can say this, I didn't want the stock saddle because the stock saddle costs money! I can't make it. (Laughs)

But all the cowboys at that time, the professional cowboys—all Hawaiian saddle. And only the boss, the foremens had stock saddle. That was one of the reason why I like Hawaiian saddle. Plus, Hawaiian saddle, rain or shine, use it every day. Stock saddle, you get the wool underneath. Hawaiian saddle don't. And when you get that wool wet, wow—the **weight**. Already the saddle itself is heavy, compared the Hawaiian. And you get it wet, get much heavier. So all that, you—that's the reason why a lot of people prefer Hawaiian saddle. And they're much stronger anyway. The Hawaiian saddle.

AL: It had been a long time since you had made saddles.

KG: Oh yes, since I left—left Kohala, not left Parker Ranch. Parker Ranch I didn't touch no saddle. I had saddle took from Kohala, but I didn't play with saddle there.

AL: So from the time you were seventeen on, you were not making saddles.

KG: Yeah. Yeah. Till I came to Honolulu and—in seventy, sixty-nine or seventy, somewhere around there. Then I came back to saddles.

AL: And why did you decide to start making them again?

KG: I—you see, my friend told me he has two saddle. He work in Parker Ranch, he has two saddle. I said, “well, sell me one.” [He said,] “that’s my spare saddle. In case I broke one saddle, I have another spare waiting.” And he said, “no saddle can buy. Nobody sell you saddle. There’s no saddle you can buy. There’s no saddle, that’s why.” That’s the reason why—I knew how to make one saddle from scratch, only—except the tree.

That’s why, in the early seventies, when we went to the Calgary Stampede, in Canada, I told my friends we’re going to, he said, he’s going to get a—you drive, and we all going, four of us, we’re going together from San Francisco, all the way to Idaho, go in Canada, and go to Calgary, and after Calgary come down in Montana, and Utah—I wanted to go in Utah, because that’s where I knew the saddle tree company is, eastern Utah, Vernal Utah. So, the three of us, four of us, they all agree with me. They wanted to see the saddle tree company themselves.

When I went there, “yes,” he said, “no problem, we can—any way you want to make it, they’re make it.” So, one of the boys and I talking to the owner of that place, give him all the—the size, what is what, yeah, of the saddle parts. Then he said, “yes, we can do it.” See, a lot of saddles they get, but not the way—almost, close to the size I want. So, there’s no problem to them. So I told him I want ‘em **this** way, wider here, this (gestures). So they got all the pattern made. Then he said, “what—we have to name this saddle now, this tree now, this saddle tree.” And the other person say, “well, name him Kingo.” (He starts to laugh) “Name that saddle tree Kingo!” That’s how the Kingo Slick came in. Yeah.

AL: So that was the name of the tree . . .

KG: Yes.

AL: But were they making a saddle—a whole saddle? Or only making the tree?

KG: Only the tree, only the tree. Yeah. That’s the most important part. I found out, later, because there’s other saddle makers over here in Hawaii, you know, but where they gonna get the tree?

AL: Well, why couldn’t you buy the tree locally?

KG: No more that tree. There came other trees, but won't fit any horse. You see, when I was kid days, had more narrow horses, the thoroughbreds, that's more narrow, [and] the Arab. No more that quarter-horse, the wide horse. You know? The old saddle don't fit these horses today. So that's the reason why I made this one wider—narrow and wide.

[tape is turned over]

The old saddle don't fit the quarter-horse because they're too narrow. The gullet get too narrow. So, that's the reason why I figured all this. If you make it narrow for the thoroughbred, make it wide for the quarter-horse. In other words, where that thing wide, it touch the—the lower hand rest on the quarter horse. And the thoroughbred—the higher end rest on the thoroughbred, don't touch the withers. Don't harm the withers. You know, after few years, that thing went—a lot of the Kingo Slick [saddle trees] came to Hawaii, and people was asking how this tree was made. They didn't know who I was. I'm a unknown person—see, even today a lot of people don't know me. What they know is Kingo Slick—who's this Kingo? But, uh. . . .

AL: So the Kingo Slick, that's made for quarter-horses . . .

KG: They make fit quarter-horse and fit thoroughbreds. As I said, this—the gullet is high, but over here it's wide.

