

William “Willy” Gomes, Sr.



A Big Island cowboy, Willy spent most of his life in Kona, where he still resides. Starting out as a plantation worker at the Honoka`a sugar plantation at the age of 14, Willy learned what hard work and dedication was all about. He then moved on to become a ranch hand for J.J. Nobriga. This led him to his life as a paniolo, which he continues to follow to this day. He was the foreman at Huehue Ranch for 32 years. Upon the sale of the ranch, he purchased 350 head of mother cows and continued operating the ranch as a lessee. Willy is still active and continues to operate his ranch with his son, William Jr. He has trained many cow and rope horses during his paniolo career, and is still active as a trainer. Of the paniolo way of life, Willy says, “life was hard, but we always had plenty fun – you gotta love it to live it!!”

Paniolo Hall of Fame

Oral History Interview

William “Willy” Gomes, Sr.

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“Willy” Gomes was born Feb. 8, 1929, in Kamuela, but he grew up in Kona. When he was about 10 years old, the family moved to live in Hamakua, where his father had a job on the plantation. Willy was the fifth of 13 children.

My dad worked for ranches. You know, different jobs but mostly for ranch. Ranch hand, you know, those days – well, they had a lot of wild cattle. So they concentrate on wild cattle, and whatever, they worked on all fencing and stone wall or whatever there was to be done, you know, in the ranch. And ride horses, he would train horses.

When we live in Kona, you know, as young kids our job was picking coffee too, yeah? Because the coffee farmers would give you a home, a house, but you have to pick the coffee, you know, they give free house but

you pick the coffee. So all us kids pick coffee. After school and weekends or – a lot of work, you know, those days.

I Is that the only work you did or did you do other kinds of work when you were a kid?

Oh all kinds, all kind, used to go down the pastures and clean land for different ranchers. All kinds. And those days wasn't too much where they would pay my dad, maybe they would give him one cow, one milk - because those days you depend on milking cows too, you know? So they give him one cow or so for exchange but oh yeah, after school we would just go down the pastures and go work. Take one extra sandwich or something. Not like today these kids, they don't want to work. But those days, everything was work. To survive.

I These days, if a kid gets a job after school it's usually because you want spending money or something, go to the movies. Is that why you kids worked back then?

Not then, no, no spending money. No such thing as spending money. But today I think, you don't really blame the kids because the government step in, right? They tell you you got to be certain age to work -- child labor, you cannot. Those days no had such thing. If you fit to work, you work.

I How did it feel to be a kid in those days? Was it – did you like the fact that you could go out and work or did it feel like a drag?

Well, we never think too much about it because that was our chores every day, we had to do it, so you know, it's part of growing up. So we never had no more T.V.s and no radios. The phonograph was the crank, those first crank phonographs. So what you going to do? You got to work. You cannot stay home and – like I say, today, the kids can watch videos or T.V. but no such thing those days.

But yeah I -- it was, I don't know, a lot of fun. We never had all the luxury you got today, but it was a lot of fun. We never had no toys. We had to make our own stuff. We had to make our own.

I What kind of toys did you make for yourself?

G We used to make wagons, we used to ride the wagon. Put kind fancy wooden wheels or iron wheels and make our own so we can ride. And then we had one toy that when we used to go to school we used to race. I don't know if you know the old days they had that wooden barrels, remember those wooden barrels and they had rings around? We used to take those rings and we'd make a wire and we used to pull that and down the road, full speed, going school and come back. Never had traffic. you can run from your house all the way, two, three miles. I don't know if there was toys to buy, those days.

I What kind of work did you enjoy the most when you were a kid?

Well, I think, I used to ride -- my dad used to make me ride horse from young. So, I used to kind of enjoy that. Because he used to break in horses too, for different people, so, you know, he would put us on and we would ride too. And then like I said, picking coffee or -- we never like that too much because it's kind of tedious. Picking coffee is not a hard job but it's a tedious job where you have to do it, otherwise you get a ripe crop and you don't pick it and comes the rain and then the farmers get after you because they gave you free house -- so you have to do that, you know, it's part of your job. But being that we had that many kids so, you know, we pick a lot of coffee.

In those days to survive we did a lot of hunting. My dad, as I say, worked for the ranch, and -- a lot of hunting. You got cattle, you got pig, and so we depend a lot on meat. Those days never had ice boxes too. So you would salt -- put them in the salt barrel, and make sausage and that's how you preserve them. Rough days, but I think it was good fun days too, it was good fun days. Never had cars. The only car you would see was the doctor and the police. There's no cars. Because like I say, all the guys that would work, horses was their transportation.

I What kind of a house were you living in then?

Coffee shacks.

I Was it part of a town?

