

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW #462-2

with

Ernest L. Golden (EG)

April 28, 1993

Honolulu, O`ahu

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Mr. Ernest Golden on April 28, 1993, and we're at his office in the airport industrial area in Honolulu, O`ahu. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, you know, we ended last interview right about the time you were graduating from high school. Okay, so you finished high school. Then what happened?

EG: I left Athens. Finished high school. I think we had our commencement exercises around June 11, [1942]. June the fifteenth a very close friend of mine and I left Athens and went to Atlantic City. My friend had been to Atlantic City the year before so he knew what summer jobs were available, and there was a demand for workers—restaurant workers. So we went to Atlantic City and . . .

WN: This is New Jersey?

EG: New Jersey, yeah. Got jobs right away. Worked in a restaurant as, I think I started as kitchen helper—dishwasher—something like that. We had little or no money when I left Athens.

WN: How did you feel about leaving?

EG: It felt good (laughs).

WN: What about your parents?

EG: I suppose my mother thought maybe I was possibly. . . . I was living with my aunt at the time. I don't recall any great reservations they had about it, I just turned nineteen. And I guess I was reliable and it was only for about three months, just for the summer. I don't recall any great reservations on any part on my parents or my aunt as far as my leaving. And this friend of mine, we're very close friends—he was not that much older than I, he was like an older brother. So as long as the two of us were together I think there was a certain amount of security in that. And we stayed in Atlantic City until from, oh, I suppose, until September, Labor Day. And then we left and came back to Athens and stayed in Athens a short time. And then went to New Orleans, [Louisiana].

WN: Why did you—well, I can see Atlantic City because of your good friend, but why New Orleans?

EG: I haven't the slightest idea (WN laughs). Just another place to go.

WN: I thought maybe you'd want to get out of the South, though.

EG: Well, I don't know why we went to New Orleans. New Orleans was just one of those accidents. At that time we would take a bus where we were going. And we'd get bus fare and we'd go. If someplace interested us, we'd go there. When I say "we" it was my high school buddy. Out of a class of about fifty students, give or take a few, there were thirteen guys, and most of us were quite close, running buddies. And of those, my closest buddy was Milton Jordan. He and I are still in touch with each other. He was school president, and I was vice president. He and I would decide to go somewhere and we'd go. And New Orleans was just one of those places where (we) went. We went for the novelty of it. We stayed there two weeks.

This all leads up to my being in Hawai`i actually. We were on the bus and then somehow or another we saw an ad, I think, in *Time* magazine offering jobs in Bermuda. And we went to the post office to sign up for (the) job, but those jobs were closed. (It was) civil service work. But they offered something in Pearl Harbor. So we signed up for Pearl Harbor and went back to Athens and stayed there a few days, and then decided to go to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This was all in October. Now remember, we started May, spent three months in Atlantic City, and then went to New Orleans. So we arrived in Philadelphia in October.

WN: [*Nineteen*] forty-three?

EG: Forty-two.

WN: Forty-two.

EG: Forty-two. October the twentieth. I know the date. Some of these dates stick with me. And went to work at a restaurant. We'd always do that because two things would happen. One, you'd get a job. (And) two, when you went to work in a restaurant, you'd eat. We would bus dishes. We stayed there until December the nineteenth. And the papers that we had signed to go to Pearl Harbor came through December 19. His paper came to the address (in Philadelphia) and we went back to Athens and found mine. They went to my address at home, in Athens. And then we came to California. For the first time since high school days we split up, I guess. His orders directed him to go to one route and mine went another, and we were traveling by rail—first-class accommodations. I didn't have any money. The little money I had, I lost. Somebody took it from me. I had about fifteen dollars. Arrived in California and went to work at (one) of the navy yards there, waiting for our orders to (go) to Pearl Harbor.

I don't recall when we got on the boat, (it was a) troop transport out of California. I don't know what dock we left from, but I do recall that we were on (the) boat, I think—I want to say thirteen days. Three of the days seem to have been waiting to get with a convoy. I think we were sailing something like eleven days because we were zig zagging and all that sort of stuff. Looks like it took us eleven days to get over here. And I know that two or three of those days I was seasick. Wow. And arrived here February 1, 1943.

WN: Okay, let me back up a little bit. You were talking about seeing something in the newspaper [*magazine*]. Do you remember what it said or how it attracted you?

EG: You mean the civil service jobs?

WN: Mm hmm.

EG: Nothing spectacular or anything. One of the things was the hourly wage. It said seventy-two cents an hour. That was the key word, that was the selling point.

WN: How much were you making as a busboy?

EG: Oh, god. I don't know. Possibly a dollar a day or something like that, plus whatever tips. It wasn't very much. I was head busboy at one time, and I wasn't making much money. The amount of money I was making in those days was so little that seventy-two cents an hour was a very, very attractive hourly rate. We're talking. . . . That comes to less than eight dollars a day, right?

WN: Mm hmm [yes].

EG: Eight-hour day. For forty-hour work week, you're talking less than forty dollars a week. But forty dollars a week was an impressive amount of income for us to consider. I'll tell you one thing, our attitude at that time was for seventy-two cents an hour. We don't care where, we'll go.

WN: Was Bermuda offering the same amount?

EG: I think Bermuda was offering the same amount, but the jobs there were closed. But we didn't know anything about Pearl Harbor.

WN: What did you know . . .

EG: We didn't know anything about Pearl Harbor. The morning of December 7, [1941], by nine o'clock in the morning, for some reason I was listening to the radio, and they said the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. Pearl Harbor was meaningless to me. I remember Roosevelt coming on (the radio) sometime during the day stating that the hand that held a dagger stabbed it into the back of its neighbor or something like that. Now whether I heard (this) in those days or whether I heard it later on, I don't know, but seemingly it sticks with me. But Pearl Harbor itself had no meaning whatsoever geographically speaking in its relationship with the United States. None. I'd seen the movies of the South Pacific and maybe related it with the South Pacific, but otherwise nothing. So when we saw this wage rate I think one of us made the statement that for seventy-two cents an hour we would go to hell and back (WN laughs).

WN: What about your military status?

EG: I had been 1-A, and that's an interesting thing because there was no call for draft. I think the early part of '43 is when the mandatory draft would've been, when the draft would've affected me. At that time, I suppose, I would've looked forward to being drafted. You see, on the nineteenth of December, I had gone down to the local draft board in Philadelphia and tried to join the [U.S.] Air Force. This was December 19, 1942. They told me that I would be drafted in January, anyway, so why did I want to volunteer? But I wanted the air force.

WN: Why?

EG: Air force just seemed to be something more glamorous than anything else that I could think of. I don't know if I was going to try to fly because in those days the air force was far removed as far as Blacks were concerned. And I had the feeling that I was denied volunteering because it was the air force. And it was when I got back to the apartment that Milton Jordan said that his papers to go to Pearl Harbor had arrived, so we felt then that mine had also. So I was going to try to volunteer for the service at that time because I guess we had just about run out of places to go, although we had signed up to come to Pearl Harbor there was no guarantee that the (application) had been (approved). So I was going to take the next move and that was join the service. So my draft status when I came to Pearl Harbor was, throughout the war, 1-A.