AL: So the arch of the tree has a high middle . . .

KG: yes . . .

AL: But it's wide on either side . . .

KG: yeah . . .

AL: uh-huh . . .

KG: For a quarter horse, won't hurt the quarter-horse, because this place is wide to fit the quarter horse.

AL: I see . . .

KG: And this place is high, and this area—and this one, just, you know that part, it's resting outside the thoroughbred, won't harm no horse. Because this no touch nothing out there. But in here—in here . . .

AL: Where it sits on the . . .

KG: Yeah. That's the idea behind this tree I figured. So, and one year, I called that. . . . Now it's under the Superior Saddle Tree. Used to be Standard Saddle Tree, but they had sold it or. . . .

This owner one time called me, said, "how come your tree's so wide?" I said, "do you own a horse?" He tell me, no. That's why he don't know. I tell him—I ask him, "how many saddles can a cowboy buy? Lucky he can buy one." He telling me, "lucky, that's right!" That's the reason why this is—the bar is that wide. It fit the wide horse, and fit the narrow horse all one fit. And he always send me letter. Now, last week he send me a letter, this person that I [had] explained why [to]. This person now, he telling—what you call—he get, I don't know what kind of tree is this, cottonwood tree . . . you heard of cottonwood tree?

AL: Yeah . . . like, the tree? The tree that grows? I've heard of cottonwood, yeah.

KG: Well, he said that he's making a tree out of cottonwood. See, that's a good tree, he tell me. But, I don't know what's that. So he—he wants me to try that, with the same pattern of mine, but using cottonwood tree.

AL: What kind of wood do they use for the Kingo?

KG: Uh, White Pine.

AL: Could you describe, just for people who don't know what it looks like, what a tree is and how it looks?

KG: (Laughs slightly) Hmm. Hard to—hard to—you've seen the tree. . . .

AL: Hm, it's part of the saddle. How do you build the saddle around the tree? Like once you have the tree, how do you start making the saddle on it?

KG: Put the—first thing is the, the ring. You know where the girth go, the cinch go? The ring? That's the first thing. That's the main one. And that's the one people want to learn the Hawaiian tree. The Hawaiian tree has a rawhide braid, completely different from the western. So that's—that's the strong part of the tree, of the saddle, because the rawhide braid.

AL: What does the braid do?

KG: Hold this girth. Hold this girth. You didn't see one Hawaiian tree?

AL: I've seen them, yeah.

KG: You see, the Hawaiian tree—from here [the pommel], the rawhide come down here to the ring. Come down to the ring. And from the ring the cinch, yeah?

AL: That goes under the belly...

KG: Yeah.

AL: Yeah.

KG: Ok, the western—from here only screws. Five screw.

AL: The shoulder of the saddle.

KG: Yes. Up here no more. This fly off.

AL: Ah, ok. So instead of riveting the leather to the tree, the braid holds it on?

KG: Yes. The braid come from the top. In other words, this thing is one piece, right around the horse. One piece. This one [the American stock saddle] is five screw holding it on. And a lot of times this one fly off. The screw.

AL: I see. So, so the tree . . . the tree itself is like the foundation of the saddle.

KG: Yes, that's the—that's the important part. But the **strength** is the rawhide. You know. You know, covered the tree, the rawhide is the strength. It's not the wood. It's the rawhide. And the—now they using fiberglass and stuff...

AL: For the tree?

KG: For the tree. They—the ropers roping-tree strong enough, five-year guarantee. Roping-tree. Fiberglass. And before the fiberglass, this rawhide tree, and some kinds plastic, they made. But again, just like—the rawhide tree is just like a glass. Once you crack, it just run. The crack just run. And it all fall apart. So they started with rawhide, still today the rawhide is number one tree. Rawhide covered tree. Yeah.

AL: After you went to Utah to see about . . .

KG: The tree . . .

AL: the tree, is that when you started re-learning how to make the saddle?

KG: No. You mean make—complete one saddle?

AL: yeah.

KG: No, no. I did that before. From old—old tree all falling—the **tree** is not falling apart. All the cover, you know the leather and stuff. . . .

AL: Who taught you originally? Was it your father who taught you how to fix and make the saddles?

KG: My own.

AL: Self-taught?

KG: Yes. Because they have their own, and they busy. And sometimes, you know as a kid, you get time, yeah? Play this, play that. Yeah. That's how I learned. And my father, you know, has cattle. Sometime people buy the cattle, they slaughter the cattle. He takes the—they throw away the hide, he takes the hide. And that's the one I play with. Not play—I use that, you know, practice this and that.

AL: What was the hardest part about—what was the hardest thing to learn?

KG: The—the braiding, right here. That's the one today, people want to learn that. And that's the one **Kohala** High School, I teaching the **Kohala** High School Ag teacher to make this. All the agriculture, all animal [studies] come under him, yeah? And they talking about saddle, now. So, I don't know how come—I didn't know him, but he came over with one of my friends, and my friend introduced me to him. That he want to learn how to make the Hawaiian saddle, yeah.

AL: So, are there any young people? I mean, is the knowledge being passed down to the next generation?

KG: Yes. High school, high school students. I was amazed they like that. I guess, some of them just like me, eh? When, you know, from kid days [you] like this kind of stuff. So I'm very glad that somebody like this, so they can continue, pass it on, yeah?

But again, you know, a lot of people selfish too, now. Human a selfish—selfish animal, let's call it. Because they don't want to teach you unless money. A lot of people don't teach you. That's the reason why nobody taught me. I like—but nobody teach me. Now you—you making saddle, and I come visit you, you put away everything. You don't want me to look how you make. That's how it is, you know, even today.

AL: Why is that?

KG: I figure this way. I figure [you're thinking] if I learn how to make, you cannot sell your saddle or something. That's what I figure. I don't know why, but that's the only reason.

AL: For competition.

KG: Yeah.

AL: Aren't there a lot of people who want to buy Hawaiian saddles?

KG: Oh, yes! Oh, yes! You see, just the other day, I had one saddle tree was here sitting long time. But you know me, I busy. So, once you start a tree, start a saddle, you cannot say, just leave it to next week, you got to continue. Once you start it you have to finish it, let's put it that way. I had one tree sitting here quite a while, and this person come around, "oh, how's my saddle?" I'm busy yet.

So then—just—today's Friday—this week, one of my friends from Big Island, Kohala up, he said there's a, you want to sell a, you want to sell a saddle—these trees. Saddles. Not trees. The saddle. [I asked him] "how much you want for the saddle?" He tell me, "two for \$300." "You **sure**? You know what you're saying?" He say, "yeah. That's all I need." So you see, a person going come look at them. And this person went, he don't know too much about saddle—

I guess he's a young man. So I tell him, gee, that's a—before he sell the saddle I tell him that's very cheap. "How come, you only want 300 bucks for the two saddle?" He say, "yeah." [I say,] "he doesn't—[if] the person doesn't buy that saddle, I'll take it for 300 bucks." Without seeing, now. One Hawaiian, [and] one Western. Ok?

So Monday, I get the three-hundred dollars and I give him. Then Monday morning—no, afternoon, this person—you know that saddle I was supposed to make?—just came over here, just by coincidence. I just came back with the trees, with the saddles, and here he come. I didn't tell him nothing. I was going to call him, you know. I told him, "I was going to call you tonight."

(The conversation is interrupted)

KG: Yeah, so. And when that thing come, boom, I'll take it. See how fast that thing go? If you get any saddle for sale like that, people are looking for this, you know. So the other, the western saddle, to me I'm going to donate it to **Kohala** High School. The western saddle. It's a nice—good condition. Because if the students are interested, and I'm going to talk to the teacher, if there's room for display his saddle, I'll give it to the school. Because **Kohala** High School is going under—you know all the basketball, baseball—under "Kohala Cowboys." And that's,

I figure, just right. Give them the cowboy saddle, and stuff. Yeah?

AL: About how long does it take to make the saddle once you start it?

KG: Once I start? I'd say, regular, about forty hours. Yeah.

AL: And, maybe this sounds like a silly question, but do you have any idea why you—you chose to become a saddle maker? I mean, I know you started out because you needed one saddle, yeah?

KG: Yeah.

AL: But it sounds like after that you really have a lot of enthusiasm for it.

KG: Lot of—lot of people are looking for Hawaiian saddle. That's why the saddle tree business came in. Of course, tell you the truth, I'm not making a nickel out of this. You see, some guys here, this instructor, the teacher told me this. He said somebody told him, "I have a pattern for this saddle, this tree I have. I told the company don't sell the pattern to anybody else." What kind of talk is that? And I'm pretty sure the company **will** sell it. The company will—will sell . . .

AL: The pattern for the tree?

KG: For his tree—I don't know what kind, though. I don't know how good that is. Because, hey, few saddle makers, Hawaiian saddle makers, making saddle. And I—you see, I had a lot of friends in the islands that goes to check like to see how his saddle come out. So he goes to his place, he see all my trees, all the Kingo Slick. You see, the Superior Saddle Tree, he put Superior plus what kind of tree this. Every roping tree has the name, you know. Somebody who made first time, yeah? The Bowman tree, and stuff like that. Well, this is—they see the Kingo Slick. So, but then one guy telling me, he said he get his own pattern. I don't know. Not telling me, telling this teacher. I said, no worry. Because this one you cannot copyright. This saddle tree—you cannot copyright saddle tree. 'Cause you make one **slight** twist or something, that's not mine, it's yours. So, you cannot copyright that. That's the saddle tree company.

AL: Do you ever worry about someone taking or using your pattern?

KG: No! No. A lot of them buying that. I'm not making nickel out of that. Good for them. Good for the cowboy, eh. I'm thinking of the cowboy, not the saddle maker. The cowboy is the one who need the saddle. Yeah. Have you—when was the last parade you went?

AL: What's that?

KG: The last parade, you been to . . . ?

AL: Oh yeah, yeah.

KG: You seen the—you went to the parade?

AL: Yeah.

KG: You see a lot of Hawaiian saddle?

AL: Yeah.

KG: Most of them, that's my *da kine*!

AL: (Laughs) That's your pattern?

KG: Yeah!

AL: How does that make you feel to see so many cowboys riding on your saddle?

KG: I—I feel good, tell you the truth. Because they like Hawaiian saddle and they get Hawaiian saddle. Yeah. Have you ridden a Hawaiian saddle?

AL: No.

KG: (Pause) I don't know it's all in my mind or what, but, the Hawaiian saddle, the stirrup, easy, easy—the position is very good. The roping tree is the roping tree. You go only so much, it lock over here. So the same tree you go up the mountain, and you coming down the hill, you like throw your leg in the front, because your horse is—you cannot. I almost flew off one time, I didn't know. The stock saddle, the roping tree. Ooh, it lock on me. And my leg going just like—going back, eh?

AL: When was that?

KG: Not too long. Whatchacall—Rudy Tongg Ranch. Up on Kapolei, that mountain there. Yeah?

AL: Because it was a roping tree saddle?

KG: Roping tree. Wasn't mine. You know, somebody else I rode. So, cannot. . . .

Of course, Hawaiian tree can rope, but not strictly for roping all around. And the cantle is high because of the hills, eh? Going the hill, yeah?

AL: Before we finish up, I wanted to ask you a little bit more about this ranch, Double Rainbow.

KG: Ok.

AL: And a few minutes ago, uh, or a while ago you said that you bought two breeding mares and that's how you started raising horses.

KG: Yeah, I bought the mares from Parker Ranch. That was thoroughbred mares, and a few years later I had a few colts from that mares. The people start telling me about quarter-horses. You see, I was—I work Parker Ranch, and they had a lot of thoroughbreds and they was good horses, good condition, you know, can last all day. So quarter-horse, say, won't last like the thoroughbred. Can't take it like a thoroughbred. But again, for arena like that, the thoroughbred is a little too slow pickup. It's going to be the quarter horse. So I went change over. But still yet, my horses, a lot of them get thoroughbred in them. Yes. But today quarter-horse about three-quarter or seven-eighths thoroughbred. You know that?

AL: Mixed up, yeah?

KG: Yeah, because the fastest quarter-horse now get plenty thoroughbred inside. I still say thoroughbred is the blood. Good blood.

AL: Old habits, eh? When—just like you had a long time, just like there was a long time that you weren't making saddles . . .

KG: yeah . . .

AL: There was a long time that you weren't riding horses.

KG: Yes, yes.

AL: What made you decide to go back and start breeding them again?

KG: Right now I'm doing it, yeah.

AL: But, uh, why—why all of a sudden did you decide to start working with horses again after such a long time?

KG: Wasn't that hard for me to come back in the horses. Look like I have horse blood in me. You know, once I—with my friends play with, help them—she came in my blood, right away like that. That's how I went strong into horses. Wasn't no problem.

AL: Was it hard for you to be away from horses for so many years?

KG: No, at that time, no. And now, you tell me, yes it is hard. I don't know why. I was away for—till late sixties, away from horses. Of course, in the fifties, about 1950, 1951, my parents were still Kohala, and they had horses when I go vacation there. But I didn't—well, I think the reason why I didn't fall for horses at that time, because I didn't have place to keep them like now. I—I'm pretty sure I don't want to rent one stall and raise one horse, I guess. My type. I don't know. That's the reason why I didn't come strong to horses, even though my parents still had horses about—let's see—about 1950. Yeah.

AL: So how did you get this place, Double Rainbow?

KG: Well, this was under Waipahu sugar. All sugar. At that time, they gave up sugar over here. So had space for lease, yeah? That's how I got it.

AL: You leased it from Waipahu sugar?

KG: Yeah—no—yeah, beginning it was Waipahu sugar. Then Gentry took over Waipahu sugar, the whole thing. Up here, all this area was Gentry, still Gentry.

AL: Gentry?

KG: Yeah. Gentry did this subdivision right there [on the hills above Double Rainbow Ranch].

AL: Oh, I see. The development.

KG: Yeah. They get the lease from Bishop Estate.

AL: So today you lease the land from Gentry.

KG: (overlapping) Gentry. Yes. This land is under Gentry.

AL: And you told me before that you were employed for a while by Circle Six, taking care of their cows?

KG: Yes, yeah. You see, when Gentry, after—oh, the whatchacall was slow, you know, Gentry is a home development, eh? Well that was—at that time the thing was very slow. People cannot buy the home or what. Was very slow. So they leased them out to this Circle Six. And the Circle Six fenced all that so many hundred acres. And, well they know how to fence up and stuff like that, but no more cowboy. So they hired me.

AL: To be their cowboy . . .

KG: Yeah, to care the cattle.

AL: What did you do for them?

KG: Take care the cattle! The owned the—they owned the area, the cattle and stuff. The cattle was from—they get it from Hana ranch. That's Hana ranch cattle at that time. And they say the. . . . And cattle wasn't that much, you know. Since I like play with horses and cattle, even was—they only paid me very little. Only my expense to go, you know. Check the water with the truck, stuff like that. And mean time I get horse go up. And they told me after the cattle come seven-hundred pounds, then they take them away to the feed-lot. After that, after the last whatchacall, bunch, they never come back. They end the

lease. They say they going develop, but till today—eight, nine years ago, Gentry say they going develop, but till today nothing. You know there's a prison up there?

AL: Halawa?

KG: Halawa prison up there. Yeah. Above the—the Gentry area. Yeah.

AL: So now, on this piece of land, Double Rainbow Ranch, could you describe, well maybe how many horses do you have on this land?

KG: Think right now it's about twenty-six, boarders.

AL: And you still breed your horses?

KG: I still do.

AL: And you still train them?

KG: No, I—the last horse I trained was—right there (points). This horse, as I say, I train him easy easy, no buck. Today horse, I think—get three horse under here that I break first time, no problem. Not like the olden days. Olden days, he no buck it's just like—the horse is no good. That's what we thought, you know!

AL: If the horse bucks it's no good?

KG: No, the horse **don't** buck no good.

AL: Oh! (Laughs)

KG: No more spirit or something. No, that's true. That's how we used to train our horses. See how stupid the human was, yeah?

AL: So, how did you learn otherwise? How did you learn to do it different?

KG: Well, I suppose to learn when I was a kid. When my father was training like that. The modern way. He had it long time ago. And partly because of him, I think I had the idea. But again, people would say, the horses are no good like that. No more spirit. From kid days, I had the idea, too, from my father. You know, the nice way. Yeah.

AL: Well, Mr. Gushikuma, I want to thank you for talking with me today.

KG: Yeah, I hope you can get one good result of this.

AL: Oh, I think it will be very good.