Oh no, no, you out in the boonies, in the fields. Nobody had houses like today.

I How far away were your closest neighbors?

Half a mile, sometime quarter of a mile, most of them was, like I say, coffee farmers. They was the neighbors. And some of the farmers got five acres, ten acres so you had one house on this end and maybe the next end, but pretty far.

I remember when I was young kid days. I can remember where you pass over here you only see two, three gas lamps, or kerosene lamps, never had electric those days too. That is all you could see. Up the hill here, a few houses, old Hawaiian houses. And the road was only this, well this is wide now but this used to be the main road, right here, the one we came on. But this was only like for one car. But again, like I said, where the

cars? There's no cars. The doctor and the policeman. If one car come we have to pull to the side and wait. So that's how it was, at this road right here, this old road ...

I Back in those days, you were living in these coffee shacks, would you live there all year round or only when it was time do the harvest?

All year round. But then no forget, those days they never had herbicide so there wasn't only pick coffee, you'd have to go around the tree and then hoe *hana*. Like the tree would cover maybe ten feet radius or something, the whole tree, so where the coffee would fall, in that area you have to clean it with a hoe. Those days it was not only pick coffee. And when they fall and then they lose the outside. The husk, and then they called parchment after that. So when the thing fall and it get rots so you don't have the husk any more. So you have to pick all that. Those days it's thick, yeah? There's mostly Japanese farmers anyway those days, had the coffee.

I About how many families or how many people would they have living on their farms to help work with the trees.

One family. Like us, we had a big family so, you know, one family. And then it's not only -- there was all these jobs, because they would dry the coffee too, right? They would have these shades and most of these coffee shades would be part of the house, the roof of the house. See the top, they would move that - they had them on wheels, yeah? Then they could move the whole top of the house out, they would have a platform. That's where they dry the coffee.

Then they had a rake. You have to rake it so you can, you know, move the coffee around so it can dry. Then, when it would rain -- in fact, one place we were staying these people had a store, an old store. So when it would rain we could hear the old lady calling for us, see? Because she couldn't pull the shade back. So we would have to run down there full speed and put the shade, you know, cover the coffee, and she'd reward us with a couple of candies or something. Those days had the Milky Way and all that kind of candy so she'd give us one candy or so, we satisfied, eh? So, it was part of the thing.

So, coffee was always, like I say, always had work. You pick the coffee, then we had to clean around the trees and pick up whatever been fall, you know, so there's always work.

I Did -- in general did the family have a good relationship with the farmers that ...

You have to. You would have to otherwise -- you don't pick the coffee, you screw up and you're down the road. But those days it was pretty easy to get house because all these coffee farmers looking for pickers, that

was the thing see? So if you get out from this one you can go to the next one or, you know, only go down the road.

Like I say, they was mostly Japanese farmers. I don't remember any Portuguese that had any kind of coffee. All Japanese, no Hawaiians. The coffee farmers was all Japanese. Even some of them never had their own land but they had lease lands. The Portuguese would lease them the lands. But those days, you know, you never need no contracts, you make a deal, you shake hand, and if the guy tell you that you have the land for 15 or 20 years, without signing anything, it's yours. It's just the word. The handshake. So a lot of, like I say, they had land from the Portuguese but the Portuguese wasn't raising coffee, only the Japanese had coffee farm.

I So, where did you get most of your food?

Hunting was the main source of food but, like I say, the particular farmer we was picking for, where we were staying, they had a store. So what they would do -- you could charge those days. When you go to the store you don't pay, they charge you. And end of the month, and they tell you, well you owe so much or whatever. And I remember even like when we moved to Hamakua, down Honokaa, the stores was same thing. You don't go to those stores and buy. They will come, make the rounds to the houses, maybe two times a week, they come there and you put your order. You put your order, they bring to you. You don't go. And same thing they would charge you end of the month, then you pay, see? That's how it was.

We always had garden. Always had garden. And we used to raise our own pig, chickens, those days. Chickens just run wild. So, when you short of food you go, catch one chicken and wring the neck and.... Was plenty from the land.

I remember when we was young days, you don't buy rice. Like, my mother had -- I don't think they had such thing as four, five pounds, they were 100 pound bags. 100 pound bag rice and 100 pound bag of flour. Because they make their own bread. Pancakes, breads, or -- you don't buy bread. We never did buy bread those days, see?

I So you'd really put your own food on the table ...

Table, yeah, you put your own food, beans, whatever you go plant. And those days, when you plant, you never need sprayer. No more bugs. Not like today. We didn't spray nothing. Nowadays you got to spray everything. So it's hard, eh? And before, you just plant your garden and leave it alone. You don't -- no put chemicals. What you have before? Mosquitoes and, we no had all these kind fancy kine bug. Maybe you might have some butterflies, they eat little bit cabbage and stuff, but no big deal. You know, so.

I Now your dad, he worked on the ranches, he was a horseman? How did he learn how to be a cowboy?

He just -- if you have horses around, you going to learn. Maybe not as fancy as today, the training. You know, today they get all kind of fancy training -- you gotta sidepass, you gotta back up, you gotta do this. Those days, you train a horse just to go work. Nothing fancy. Can stop, turn -- you can rope wild cattle. The mouth not too soft but hey, survive. Do your day's work. Simple as that.

I Did he teach you all that stuff?

I tell you what, those days, they never had the patience and time to tell you anything. They put you on the horse, ride him, if the thing going back or run with you, you survive. I guess maybe we had so many kids that he thought that he can afford to lose one or two, no big deal, what the hell (laughter).

But I was the one that he used to put me on mules and this was mules and horses that he was training for people. But those days no more too many, like we get some Filipinos or the kind of people, that they use horse too for go hunting or whatever, wherever they going to go, transportation, so, he would train some of those horses and maybe shoe, you know, shoe horses for those guys. So, anything for few dollars.

I How would he get paid for his work doing the training. . would he just get paid cash?

Those days I think pretty much was cash. You know, even the plantations, always cash, that's how we used to get paid. I don't know why but it was all cash money. And those days you're talking, what -- cash, 25 dollars? a month? Those days you work for a dollar a day, back then. So yeah, I think they pay him cash. I don't think they even had checks, those days. Everything was cash.

I He was known as a horse trainer, is that right?

Well, kind of all around. Ranch hand, ranch hand, and when he worked plantation, they work with mules. You know those days plantation no had equipment like today. Like all in the fields, all with mules, yeah? Whatever, you go through the cane field, you rake and whatever, pull the grass and -- all with mules. They never had tractors like they get today.

I Did he train mules as well?

Train mules to work the field, yeah. I did too. And those mules, the plantation used to buy those mules from Parker Ranch. Parker Ranch used to bring them in from the mainland, they was mainland mules. They were big mules, see? Not the small. The small ones they used to use for what they call pack saddle. You know what's a pack saddle? The wooden one, and it goes like this with a cross. They load sacks of fertilizer maybe like one on each side and one on the top, maybe three. Those sacks would weigh like, I don't know, 80, 100 pounds. And we would get like a chain of those mules, maybe five, six, eight.

And the big mules, that's the ones used to work the field. Carry the plough and all those things. And like I said, they was California mules, the big mules, from Parker Ranch. And when you get them from Parker Ranch they only was handled like maybe halter but not to work. So you have to train them how to go work in the field. So when you reach the end of the line you got to take them back to the next line and end of the line turn them back and all that and then you had to train them for ride, otherwise you're going to walk. And from the stable to the field sometimes you would go a couple or three miles.

I How was it different training a mule from training a horse?

All you need is a snaffle bit, as long as you can control them in the field. I think the hardest training was to ride it. Then we no put saddle. You no ride it with a saddle now because you have what they call the harness. You know like how they pull these wagons -- they get the harness and the chains and all that? That's what you get, you only get that, no saddle now. You have to ride them bare back. Some you get buck off . . . They don't know what is ride, eh?

I When did you get your first horse?

Oh, my first horse? Man, I think I was about like -- I tell you what, I had to buy my first horse. You know your dad will promise you, 'yeah, I go buy a horse for you,' but never come? So, I bought my first horse. Maybe I was in my early twenties.

I Do you remember when you first started training horses?

Yeah, like I say, when I first started riding in Kona, when he put me on a horse, I never know what was training. I just got to ride, hang on -- hopefully, you know? But the training -- I would say when I was oh, maybe about nineteen, twenty.

I How did you learn what you were supposed to do?

Well, sometimes you watch different people. You know, you watch the older people and you ask them and they will show you. And then I think you kind of develop your own. You've got to develop your own, you've got to kind of think what do you want to do.

I What would you say your style is or your technique, your skill, when you're training?

Right now I know I've got my own thing but everybody got their kind of different ways of training. Well, first of all, when you like side-pass them, you've got to do some spur work. And there's a lot of techniques that -- me I can figure, pretty much figure out the horse, what the mind want to do. So you have to get them before they do the stupid things. So if you let them do the stupid things, you've had it, but if you kind of know -- I can kind of sense what this one's thinking about, or whatever. So you kind of take it away from there. You can get in control.

Before in the old days, we don't train a horse that is two years old. You want it can work for the ranch. You train a horse that is six, eight years old. Try train one of those horses. Because they would let them run until six years old then bring them in. Then try ride that. They kill you! So if you wasn't a good enough rider, you're going get buck off -- and one thing about the horses too, if they buck you off, then they going try again, they know they can get you out. So it was really rough.

Today is duck soup. Two years old you start riding one colt, you know, and the mind is not like one eight year old horse. So you can control him better. And then I found where like I said, the old days, bring them in the pen, put your saddle, ride, you're riding a bronc. Today, you know, before you ride, you put the saddle and you put the bit, whatever and you can drive-rein them without riding them. You stop them, you turn them, you even can back them up. So when you ride them, at least you got some control. So if he like act stupid, you can hold them and you can scold them, you have the mouth already pretty well. Rather than go try ride one bronc, he's going to be more -- it was kind of hard for the horse too, you got to rough him up.

I Why did people wait so long to train horses before?

G Before? Well, I guess they had so many horses before. Before, ranches no buy horses from outside. Each ranch used to raise their own horses. So, they get so many that they cannot keep up. So they would wait, like I say, six years old and eight years old and by that time, the horse -- half of his life is almost gone. And they're too strong. And those days, those horses used to buck, that was the breed, no? They would buck. Thoroughbreds, they like to buck, and they're strong, so they're going to fight you. So that was real hard.

I Even though it was harder back in those days, was it more fun for you to get on the bucking bronc ...

Oh yeah, because you like ride, those days, sure. Oh yeah, you like ride, you like them buck. You like them buck because when you're young, you don't care. You're strong -- man alive -- you can hold those horses. If they no buck, no more fun -- you **like** them buck. But today, oh, you don't want them buck because as you get older you get smarter too, yeah? Those days, you know, you got one bucking horse, you're not thinking, hey I'm going to fall down, and I'm going to broke my leg and maybe I cannot ride. No, no such thing. It's just do it.

I How many injuries did you have over the years?

I tell you, knock wood, but I never did went doctor for broken leg or whatever. No, maybe I get little bit back trouble but never go doctor. I don't know, those days, no too much doctors too. You don't think about doctors, just go work. Nowadays, 'oh my back's, oh, I cannot, my back's sore.' I don't understand some of these.

I So, you mean you never broke any bones or you just never went to the doctor about it?

If I been broke, I don't know. I mean, I got buck off and horses fall with me and all that, but it's just ...

I'm 73 now and I still training horses. And I shoe my own horses. And, I guess, some guys is in their twenties and say 'oh my back, I cannot, my back's sore.' How come? I don't understand, because I still shoe horses, so what's the big deal. So I don't know. I guess some guys they just cry babies too. They get one small pain, hey, sore back. Yeah, everybody get some pain. But you just got to do it. So I don't understand these young guys, they cannot shoe one horse with a sore back. I still shoe and I still training.

I How long did you live with your family in your mom's house up in Honokaa?

Until I was, what I was? That was just before I came to Kona and I had my own house, so maybe 25, 26. But one time I was -- my old man died, he was only 51 years old. And at that time I was the head of the family. I was supporting the rest of the kids, the older ones was gone, like my older brothers, my older sisters was gone. But then at the time I was sole support of the family.

I How old were you when he died?

Eighteen. No maybe, maybe sixteen. Sixteen or seventeen. That was 1946. I don't know if you remember but the plantation had the first strike. Before that, never had union, right? When the first time I started plantation, no such thing as union. And then at first came union so the first strike was 1946, I think. So they had a meeting in one of the theaters in Honokaa, that's where they used to hold their union meetings. So when he came out, I don't know, some kind of argument, I don't know what. Then, one guy went false crack

him, and he was kind of moving, and the guy went false crack him and he fell and hit his head on the curb, the cement.

And those days, no had doctors. You only had house doctors, plantation doctor. Plantation doctor was only for put bandages, or they give you cough medicine. Because plantation, they would get the cheapest doctors they could. And those days, never had doctors. You no had all this kind fancy -- now you get one for the front of the eyes one for the back, one for the ears. Before, one doctor was everything. We only had one doctor, from the toes right up to your hair, that's all you had, one doctor. And even horses, you know, it was one doctor. But like I say, today, all kind specialist. Because everybody want a piece of the pie. These guys want a piece of the pie, and for check your body you got to go to about ten doctors, you know, for check the whole thing.

But that's all -- and then he went into a coma and never came out of it. You know, like I say, those days, no more doctor. And he was only 51.

I How did that change your life, to come into that position and take that responsibility?

Same thing, just work. I was working plantation. Just work and come, whatever, give the money home and keep, you know, keep going. Until they become of age. But when I got married, well, all the family was gone already, they got married and all that. They had only the -- the youngest girl, was only the baby home, so yeah.

That never changed my life. Like I say, you don't own one car, where you going? No place to go. Just work, come home and pretty much do your thing. So. It was rough but, well, it was okay. Never had money, and plantation, small pay. And like I said, my mom, no more money, with all those kids and stuff. So she only depending on -- there was no other income. It's just that -- my wages.

You got to really struggle. You cannot be extravagant. My mother had a rough life. Oh, work all her life. All her life. If they go some place, they would have to walk. Like we go to church, young days. Maybe it was like the mother hen with a pile of chicks, all us kids, walking to church. The old people never had recreation. Like I say, only we had that crank phonograph, that's all we had. No more electricity until we move over here and it was years later. No more electric, only the kerosene lamps..

I Do you think that you, your mother and most of your family were happy most of the time?

Oh yeah, yeah. Well, life was rough but we didn't take it that way because never had a luxury. If we knew had a luxury there, then we would think life was rough because we never had that, but never had nothing. So life

wasn't rough. I think, you know, but if we knew they had T.V., and had this that we never had. Then. But no had nothing, nobody, no had electricity.

I You met your wife in Honokaa. What was courting like?

Those days? Rough. That was rough. You couldn't go alone, you got to take one chaperone -- the mother would have to go or the other sister. Not like girls are today. Today these young guys can drop this girl now and go and pick up one down the road. No such thing, never had.

I How did you meet your wife?

She was the cashier for the theater. And then, well I knew her brother well, he used to work with us too, same ranch, and then I knew the mom and I knew the dad, so we kind of did things together up the ranch. And then like I say, she was cashier. So it start from there.

I You developed a liking for her.

Yeah, yeah. Like I said, there was no more choice. There was no more choice, so, whatever come along you got to go. Like today, these kids got all these choice. No such thing before.

I So what kinds of things would you do together when you were courting?

Mostly was the movies, go to the movies or sometimes go up the ranch, horseback riding or something. But like I said, you know, not you alone, we'd have somebody else, a friend, or something like that. But no was too much courting because I never had a car, what are you going to do. You cannot go travel.

I And how long did people know each other and court each other before they got married?

Maybe one year. Today they stay together for ten, fifteen years but before, no -- eight months, one year, marriage. And not too many women would get pregnant as they do. Today, sixteen already you know, they're already giving birth. But it wasn't free like that before. Now they sleep with everything.

I Was that why you moved out of your house, because you got married?

No, I was staying with my mother, I was staying with them when I first got married for, I don't know, maybe a year, or near one year.

I In that case, why did you end up moving out and moving back to Kona?

Because pretty much they were on their feet already. Only had the last girl home, I think, the last baby. And then she was getting social security already. My mom got social security and the family was small.

I But what brought you back to Kona?

I came work Huehue Ranch, from the plantation. I was recommended by a good friend of mine that was one ranch foreman too. I worked different ranches before that.

From the plantation, like I say, I work when I was fourteen years old, and I think I left there a couple or three years maybe, and then I work for a trucking outfit, small trucking outfit. I used to -- in those days, the sugar would have to be transported on the truck from the mills. Not like today, all bulk. But before is all bag, hundred pound bags and you load them in a truck and then take them to the -- those days, there was a train, a railroad train from Paauilo. We would load all the train cars, 15, 20 cars, and then the train would transport the sugar to Hilo, in bags now, see?

I What ranches did you work at before you went to Huehue?

The first one I went to, I think, was J.J. Nobriga, Nobriga Ranch, then I went to -- Hanaipoe was Choi Chow, Chinese rancher there. Hanaipoe was up the mountain. Seven miles from the highway, from Waimea Highway, about seven miles up the hill. Both ranches was up there. One was four thousand acres and one was three thousand acres. But I worked for both of them, it was side by side.

I How did you get your jobs at those ranches?

Those days, ranches was easy. You just go there and you want a job, they hire you. Not like today. You cannot get a job today. But those days you go from one ranch to another. As long as you could ride horse, you could train horse, bucking horse and little bit, you know, skill about cattle, yeah, they hire you, easy. So I went from one to another. In fact, I work Nobriga, then I had quit, then I went to this guy Choi Chow, then I think I went back to Nobriga, then I went back to Choi again, then I went plantation and then ... but back and forth, you know, because that way more convenient, little bit more pay and you like more horses, like that, so.

I Usually you don't see a lot of Chinese guys being ranchers.

Yeah, its rare, it's rare. But this guy, this Chinese guy, he wasn't only a rancher but he had markets in Hilo, meat markets. So he would supply. And then he had a Chinese market in Honolulu, so he would supply them.

I Did you work closely with either of these guys, Nobriga or Chow?

Not the boss himself but the boys, the sons, was running the -- one of the boys was the foreman for the ranch and then had couple of sons working, and then me. But the old man was, well he was the boss. And like I say he had this -- he used to live in Hilo. Then he had this market in Hilo, so.

Every weekend he would come up, stay up there all the weekend. Because (laughs), we stayed up the mountain so the food supply kind of limited. So he would come from Hilo and he would bring the supplies. A lot of times bring a pig head, we would roast 'em. You know, those Chinese they use those Chinese beans and all that stuff. And the wives used to come and make Portuguese soup and all that. So, he used to bring the supplies, every weekend he come.

I How many cowboys would you have working on these ranches?

Three of us. Me and his two sons. When we used to do the big cattle work, like branding, that's a big cattle work when you go brand. So he would get help, like friends would come from McCandless Ranch and go over, stay up there over the weekend because there's a house and everything. Stay up there, we do all the branding, da kine cattle work. That's the big job. For small kine cattle work, if you going pick up a few steers for slaughter or something, we would do it, the three of us would be enough.

I Do you remember what year you came to Huehue Ranch?

1961.

I And how long did you stay?

32 years. That's the last place I ever work.

I You came as foreman?

Yeah, that's why I came. Otherwise I wouldn't leave the plantation. But like I say, I work plantation when I was fourteen years old, blah, blah, different kine job, then I went back, went back after working for Choi, Nobriga, working ranch hand, and went back and I went cane truck driver. You know, that's three shifts. Work in the morning, swing shift and graveyard. So I work ten years there. Because I went there in 1951. In '61 I came to Kona, so ten years cane truck driver, then I came to Kona. And 32 years, from '61 right through.

I You must have liked it.

Well, you know, cowboy life is a good life, yeah? Small pay but, hey, you out in the mountains and -- not like breathing all this smog that's right down here, all this smoke. Kind of healthy life, you know, and good fun. Then we used to rodeo too, yeah? Lot of rodeo, so you like work ranch, so you can ride your horse and -- those days, when you rodeo you no had no fancy horse like today. You had to go take couple of horses that, you know, never know how to train.

I At the time, what was the area like? Wet? Dry?

Oh wet, up Holualoa, that thing, used to rain every day. Those days was wet. Today no. But those days, every day, raincoat. If it wasn't really pouring rain, you'd have that wet fog, you know? Hawaiians call *uiwai*, yeah? *Uiwai*, wet fog, all day, raincoat all day. And there was places where you couldn't go with a horse because they would just sink down, it was all swamp. Even some of the cattle, they have a hard time cross certain areas. They were just down in mud. Today, you can drive one truck across. See the difference? No more rain.

I What was that like, chasing wild cattle up there in the ...

Lot of fun. Lot of fun, so. Back here, where is Hualalai Ranch today, the Huehue Ranch had that too. They had Hualalai Ranch, they had Bishop Estate, they had state, all kind of land. But was kind of all in forest, all uncontrol yeah? Wild cattle. And in fact, when I came here in 1961, we had to clean up that area because they gave up the lease. I think they gave up the lease 1960. Huehue Ranch gave up the lease and so we had to clean up all the cattle that was in there. So that means go out and rope all of the cattle. In fact, when we got out, there was still cattle left but we just left it alone.

I Did you have any close calls when you were catching wild cattle?

Lot of close calls. You know, the horse stumble with you, and the saddle go right to the neck. When you rope, you all -- Hawaiians call them *naki* -- you have to tie hard in the saddle. Otherwise you might lose your rope. So when you rope, you're taking a chance on your horse going down or your saddle. And you make sure you've got a good saddle before you go.

One time I had my saddle that went right over the horse's -- the whole neck and out. How can that happen -- off over the neck, and through the front legs and dragging? Because the bull is tied on the saddle and you cannot take it out? The bull jump the wall too, so the thing go over the neck and you there right in the saddle, you know, following. And then, well when it comes to a tree or the wall and it's kind of in a lock, well it's a mess.

But I think the worst working with cattle was down in this lava here. We had all this land down here. You know, the airport, down to Costco, that's all State land, but Huehue had the lease of that, down to the beach they had everything. And when the new road came in -- there was cattle until the ocean. And those days, the only water the cattle would drink would be brackish water by the beach. They would go drink water at night but then they'll come back maybe a mile up or so, and that's where they would bed down. So that means crossing that highway when they go for water, and there was a lot of accidents.

So we had to go down there and rope all the cattle, get rid of all the cattle, you know. And you try rope down there. You don't want to rope only one, so we would carry like maybe three, four lasso ropes and plus we carry hobbles. So we just rope one and maybe get him to the tree or something or sometime they would fall and you jump down and you just hobble him and you go chase the next one. Because you want to get them as fast as you can otherwise they go into the brush.

So that was rough -- if you horse ever throw one shoe, forget it, you got to shoe him because he no going to go nowheres. You know, it's all lava, they would bleed.

I Were there trails that you had to follow or could you rustle them out.

Pretty much, pretty much. They would kind of run on the trails. Then some places if the terrain was pretty good, they would go off the trails. But down where is the lava, they had their regular trails. So you try get them when they on the trail, see?

If you rope them, after you get all that done, then you'd go and remember where was the other animals. I had one there or I had one there -- you got to remember. You know how many ropes that you had when you went out, maybe three lasso ropes or -- the only time we used to use lasso rope mostly was with the bulls. So if we rope the bulls on the horn, then we can just take it to a tree and tie it. On a cow, cow is more weak, so when you rope them and you give them (inaudible), they would trip, yeah? So you would jump down and put hobbles. That were different kind of rope, short rope.

You don't want to go down there all day and go rope **one** cow. So you rope three, four. And then it's a challenge. If you rope three, I like rope four. And then you needed good horses, you got to get horses that can take the thing.

After that we put them on the rope and kind of lead them to the truck. But some of them, you know, they get stubborn, you have to drag them and they would get all bloody, some of them and when you bring them up to the pen, they would die because they go into shock too.

So after that we got kind of smart and we had one of those boom trucks, army trucks, and so what we would do, if we catch them outside of where the truck was parked, we'd put them on a boom truck and pick it up. And then the bulldozer would make this rough roads where the truck would go, and load them there and bring them and then dump them in the truck and then untie them. And in places where the truck couldn't go, afterwards we was using a bulldozer blade. We take a bulldozer and put the cow in the blade, you know, and tie him and then bring him out as much as you can to the other truck.

I Can you tell me how the ranch work changed in your 32 years at Huehue?

Well, more and more you get less men. They cut down the work force. Improve the land more, make more fencing. Cut smaller paddocks and clean the land, improve the land. And then you don't need as much cowboys, right? And you don't need as much horses because if you don't have cowboys, then you don't need the horses. Simple as that. You cut down, cut down, until everything is cut down. Towards the end, we only had a handful of guys.

But then again, by that time they got equipment, they get truck, they get trailers, they get tractors, so everything was easier. In the old days, if you wanted to take a block salt out to the cows, you'd have to put it on a horse, or on a mule. But there's no jeep roads, right? No more tractors. Towards the end, no, the jeep goes there, all over the place. I used to go places I never thought I would see one jeep road, but now is all jeep road. Even paved some place. So you no need, when the roads come in, you no need all that extra men or that extra horses or -- so it's cut down, cut down, cut down.

I Do you feel that it makes more sense the way the business is run today, or do you feel like it's not an improvement?

I tell you what, today's too many fingers, too many hands into it. Like Parker Ranch, they got what, four, five trustees? Before you had one manager, right? That's all. And you know how much those trustees make? Big bucks. The cowboys is small pay. So now what, they got all those trustees, they got to cut the workforce. I don't know what's happening. Too many fingers in there. So -- but they don't cut from the top, right? Comes

the same thing, they like cut back, they don't cut from the office guys. In fact, they like raise. And they cut the poor workers. Cut back, cut back, so, that's what happening.

I What about the way the work itself is done today?

Well, again, coming back today, is too much college degree guys. These guys they go college they come back, they think they know everything. They smart, (inaudible), but commonsense, they don't have it. So what, you work, you can work one ranch all your life, you the foreman, you whatever. Here come one young kid from college, 22, 23 years old, he put as manager because he came from college. But he don't know the ranch work. And every one got to do their own thing. Even if the ranch is operating good. So they change things. They no going to follow what the other manager had because then they not doing nothing.

But, you know, coming to drive the cattle, the other guys he worked that ranch for 20 or 30 years, they know the cattle, how they drive. Now you get one new manager, nah, we don't want to go this way, we going over here. So they try to change the whole system and it don't work. It don't work because, don't forget, even cattle can be trained. As long as they know the routine, they know, they're not stupid. But this kind of stuff happen and everything gets harder, right? You know, but, you got to do them the way because that's the manager.

In the old days, I think you could get along with the managers pretty good because in the old days, they was from generation to generation. You work for one ranch, your grandfather work for the ranch, your father work for the ranch, you work for the ranch. Same thing at Parker Ranch. You get Parker Ranch, generations been there.

And now something like this happen, it's a mess, all stir up. Sometimes they say, ah, now this cowboy's lazy, they don't want to do that -- but **why**? Because they know, when you get one change-over, you're not one 20-year old timer any more. You can work there for 20 years, but if somebody else buy that ranch, I don't care if you work 20 years, but you starting today. So with that in mind, why should they be loyal and bust they ass -- it's not going do any good because tomorrow you can go down the road.

And that's what heppen, you know what I mean. Plenty change over, change hands. It's like with us, I work over 32 years, they sell them to the Japanese, golf course. I start today as a new man. They no consider my 32 years or what, they don't care.

I Where do you see ranching going in the next 10, 20 years in Hawaii?

Nothing at all, down the road. For one thing, these environmental people, they don't like cows, they don't want cows. They want to keep the mountains for the birds, for the koa. So cows is going to be something of the

past. That's what's happening all over. The only guys can hang on to ranch is the kind guys with fee simple land.

But this is like Parker Ranch, the only thing they cannot sell is the lease land. They got Hawaiian Home, they get state land. But their own land, they can sell their own land. The fee simple land. So what, the ranch gets smaller and smaller and smaller. Like I say, the only way they can keep cattle is because they cannot sell the state land.

I What ranchers do you admire?

I don't know if you know Jack Ramos but he was big time rancher, he just died. But he was my idol because he never did take out no bull. If anything, he would put in bulls but he would never take out bulls. You cannot. Because the land is so damn rough, *makai*, you know, that's all rocky, rocky land, and you cannot go seasonal breeding because one cow stays in heat only for six hours. That's all. I mean, they start getting in heat, maybe, ten hours or so but they don't accept the bull, right? The bull going chase them, going smell them. But that heat, when they accept the bull is only six hours. So you get one thousand-acre paddock, or hundred-acre paddock and the cow is over there, by the time she come here where the bull is at by the water, ten hours gone, that was gone, so she's out of heat. So now you're waiting for the next month. Because only once a month they come in, 18 to 21 days, you know, so, that's the waiting period . But if the bulls are there all the time, hey, they're going to get bred, you know, simple as that.

I What area was his ranch in?

Mostly Hamakua, Hamakua area but he had all land, so many acres here, all down the line.

I And how come you admire him so much?

The way he operate. Like I say, leave the bulls in. And no fancy, no fancy – iron roofs he would use to block one gate, or whatever. Make do. They put all their profits back into the ranch. But you look, all run down, all broke. You know, that thing is all -- but that's all Jack Ramos was. No more overhead, no more overhead. Never had workers, only had one worker, one work man.

But like I say, when they brand, all the friends come, right? They make a big pot of stew, feed them beer, hey, you get all the help. And that's the biggest work in cattle is the branding and weaning. Other than that, so what you doing if you get the grass, you get the water -- you waiting for the calf drop. That's what you're doing. Then when they drop, two, three months, so what do you do, you brand them. Bring them in, brand them, castrate them, and then you let them out again for another six, seven months or whatever. Until you come back and wean them. You know what is weaning? You take them from the mother then you sell them, so, no

big deal. Other than that, like I say, you got water and grass and you have the bulls, let them go, let them breed.

Everything is common sense, like us *makai*, over there, rough country, right? So when we go out and buy bulls we don't look for the kind of bull that this lady stay patting him on the head, or the tame bull. That bull is not going to get around. He's one tame bull he's going to stay in his area. But you like something that, hey, I want to jump the fence over there – wild. Wild, you look for that. Those bulls going to travel -- and young bulls. Young bulls they rape anything. That's what you want: young, lively bulls, so they get around. Because like I said, us down here, I tell you what, we got in like 90%, 95% calf crop. Because we don't take out bulls. But when the ranchers operated, what we had, 65%, where the rest of the cows, you no more calf. Because seasonal breeding. You cannot do that, like I say, you got to make do with your terrain, your country. So, with so many cows you put like, well, you go down there you put like, in that kind rough country, maybe 15 cows per bull.

So say you put 10 bulls down there, good and well, you put 10 bulls. Another week one bull lame already. Because you know, rough, so he's lame, he's standing, he never go get around. The second week, one more bull is lame, they fight or something and they hurt their leg. So you're down to what, eight bulls or so. By the end of the month you get five bulls working.

Like I say, you get the grass and water, anybody can raise cows. but, when you get drought, no more grass, etc. and no water, then you got to play checkers, right? That's when the management come in, you got to know how to juggle them around or sell the young cattle or wean the calves, get them out of the mothers. That's when you managing.

Yeah, that's when you got to manage them. You no can keep one calf with a cow and let them starve. So what d'you get, you get one skinny calf and you get one skinny cow. but if you would take the calf away, then you would get one strong cow. But then again, you need one strong cow for her next calf. But if she's really run down and all she's not even going to breed. So all that kind of stuff, that's where management come in, when it's drought and you got to play around. But like I say, you got water and grass, anybody can run cattle, anybody, simple as that.