WN: Milton Jordan was the same thing?

EG: Milton married his high school sweetheart, high school girlfriend. He and I came here together. I often kid him when I see him now. Lillian—she was Lillian Thomas at the time—they were corresponding, they were very much attached. He left [*Hawai`i*] after nine months. And once you left here, you went directly (into) the service, especially if you were physically fit as we were. And he went back and I think he got married. I don't know whether he got married before he went in the [*U.S.*] Navy or afterwards, but they got married then. And they're still married.

WN: Wow.

EG: The only two of all the classmates to have married classmates. We're all very friendly. I talked with him a few days ago. But no, he left after nine months.

WN: Besides you and Milton, were there others from that area—from your area—doing that, going to Pearl Harbor?

EG: No. After I arrived here, come to find out there were quite a few from Atlanta, Georgia. I would say a large number of Blacks [*working at Pearl Harbor*] were from Atlanta, Georgia.

WN: I know it wasn't the case of you, but I was just wondering if going civil service, let's say Pearl Harbor, enabled somebody to get out of the draft, to be able to earn some money in civilian work rather than risking (laughs) going into battle.

EG: I don't know if going to war was the greater incentive to come to Pearl Harbor than to get out of the South. I think going to war would've been more attractive than staying in the South. I know Milton or I, neither one, thought anything about, hey look, we're going to be drafted. Our motivation was leaving the South. And I think that being drafted would have served that purpose almost as well as coming to Pearl Harbor. I would've gone to either one. It didn't matter to me. However, once you were here, you got six months deferment if you just stayed on the job and you were a dependable worker, that's about all. There may have been some who left. I don't think many Southerners—Blacks that came here—came to dodge the draft. From other parts of the country some of those people may have been a little more sophisticated in their thinking as far as going to war and not going to war, but we were not. Looking back, no. Out of all the years and all the people that I've known here in Hawai`i, war workers, guys who came over that were here when I came in and those who came after (me), the conversation

never came up that, hey, listen, we came over here to get away from the war. I think we came over here to get away from the South.

WN: Interesting.

EG: This just dawned on me as you asked your question. As I said, and I'm being repetitious, if my only options were staying in Athens (or) going to war, I would've gone to war. I would have joined the service.

WN: Is this a common reaction, do you think, or is that more . . .

EG: I believe in those days it was a common reaction, yes. War couldn't have been (any) worst than what we had. The only thing you could do in a war is get killed. You could get killed in Athens if you didn't act right. So that was no reason to stay in Athens. It's an interesting thought to me. I don't quite understand it now. But I wouldn't have hesitated to volunteer to go in the army or navy or what have you.

WN: So you said you knew nothing about Pearl Harbor. What was going through your mind before you came to Hawai`i as to, you know, you said you saw [*movies about the*] South Pacific. What else? What did you expect?

EG: I really don't know. I had no idea where I was going, what I was getting into.

WN: But you did know or think that it was an improvement from Athens?

EG: It had to be. It couldn't have been any worst.

WN: Did you hear anything about the multiracial aspect of Hawai`i?

EG: No, nothing at all. I didn't have any idea what Hawai`i was like. And I tell you what I didn't do. I didn't associate Pearl Harbor with Hawai`i. I didn't associate the two. I was going to Pearl Harbor—I wasn't going to Hawai`i. I don't know where I thought Pearl Harbor was. Geographically speaking, I should have known. In other words, when it was decided that we were going to go to Pearl Harbor, we didn't say, “Hey, we're going to Hawai`i!” We were going to Pearl Harbor. Hawai`i happened to be, I suppose, a side benefit (laughs). It was a goodie that we had (not counted on). I guess if we had known I would have possibly been a little more eager to come. As I said, the money factor was the motivating, the driving force behind that.

WN: Did you have any idea as to how long you'd stay?

EG: Eighteen months.

WN: Oh, that's what it was for?

EG: Eighteen months, and I think I came with the intention of staying the eighteen months because if you stayed eighteen months then you fulfilled your contract. Then transportation would be paid for you (back) to your hometown. Milton, I think, had to pay his way back because he left before his contract was completed. I don't even know when I decided to stay and live in Hawai`i. It may have been after I got married (in 1950). I think (for) the first few years the

idea was, this was a temporary thing. I think I fell in love with Hawai`i as we were sailing into the harbor.

WN: Tell me about that.

EG: We'd been on the ship for eleven days. My first two or three days were very bad from seasickness. I forgot the name of the ship we were on, but I recall the ship was full of people, full of guys.

WN: Civilians or . . .

EG: Both civilians and military people. It was a troop transport. But you're crossing what we call the high seas, and the high seas has a blue, indigo blue, not very attractive to me. And it was cold and I don't adapt to cold weather very well. But I think about three days before we arrived here, the weather changed and became warmer. This was in January. When I left San Fran---I have never been so cold as I was in San Francisco. I don't think I really got warm until about two or three days out of Pearl Harbor. And then as we were sailing into Pearl Harbor, the colors of the water changed. I think this was the first thing that impressed me. (No), the second thing. The first thing was the warm climate. The second thing was the colors of the ocean. Beautiful greens, various colors of greens and blues combined. This impressed me. At that time we still weren't in Hawai`i as far as I was concerned because we just pulled into Pearl Harbor. Honolulu wasn't on my mind in those days because I didn't know where Honolulu was either. But the first impression of Pearl Harbor, though, itself, was very negative. You see, I didn't work at Pearl Harbor when I [first] came. I worked in the harbor, but that was at Ford Island. And I was glad I was at Ford Island because when I first saw Pearl Harbor, Pearl Harbor was a mess. Ships clutter, wartime clutter.

WN: You're talking about clutter from the attack or just . . .

EG: Clutter from equipment and everything. I mean it was a place I didn't want to work. In other words, we were laborers, and I couldn't see working (in) some of the greasy, oily areas that I saw. And I don't know how I got what I wanted, and that was not to work at Pearl Harbor. They assigned me to Ford Island. And you had to take the ferry over. That was the only negative part about that because it took you all day to get there (WN laughs). You know, literally speaking. You had to spend, what, forty-five minutes on (the) ferry. That's quite a bit of time crossing over. Maybe it was less than that. But we spent a lot of time waiting for the ferry and getting on the ferry and crossing on the ferry. But Ford Island itself was not the clutter—that was Pearl Harbor proper.

WN: So what did you do at Ford Island?

EG: Laborer from the start. We cut grass, cleaned up around the buildings. Then later on I was working (in) the tool room, worked in that most of the time. Not most of the time. For a while. Then I transferred from there to the boiler plant. I had one or two other jobs in between. I was civil service here for about, from 1943 to about 1946.

WN: How did they evaluate you in terms of what your abilities were? I mean, did they make an attempt to match your abilities with a certain job?

EG: That may have. But I don't recall having any test or anything that would, you know, see if I

was suited for any particular work. I think you had the opportunity to try to apply for different positions. I think the opportunity was there for you to try to promote, you know, to better yourself. But, I don't recall exactly what they were. I don't recall.

WN: Were there those that were better skilled and got better jobs and better pay?

EG: Oh yes, yes. I would say that most of us were possibly just laborers.

WN: And you were with a team or a group?

EG: Yeah, I was with a group, and I think this was my first exposure to working with some local kids about my same age. And a good cross section of Hawaiian people. There were some Chinese, some Portuguese, some Filipinos. Most of us were in our teens. But then there were some older Filipino people there that was doing the same work and we worked with them also. That seems to be parts of the team. They had what they called lead men, and we would be assigned to a lead man, and he'd have certain responsibilities. He'd take a team or a crew out and that crew would partially consist of the makeup that I explained to you. And usually there was some Filipino people in the group. But I remember making friends at that time with, oh, about four or five kids, teenagers, about my same age. One part-Hawaiian— Hawaiian and something. I don't know what. . . . There was Chinese-Hawaiian. Portuguese kid. Chinese guy.

WN: And there were also Whites in the group, too, from the Mainland?

EG: There may have been. I think there was one or two Whites in that group that was doing the same thing. When we first came here you'd report for duty in the morning and then you'd be given some assignment. Sometimes you worked in the carpenter shop, sometimes you'd work on the outside crew doing outside work. This is how it was set up, I think, now that I look back. I think one or two of the lead men were Hawaiian, come to think of it.

WN: "Lead men" meaning bosses or . . .

EG: Yeah, they'd be sort of supervisors, supervisors of a crew, and I don't know how many people they'd have on a crew. I made quite a few friends in those days. There was I think one or two Puerto Ricans. No, that was later.

WN: So the majority of your group was local?

EG: Yeah.

WN: Some Whites and some Blacks?

EG: Yeah, I think there was one or two or three Blacks. They may have been older than I. But I think they were also working as laborers and we worked together with these various assignments. There were some Blacks and Whites from the Mainland on this thing. But, I think, by and large, most of them were local people.

WN: And how was that? Any problems or . . .

EG: No, I don't recall any problems in those days. We got along quite well. We got along very

well. I made some friendships that I treasure until today although I haven't seen a lot of these people in many, many years. And a funny thing about it, I think now, in contrast, and this was one of the things, I think, that endeared me to Hawai`i, endeared Hawai`i to me, whichever way you want to put it, was that the friendships that I made would have been denied me in Athens and in Georgia and in the South. I think this was a good thing. That was a good cross section. I made some good friends in those days. Over the years we've lost touch. I'm sure a lot of them went back to the Mainland. They've been gone quite a few years. But it gave me an opportunity to meet other people of different racial backgrounds. It was a good cross section, too. A very good cross section. Naturally, when you're from the South there was this White and Black thing, and there was always somehow or another you knew or you felt, and I'm not going to say this well, the friendship wasn't on equal basis, the relationship wasn't on equal basis. And here we were meeting on equal terms. It was just a pure, open friendship. And I think it was something that I needed. It was something that I had been looking for. I think it was something that I wanted, that sort of relationship with people. To be able to select and choose my friends.

WN: There's less regard for class here.

EG: There's less regard for---I don't know about class. You see, because I had just come from an environment where color was the only thing. Color was what determined whether there was going to be a friendship. If you were White and I was Black, then I knew that there was going to be limits to our friendship. So it didn't matter whatever class (there) was. Regardless I could've been the most educated, intelligent person and you were White and you were the least that you would still be better than I. Okay? And so here in Hawai`i the emphasis wasn't on color, although we were all aware of it. And I think as teenagers we joked about it.

WN: Did you know so-and-so was part-Hawaiian, so-and-so was Filipino at that time? Or are you looking at that in retrospect?

WN: I knew it at that time. Very early, I think, when we came here, of all the Orientals we started making distinctions between, and there were discussions about it. And the shape of the eye and that sort of thing were supposed to determine the difference between Chinese and Japanese. I don't recall Japanese being at Pearl Harbor, being at Ford Island in those days, there may have been some. So I think primarily I was dealing with the Chinese. I think I had some dealing with Korean, based on the name. Now, Chu was working in the office there and I think Chu could've been Chinese, but now I imagine he was Korean. I'm not certain. But this fine distinction now comes from years of being in Hawai`i. At that time, I don't think the fine distinction was there. The Filipinos were older people. They were more mature; they were older men who we were working with. Most of them smoked Tuscany. Most of them, I think, just came off the farm [i.e., sugar plantations]. And most of them spoke Filipino. None of us, including the local kids, knew what the heck they were talking about. Albert was Portuguese, we knew that. There was a kid named Lee that I got to know, that's his last name. He was Chinese-Hawaiian. Tripp was part-Hawaiian. Tripp could have had some Afro-American blood. No one even mentioned it in those days, but Tripp did have. These were some of the kids that were quite close, that I got to know quite well. One Chinese kid. And all of us, within let's say a year or so, (were) about the same age. And we spent our lunchtime together, and it was from choice. We just did it because we wanted to be together. It was interesting. I was interesting to them because I don't think they had an opportunity to associate with Blacks. And they were interesting to me because I never had an opportunity to associate with them. There was some *Haole* kid there that I don't remember his name, but he was about the same age from

Tennessee—somewhere in the hills of Tennessee. A very, very likable guy. Very likable. He was about the same age. And I think that it was a positive experience for him.

WN: Did you meet anybody like that *Haole* guy from Tennessee in Athens? Did you know anybody on that kind of basis? Those kind of fellows?

EG: Yeah, but it was altogether different. It was a different thing. It's a funny thing about that society there. I worked as a houseboy for a family. And I was about twelve years old. At that age we played with the neighborhood kids which were all White. We just played together. This was pre-high school days. But once these kids reached high school, those relationships were severed, were cut rather sharply, too. They just stopped. And then you had to start calling them "Mister." I don't know how this came about. But they had some sort of code there that established that division. So if I had been in Athens I could not have continued that friendship that had been established earlier. Because I recall a young man or teenager who was a brother of the lady I was working for, and he and I and my uncle played together. But this relationship was severed after he reached high school. He then became the master. It was no longer friendship. He could be condescending, and he knew then that he could no longer play with us. So that sort of thing [*i.e., making friends with Whites in adulthood*] could not happen back there, not where I came from. It could not have happened. It happens now, I imagine, without anyone thinking about it too much.

But Hawai`i was different. Hawai`i had something. I used to discuss this with friends of mine, and I suppose I've come up with my own theories about Hawai`i. And at that time, though, what I looked at was I came from an area, I came from an environment or society where discrimination and segregation were the law of the land. I coined (the) phrase, "organized discrimination-segregation." And even if there was segregation and discrimination and prejudices in Hawai`i, it wasn't, to my way of thinking, organized. That was different. It wasn't the law of the land if anyone did it. They did it because it was a personal thing with them. But where I came from the law said that this was right and proper. And I could live with any society that did not make this the law of the land, although I lived in a segregated area when I came here. We lived in CHA-3. CHA-3 was segregated.

WN: Okay, let me turn the tape over and we can talk about CHA-3, okay?

EG: Okay.

WN: Okay, you were just about ready to start talking about CHA-3. Why don't you tell me first what CHA-3 stands for.

EG: Civilian housing area three. It's under [*the U.S.*] Navy. Under the navy, for civilians. I don't know what to say about CHA-3. We were all assigned to units there. They were four-unit buildings, and all of the civil service workers—Blacks on 18th and 19th Street. And it's back of where Hawaiian Airlines is now.

WN: Hawaiian Airlines . . .

EG: Hawaiian Airlines building, new building now that they're in.

WN: The new terminal?

EG: Not the new one. They're building another one now, you know.

WN: Oh, they are?

EG: So the new building, the multi-story building is a new one. But the existing building Hawaiian Airlines is in now, CHA-3 was right back of there. Just between Nimitz [*Highway*] here and Hickam Field. So it was bordered on, what they call Luke Field? No, Luke Field is on Ford Island. It was bordering on Hickam Field, just in back of Hawaiian Airlines. Like I said, we were on 18th and 19th Street.

WN: This was considered the [*U.S.*] Navy area. You weren't in the Hickam area?

EG: No, Hickam was separate. This was outside of Hickam Field gate, about a half mile outside of Hickam Field. It had a mess hall, CHA-3 banquet hall. And that was sort of an entertainment center where you got the movies and you had whatever social activities seem to be there. There was a boxing arena attached to the commissary, I think. There was a beer garden where you got hot beer.

WN: Hot beer?

EG: Yeah, I don't recall any refrigeration around in those days (WN laughs). Not hot, hot beer—not stolen hot beer. This is warm beer.

WN: Uh huh. They didn't even give you cold beer?

EG: (At) CHA-3, I don't think they even had cold beer. There was so many things that we didn't have back in those days that you would say how did you get along without it? I wasn't a drinker, anyway, in those days. I didn't drink anything hardly. But I remember there was a beer garden there. I recall a lot of mud. And remember, I guess a lot of these things that I'm trying to remember may have been short-lived. But my first impression of CHA-3 was wall-to-wall men, just a whole lot of men all striving to go somewhere and going nowhere. A lot of mud. Looked like money was plentiful. No women. You got from one place to another on what was called a “leaping lena.” Ever heard of “leaping lena”? It was transportation---this was a trailer hitched to a tractor, I think, sort of open. It went around the whole area. And this was our transportation from one part of the area to another. But it was, I suppose, the speed of a person walking, so you just leap on and leap off whenever you got to where you want to go.

WN: How many units do you think there were total for CHA-3?

EG: Wow, that's a good question. You had Main Street. I have to start. . . . Main Street, and between Main Street and 19th Street must have been fifteen, sixteen, seventeen. . . . And each one of these streets were possibly couple of blocks long, maybe a little more. And there may have been two to three buildings per block. That gives you an indication.

WN: How many units do you think were in a building?

EG: Usually four.

WN: Only four units?

EG: I think there were four units to a building.

WN: And this is one story?

EG: Two of the units, I think, had up and down and two of the units, I think, were just single level. But they were like one- or two-bedroom apartments, I think. You know the [*public housing*] on King Street?

WN: Yeah.

EG: Right across from Farrington [*High School*]? Designed something like that.

WN: I see.

EG: It was something on that order with the two units on the end being single story and, I think, the two units in the center being two story. I don't know how many baths were in the place, in each unit. But you would have at least two people per room, if I'm correct. In other words you had a roommate—assigned roommate. I don't know how they made the assignments. And I think all of you shared the same bath.

WN: How many of you shared the same bath? How many were in one . . .

EG: I would say at least four people per unit. It wasn't a bad accommodation as such for single people. Later they built dormitories for all the bachelors. All of what I'm saying existed for about a period of three years.

WN: Was it brand-new when you moved in?

EG: Yeah, pretty much new. They weren't old buildings. They were fairly new. Now remember this was a segregated area. There was some married couples in that area, also. There were very few Black women here in those days. Very, very few. This was one of the things that was noticeable, the lack of any sort of feminine companionship and one of the things that bothered me. I dated quite extensively when I was in high school. All through high school I had no problems with girlfriends. And then all of a sudden to come over here and not have any girlfriends at all was something that didn't set very well.

WN: Did you have a steady girlfriend at all over there in Georgia or anywhere?

EG: I had more than one girlfriend at that time. It's funny in contrast. Nowadays, the emphasis is on some sort of a relationship, whatever they call it. Seemingly in those days it was the thing to date more than one person, especially us guys. There was a group of guys that we ran around with. We were running amok as far as the girls were concerned. Here's thirteen guys in a class of something like fifty-four students, and you could see how selective we could be and what a choice place to be. And we were in a choice position. So we had all the girls that we wanted. We had special girls but didn't---a special girlfriend we'd always have. Other girls we dated. So all of a sudden I'm in that environment and I come over here and I don't have any dates at all. It was quite a letdown. That was one of the things that bothered me here. But then it wasn't too long before we somehow or another solved that problem. Ten of us got together and formed an organization just to give parties. We called ourselves the "Ten Bachelors." And we gave some pretty first-class parties. We would rent a hall and each one of us was entitled to invite x-

number of people. And through this we got some social life. And since we did it well we were quite popular. This was in, I suppose, after the war was over. When are we talking? Nineteen forty-six, thereabouts. But we resolved that problem of not having any dates because we would give parties and our parties were sought after. Whenever we did give a party everybody would want to get invited to them. So we sort of solved the problem of not having any dates.

WN: So what, you had live bands and things like that?

EG: We did have. Yeah. Made some lasting friends though that. I don't know if you---there's a Harold Lewis.

WN: Yeah, Aku.

EG: No, not Aku.

WN: Oh.

EG: (This is) a local Harold Lewis. Harold Lewis had a band. I think he later became a liquor (commissioner). He was a bandleader at that time. And he was a typical bandleader in those days that stood up in front of a band and used a baton and that sort of thing. Very, very fine person. We hired his band one time. We'd hire some navy bands every once in a while. We would hire top bands and give big parties. I'm sure that most of those parties were just invitational. We would defray the cost, I'm sure, because each one of us had to ante up so much money, do a lot of work and decorate the halls and come up with the food and the drinks and stuff like that. The highlight was when Nat King Cole came here the first time. We hosted him. We hosted him at Lau Yee Chai. This was big stuff. I've got some pictures from that now.

WN: "Hosting" meaning . . .

EG: Well, we gave a reception for him. I think he played one or two nights at McKinley [*High School auditorium*]. I don't know when he first arrived whether we gave him a reception or when he was leaving. But there was a Ralph Yempuku. Ralph Yempuku used to be promoter here. And this is when I first met Ralph. We became friends after that. He and his brother. But I didn't know the brothers as well as I knew Ralph. And I think they were---were they promoting King Cole? Lau Yee Chai was first-class.

WN: It sure was.

EG: Beautiful restaurant. So we invited lot of select friends and stuff like that. Impressive.

WN: This was during the war?

EG: Must've been after the war because during the time that I was with the "Ten Bachelors" I'd left the navy yard, I think, by this time. I'd stopped working civil service. There's an overlap here because I stopped working civil service. A lot of this (was) during the time I was attending art school because I was doing a lot of the art work for this thing. So it was an overlap there. Part of the time I was still with civil service and other time I'd quit and started . . .

WN: You quit civil service in '46?

EG: About '46, sometime around there. But the war was over I'm sure.

WN: So these parties that the "Ten Bachelors" put on, who came?

EG: We tried to invite as many single girls as we could.

WN: Local?

EG: Some, yeah. There were hardly (any) Black girls here. They had some married families here. They were all invited, usually those who were friends of ours. Because each one of us would have ten to twenty invitations that we could just give to our friends. And if we did somehow or another have some local girlfriends, then we would invite those. A lot of guys who had come here and by this time (had) left civil service or left the service for some reason or another and had moved Downtown, were a little bit more into the local scene as far as the girls were concerned than we were. They were naturally invited so there was, I suppose, some of the time some of the call girls and stuff like that, but. . . . There was feminine companionship there, something that we didn't have. But it was all done first-class. Beautifully decorated. Good entertainment. It served its purpose.

WN: Were there any ground rules from higher-ups, you know, as far as what kind of parties you can have or who you can date, things like that?

EG: None that I recall. I don't know if the curfew was still on as to how long these parties could go into the evenings, but I don't recall anyone giving any restrictions or limitations. CHA-3 could be off-limits if you weren't careful. This was the beginning of some of the pimps that got real strongholds in Honolulu later. And some of these guys could have been considered restricted guest, I suppose, if someone had decided they want to do something. But by and large, I don't recall any restrictions. We were given pretty much carte blanche because the type of affairs we were giving were all done with good taste.

WN: Were military personnel invited also?

EG: We probably did have some military. I don't think we made a fine distinction. We must've had friends from both civilian and military.

WN: Did you come into contact a lot with military personnel?

EG: Some of my friends were military during those years. Another good friend of mine who was in the navy at the time after Milton Jordan went back, this guy and I became very good friends. A guy named Cunningham, Johnny Cunningham. He was a civilian here and then somehow or another went into the navy or was drafted during the time he was here. And he used to come off the base and then get in civilian clothes and we'd all go Downtown. He'd borrow my clothes, and we'd go Downtown as civilians. If he got picked up I'm sure he would've gotten some sort of penalty of some kind. And I would go on the base and put on a navy uniform, and go into the movies and the mess halls, do all these sorts of things. We were nuts.

WN: I would imagine, though, the restrictions being imposed upon someone who's in the military was a lot harsher or stricter than people like you.

EG: Not much, not much, I don't think. We were still . . .

WN: There weren't much difference?

EG: I don't think that much different. I think there's a difference in the clothing you wore. I didn't see that much difference. For a while there was a curfew so you had to be in the barracks or in your dormitory, wherever you were, by ten o'clock. And I think they [*military personnel*] had the same sort of thing. I didn't see any big distinction. We made more money. I think that was the biggie, we made more money than they did. For a long time, sailors or soldiers hardly made any money at all, you know. They had access to some of the foods and stuff that we didn't have because they ate better than we did. They had better booze than we had because there was rationing. There was gasoline rationing. There was rationing on whiskey. There was rationing of cigarettes. But the guys in the military, whenever they had an opportunity, they made friends with some of the civilians because I guess that sort of gave them a taste of getting away from the military. So whenever they could they made friends with us. But they had some of the things that we needed and we had some of the things, I guess, they wanted. Because I recall with our ration cards, we could only get whiskey. We could get Five Islands gin and Ninety-nine. Those were the two local brews. And they were some bad whiskey. But guys would come in from the military and we would buy theirs, you know. And they really didn't want it, so we could buy whatever. I guess some of the time it was some of the booze that we were using for our parties. We could get military connections.

WN: The military had less pay but they had a lot more perks [*i.e., perquisites*].

EG: They had a lot more perks than we had. They had the perks that we really wanted. But looks as if we were both pretty much in the same boat. We worked in the same place. At Ford Island, military had it better than we did, I guess. The guys that I knew at Ford Island—one works for me right now. I met him a long time ago. He was a chief at that time—chief of the mess hall. And Smitty was in the navy long before I came to Hawai`i. But he was in charge of one of the mess halls then, and I knew that he had it good. He had a good life.

WN: You said the food was different between the military and you guys. How? What kind of difference?

EG: Well, heck, we had powdered eggs (WN laughs). We had typical mess hall type food. These [*military*] guys that I was friends with were working for officers and they had officers' mess and officers' quarters. At Ford Island, my friends that I got to know in the navy worked in officers' clubs and consequently they had the quality foods, the very best of everything. I know that a lot of the guys, when I transferred from labor and I went to the boiler plant, and we'd have to go around the island—Ford Island—to service equipment and check on the units and things like that, and some of my guys who worked at the boiler plants had a regular thing with the chiefs in the officers' quarters because they had big spreads. I mean they had good food. And these guys would always go down just about lunchtime. If they were in with the chief, the chief gave them whatever food they wanted.

WN: These were civilians?

EG: Yeah. Civilians worked with me. But these old-timers knew how to get around the chiefs, and everything like that and they ate well. And it was a long time before I even got on to this. But no, they had it quite---they had the perks, as you said.

WN: What about the enlisted men? Did they eat good, too?

EG: I think the enlisted men probably ate about like we did (WN laughs). It was just about the same fare we had. During the time I was masquerading as a sailor (WN laughs), you know, I would spend weekends on the base. I don't know what would've happened. I suppose they would have put me in the brig or something if they caught me. But a couple of my buddies would come off, and when they came off, like I said, we'd go Downtown in my clothes, they borrowed my clothes, and I'd put their clothes on when I went on the base.

WN: Was that easy to do?

EG: There was no problem.

WN: What about ID or anything?

EG: I had to have ID anyway. Because I think everyone in those days had to have some form of identification to get on the base. They had these little things that were made, these guys were making them for your badge. So I think this sort of got you on the base anyway. First of all, I was working on the base so there was no big thing getting on the base. I just decided, you supposed to leave after the day's work was over but maybe I didn't leave. I just, you know, stayed on. It was something a teenager would do.

WN: (Laughs) What advantages were there to be on base?

EG: Okay, you had base theaters. You had all the base activities that we didn't have over at CHA-3. And you were asking about the food, I think the enlisted men's food must've been better than ours. Well, you're with your buddies and that was about it. A diversion. It seems simple now, but back in those days it was . . .

WN: You were a teenager.

EG: Yeah, it was different. It was something to do.

WN: I'm wondering, the civilians and the military personnel, okay, Blacks, was there an image difference socially, for example, having that uniform on, you know, having a certain social status here in Hawai'i as opposed to somebody like you who didn't have that uniform? You were here for a different purpose. Did you feel that at all?

EG: No, I don't think so, I don't think so. I think that a Black man was a Black man back in those days, and whether he was civil service or military I don't think there was a distinction. We did have to overcome some of the propaganda that was put down about us. We know that. I think most of the social life in those days, was centered around the lack of feminine companionship. Those who came before us, and the Blacks were not the first—the Whites came over here first—and I think that most of us, both Black and White, the majority of us were from the South. Now, why this was the case and why I happen to feel that way, I don't know. Maybe it was because most of the friction that existed to me at that time seemingly was between these two groups, okay? And I was one of that group. So the other group, I can only surmise based on being more visible in a negative way, were Southern Whites, and Southern Whites were here before we were. And Southern Whites, to protect whatever little feminine interest that was here, did whatever they could to make sure that we didn't get it, that we didn't get close to it.

To give you an example, you get on a bus. You go in a theater, and if there was a woman there and you sit down next to her, she was going to move. You got on a bus and you sit down next to her, she was going to move. She did not sit down next to you, and there was no fine distinction whether you had on a uniform or not. It's just that you were Black, and she wasn't going to sit next to you. This went on for quite a while. The men were friendly. The local people I came into contact with, males, were friendly to me. The women, I wasn't exposed to them to any great degree until after we started having those social affairs. And then we were exposed to some local girls. I think by this time, though, some of the brainwashing had been dispelled. I think that some of the lies that have been told, they, being intelligent people, had decided, wait a minute, what we've been told doesn't necessarily fit.

WN: What had they been told?

EG: Well, first of all, they were told that if (they had a baby by a Black man), it was going to be (a) monkey. This was one of the things. And I suppose the whole thing had to be tied up with a sexual sort of theme, and it leapfrogged everything else. In other words, your first contact goes from this contact to a sexual contact. There was no such thing as a friendly relationship, of a relationship that's platonic or anything like that. It went from good morning to I got you in bed. This was the way the thing came about. And (laughs) since it came that way you knew where they were coming from in the first place and that is, hey, don't even associate with them because the minute you speak to one, you're going to bed with him. And if you go to bed with him, you're going to have a monkey for a baby. Which was stupid. But it worked. It worked for a while. And as I said, the women wouldn't even speak because I guess they thought if they speak, they'd already had intercourse. That's the way it seemed to be. So we, along with a whole lot of other men, were denied feminine friendship. And I think a lot of us would've just wanted to. . . . Every woman you see you didn't want to go to bed with in the first place. There's a lot of ground in between the two. Of getting to know a person to getting to be friends with a person. Married people---we would have enjoyed just going to a family's home and sitting down, just talking with a family, being around a family.

I did get to know a family, more than one, during the days right after the war. And that was Frank. . . . There was a Portuguese man who lived in K<sub>ne</sub>ohe. His name will come to me later. We worked---this was during the time of the boiler plant. There was one or two other Blacks in the boiler plant. They were older than I. Frank Andrade. Frank Andrade was married to, his wife was Japanese. Frank used to provide transportation for us. Share-the-ride sort of thing. He'd pick up two or three of us and take us to work and take us back home. But Frank would invite you to his home. I think he had a daughter and I don't know if he had any sons or not. But just the pleasure of being in somebody's home was all the lot of us was looking for. We would have no more thought of disrespecting his household by trying to seduce his wife or seduce his daughter---no way. This was a friend of ours.

But like I said, the propaganda leapfrogged this whole thing. So therefore on first contact the women just decided, you are invisible until you sit down close to me, then I'll get away from you. But to answer your question, and I did in a long drawn-out way, I don't think that the civilians had any edge over the service personnel, nor the service personnel had an edge over the civilians. They had some USO [*United Service Organizations*] houses here, and I think as a civilian worker we could attend those USO places also. We had almost the same privileges as the military had. Even when we traveled, we traveled on a per diem. We traveled all first-class accommodations. When I went back, I traveled on orders and I had all first-class accommodations on the Pullman and that sort of thing, so we had almost all the privileges the

military had. So when you were in Hawai`i in those days, civil service workers and military were treated about the same way.

WN: Let me ask you just a couple of more questions on CHA-3 before we move on. The section that you lived in CHA-3, was that 18th and 19th Street?

EG: Eighteenth and 19th Street, that sticks in my mind for some reason. Nineteenth Street, I think, was the last street there, and I think on most of those other streets had houses on both sides. Nineteenth Street, I think, only had houses on one side. On the *makai* side was the air strip, I think. There was a big fence there along the road that separated CHA-3 from the air field. Little later, they put up the bachelors' quarters, which was a four-story building. I don't know where the White bachelors' quarters were, but ours was right there at 18th and 19th Street.

WN: This was all Black?

EG: Yeah, all Black.

WN: So that somebody made the assignments according to race?

EG: Yeah. Remember now, [Harry S.] Truman hadn't integrated the armed forces at that time and the [U.S.] Navy, I think, was the most segregated of the services, and their policies existed on all of their facilities. And CHA-3 was a naval facility operated by the navy and under naval jurisdiction. So whatever prevailed there was the navy policy. So you were assigned segregated quarters. It was a funny sort of thing because the mess halls, I don't think, were segregated. I don't think the mess halls were segregated unless you segregated yourselves in there. And I don't think the banquet hall was segregated either. Barbershop was . . .

WN: Barbershop was?

EG: Was. Beer garden wasn't, I recall. I think that people segregated themselves possibly in these places, I don't think it was forced on you.

WN: That was my next question, whether it was an institutional-type, organized segregation.

EG: No, I don't think it was institutional, no. I'm sure that individuals segregated themselves. But I don't think it was "organized segregation," using my term.

WN: And you said the navy was the most segregated of the branches?

EG: I think so. Now, navy and possibly marines. I don't think Blacks could even get in the marines. But as far as the military was concerned, if you got into the navy you were a mess boy. The army was less segregated. The air force was possibly---like I said, I tried to join the air force in December '42. There were very few Blacks in the air force.

WN: By being segregated did it remind you at all of home?

EG: CHA-3?

WN: Yeah.

EG: No. It just was maybe more of the same but in a lesser sense. It was an improvement over what I had been accustomed to because, as I said, to my way of thinking, it wasn't institutionalized, if you want to say that. However, the living accommodation was. And maybe I didn't expect any more. Didn't find it unusual, I think, at that time. Maybe over the years, though, as I became less indoctrinated with my Southern upbringing, maybe that was the thinking. Why did they bring me this far, you know, that sort of thing. But that may have been later on. In the beginning I possibly accepted it as a way of life and as the way things were supposed to have been. That was probably my first impression.

WN: Was what you got the same in terms of quality with the Whites?

EG: I would say yes. The four-unit buildings were all the same. The bachelors' quarters as far as that was concerned were the same. They were new buildings. And the rest of the facilities we were sharing on an equal basis, as far as I could see. I would say separate but equal in those cases where it was separated, segregated. We didn't have any Blacks running anything that I can think of. All the shops---the shops and the mess halls I think were probably staffed, by and large, by local people, and I'm sure that *Haoles* were in charge of it.

WN: Okay. You were talking earlier about certain propaganda that was spread or circulating around town about you guys . . .

EG: You mean about the Blacks, the Afro-Americans?

WN: Yeah. What did you try to do to . . .

EG: Dispel it?

WN: Yeah. Was there an attempt at all or . . .

EG: Probably on an individual basis. I dare say that we overcompensated by trying to disprove what we had been accused of being. I guess maybe we did. Maybe we did everything we could to try to show—and we're speaking now of not only the women but I suppose both men and women—that we were not what we had been accused of being. I think this is what we did. I think maybe this is why we decided to assimilate into the Hawaiian society.

WN: Okay, let me change tapes.

WN: Okay, well, can you tell me something about Downtown [*Honolulu*]? What was it like as a young teenager?

EG: Wall-to-wall men—number one. You know, transportation-wise—I've thought about this since we started talking. Hawai`i had some unique transportation. Did you know we had jitneys here at one time?

WN: Uh huh. I've heard.

EG: Jitneys used to operate up and down King Street. They seemed to operate from Pearl Harbor. You would share a jitney ride. I don't know why—they should possibly bring that back because it was one way of helping to relieve some of the transportation problems. You had jitneys. You had trolleys. I've forgotten what sort of bus system you had from town to Pearl Harbor. You

had the little train that ran from Downtown to Kahuku and then Wai`anae side, I guess. But Downtown---for a while, I didn't even get Downtown.

WN: How long was it before . . .

EG: Before I got Downtown? It may have been six months or so.

WN: Six months? Woo! (Laughs)

EG: I remember six months or so. You know I told you that we used to go to work and then you'd be assigned to work with a crew. And I think one of the choice ones was this guy, Chu. I remember the name. Chu used to deliver furniture for the navy. Picked up, I guess, office furniture, stuff like that. And when you were assigned to work with Chu you came in town. You went Downtown and fooled around and had breakfast. I think this was my first time coming Downtown. Here's my favorite mailman . . .

(Mail carrier enters. Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

WN: You went Downtown with Chu.

EG: Yeah. I'm sure his name was Chu.

WN: Chinese guy?

EG: He was Chinese or Korean. He may have been Chinese. I remember the first time we went down to have breakfast, somewhere on River Street—and there was two or three local guys, two or three of my teenage buddies were on this . . .

WN: Was Milton with you?

EG: No, Milton went to Pearl Harbor when he came here. He went to Pearl Harbor and I went to Ford Island. We sort of drifted apart for the first time in four years after we came to Hawai`i, I guess, because of the assignment to different areas. I've forgotten---I don't even think we had the same accommodations as far as housing was concerned.

WN: If I recall, I think there's a photo of you and Milton Downtown, right?

EG: We're still buddies. Yeah. But remember it had to be within nine months, okay? I'm trying to remember now my first impression of going Downtown. That picture was taken, I suppose, just before he left. And we by this time had become seasoned Hawai`i civil service workers. It didn't take us very long to really adapt ourselves to where we were. But I may have gone Downtown before that. I must have gone Downtown. It had to be before six months. Must've been because the natural thing to do would be to go in town to see what Honolulu was like on your day off.

WN: What day was that? Was that Sunday?

EG: I don't know. You didn't have any particular day off that I recall. Maybe at Ford Island you may have been off on a Sunday. But we were working pretty much six days a week. It may have been Sunday. It may have been a day of the week. No, I don't think it was Sunday.

But I think before you were asking me about some of the things that existed Downtown. Downtown was a honky-tonk. That's the only thing that I can recall. It was one big honky-tonk. Curio shops on Alakea and Hotel Street.

WN: Yeah.

EG: What's that building? That building right across from there. Right above that was the Army-Navy YMCA [*Young Men's Christian Association*]?

WN: Right, right, right.

EG: Right there where that building is, there were curio shops where they had cameras, somebody was always taking pictures. And they'd have hula girl pictures in there, and curios, and cards, and knickknacks, and everything, I guess, that a guy wanted to pick up to send back home to show he's been in Hawai`i. There were bars all Downtown. Bars, curio shops, barbershops, tattoo shops, theaters. And from River Street—I think on both sides of River Street—Beretania Street, Smith Street, Nu`uanu Street, between Hotel and Beretania Streets, were houses of prostitution. And wall-to-wall sailors and soldiers and civilians. And that seemed to be what I recall Honolulu being like in those days. And lines. There (were) lines that stretched around the block. And I used to tell people that, look, you got three lines. You get into (a) line, you're going to wind up in one of three places. You're going to wind up in a theater, a liquor store, (or) you're going to wind up at a house of prostitution. That was only three lines. You get in one of them, that's where you going to wind up. Like I said, I wasn't drinking in those days when I first came here so I wasn't that interested in going to the bars so we just walked up and down the street.

One of those days when we came. . . . I must've gone on the truck with Chu for more than once because I remember the first time we had breakfast. You see, I didn't used to eat rice. I wouldn't eat rice because I think the way they cooked it back home I didn't like it. And I've gotten used to the taste for rice over here. But I remember the first time going Downtown to have breakfast and they served me rice with eggs and, I think, Spam—I think that was about the only thing you could get in those days; no such thing as bacon. And I couldn't eat breakfast because I didn't have bread. That was my first experience. I think the Chinese-Hawaiian kid was William Lee. Lee was a little bit more progressive, a little bit more advanced. He was no older than the rest of us. He was a little more streetwise than the rest of us. So he was going to go up to one of the houses, right? Must've been about not quite noon, I suppose like eleven o'clock. But we got upstairs there—it was upstairs. And then you sit down. They had a little old entryway. And everybody's sitting down. Then you could look inside the booth where they had little curtains. And I think Lee went inside, but I looked at it and I decided no, it was not for me. And I came out. That was the closest I ever got to. . . . It was three bucks. Charged three dollars. And I know that some of the guys in the dormitory where we lived, this was the talk. On J-day they'd get up like they were going to work. Four, five o'clock in the morning to go Downtown and stand in one of those lines. And believe it or not, this was as much a part of Honolulu as anything else. But remember, I had all of the girls that I wanted when I was in high school that I wasn't paying for. This was against all my principles. Paying for sex with a woman? No way. So I never did go into one of those prostitutes, but it was a way of life.

WN: Was three dollars considered a lot?

EG: For the time that you spent there I think three dollars was a whole lot. When you were working that was three dollars out of your day's pay. For some guys it was, heck, it was great. They enjoyed---they looked forward to it.

WN: Were the prostitutes local or were they from the Mainland?

EG: I think they had some local. But one thing about it. Blacks couldn't go into all of the houses. I don't even know if I would've been allowed into this one or not because these were local guys that I was with. But I never did get to the point where someone said no, you cannot come in here. But I do know that the houses were restricted. There was one or two where Blacks went. And I don't even know where (they were).

They had other things. I'll tell you something else they had, they had taxi dancers. Taxi dancers was the thing that I spent my money on, you know, as far as contact with women. Right across from, you said, your grandfather's place?

WN: Yeah, the Swing Club, was it?

EG: No, it wasn't the Swing Club. Swing Club was on Hotel Street.

WN: Oh, okay. My grandfather's place was on Beretania and Nu`uanu.

EG: Nu`uanu. There was---now I can't recall the name of it but . . .

WN: Brown Derby?

EG: No, Brown Derby was across from Liberty Theater? Yeah, Liberty Theater was on Nu`uanu Street, right? Okay, you're coming up Nu`uanu Street, and if you made a left turn on Beretania Street right on the corner. . . . You say, if you made a right turn it would've been your grandfather's warehouse, right?

WN: Which direction is this?

EG: Going Nu`uanu toward the mountains.

WN: Okay, going Nu`uanu toward the mountains.

EG: You take a left on Beretania.

WN: Mm hmm.

EG: This was a dance, taxi dance.

WN: But it wasn't the Brown Derby, though. Brown Derby . . .

EG: No, Brown Derby was on Nu`uanu Street.

WN: I know what you mean because I do remember a dance hall.

EG: There was a [*taxi*] dance hall over there. And this one was restricted too. The bars Downtown

were segregated.

WN: Really?

EG: Yeah. Johnny Walsh had one on King Street—King Street and, I think, Smith [*Street*], somewhere. It was called Johnny Walsh's Bar. Johnny Walsh also had the Zebra Room. Segregated in one, and the other one, Zebra Room, wasn't segregated. Seemingly, from Kalakaua up to Waikiki up toward Waikiki segregation didn't exist. For some reason we never got much beyond Richards Street. Let's go to Punchbowl. No, let's take it to Alapa`i Street. We didn't hardly go much beyond Alapa`i Street, for some reason, for most of our activity. So most of it centered from that way back toward River Street and Aala Park. So the taxi dancers was one of the places that I would frequent, that we would dance, and it would probably cost you more than the prostitutes. But I think ten minutes the bell would ring and you'd be dancing. But even they were segregated. There were plenty of them though. They were all up and down from Nu`uanu Street all the way down to A`ala Park. There used to be an AalaStreet. Aala Street was pretty much, I think, frequented by Filipinos to a great degree. That's a Filipino hangout. Filipini businesses, Filipino bars. And there was a taxi dance down there, and I think that was less segregated.

WN: When you say “segregated” now, what are we talking about here? We're talking about . . .

EG: Well, some of those taxi dances, Blacks could go in.

WN: I see.

EG: I don't know if it was a two-way street, this taxi dance that I'm talking about, that we spent most of our time in. . . . The name will come to me, I'm sure. Whether Whites couldn't come in there or something like that, but. . . . There were certain places that catered to certain groups.

WN: So there were some taxi dance house that were just [*frequented by*] Blacks?

EG: Yes, this was one. Pretty much only Blacks or locals could go. For some reason, Filipinos and Blacks spent a lot of time under the same conditions, especially this taxi dance, because I remember seeing Filipino guys up there. Not too many other local guys, but primarily Blacks. It was also about this time, I think, that some of the rumors about us (had) been dispelled, because I know a lot of the guys who married taxi dance girls, girls who worked in taxi dance halls. To my way of thinking, you have types of people who will leave his original hometown to go somewhere else. You have the one with the pioneer spirit, and he is—I don't want to use the term “streetwise”—he's a little bit ahead of the crowd in his thinking and his abilities and his know-how. He's a survivor. And this is the one I'm thinking in terms of. You had a lot of us, you had a lot of those people that came here. And they were possibly that way at home and decided, hey look, Hawai`i affords me what I'm looking for. Some of these people may have been dodging the draft. They were usually almost street people. I think some of the military guys got out here in those days because they got discharged here and they became part of the street crowd. Milton and I were leaders in our little group, one way or another. And even (at home), we were sort of pioneers.

WN: This is Georgia?

EG: This would be—yes. Even when we were at home, we ventured out. We ventured to places where others waited to see the outcome. We were usually good at communicating. Most of them were good at dancing. And this is the crowd I guess that sort of broke down some of the things that have been said about us. So when the local girls became exposed to these guys, they found that, hey, this guy can be fun. He dresses well. He dances well. He does this well. So, therefore, hey, this guy's okay. So this initial contact so very often may have been through this sort of relationship. Here's a girl who is working in one of the taxi dances and she's doing it for the money. She makes darn good money at it. She's not a prostitute. And the guy is not a pimp. But he is fun to be with, okay? And he doesn't have a tail, and he doesn't have all these other things that was said about us. So this seems to have been, somehow or another, the door through which we came to get to know the local girls.

WN: Most of the taxi dance girls were local?

EG: As far as I can recall, yes, most of them were. The taxi dance hall that I'm thinking of, the one that we went to most of the time, I think most of them were local. I don't recall seeing any *Haole* girls in there. There may have been taxi dance halls with *Haole* girls in them. But this one was local girls. And as I said, a lot of guys that I got to know, got to be friends later on, married taxi hall dancers. These were some of the girls also who would frequent our “Ten Bachelor” parties, okay. So these would be some of the local girls. This was, to my way of thinking, some of our first initial social contacts, through that way, through that source. But there were plenty of taxi dancers around, taxi dance halls.

Trying to see what else was unique around in those days. Oh, I tell you something else. A lot of tailor shops. There were a lot of tailor shops in those days. Tailor shops. Tattoo shops. A lot of sign shops were around. You know, you don't see too much of that anymore, but you know these handmade signs? There was a lot of that in those days. For some reason I guess there was a demand for it. But I remember khaki pants was the thing in those days. And at the tailor shops, we'd all have our khaki pants made. Drapes. Of course, drapes were still popular.

WN: Yeah, drapes.

EG: You remember drapes? Tailor shops made those. All a part of the Honolulu scene.

WN: Who wore drapes mostly?

EG: Blacks and Filipinos—here.

WN: Interesting.

EG: Mexicans did, too, I think, in California. Zoot suits, there were zoot suits.

WN: When I was growing up in the fifties drapes were big in my high school, but I just was wondering how it originated.

EG: You may have a lot of Whites then and non-Blacks who wore drapes or zoot suits, but to my knowledge I think more or less on the Mainland it was a Black thing. And I think over here, Filipinos.

WN: Ernest, what I want to do is stop here and continue another day. At that time what we can do is

finish up talking about Downtown and then get into postwar and things you did after the war.  
Okay?

EG: How are we doing?

WN: We're doing fine.

EG: Are we? Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW