

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW #448-4

with

Manuel Nobriga (MN)

March 25, 1993

Waipahu, O`ahu

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Mr. Manuel Nobriga on March 25, 1993, at his home in Waipahu, O`ahu. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, why don't we begin. Okay, let's start. So the war was going on and the war ended in '45. Was there anything different right after, as the war ended?

MN: After the war ended, everything got calm. Well, people were happy, relaxed and all that. There's no war, no ration or anything. Anything was open. And no friction. And then sports came back again. Everything. The plantation came back and start all the entertainment. Sports in the ballpark. But the band and a few things we had before that. The band broke up because mostly Filipinos. During the war lot of them move here and there. We had a plantation band. Filipino band. But sports gradually came in and that's when everybody became normal again. Life start going again. Actually during the war we didn't have any hardship. Only was the blackout, they were real strict for our own sakes. Outside of that everybody had job. There was no crime or anything.

WN: Did people start moving out after the war ended?

MN: After the war ended was when people start moving out. We had lost lot of mechanics. Guys went to Pearl Harbor [*Navy Yard*], the guys that weren't frozen. They didn't come back, but we start getting new boys in. Especially in the shop, they didn't allow Japanese boys there, but I got Sadao Shinno there and a few other ones. They became the top men, because I was promoted to engineer. So he [*Shinno*] came in and he did all the work for me. He was good. He came from trade school and all. He was a cyclist, one of the good riders for Waipahu Pedal Pushers. So in sports and all, all these guys that wanted something, I always help 'em. But he came from trade school, he made number one machinist in the shop. But everything went normal again.

WN: Did the motor pool guys just leave when the war ended? Or did they leave before that?

MN: The war was still on---they ended just about that time. They went down under, a few of them went down under mopping up, or something. And one of the guys that went down under fell in love with one of my daughters. Leo Gollnick. So he wanted to get married before he go down under. Everything was quiet. There were guys being discharged and everything. So the motor

pool [*men*] went--had to go down under. Before he went down under he got married. We still had blackout, not real blackout, but not like it was [*during the early part of the war*]. You could have lights in the house and all, but put your shades down during the night. Of course, they didn't know what would happen again. The streetlights weren't on yet. He got married and went down under, and two or three months he came back. All of them came back.

So he came back and he went to Portland, Oregon. He took his wife there, took my daughter with him. So he went to Portland, Oregon, he was a mechanic. One of their children, the oldest one, Lucille, was born in Portland, Oregon. By that time, as years went by I went to visit them up in Portland, Oregon. But somehow I didn't like it there. Maybe it was my daughter, they decided to come to Hawai`i.

So he came to Hawai`i. He didn't have any problems getting a job down navy yard. So he got an electrician job there, he got promoted to foreman. And he raised [*three*] kids over here in Waipahu. He bought a home up here in Waipahu, up on the hill. Then he got retired. After he got retired, stayed around a while, then he sold his home and he bought a place in Mililani. He got a good price for his old home over here. He bought a place in Mililani and she got sick. She died from [*lung*] cancer. After she got [*diagnosed*], she lived at least fifteen years, no problem. Then she start smoking [*again*]. She used to be a heavy smoker. Start smoking again a little at a time. Then she said, "What's the use. The thing won't go away, eh." But came worse. In fact, that's my second oldest daughter. She was number three in the family. She died. Josephine was sixty years old when she died. When she died, few months after, one of my brothers-in-law died, then my mother-in-law died. All in the family. For fifty years we never had any deaths in the family. Then I lost my wife [*Lucy Perreira Nobriga*], she died [*in 1987*]. Then Leo died. In fact, her [*Manuel Nobriga's daughter's*] husband died before my wife. I think in four months I lost my daughter, Leo, her husband, and my wife died. We were planning to celebrate sixty-five years [*of marriage*]. But two months before that she passed away. She had a guest list and everything. Didn't happen. So I used to think, well, we were lucky. For fifty years we didn't have one death in the family. And I had a flock of twenty-two grandchildren. Not one died till my daughter died. Three in a row. And since then I lost an in-law, mother-in-law, all that. Well, my wife's family wasn't so much. It didn't affect me, my wife's family. I lost brothers-in-law and all. A big bunch of them. And the last guy that came from Madeira with us, but he actually was born in Brazil, he died---he was sixty-five years old. That's the only friend where I had from Madeira. He died two years ago.

WN: During the war, what became of your involvement with the Territorial Guard?

MN: After the war, they disband the whole thing. They give you certificates and all that and that's it. We didn't have---nobody was issued a gun. Nobody ever took up a gun, I think, outside of the officers. And I used to take care the revolver .45. Outside of that you couldn't carry it home. The officers could take it home. Then we have drill every week, every week we had drilling. Sometimes twice a week. Marching, you know, right face, left face, forward march. That kind of stuff. A lot of Filipinos they. . . . They had one Filipino had experience from the army, but he had one accent, eh, Filipino accent like most of them. So he used to say, "Rice face!" Rice. Left was, "Lipt about face!" But I work with Filipinos so long I know what they say. They had the pronunciation of an f and an s is different. Left, "lept." The f and the s. "To the rear march" they were all right. Four, they said "p." "Por you. Por me." Five, "pive." The f is a p. The p is a f. That's their pronunciation. I have yardboy come here once a month, he still talks to me like I talk

to him that kind of language too. “No porget, eh. No porget make good job. Number one.”

“You work with a Filipino before?”

“Oh, yeah. I was their boss (chuckles).”

WN: So it was mostly Filipinos---mostly Filipinos in the [*Hawai`i Territorial*] Guard?

MN: The [*Hawai`i Territorial*] Guard was strictly Filipinos and a few whatever other nationalities. But Japanese they didn't come in.

WN: Did they have Hawaiians in there?

MN: They had some Hawaiians. Actually they had a few Hawaiians in Waipahu. They had one. He was too old. He didn't join the army. We had a few Chinese-Hawaiians. But all they did was drill.

WN: You didn't have any incidents?

MN: What's that?

WN: You didn't have any. . . .

MN: No, no, didn't have any fights or anything. I was surprised. They get angry at one another, they changed regiment, you know. I changed regiment. I was with a Portuguese---all those that weren't Filipinos. When the guy come over there give the orders, “March, left face, right face.” You couldn't hear 'em. All those guys talking together (chuckles). I couldn't hear 'em. That was hearing aid, eh. I didn't have any. I had hard time, you know. So, one day I got mad with one of the guys, Pestana. He was my good friend. I told him, “Eddie, you talk too goddamn much. I quit.”

“You can't quit. You sworn in.”

“Only the hand. I never sign anything.”

(Laughter)

WN: Nobody got paid?

MN: Nobody got paid. You wore the uniform, you buy your own.

WN: You buy your own?

MN: Nobody was issued a gun. Just drill and then they tell you what could happen and this and that. I was sworn in as a regular, few of us, so in case there was an attack I could be taken as a prisoner of war. That's why I had that certificates. They asked me, “Nobriga, if you want to stay in, I'd like you to. You're in this way.”

My wife didn't want. [*But*] I said, "Look, if anybody come and shoot me right in the backyard, here."

So she said, "Okay, okay, okay."

WN: So in 1944, you switched from being in Company B Waipahu Battalion Territorial Home Guard to Technical Sergeant of the O`ahu Volunteer Infantry? For that reason so that you'd be part of the military?

MN: Yeah. That's why I became military. Actually, we were just [*Territorial*] Guard. But military you had to be sworn in with military people.

WN: But you still didn't get paid for that? You still didn't get any pay for that?

MN: No, I never did get any pay. I had some kind of award, certificate. I lost that. I actually didn't do anything there to worth [*i.e., earn*] that. I wasn't worth that. I was just over there to kill time and have fun. And then, I was in charge of the guns and I learned how to dismantle a gun. Take 'em all apart, put 'em all together again. I was a machinist then. I like. I had something to do. Had no TV, you couldn't play this, you couldn't play that in the night. Talk story year round. You can't tell your wife stories over and over again. She say, "Oh, I heard that before."

(Laughter)

MN: You know. Say something, "Eh, you told me that three times this week."

(Laughter)

WN: Were you happy that the war ended?

MN: During the war I never was sad. I was always with the cadre. I would go on the side. We had the motor pool over there. And all the trucks that were coming in, I got acquainted with all the officers there, the men, eh. So in the evenings, once in a while I used to go there for half an hour or so and come home. 'Cause I had the guns in there and different equipment from the home guard. The guns were there, ammunition and all. But nobody used. But they had lockers. At the beginning, one guy, Captain Homer, he saw me going over there, "What the hell is that civilian doing over there? Eh you! Who gave you permission?"

I said, from the company, this and that.

"Oh, okay. I'm sorry." And he became my good friend.

WN: Did you have to go around to make sure that people had their lights out and things like that? Was that like a block warden?

MN: When the war really broke out they had block warden.

WN: That was their job, not your job?

MN: I never did go. I told the boss, “No, I can't go.” I may be going around block warden and then there's a breakdown in the mill, they want to call me all over the place.

“No, no, no, you don't go. You don't go.”

They say everybody has to go. And I told L'Orange, “If I going be a block warden, okay. But if they call me breakdown in the mill, I'm not going. I'm on duty.”

He said, “No, no, no, you're excused.” 'Cause during the war we got frozen. The labor got frozen. Especially the mechanics. So I never did go for block warden. But when the war ended, that night, everything went blackout, I went to the Japanese Camp just to tell the people there, my gang from the mill, people I knew, “You guys cool head.”

WN: When the war started you mean?

MN: When the war started. The attack, the day of the attack. But outside of that, we never had complaints, we never had. . . . The only thing I missed were the people, the Japanese people. They were so quiet. They were like somebody died. I felt that way too lot of times. They were really embarrassed or I don't know. I know I felt bad about that. Because it's no fault of ours what the heck the other people do. That's why, on TV [*i.e.*, a recent television documentary] one day, about Hiroshima. This top guy from Japan came on TV, he said, “If there was no Pearl Harbor, there wouldn't be a Hiroshima.” That's what he said right on TV. That's the end of it. You start something, you didn't finish. Somebody else finish it. But, if there was no Pearl Harbor, there wouldn't be Hiroshima. They complain so much about Hiroshima this and that. If there wasn't Hiroshima, there wouldn't be no Pearl Harbor. Pearl Harbor was there first. So in other words, they were blaming one another, but they blame the guy that started it. That's the way I felt. The Japanese people didn't start that. It's the big guys that wanted something. And all wars, that's the way it starts. The [*common*] people don't want wars, nobody. After all, who fights the war? Who gets killed? It's the people. Not the big guys, they stay at home kill everybody. So I used to argue this and that. When the guys came on TV say that, I say, “From now on anybody tell me something, that's it.” No more arguments. War is war.

WN: The Japanese that you knew on the plantation, did you feel that they were different from the Japanese in Japan at that time?

MN: The Japanese on the plantation were very much against Japan. The whole Japan. They used to say, “You know Nobriga, all them goddamn bastards over there. It's not the working people.”

I used to tell 'em, “I agree with you. It's the big guns that want to get more and more. They want more stars or something. I understand that.”

They were very much against Japan, the guys, every one I knew. I had one guy, Furukawa, he used to take care the. . . . He had three, four sons. I think two of them went to the 442nd [*Regimental Combat Team*] volunteer. Anyway, he was supposed to be picked up, go to the concentration camp, eh. And he used to worry, “You know Nobriga. . . .” I used to do all his pipe work. On the big flanges, threading and all that. He didn't know how to explain that very good to some people. But with me I knew what the heck he wanted, so they always say, “Wait till

Nobriga through with that machine, take care you.” Then I used to take care Joe. I used to call Joe Furukawa. And he really complain all the time about Japan. Worried because he was happy what he was doing. He had a good job. He was pipe fitter in the mill. Foreman like, you know. I was a machinist. I was making way much money than him. He was foreman, but small pay, you know. But machinist---the only people that were having real good journeyman's pay, was machinist. The rest were all underpaid. Mechanics and all, all underpaid. But machinists, somehow, we had journeyman's pay equal to outside [*the plantation*]. Those days journeyman's pay was dollar an hour, we weren't getting dollar an hour, but with house and everything, was over dollar an hour. That's why I came to the plantation.

WN: So the people that left the plantation to go defense work, they lost their housing?

MN: They lost their houses.

WN: They had to go find housing on their own?

MN: They buy a house. Some bought a house in `Aiea, and some of them [*who*] weren't married, from the family, they could come home [*i.e., live in their parents' home on the plantation*]. They used to allow that. But if there was a family, they couldn't give 'em a home. So some of them stay with in-laws and stuff like that. They manage. But they never did try to push 'em. I had lot of my family went to navy yard, welders. And lot of boys from Waipahu used to be in the mill. . . . They all wanted to be welders. You can become a welder in two or three days. If you can melt that stuff. If you can control that rod, that's it. Anyway, I took up welding one time. I wanted to learn. So the boss say, “You have to buy a mask. Your own mask. You can't use the other guy's mask.”

“Okay, after work.”

I saw this other guy Pestana, he used to be welding foreman. He was foreman already. So in one week I could melt and use the rod as good as any of them there. Just melt, you know. Yeah, I had a good hand.

“What the hell, quit, go navy yard. Big pay.”

“Hell, I'm a machinist. I don't want to be a welder.”

“Yeah, but why, you learn and all that. You could be.” The foreman said, “You could be. Some of these guys here can't weld as good as you, you know.” Arc welding, you know.

WN: What kind of welding?

MN: Arc welding, Arc. With the rod, they call it arc welding.

WN: Arc welding.

MN: Everything is melted with the rod. Not gas and that stuff, the [*blow*]torch. But arc welding, get a rod and you melt it. Weld things together. Anyway, I never did like welding. I never did like fire. My eyes were bad. Tell you something about my eye. I was born like that. Couldn't read with my

left eye. I don't read with my left eye, yet. And when I got cataract, the doctor say, "You have a bum eye. You can't see from that eye?"

"No."

"How do you manage all your life, machines and all?"

"The right eye is okay."

So I had cataract both eyes. Told me, "Well, I'm going to operate your right eye. Somebody got to take care you, 'cause you can't see out of that eye."

I told him, "No, fix my left eye." So he did. And you know something, I can watch TV, I can see your clothes. If you not a good-looking man, I could tell you. But you good-looking man, even with this eye. You know what I mean?

(Laughter)

WN: Thanks, eh.

MN: So, anyway, then they fix that eye. I was happy. I can read the watch like this, see. Before I couldn't do it, I was born like that. Then after that, okay, then I went this side. I still can see TV, you know. Everything came all right. This side I could never read without glasses. [Now] I can read without glasses this eye. He made a good job.

WN: You were telling me that during the war you took some contracts. Defense contracts?

MN: During the war the labor was frozen. So during the war, a contractor, this contractor's son-in-law, Jack Vorfeld, was his son-in-law. I forgot the contractor's name. He said, "You know, I have lot of jobs. I could give you. After the plantation, work for me." He had this, fire department hose fittings. The fire hydrants and all, the nut, male and female nut. He had a lot of those casted to be machined and threaded. Around five, six inches, for big nuts. So Jack told me if I would like to do it. I said, "We have to see the company if they let me do it after work." Then he brought one. Jack told me, "Big one. How much you gonna charge for it?"

I said, "Well, let me machine one first, and let you know. I can't--I don't know. I never did one like this. I made small ones like that, but [not] big ones. And rough, you have to bore and then thread it. And it has to be right so it can fit any holes any place." So I made one. And I told him, "The first one took a little long. Maybe two dollars a piece."

He said, "You can charge a little more."

"Make it two and a half a piece then. Whatever." I said, "I won't make it less than two dollars [\$2.00] or two-and-half dollars [\$2.50] a piece. Depends the size."

So when he saw his father-in-law, he brought up a half a dozen of those. Then I got another machinist gang up with me. After work, the manager, L'Orange said, "Well, those boys, they all frozen now, after work, they can do as long as they want. Not more than two hours after work,

'cause we want 'em for the plantation.”

WN: So lot of you folks did that?

MN: No, only two of us. They didn't want to give all. . . . Only two of us. They had two machines there that, after work, the machine was clear. During the day the machinists take over, see. I used to work on big machine. So, we got the job. After work we make big money. Couple of hours.

WN: How much did you make? Did you make more than what you made at the plantation?

MN: He said, “Any amount, two dollars and a half and up.” Two, I make five bucks.

WN: How much were you making on the plantation?

MN: In one hour [*after work*] we used to make five, six dollars. Plantation we were getting sixty-five cents an hour, at that time, house, everything. Equivalent to one dollar, in town, those days. So, we said, “Bring some more.” So (chuckles) we made more money in three days than the whole week. Then we got kind of rich and we used to go buy. . . . Everything was ration so we used to go buy liquor and all that. But that didn't last forever, you know (laughs).

WN: When did that end?

MN: That ended, month and a half, they had enough nuts and all that. Then they brought in something else. Spindles. For carts, you know, when they load ammunition, big carts, spindles, male and female. I didn't like that, all heavy steel. Thread 'em. You thread the shafting and you could put a wheel on there. We had to bring the pins, the shafting. I didn't like that, so. Then couple of months after that, the guy, the contractor, he got into something else, eh. That's it. They were having all those, get those fire hydrants along the beaches, you know. They dig a well, put the fire hydrants there. They get the water from the ocean, in case of attack. That's the story he told me. And they had motor way outside, not close to the beach. Get the water free, eh. Bring the ocean [*water*] from there. You could water all over the beaches down `Ewa way, whatever it was. But it never happened. After they attack, they never come back. They had one incident, down here, down West Loch, down Honouliuli some place. They had a explosion there, but it wasn't Japanese. Some ammunition boat or something exploded. They rushed half a dozen guys to hospital over here. I don't know if any of them died. They took some patients that were good enough, put 'em in the back with those guys there. Don't want incident to happen. Beyond that, we never had any problem. Was peaceful in Waipahu. People used to fight less, people didn't have a chance to fight, [*because of*] blackout.

WN: Now, before the war ended you got involved in the union [*i.e., International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union*]? When did you first hear about the union?

MN: Well, before the war, in fact during the war we started the union. I started with Major Okada and this other guy Alphonso. And the guy Reinhardt. But Reinhardt he gave up.

WN: Alphonso who?

MN: Alphonso Guerrero, he was from Spain. He used to work in Gibraltar for the English. Rock of

Gibraltar. Used to work for them, and he could speak little English. Then he married a girl that I used to go to school with. We were good friends. He got married to the girl. He married, had children all that, raise a family. Then anyway, this Alphonso, Major Okada said, "We go form the union." We got together at the ball ground. Major used to take care baseball teams against my team. We were close.

So I said, "Sure, I'd like to learn about the union." I wanted to learn something about the union because my brother was a secretary-treasurer in Oakland Bay area, welders and builders.

WN: Your brother?

MN: My kid brother. He was secretary-treasurer and we used to correspond and he used to tell me about unions, see. And funny, I kind of liked this kind of thing. You know, [*he said*], "I used to work there for cheap wages and all. Get involved in the union." This and that. They organizing here, they organizing there, this and that. Harry Bridges and all, he knew them. And he was with the top guys. So that's how I got in, Major was talking about it, I said, "We go. We go to school." So I went to labor school. We had about five or six weeks [*training*].

WN: Where was it?

MN: Downtown. I forgot what school there. McKinley or some place. At one time, we had it close to University of Hawai`i. These guys from University [*of Hawai`i*] came in and teach us, I think Reinecke or somebody and his wife.

WN: John Reinecke.

MN: And his wife.

WN: Aiko [*Tokumasa Reinecke*].

MN: She was Chinese or something.

WN: Japanese.

MN: Japanese. I always thought she was Chinese. Anyway, she was sharp lady. And him, oh, I liked the guy. And he taught us lot of stuff. But all he used to teach us, not to fight. Learn how to fight, but no fight. Let them fight us. Lot of tricks in that. Don't get mad. Let them argue. You want to antagonize them guys, go ahead. But don't get in trouble. You soft and all that, you can get more that way. And I went about five sessions, different guys. Harry Bridges came down one time, gave a little talk.

WN: Now, this is still during the war, right? The war hadn't ended yet . . .

MN: During the war, during the war.

WN: . . . when you were doing this, was it allowed to go to this kind of labor school?

MN: Yeah, was allowed.

WN: Was anybody trying to stop you at all?

MN: No. Was free.

WN: Still had martial law, right?

MN: They had martial law. You couldn't go out in the night. During the day anybody could do what they want, as long as you don't get into trouble. But little by little. . . . Anyway, then we had a meeting one day. I had a pass to go out [*during*] blackout. Jack Hall down there gave me a pass. And all the guys who went to labor school had a pass. Because they used to have meetings in the night Downtown. I just went to one or two, that's all. Anyway, during the war, the union decided we organize to send somebody to the Mainland to the sugar refinery there.

WN: Oh, Crockett [*Sugar Refinery in California*].

MN: Crockett. So we had a vote. They asked me to go. "No, I don't want to go."

WN: How come?

MN: I wanted to stay with my family. Was still blackout, eh. And they going travel blackout, too. Boat and all. No airplane, boat, you know. I don't like, I get seasick. So I told 'em, "No."

"Well, you sign up already. All right we vote." So we had a vote in the shop. I walked out of there. They came after me, "You elected, elected."

"I'm not going."

"What kind union man?"

"My family come first. I am not going. There's plenty you guys here got no wife, no nothing. You go. What I'm gonna do over there, learn? I don't want to learn. I got to take care my kids. Who was the second highest [*vote-getter*]?"

"Oh, Alphonso Guerrero got second highest."

"Let him go."

"Oh he has a family, too."

"Wait, wait, I'll talk to him."

So I *wen* tell him, "Eh, Alphonso, I'm not going, you know."

"Really?"

"No, I'm not going."

“Who going?”

“You.”

“Oh, I don't know if Lola going let me go.”

“Talk to her. That's good chance for you.” So he went. He went to the refinery and he came back. I think it was four, five days. Was a week altogether, the boat [*ride*] and all. He came back and he tried to explain the thing to the boss. How they treat the labor over there, the sugar industry, refinery, this and that. But he couldn't get it across, you know. L'Orange said, “What the heck is he talking about? Nobriga, tell me.” His [*Guerrero's*] English was, Spanish immigrant, I had to explain to the boss (chuckles).

WN: Which boss is this?

MN: Was L'Orange.

WN: Yeah. How did L'Orange feel about all this union organizing?

MN: L'Orange was already manager. L'Orange was a good, good, good man.

WN: But how did he feel about you folks doing organizing union?

MN: Oh, he was for labor, you know. He was on our side. He always used to say, “Don't bite the hand that's feeding you. Don't bite the hand that's feeding you.”

I said, “I know. We not trying to break up the company. We trying to get our fair share. We not being treated to our right. That's not your fault, Mr. L'Orange.” But the guys who owned the place. . . . At home I treat all my kids alike. But the company not doing that to us. Stuff like that. In labor school we learned how to tell the boss off, too, in a nice way.

(Laughter)

MN: I learned plenty from labor school. You learn lot of respect for the other person. We had lot of respect for the bosses, too, but we wanted in return, too. We wanted to be known that we were human, too. Stuff like that. I knew all the stuff. A lot of stuff I knew from my dad. Do unto others. He's religious. Do unto others as you want them to do unto you. You know, that's religion. But anyway, this Alphonso, he got the message through. I explained to the boss. They used to have a cafeteria there [*Crockett Sugar Refinery*], see. And they used to let the guys go out, have coffee and all that. All on the Crockett [*grounds*], where the refineries. And he wanted us to get one here, too. Alphonso, he say, “They have a ca-fe-te-RI-a over there. Ca-fe-te-RI-a.”

The boss say, “Tell me something. What the hell is a ca-fe-te-RI-a.”

I say, “Alphonso means cafeteria.”

Alphonso say, “You no understand. Manuel understands (laughs).”

This Spaniard, he never did become an American citizen. He didn't believe in that. He was a Spaniard, he going to die a Spaniard. I like the guy though, that's his choice.

WN: Okay, so besides you, Alphonso Guerrero, Major Okada, who else was involved in this core group?

MN: We had---[Henry] Reinhardt was in there.

WN: Reinhardt?

MN: [Tadashi "Castner"] Ogawa. Newton Miyagi was there. All these guys were involved. That's the guys finally came to sign the contract. They picked us.

WN: Reinhardt was a worker? Where was he from?

MN: Reinhardt was a machinist. And Miyagi was a welder. And Ogawa was---he was a pan man up at the boiling house. He was working at the boiling house. Sugar.

WN: So these are all the industrial-side workers, right? 'Cause agriculture wasn't involved yet?

MN: Agriculture was.

WN: The pickers, I mean, the cutters . . .

MN: Social security didn't cover agriculture workers at that time, when they first came out with social security. So they were out. If you were working for the pumping department, you were a machinist in the pumping department. The pump is there because they want the water for the cane. So you're [considered an] agricultural [worker]. But if you were [working] in the mill, something going through the mill, cane came in from agriculture, but you turn it to some different product, turn 'em to sugar. So, you covered [as an industrial worker]. That's social security. Or you mechanic or anything. Anything that's pertaining to agriculture, at the beginning, was like that. That went on for couple of years. I don't know how long. Anyway. . . .

WN: At the beginning the actual union bargaining was first only the industrial mill workers or shop workers?

MN: The bargaining was for everybody. The bargaining was for the whole membership. The whole sugar workers, everybody. Only social security was separate. We had nothing control over social security. That's Congress, the guys passed that. [President] Franklin D. Roosevelt passed, okayed it. He started it and Congress okayed it. But I don't know, took couple of years, Congress change it to [cover] everybody. They all Americans.

WN: Yeah. I think it was the Little Wagner Act, yeah? [Warren Nishimoto is referring to the law permitting unions to organize agricultural workers, passed by the territorial legislature in 1944. Manuel Nobriga is talking about social security coverage for mill and field workers.]

MN: Yeah. But anyway, my dad had to come over from agriculture department, to the mill, to make a quota, so when he retired he could get social security. And we did that and he retired with social

security. [*Prior to that*], my dad was getting something like twenty-six dollars a month from the company when he retired. They knew that it wasn't enough even for groceries. You could almost live on twenty-six dollars a month, two people, with groceries those days, you know. But wasn't enough. So they told me, "You know, Nobriga, if you tell your dad to move from the pump department to the mill warehouse, we can fix him up to make the quota and put him on social security." So I did that. And he supposed to stay there and make the quota. The quota had so many months or something. So anyway he stayed there maybe a month or something. One day, they told me, "You just tell your dad, we got it all arranged. We got it covered. We fixed it. He don't have to stay there a whole year." They fixed it. I told my dad, my dad was happy as heck. He got twenty-six dollars from social security by putting in one quota in the factory. And after forty-two years on the plantation he got twenty-six dollars, big difference. But the company is different. They still gave you a house, electricity, everything, at his time. So, he retired enough money to. . . . I used to buy his tobacco. He didn't want me to. I used to buy a bottle of hard liquor for him once a month. I visit him, two, three times a week. My kids visit them every day. One or two kids. My kids start learning speak Portuguese with my dad and my mother. They knew some Portuguese, the bad words. "You go over and see Grandma, teach you what that word means. Don't ever say that again."

(Laughter)

MN: You know, Portuguese say, if you say that, Jesus can hear you. We were brought up like that, Christian. And every time you say something, you don't worry about your folks, you don't want to hurt Jesus. Kids. That's why lot of Portuguese became fanatics. Real Jesus. For a time, when I was a kid, I used to think that way. When I grew up went to catechism, oh this and that, this and that. I believe---I'm a Christian, but I'm not 100 percent Catholic. Nobody is. The priest is not a 100 percent.

WN: Okay, you went to labor school, Alphonso Guerrero went to the meeting at Crockett, California, you folks are getting started, and the war is still going on though, right?

MN: Well, to get started, I forgot to tell you, we had a meeting first. Sign everybody up. I don't think I told you that.

WN: No.

MN: We had a meeting in the plantation hall, clubhouse. We asked for the hall, L'Orange. He had no choice. We had a meeting to pick different guys. The union was there already, but they wanted to pick up people who gonna sign and to go to negotiations. Get together to get the feel of what they wanted. So, when I went there, one of these guys said, "Nobriga, what are you doing here?"

"What I'm doing here?" I was by the door and he came from the office, management.

"Yeah, what are you doing at this door? You're a machinist."

"Yeah, I'm a machinist."

"You got good pay." This and that.

“I'm not a supervisor. I'm not part of management. I'm a working machinist. I'm not a boss. When I become part of the management, different. You can't talk to me like that. Forget it.”

“Yeah, but I'm gonna advise you.”

“Thanks but no thanks.” I didn't like the way he approached me. Thanks, but no thanks, he tried to scare me. “You just go back and tell your boss, I don't need no advice from you. If I need advice from anybody, I go see L'Orange himself. You tell him.” I got mad with him.

WN: Who was this now?

MN: Leno. One guy by the name Leno.

WN: Workingman?

MN: No, he was a office guy.

WN: Oh, I see.

MN: He told me, “What the heck I was doing there?” I was skilled man but I wasn't part of management. I belong rank and file. He didn't want that. I was probably getting more pay than him. He was a pencil pusher. I had an argument with a payroll guy. One day, I work overtime, I went and get my pay. Almost \$200, I work overtime and all.

WN: This was before the union?

MN: All this thing wasn't a union [*yet*]. And he told me, “You know something Nobriga, you got a bigger check than me. Got more money than me. I'm right here, I got education, I went this, I went that, and you make more money than me.”

“What are you trying to say, that I'm dumb?”

“No, no, no. What I mean is I got a diploma and I went through all this and you make more money than me.”

I told him, “You know what's wrong with you? You were at the wrong job. You want money. Every penny I made is with these two hands and something up here [*points finger at head*]. I don't have to get a machine to add stuff over here like you. And what the hell you trying to say, you're a better man than me because you get an office job? I get full of oil and all that and get dirty. I'm worth every penny I earn. Give me my check and be done with it.”

“Oh, don't get mad.”

He give me my check. I used to fight them *Haoles* (laughs). I like 'em, but the guy used to get sassy with me. I tell 'em off. They used to really discriminate. The *Haoles* discriminate everybody, especially workingmen. “You don't belong there. You're a skilled man.”

“I don't belong you. I don't belong your guys' society. I may be making more money than a lot of

you guys there in the office, but I earned every penny I got. If these hands don't move and I don't move I don't get it. You guys can sit on your *`okole* and still get paid. If I don't move, money don't come in." Well, I *wen* learn that stuff from the union. Tell them guys off when you get a reason to. Sometimes I used to make up reasons. I get mad. (Laughs)

WN: You know, you were in your forties, right, by the time you folks started the union?

MN: Yeah, I was in my forties, forty-five.

WN: And guys like Major [*Okada*] were real young guys, eh?

MN: Yeah, we were young.

WN: How did you guys get along with the young guys and you guys were the older ones?

MN: We used to get along good. I had lot of respect for Filipinos. One time at [*a meeting at*] August Ahrens School, they wanted to nominate somebody for something. Was mostly Filipinos. Some guy nominated this guy, that guy, this guy. And that guy say, "I move the nominations be closed."

"Oh, no, no, no, no, no. No *pau* yet. No *pau* yet. One more man. One more man. Nobriga."

I said, "I decline the nomination."

"No, no, no, you cannot. You no can do that. You no can do that."

"All right."

I took it. Then they vote. I clean sweep the whole bunch (laughs). The Filipinos used to like me, see.

WN: This is voting for what?

MN: Voting to represent the union of some goddamn thing. I don't know what it was.

WN: Oh, I see.

MN: For some kind of talk with the boss. Or some kind of committee or something.

WN: Who were some of the Filipino leaders?

MN: Well, the Filipino leaders---most of the [*community*] leaders were bosses. They never got in the union. The guys had a good job.

WN: What about the union leaders?

MN: Well, we never bothered them. Frank Barcelona he was more like a king, you know. Newton Miyagi's father, he was the Japanese bigwig man. He used to work in the office. He was leader

[of the] Japanese. Newton was his son. He [Newton] was Hawai`i born. But the father was Japan born. And then they had the Filipino, Frank Barcelona. He was a Filipino in charge of all Filipinos. And then they had this guy, Jimmy Monden. He's supposed to take care the Hawaiians. But they didn't have enough Hawaiians [working on the plantation]. And they wanted a Portuguese representative, some Portuguese leader. And they try to pick one, everybody refuse, refuse. They had one lady---they had a gathering of all these different clubs and everything. And the Portuguese came in and the old man L'Orange brought 'em all up. And that day for---when they had that meeting, Filipinos, Japanese, Hawaiians, and all that. So L'Orange came and see me, he said, "Well, we gonna have speakers today, Frank Barcelona gonna speak. And Monden gonna speak. And Miyagi gonna speak. So we want you to speak for the Portuguese."

"Mr. L'Orange, I'd like to do it, but no. I don't like to refuse you, but the answer is no."

"But I want you to."

"But my people didn't pick me, Mr. L'Orange. You picking me. I appreciate that, more than you can ever. . . . I do appreciate that."

"You qualified. You can talk. You know what to say." This and that.

"Mr. L'Orange, I can help you by picking somebody I know, Portuguese. But not me."

"Okay then, okay. Find somebody."

"These Portuguese are way older than me, being over here for long time. And nice people, nice family. I going pick 'em." So I *wen* pick a guy, Joe, Joseph Moniz. I went and ask 'em.

"Eh, Nobriga, no, no, I'm scared." He didn't want to talk.

"Just go over there." And L'Orange was assistant manager at that time. "Go over there, just thank Mr. L'Orange for recognizing you and then, `Someday I know that you will be our manager. I'm looking forward for you be our manager someday. And my people will always do the best by you.'"

That's all he had to say. And he went there, he had a big hand. And L'Orange liked the guy forever (chuckles). Anyway, he went. After that L'Orange came by me, he said, "You did the right thing."

I said, "That man has been here longer than me. He was born here and all that. I would be disrespect him if I go take over." And besides, nobody elected anybody from the Portuguese. They [Portuguese] all independent people. Everybody wants to be boss (laughs). So I figure of all the cool-head guys, he [Moniz] was. I knew him. Soft-spoken. When he used to get angry, he never raised his voice. I used to wish I was like him sometime. I get angry, I raise my voice. I didn't get it from my dad. My dad he was a soft-spoken man. But my mother (laughs). . . . But she used to talk loud because she had no choice. He [father] was almost deaf. So we got it from my mother. She won't call you, "Come here." She yell at you because she thought she was talking to my dad (laughs).

WN: So, did people from Downtown come? Like Jack Hall? Did he come to talk to you folks?

MN: Well, Jack Hall didn't come over here to help. We got that all straighten out Downtown. For sign and everything was all made Downtown. And I didn't go down there. Major was hustler. He went down there. Major didn't want to sign. I told Major, "How come, you get my name there and you don't want to sign?"

"No, no, no, Nobriga. I get other things to do. I want to stay in the back. Don't worry about me. I want you to go sign."

I said, "You took me to labor school. We went together and all, now you don't want to sign."

WN: This is---sign what?

MN: Sign the contract.

WN: Sign the first sugar contract [*between the sugar planters and the ILWU*], 1945?

MN: Yeah, yeah. So he picked me. He gave me the list of the other guys. So we went and sign in the manager's office.

WN: So, you know, when the war ended, did things pick up faster to get the first contract out?

MN: That's when we got faster. All this stuff came after the war. The war was still. . . . The war never get altogether clear for long time. Was over, but officially didn't come for long time. So during that time, they weren't fighting, but they were getting things together, everybody.

WN: You folks knew, by then, that the war was going to end soon.

MN: Yeah. And then during the [*latter part of the*] war the labor became lot of more power and all. Not only in Hawai`i, everywhere. Because they the guys that went out and fight. And they deserved to be recognized. That's how 442nd [*Regimental Combat Team*] went, too. We do all the fighting and we come home. We even get a job. That's was the whole thing about the sugar workers. To start, were really underpaid. Enough to exist, enough. You happy, you work, you sleep, early to bed, early to rise. In and out, you having a good time. People were more together. If you weren't together you were lost.

WN: So you're saying that one of the reasons the union took off and was able to get the contract and so forth, one of the reasons is because lot of the workers were people who fought in the war and came back?

MN: Oh, I always thought and I think, still think, the reason why is without that war the sugar industry wouldn't be. . . . The union would never exist. The war did lot of things for people. Lot of things. People became civilized and people start buying cars and stuff. Everything went up. Not only in Hawai`i. All over. Especially United States. Soldiers and all came back, get a job and all. After the war, everything went different. Not only here, Japan was the place that grew the fastest in the world. If didn't have a war, Japan would still be way back. Used to buy anything from

Japan, "Made in Japan," they throw it away. Now everything made in Japan. I got a TV, Hitachi. I buy the best. I get 'em what, eight or nine years.

WN: That's probably made in Taiwan, though? (Laughs)

MN: I don't know where. Regardless, but, it's a Japanese name. Oh yeah, somebody else make it for them, but it's theirs. And before we never used to buy, because they didn't want to buy stuff from Japanese. I used to buy shoes from Japan, eh. But they never fit me. They small. Wide, but small.

WN: Plus you said, too, that during the war the federal government was really running Hawai`i. All these controls and as soon as the war ended these controls were lifted.

MN: During the war, everything come under federal law. [*Hawai`i*] was a territory then. We came the fiftieth state few years after. Quite a few.

WN: [*Nineteen*] fifty-nine.

MN: And we wanted to be the forty-ninth state at that time. But Alaska got it. Alaska and Hawai`i got in about the same time. I think Alaska got first.

WN: Right.

MN: And then everything went calm. Everything change. If they didn't have a war, everything be the same thing. You take especially TVs and cars and all that. Airplanes. When I went the first flight to Portland, Oregon. I went on those big clippers (chuckles). Hell of a time to get over there. Fly around Portland. All foggy when you fly. Fly around, fly around. I didn't like that at all.

(Laughter)

MN: You went up there too? Your time was already better.

WN: Oh yeah. You know, you were really close to Hans L'Orange, yeah? You know, as part of the plantation, what they call paternalism, they were able to supply the sports activities and the field and the supplies and things. And then now you folks talking about union. How did you feel about that? Did you feel bad? Or you know, how did your relations with L'Orange change? Did it change at all?

MN: Well, after we got the union, L'Orange stopped backing up all the sports. We felt bad. And we felt that the union spoiled it. Lot of people. And I told 'em, "You can't have your pie, and still eat it." Or something like that, I told 'em. "You folks are better off now. You get good wages and all that. You can take care your own play things. You can buy a car and everything now." This and that.

"Oh, not yet. You can't even buy a home."

But when they [*union*] took over and all, they lost the ball ground. So Major and a few politics, you know, that's when [*John A.*] Burns came in as [*governor, 1962-74*]. We push through him

and all, eh. They bought the ballpark from the company.

WN: You means Hans L'Orange [*Park*]?

MN: Yeah, Hans L'Orange Park. That used to be---when we came Hawai`i to Waipahu, that used to be a cane field there. Way back. They had cane field right up to the houses. So they bought the ballpark. They didn't have toilets or anything like that.

WN: Who bought it? The city or the state?

MN: The City and County [*of Honolulu*] bought it [*from O`ahu Sugar Company*]. Then they bought that. Then they start putting some facilities there that you can go to the toilet and all that stuff. They start putting all that stuff in. And then they got a janitor take care the whole place. Then they fenced it. That belong to the city and county. Then way in the end there's a marker there with "L'Orange Park" that. . . . When L'Orange was retired for a few years, they dedicated the park.

And I went down the ballpark, where the place is now. They had the chair there, L'Orange came and we all shake hands with him, this and that. We all waited for Eileen Anderson. She didn't show. "Boy," I said.

All the guys over there said, "Eileen Anderson not going be mayor anymore in this town."

And she lost [*to Frank Fasi in 1984*]. She didn't show. Some representative said, "Well, Eileen Anderson had this and that, this and that." That one time that the people wanted her to come, and, you know, city and county for Hans L'Orange, she didn't. We campaign for every goddamn thing when elections came around. That's it. Then she lost.

I met her, here at this corner. I met her there when she came there campaigning. This Japanese guy from Liliha introduced me to her. And she told me, "You know I'm running for mayor." This and that, this and that.

I said, "I'm sorry. I wish you good luck, but I'm Frank Fasi man. I wish you good luck anyway. I'm sorry. I'm Frank Fasi man." I walked away. I never like her. She turn us down.

Then I told that guy, "Eh, what the hell you take that lady around for? You know what she did to Hans L'Orange?"

"I had no choice." That guy told me. "I can't refuse. *Bumbai* I lose all my friends."

I said, "Who's all your friends? She's not your friend." I got mad with him. He was taking her all around, campaigning. I told her straight. Then she lost. That thing went around, you know, about that dedication.

WN: She only had one term, eh?

MN: One term. Frank Fasi came back and beat her. And that thing was surprise. To me it wasn't. I

was glad (laughs).

WN: How did the management of the plantation change after union came in? After the war and the union? Was there difference? Big difference?

MN: When the plantation---I'm gonna tell you a little story about the plantation. When we got the [union] contract, the assistant manager [of *O`ahu Sugar Co.*] came down.

WN: Who was this?

MN: What the heck his name now? I always forget his name. He came down to my place. I lived in the ballpark at that time. He came over there, L'Orange send 'em down. I forget his name. Well, anyway, the assistant manager came down and told me, "Nobriga," was in the evening, "want to take a ride with me?"

I told him, I look at him, eh, "Why, why, why, I like take a ride with you? Where you going?"

"I'd like to talk to you about, no offense, about the union." This and that.

I used to be in the scouts. I was assistant scoutmaster. And he was the big leader in the scouts, assistant manager [of *O`ahu Sugar Co.*]. He [later] went to Lahaina [*i.e., Pioneer Mill Co.*]. Anyway, so I went with him for a ride. And he told me about, when the boys want to make a strike or shutdown this or that, you know, he was advising me just what to do, see.

We came home, before I got out I told him, "The union not here to break the plantation. We only here to get a better deal. By getting a better deal we're gonna build up the plantation, providing we get our fair share. That's what the union is all about." I told him. "Nothing else. And we're not here to bite the hand that's feeding us."

And he told me, "Okay, Nobriga, I'm glad I saw you."

"There won't be any problem. You treat us nice. You treat the people nice, they going to appreciate that. We not here to break the [plantation]. That's where we get our money, that's where we get our everything for our families and all."

He was satisfied. And he *wen* tell L'Orange. L'Orange came in the shop, "I'm glad Tester talked to you. I told him he didn't have to. But he wanted. And you gave him the right answer."

L'Orange was all for labor, you know. Hundred percent for the labor. He used to love the labor. Ballpark, everything, was all there through him. But, Eileen Anderson I never forgot that. Oh, his name now, I got his name, Tester.

WN: Tester.

MN: Keith Tester.

WN: Keith Tester.

MN: Keith Tester. He went to Lahaina afterwards. He went to Pioneer [*Mill Co.*].

WN: So after the union [*came in*], the management didn't do as much. As far as sports and housing and things like that?

MN: The union---we had a beef. After I became supervisor, I had a few run-ins with the guys, you know. Some of the guys turned me in for some reason. There was a time when they turned me in. I had two boys [*i.e., workers*], I suspended 'em for a week without pay. On a weekend washdown of the mill, they wash a little bit and hand that thing over to these two mechanics. They hand the hose to the other guys and they'd run off, go home. And these guys clean up the mill. I no go supervise everything. After everything is done, then I go down and see what they did. They get hour and a half for that. Overtime. So I went there, oh, pretty clean. But couple of weeks after I went that shift again, I went there again. These two guys who were cleaning were mad. I said, "Eh." I went there a little earlier. "Where's Manchi?"

"Oh, Nobriga. Every time over here, make us sucker. He run away every Saturday, weekend."

So I found that out. I was paying them time and a half for that. That happened three weeks. I got really burned up. I used to like these two boys. They good mechanics, the best. They couldn't work with the other engineers, but they liked to work with me because they were my type, fast. Fix fast. The other engineers say, "Eh, you gonna get accident."

I used to just leave them, "You guys know how to work. That's your speed. You can't slow 'em down, they get hurt."

So they came on my shift. And then when they did that, I suspend 'em for one week. Then L'Orange told me, not L'Orange, my boss, Jack Vorfeld, "You suspend 'em more than one week, two weeks."

I said, "No, Jack, no Jack."

WN: Jack who?

MN: Jack Vorfeld, my boss. He told me, "Don't suspend the guys less than one week."

I told him, "Well, they my good mechanics." He wanted to suspend them more. More than one week. I said, "One week, Jack."

Then when they were home, the second day, their wives passed by the mill, one of them told me, "Hi, Mr. Nobriga."

"Eh, how's Manchi?"

She said, "Good for him. He used to come home early on Saturday and I used to tell him, 'You running away.' And now he get his medicine." I fight him.

I figure (chuckles), this is getting bad. I said, "Okay, okay, okay, you no fight him anymore." I told her. "I'm sorry. I hurt the family."

“No, you no hurt the family. Good for them. They no listen to nobody but you.”

So I went and see Jack. I told him, “I want to get those two guys back. The two days is enough for them.”

He told me, “No, no, no, one week.”

“Jack, I can't lift that thing out. I can't fix it up. I go to the big boss.”

“Why?”

Then I told him the story, eh. “Put yourself in my place, what would you do? The wife's a good friend. The wife said they deserve that, but me, I don't want. They don't know that they hurting their family. Two days was enough for them.”

“Well, okay. I agree with you. You don't have to go see the boss. You go ahead. You go to the. . .” Those days they call 'em industrial relations [*department*]. Now they get, what is that name now, human resources. That's what it is now.

Went over there, fix it all up. I sent a guy over to their house. “Come back work.” The guy said, “They never run away again.”

(Laughter)

WN: Okay, now this is when you were management, right? So from '46 on, just before the strike, the first strike, you became an engineer or part of management. How did that come about?

MN: I don't know. Before the strike came on--see, what really union was for is to give everybody a break. Not only bring *Haoles* or whatever, their favorite guys come out and get promotion. So L'Orange, we were always kind of friendly. L'Orange came ask me, “How about promotion, Nobriga?”

I said, “For what?”

“I want to bring you [*to be*] shop foreman, or engineer.”

I said, “I've been twenty-five years, after twenty-five years you're the only man recognize that. I take it. Thank you.”

But my [*immediate*] bosses didn't okay that yet. They say, “I'm the boss.” He got mad. “I'm the boss. I'll fix that.”

I said, “We'll see.”

Shop foreman. They all used to give excuse. We can't let him go, we need him for this, we need him for that. I used to run all the big machines. Nobody wanted to work on the big machine. So I got promoted to shop foreman. Then when I got promoted shop foreman, this guy that used to be

with me, Vorfeld, he was the chief engineer, he got promoted. He was my helper and all, but he got promoted way ahead of me. He became my boss. Then he came over there, he said, "Eh, Nobriga, how about you come in the mill? I would like to get you in the mill instead of the [machine] shop. I give you more money than in the shop."

I said, "Johnny Rapoza is on the job now. What we gonna do with Johnny Rapoza?"

"No, he's no good over there. I don't like 'em. How about you swap? You going get thirty, forty dollars more a month than him."

"Okay."

I went [mill] engineer instead of shop foreman. So I went shift engineer. And I stayed shift engineer. In the meantime, the guy that became shop foreman, we exchanged. He died in less than a year. Then they wanted me to go back to the shop. They didn't have anybody to replace him and they wanted me back. And Jack [Vorfeld] told me, "The shop job is open. I don't want to release you, but if you want to go it's up to you. We're not going to cut down your pay, but if you stay here we're gonna raise your pay instead. You got night work, but you shift. Three months of the year you work daytime repair and all that. The rest shift, eight-hour shift."

So I said, "Well, I need the money, what the hell, for the family."

I stayed back. In the meantime when this guy died, I stayed back, they wanted a guy to take care the big work. That was, in fact, before he died. He was only shop foreman couple of months, he died. And they want a guy to take over all the big work. Nobody wanted to do it. So they got a guy, he's related to my son-in-law, Lopes, from navy yard. Do all the big work in [Pearl Harbor] navy yard. He came over there and took over all the big work. They hired him special. But outside of that, everything went normal, people got along okay.

WN: How did you feel? Now you went from labor rank-and-file to management? How did you feel about that?

MN: At the beginning I felt very bad about that. I felt---the job that I was doing I kind of lost patience. How the hell, this is the same thing over and over again. Breakdowns, or something, I got these two mechanics on my shift. These guys that I laid off, they used to fix chain, things like that. They were fast, eh. But after the breakdowns, put out the time, go over there. I got involved with these guys that bring the cane [to the mill] in the night. I used to go on the night shift, a guy by the name, Mako Suzuki. He worked on my shift. He take care the field work in the night. He's the big boss over there. And he runs up and down with the car. And he had the department telephone. He ring down the mill, this and that. So, in the meantime, he lost his wife and he asked me, "How about you take a ride with me on the ten o'clock shift? I lost my wife." This and that. And the ten o'clock was rough for him.

So I had to buckle, "I'll see Jack as long as you keep in touch with the power house. If something happen in the mill you gotta drive me back, regardless where you are."

So he said, "I knew that."

So we talked to Jack. Jack had to go see the manager. The manager said, "If Nobriga wants to do it, and Mako wants to do it, they can control."

He used to like Mako. Mako was number one. So I used to go on the ten o'clock shift. I used to go with Mako.

WN: Okay, wait, I'm gonna turn the. . . I'm gonna switch tapes.

WN: Okay.

MN: I used to go with Mako. And at the beginning, in the car, poor guy start weep, you know. "Eh, stop the car, stop the car. Go ahead, you want to cry, cry. Go ahead." I used to feel sorry for the guy. At that time, I didn't know what when you lose a wife, what it was. Bad, bad, bad! Anyway, after I got to going every ten o'clock shift, I used to go with him two or three times a week. I got so I start beginning to like the job. And the ten o'clock shift was hard. I used to look forward to ten o'clock shift. Used to go out with Mako, we talk story, afterwards he got relaxed. And sometimes he used to come down the mill, "I'm not going out tonight, Mako. You sit over here in the office." And he talk. And he get his supervisor out there, telephone. So him and I got along good. My last four, five years, him and I worked together. I used to like that job, when I was with Mako. All the other supervisors, I used to get lot of problems with them. They couldn't bring the cane, they blame me that the mill going too fast or I going too slow. They piling up the cane, you know. No cooperation. They come down when they used to bring lot of cane and sometime they bring so much cane, the mill only goes the top speed. The guy come down and, "Eh, Nobriga, what's the matter? All the cane, all the trucks line up. You the speed king, you can't drive the cane." They come over here, needle me, you know.

I say, "Eh Meyers, one of these days, you're gonna cry you can't bring me the cane."

"Oh, we getting enough cane. We getting enough tonnage. We get 200 tons an hour. What more you want?"

"You go to the lab and see the performance. You don't know what you're talking about."

"What do you know?"

"Go to the lab and see."

And he went and he found out what the hell it was all about (chuckles). Field guys. "You can go to the lab. Your performance is right there every hour. If you putting too much water in the sugar to get all the juice out, it's there. Turbidity. Or the purity. How much trash, how much mud. It's all analyzed in the lab."

So every hour I used to go there, I figure, well, I using too much water. In the mill, they get spray of water going in the bagasse to get all the rest of the juice that's in the bagasse. And if you have too much water, you gotta boil that water in the boiling house to get all that purity out. And it's marked you know. Every hour, they take mine and say, "Eh, you using too much water." I go over there and cut down on the water. Or, "There's turbidity," or, "Too much mud." "You going too fast." Only allowed so much. So I used to run the place according to the lab. And once in a

while these field guys used to come over there, turn me in to the boss. Boss come around, “Eh, Nobriga, going too fast for the guys.” Or this and that. They always blame me.

“You go in the lab and look.” He go in the lab, that's it. He stop listening to them people. That I was making too much tonnage for the boiling house. They say I'm putting water. “Go in the lab and see the turbidity. Go see how much sugar, how much water. What that guy talking about?” They go in there, they never believe 'em after that.

WN: Let's talk about the strike. Just before the strike you got promoted. How did you handle that? You know, you folks were an instrumental part in getting the union contract in '45. And then now the first strike [1946], you're on the other side of the fence.

MN: When the strike went on, they kept all the supervisors. Go on the shift, too, you know. Take care the mill, some out in the field, ride around see that nobody set fires on the cane. But the labor was smarter than that. They not gonna set fire on the cane, that's their life. So we had a meeting there, and I said, “The union not going to set fire to the cane, that's their life over there. No cane, no more they can come back after the strike.”

“Yeah, but they don't think like you, Nobriga.”

“Sure they think like me. I was a union man before I became one of you guys [*i.e.*, *management*].”

They never did like when I used to say that. Jack said, “You better not say too many things like that in front the boss.”

“I told L'Orange that. Mr. L'Orange know my style.”

“You told L'Orange that? What he said?”

“He said, he agree with me.”

“Okay, okay. But anyway, I want to keep you for a little more years here. No bother with it. Just listen and no say anything.” But when they used to say against unions, I used to get mad because I signed the contract. I was there.

WN: Let's take a break now, okay. Can we take a short break?

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: Okay, you know, you were management during the strike. Were there any problems, real problems with the workers? Picketing and so forth, any problems?

MN: During the strike, all the supervisors came on duty, you know. The shifts went on. On the mill shift, they had two supervisors on duty all the time. In fact three supervisors. Had to go around the mill, you know, in case somebody set fire or something, but never did happen. Not one incident. Didn't have fences those days. Now the whole place is fenced, but if you want to make trouble, the fence is nothing, you can jump over the fence. But anyway, no problems.

WN: What about problems with scab labor? What about Ilocano? Weren't the Ilocanos coming in at that time?

MN: No, nobody came in. Nobody wanted to be sugar worker. Nobody interfered with the sugar strike. But when the strike started, they got all those bubble-eyes in front of the office, in front of the mill, and they were walking around the street. From Waipahu Street and came by my place. And they had a foreman there, Gouveia. He used to be a *luna* in the field. They pass Gouveia, the Filipinos start yelling, "*Bakalao, bakalao.*" *Bakalao* means codfish in Filipino. "*Bakalao, bakalao.*" I don't know. They didn't like him. The Filipinos, they had no choice. But he was a push, you know. If the guy not doing right, he give 'em a note and he lose his day, at those days. That's before the union. "Oh, you not cutting right, oh, you go home." Stuff like that. That's the way the *lunas* used to push people around. I worked in the field when I was a schoolboy, too. I know.

Anyway, they pass there and they did that for about four, five times, parading from in the morning. They pass this place. And I live the other house over there, passed my place. My wife look out, eh. They pass my place, some. They never bother. And then my wife told me, "Eh, I'm glad those men didn't say anything." They yelled over there, "*Bakalao, bakalao, Gouveia.* All these man, you know all these man."

I said, "Maybe I don't know one of them. I know only the mill men. Maybe they pass by I don't know." But they didn't yell.

So, four, five times they went by like that, then they quit. They stopped going around. Everything went quiet. But everybody go on [*strike*] duty. The strikers go on duty. They had a bunch [*picketing*] by the mill, where we go in, they had a gate. Everything was close up. They go in--my men, my number one mechanic, Yoshi, he died already, Yoshi. And a few other guys, some field guys, five of them by the gate. Sit around. We went on the shift like we were going [*work*]. One week you work two to ten and so on. So first time I went, I went in, I look at him, "Hello, Yosh." He just, that's it. I felt sorry for the guy. I was made part of management only about two or three months before the strike went up. And I used to feel bad in the beginning, goddamn they think I sold out. But I didn't sell out because before I accepted the job, somebody talked to me, they came down, "You take that job. No quit. That's what the union is for that everybody get their break. If you're not going to take it, you going against the union rules." He made me take it, was Major [*Okada*].

I said, "I realize that. I was taught that in the labor school, but I feel guilty as hell."

"You and I not just another guy. The people think about you and me different. That's the way I feel anyway."

"No, no, no, no, no. We work. Guys like you take over." So I went. But he [*Major Okada*] never did get a promotion 'cause there never was one over there where he used to work.

WN: Where did he work? In the mill?

MN: He worked on the vacuum pans, where the final sugar is done and they dump 'em down to dry.

He had a top job up there. Sugar boiler. They had a sugar boiler, the boss, but the guys that really do the sugar boiling was, he was one of them. When the crystals ready to drop, molasses, they drop 'em down, then it goes down to the centrifugals, dry it, get the molasses out, the brown sugar come out. Major was like that. Major was---I don't know if you ever knew him.

WN: I knew him, I knew him.

MN: Small guy. Sharp. He didn't give a damn how big you was. If he had something to say, he tell you.

WN: In fact, Major was one of the ones that wanted this university project to get started. You know the oral history, interviewing and everything. He was one of the ones that really supported us.

MN: Major, he was a good man for everybody. I understood Major more than anybody else. Guys used to say, "You and Major make a beef and, what, you still friends?" Why not. I know lot of stuff today through Major. He made me go through labor school and all. In fact, I got friendly to Major through his wife. His wife used to have a saimin stand. And she used to sew. My wife used to call her dressmaker. And Major's name wasn't Okada. That Okada was his wife's name, but he had other name before. He was adopted [*into a family*] that had no [male] children. He married that *wahine*, eh. That's how we became friends from way back.

But Major knew that he didn't want to hurt me and I didn't want to hurt him, but he had his job to do. "Eh, Nobriga, come on, come on I want to talk to you."

"No, no, no, I got no time for you today."

And the union guys used to say, "You talk sassy to the union boss, you no scared?"

"No, no, this not. We not talking about this, this my friend."

"How come you friend with Major?"

"What's the matter, you think this animal?" (Laughs)

This Filipinos couldn't understand that. They think that we enemies after I became boss [i.e., part of management]. I just told them, "Look, suppose no more all workingmen like you fellow. I no can be boss. You fellow make me boss. You fellow give me the job. If no more workingman, how can be boss?"

"Eh, I understand. Yeah, yeah, yeah."

Some of them, they tell you. Without men, who you gonna lead, yourself? Anyway, but Major and I were close because family, family ties. The wife and my kids and they used to go eat saimin there, too. We're neighbors when we were living by this store, Kiso Store.

WN: Okay, so, you know, the war ended, the union got started, they had the strike, you retired in '63, right? What changes have you seen through the years? How has Waipahu changed over the years?

MN: Waipahu, the living and all, Waipahu is not the same. The difference what I feel is, families were together those days. Even with the union, I lost track of lot of things when I moved from the ballpark. My kids were raised there. We lived there almost twenty years. They built a house, they built two houses there. And my kids were raised in the ballpark.

WN: You moved here in about what, 1950s? To this house?

MN: I've been here [*Manuel Nobriga's current home*] about twenty-six, twenty-seven years.

WN: So in the sixties sometime, eh?

MN: I moved from below here, and then here.

WN: So from the ballpark you moved down . . .

MN: Down here for about two or three years. Then, eventually they was going to sell that place to somebody. This place was open. My wife asked me, "Let's get this house." She admired this house. Everybody admired this house. You know how many houses are made like this in Waipahu? One more. This one and one up in Manager's Drive. Two houses like this. They were gonna build some more, but too expensive. So they stop building. This was built for, at one time, for an assistant manager. I got this house when the assistant manager who lived here went to Wai`anae. Then they had the chemist superintendent. And then they had a guy, he was working the shop, [*E. K.*] Hardy. He died. Then one of his relatives moved in here. Somehow he was here for five months, he wasn't working the plantation, but he had the house. And they were wondering. So I asked the guy, "Hey, you no work in the plantation?"

He told me, "No."

And I told him, "I'm gonna apply for this house."

"Oh, go ahead apply. Somebody tell me move, I move."

So I went apply for this house. This place here was going be closed down. So I went down here, I got this house. I had lot of trouble to get it painted and all that. But L'Orange gave me this house. In fact, when I ask for this house, L'Orange told me, "Nobriga, you can have the house, but that's a good house, a good place, are you gonna be happy over there?"

I told him, "Yeah. My wife wants the house very badly. In a few years I'll be retired," I figured.

And I came here and he says, "Okay." And he didn't want to paint the house, and he got me to paint the house. We been in here maybe twenty-five, twenty-six years, I think.

WN: Twenty-five, twenty-six.

MN: Close to thirty years. See, I've been retired thirty years [*since 1963*] and I was here about four years [*after retiring*]. Maybe twenty-six years I've been here.

WN: You been here---ballpark, you were there for twenty years, yeah?

MN: Beg your pardon?

WN: You were there at the ballpark for about twenty years?

MN: About twenty years.

WN: You were here for about almost thirty years?

MN: And then I was away, Maui, I don't know how long.

WN: Yeah, right, right, okay.

MN: But I been in Hawai`i, when I came from Portugal, all my life.

WN: So as you look back at your life, how has your life been?

MN: I look back on my life, if I had to change, I don't know. You see, I was handicapped all the time with one eye, eh. And I wanted to make it so badly, how I got jobs and became a machinist, I've been wondering about it for years and years. I got away with it. If was today, I could never get a job. Physical. Nothing wrong with my body, it's the eye. A machinist have to get good eye. And then, the most you use when you're a machinist, you use your right eye. You bore something you use your eye, you look in the hole, eh. And if this eye was the bad eye, I couldn't make it. But the good eye was the right place. And anything else, not only boring, towards the chalk, everything, you have to have a good eye. And the chalk is on the left. The left eye don't have to do. You not gonna look like that, you look like that. But that's it, that's how I made it. And nobody knew that I had a bad eye until they came to this safety first in the plantation. Had to use goggles, but I already had. Had to use all that. Then they knew, but I was set. They didn't care if I had one blind eye. I could do the work.

(Laughter)

WN: You know what I've noticed, you know, all the interviewing that we're doing is that you really have a strong sense of family. You always have brought up family.

MN: That's my number one.

WN: Like you said, the problems with Waipahu today is that people don't have the sense of family anymore. Or you know, not just leaving for the trip for the ILWU [*i.e., labor school*], you wouldn't go because you had to take care of your family.

MN: The unions came in, they forget about too much, the money too much. The mind is too much on better job, equal pay and all that, but the family. . . . Anyway, life changed. Before if you have to have a good time, you had to be friendly with everybody. What you gonna do if you didn't know anybody? You can't get in the car because you didn't own one. So you had to have your fun, you have to get your fun with your neighbors. And if you want to get a big thing you

didn't have to go all over to town. The company had a ballpark, we could get all the celebrations. They give it to Filipinos for so many days, they give it to the Japanese so many days. And the Japanese had one in the camp, by themselves. And when the thing was separated like that, I start making one, O`ahu Portuguese Welfare Association. I made one. It didn't work. They [*Portuguese*] are the hardest people to get along. My people. We held dances in the gym. The manager came down, the assistant manager came down, they watched and danced with us. The guy from Portugal knew all about dancing. He taught that and he came to my dance twice. You got to bow old-fashioned and take your partner and bow. The real old-fashioned style. They loved that. Then the war came on, see, and ended that. But anyway, afterwards everything came on again. L'Orange told me, "Why don't you start the Portuguese. . . ." this and that.

I said, "Where are the Portuguese? They all moved all over the place." The war came on and a lot of Portuguese moved out too, you know. And I say, "Mr. L'Orange, you know my people. Very hard people to stay together."

"Oh, but you can do it."

"I have to take care my job first." I used to tell him.

I'm not a machinist anymore, I have responsibilities, my responsibilities are bigger in the mill. Only when you get your shift, you free. "Let me think about it." I never did go back. "There's no Portuguese here anyway." I told 'em. He used to love those---he used to come to couple of dances. I used to get him involved anyway. The Portuguese get any kind of trouble they come and tell me, "Eh, what's the matter with this guy Joaquin? He quit, he's going to the Mainland. How come?"

"Mr. L'Orange, I don't represent the Portuguese."

"I know, I know, you told me that story before, but I want to ask you."

(Laughter)

MN: So, that's the way it was. But family, family ties was. . . . I got it from my dad. My brothers all left home, I could never leave home. He had four sons, three went to the Mainland, my [*four*] sisters got married, they not home anymore. I was the guy left. He asked me to stay back, if possible. That's how I came here and get a machinist job. And then I figure, well, I may as well look for a *wahine*. And that's it. My wife [*Lucy Perreira Nobriga*] was only fourteen [*when they met*]. She was tall girl, I thought she was sixteen, seventeen. She got married when she was only sixteen and I was twenty-four. I didn't look it at that time (chuckles). And we made a good life, very good life.

WN: Well, in two weeks [*April 7*] you're gonna make ninety-five years old.

MN: Yeah.

WN: Yeah, so . . .

MN: Ninety-five, then I be married seventy years, if she was around. But my wife had heart trouble, blood circulation. Her leg used to come big, you know, and then go down. She had this small little pill with her. I don't know if you ever saw those.

WN: Nitroglycerin.

MN: Yeah. I used to go there get so many, so many. One day I saw Dr. Cortez. I say, "Eh Doctor, I gotta come here every week. Tell me what's wrong with my wife. I know what's wrong with her, but tell me, I want to hear from you."

"I don't know when, but she ain't got a chance. I'm not God, but when she start taking this, its best." He gave me a whole bottle of that stuff.

Every time she had pain, I said, "Take one." She couldn't stand it. She take one and the thing [*pain*] go away right away.

WN: Okay, well, before I turn off the tape recorder, you want to say any last things?

MN: I don't think so, except I appreciate you coming here and all that. Going through all this, mostly talk story. I had a chance to tell somebody. I never told anybody else that much. I don't believe even I telling you that much at one session. My wife knew me better than I knew her, anyway. My wife knew every move or everything you did. You won't be able to come home from work or wherever your job, "Hello." Even the voice they can pin you right off. They know you so well. She come around for a while, "Things didn't go right today."

"No, everything went good."

"No, no, no, no. Tell me, tell me. Get it out of your system."

That's it. That was my wife. The kids, too, she could tell right away. Sometimes they come home and she tell the kids, "Maybe I go let your father talk to you first. I'm not going to talk to you anymore." And that was it.

(Laughter)

WN: Okay, well thank you very much.

MN: Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW