

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW #443

with

Roland Dacoscos (RD)

May 1, 1992

Kalihi, O`ahu

BY: Joe Rossi (JR)

JR: This is an interview with Roland Dacoscos on May 1, 1992, in his Kalihi home. The interviewer is Joe Rossi.

Mr. Dacoscos, to begin with, could you maybe tell me a little bit about your parents and how they came to be in Hawai`i?

RD: My parents came from the Philippine Islands back in February 24, 1913. My father [*Bernard*] was about twenty-nine years old, my mother [*Phillipa Gonzales*] was twenty-two. They came over with my oldest brother, who was Benjamin—he was six years old—and my oldest sister, Florita—she was at the age of three—and my second-oldest brother [*Salvadore*], who was only one month old. And that was back in 1913.

JR: Do you know what part of the Philippines they came from?

RD: They came from—they call it Iloilo. And by looking at the map, it would be considered the Visayan area. Whereas you say [*former Philippine president Ferdinand*] Marcos is from Ilocos Norte, which is the Ilocano people.

JR: Do you know what they were doing before they came to Hawai`i, what your father was doing for a living?

RD: What he had told me at one time, he was a policeman. Can you believe it? What's surprising is my father could read. He could talk a little bit Spanish. Surprising, yeah? But actually, outside of being a policeman back in the Philippine Islands, I really don't know what he did.

JR: Where did they come when they got to Hawai`i, what part?

RD: Well, he was assigned to Olowalu plantation. That's in Maui. That's where he was assigned. And my third-oldest brother [*Raymond*] and my sister before him [*Mary*] were born there. And from there they came to the island of O`ahu.

JR: Do you know about when they came to O`ahu?

RD: I never thought of that.

JR: When were you born?

RD: Oh, I was born 1921.

JR: What date?

RD: January 24, 1921, at Waipahu. Of course, I had an older brother just above me [*Frederick*]. He was born in 1919.

JR: Was he born O`ahu or. . . .

RD: I think he was born in Honolulu, I think. And somehow---probably my parents was working in Waipahu for short while, and that's where I was born. You know, you were born by midwife. Probably she didn't send in my record, that's why I don't have any birth certificate.

JR: That wasn't unusual, though, back then for a person to . . .

RD: Yeah, I guess so. These midwife, they not on the ball.

(Laughter)

JR: So, do you know how old you were when the folks moved into Honolulu from Waipahu?

RD: Well, I really don't know. But like I said, they came to Honolulu and my brother that was above me was born. And I was born after him, which was 1921, that was Waipahu. So I was thinking that maybe he worked at the plantation there.

JR: Your dad?

RD: Yeah.

JR: In Waipahu?

RD: Yeah. And then we moved to Iwilei. Iwilei, that's right across Dole Pineapple [*Company*] and American Can [*Company*].

JR: Yeah. Is that where you spent most of your youth?

RD: No, no. When I think about my youth, I think I lived so many different places.

JR: Oh yeah?

RD: Yeah. From Iwilei---that's right close to A`ala Park. From Iwilei, we moved to Kaka`ako. And Kaka`ako in those days was rough.

JR: Oh yeah? (Chuckles)

RD: Yeah, they had gangs all over the place. They had Kaka`ako Gang, Pauoa, Liliha, Kalihi, and

we used to fight.

JR: What kind of gangs were these?

RD: Oh, just teenagers probably. Maybe teenagers and a little older. But they had good things too. They had football games representing different places. And they used to challenge. They used to call themselves the barefoot football.

JR: Yeah, I heard about them.

RD: Yeah, of course, I was too young to even play.

JR: Well, these gangs, was there a dark side to it? I mean, was there gang fights and that kind of thing?

RD: Oh yeah. There were a lot of gang fights.

JR: Did you know people who were in the gangs?

RD: Well, at that time I was just too young to be associated with those gangs.

JR: But you knew enough to . . .

RD: Yeah, to remember anyway.

JR: And to watch for yourself. When you guys were moving around a lot . . .

RD: Okay, yeah. The place that we moved was from Iwilei to Kaka`ako, and to Kalihi—Kalihi, had a Long Lane—and then back to Kaka`ako again. Actually, one other place. It was more toward Kewalo Basin. And that's where my father used to work in the lumber yard.

JR: Oh, what was he doing?

RD: Well, carry lumber and stack 'em up. They didn't have all these big machinery to stack 'em up. And that was back in 1928, '29 like that. And that was when my mother passed away, 1929.

JR: Oh, when you were still very young.

RD: I was about eight, nine years old. So I didn't have any mother for years and years. But anyway, my father developed tuberculosis, so he landed in Le`ahi Hospital for two or three years, came out, went back again, and he went out. Back and forth until, I guess, he was considered cured, yeah. Out of nine in the family—I had six brothers, three sisters. Out of all of them, I was the only one that caught the tuberculosis from my father.

JR: Oh yeah?

RD: Yeah. I was in the fifth grade then. I remember because President [*Herbert*] Hoover was running against Roosevelt, [*Franklin*] Delano Roosevelt, and Delano Roosevelt won. I remember, I was in the fifth grade then [*1932*].

JR: So what happened?

RD: So they put me in a hospital for children—they call it Palama Preventorium—and I stay there for about little over fourteen months.

JR: Fourteen months? How did you feel? I mean, did you develop symptoms or what?

RD: Well, they give you that tuberculosis test, and it came out red. And they gave me the x-ray and it shows, I guess. I had a touch of TB, so they sent me there until I was, I guess, all right.

JR: How did you go to school and stuff if you were there?

RD: Well, I was in the hospital. It was located at Palama Settlement. And we used to go to school to Lanakila [*School*]. And then I remember, we used to pass Likelike School. That's another elementary school. That's where my wife attended from kindergarten to sixth grade. Well, fifth grade, passing this Likelike School kids, they would yell at us, "Oh, TB kids!"

There were about forty boys and about forty girls. See, the girls live on the tops, upstairs, and we live downstairs—the boys, I mean. And then we used to go school. Like I said, we passed Likelike School and they tease us, and then go to Lanakila School.

JR: How did they know that you guys had TB?

RD: I guess they knew because of that hospital. It's close by. It's a resident district.

JR: Every day you guys would march as a group?

RD: March to school. And they were just building Lanakila Park. It wasn't even finished yet. You know that park? And then we only go school half day, because we have to come back, eat lunch, and rest. A patient who's sick, I guess they have to get their bed rest.

JR: So you dormed there for fourteen months?

RD: Fourteen months. They called it P_lama Preventorium. It was affiliated with Le`ahi Hospital. You know, Le`ahi Hospital?

JR: Yeah, yeah.

RD: At one time, way back in the twenties, TB was. . . .

JR: You said the girls were upstairs and the boys were downstairs. Was there like a supervisor?

RD: Yeah. They had nurses.

JR: They were the ones that watched after you?

RD: Hm hmm [*yes*].

JR: And were you told not to get too close to certain people, like when you were walking to school or anything like that?

RD: Oh no, nothing was said like that.

JR: Were there some kids that were sicker than others?

RD: In fact, if you look at us, you don't think we were sick. We just had a touch of it, that's all. Because, I guess they wouldn't take me in the army if I had TB. (Chuckles) In fact, a lot of people have TB, but it's not active or whatever, you know. It's just dormant. And now they got good medication, so there's not too many TB. But now the immigrants are coming with that, so it's coming back again. But not as much as way back in the twenties and thirties.

JR: I wanted to ask you, what did your mother die of?

RD: All I can remember was—you heard of the word “beriberi?” You know what kind of disease is that?

JR: No.

RD: But I remember my mother used to tell me to touch her feet. She was swollen. And when I press like this . . .

JR: Like on her calf?

RD: Whatever, where is swollen. And then it come out slowly. The indentation, it stays there and then comes out slowly. I was a small kid, but I remember those things. But I don't remember too much of my mother, because she died when I was only about eight years old.

JR: Do you know if she was in a hospital towards the end or at home?

RD: No, I cannot remember. She wasn't at home. And you know, in those olden days, they bring the body home.

JR: Afterwards.

RD: No, no, when she die. You know, during '29, it was depression time and everybody was poor. People were out of jobs. And so my oldest brother had to make the coffin.

JR: Oh really.

RD: Yeah, from redwood. And I remember the smell of the paint, that black enamel paint.

JR: He painted it black.

RD: Yeah, black. He made it. Couldn't afford to buy a coffin, yeah. And then they had the coffin in the living room. Back in the old days, that's what they do. They bring the body home, instead of the mortuary.

JR: Do you know where she was buried?

RD: Yeah, at Diamond Head.

JR: Whereabouts at Diamond Head?

RD: At the back of Diamond Head, there's a cemetery right there [*Diamond Head Memorial Park*].

JR: Oh yeah, I know the one. There's a big thing there now, like a mausoleum-type thing.

RD: Yeah, way in the back.

JR: It's right near the military.

RD: Right, the National Guard.

JR: Yeah, okay. It must--you know, with your dad being sick and your mother having passed away, how did you guys manage?

RD: Yeah, that's the part. I stayed with my brother. And he support me going to school. He used to give me dollar a week.

JR: Oh yeah? Which brother is that?

RD: Raymond.

JR: Is he the oldest?

RD: That's the one that taught me the saxophone. He's the third.

JR: He was old enough to have a job at that time?

RD: Oh yeah. In fact, all my brothers, they all have to leave school to go work at a early age.

JR: How much school do you think they got?

RD: Up to intermediate school just about.

JR: Whereabouts was he living then, when you were staying with him?

RD: Well, we used to live at Palama and then Kukui Street.

JR: You know, why did the family move around so much? You mentioned your living in Kaka`ako and then Iwilei, all these different places. Why is it that you had to move so much?

RD: It puzzles me. Well, to begin with, we were considered poor. So we go where the rent is, I guess . . .

JR: The cheapest.

RD: Yeah. That's how it is, yeah?

JR: Yeah. Do you remember what kind of places you were living in?

RD: Usually a building where there is two family upstairs and two down. And used to be we would occupy one section. And same thing like other places, where they have rows of houses, and we used to rent one portion of it.

JR: Were they generally other Filipino families?

RD: Oh, they were all mixed, all mixed. There would be Japanese, Chinese—you know, ethnic.

JR: Were there many Filipinos . . .

RD: Oh, at one time, back in Kaka`ako days, back in I would say 1926, '27, '28, '29, there used to be groups. They used to call [*one area*] Portuguese camp, with a lot of Portuguese living. That's where---you know where Lex Brodie is, the service station [*i.e., Lex Brodie's Tire Company*]?

JR: On Queen Street, around there?

RD: Yeah, around that area. The Portuguese used to live there. And another section used to be the Japanese camp, a lot of Japanese. And they used to call a Filipino camp. That's all, about three—Japanese, Filipino, and . . .

JR: What about Chinese?

RD: Not too many Chinese, and not too many Puerto Ricans, and no Blacks. Blacks was rare. You never see Blacks around.

So anyway, when we used to live in Ala Moana—Kaka`ako now—there was a school they used to call Opportunity School. And Opportunity School, later I found out, was for children who was in grammar school that was slow in learning. And it was located close to the beach, close to Fisherman's Wharf.

JR: Yeah, I know where that is.

RD: Well, Opportunity School was alongside the beach there. And because the school was near the beach, I figured you could go swimming there. That's the reason I went to school there, [*not*] realizing that it was a school for handicapped people. So in the second grade, they sent me to the University of [*Hawai`i*] to test me with blocks and things like that, to see my IQ, whatever. From that, they transferred me to a regular one.

JR: So at first they thought you might have a learning problem or something?

RD: No, I just told my parents that I want to go to that school because it was close by where you can go swimming. But at that age, I was already a good artist. That school, they teach you carpentry, weave basket—you know, things to do with your hand. I was a good artist. They

sent me to a class where you can draw. Thanksgiving I draw turkey, pilgrims, like that. And anyway, after the test, they sent me to Pohukaina School. And from the third and the fourth grade—right after the fourth grade, they found that I had the TB, so I was sent to the Palama Preventorium. That's a hospital for young kids. So then that's when I went to Lanakila School. And afterward I was going to the sixth grade already. Then I went back to Kaka`ako. They called it Kawaiaha`o Court. It was homes right next to the graveyard. You know, the graveyard right there?

Okay, let's see, where am I now?

JR: That's sixth grade, yeah?

RD: Yes, sixth grade.

JR: Then you must have had the intermediate, yeah.

RD: Okay. After the sixth grade, I went to Maui. By then, my father and my three older brothers had moved to Maui.

JR: What for?

RD: They were teaching. They used to go from camps to camp, Pu`unini and all these various camps, and at that time, every camp had an orchestra. And my brother used to teach them—my brother Benny, my oldest brother—to play American tunes—you know, pop tunes—and Filipino songs. That's how our name was established, by playing all that. And I was already---I tell you, I was sixth grade at three different schools. And the last few months, I was on Maui. I was there one whole year.

JR: Which part of---were you moving around Maui or did you stay in one place?

RD: We stayed in Wailuku. And then I used to go with them when they teach, from camps to camps. And you know, when we go to camps, we stay so many hours. And the people, they so generous, they used to cook Filipino dishes and feed us. And when it's late, we used to come back from the country, back to Wailuku. And when you a young kid of, say, ten, eleven, you can see all the lights, you know, the mountains, Haleakal_, that big mountain. I was there one year. It was good.

JR: Tell me a little bit more about that. Your brothers and your father all played instruments. They were a musical . . .

RD: Yeah, musical family.

JR: So the Dacoscos family would go to these different camps and teach the people that lived there how to play the instruments?

RD: Yeah, they used to form orchestra.

JR: And somebody would pay them to do this?

RD: Oh, they paid my brother, because that's his livelihood. That's his living. And I would consider myself—I lived playing music all my life.

JR: How did you like visiting the camps?

RD: As a young kid, it's pretty good, yeah.

JR: Did you have an interest in being a musician at that point?

RD: No, no. I told my brother, “When I get older, I'm going to be a fireman,” or this or that.

But he said, “No, when you get older, I don't think you going to be that.” (Chuckles)

JR: What instruments did each of the members of the family play?

RD: Well, my oldest brother, he plays most any instrument, yeah? Plays the violin, trumpet, piano, saxophone. So he knew everything about that.

JR: Which brother is that?

RD: That's my oldest brother, Benny. In fact, if you talk to most of these old people about my age or older, they would remember him. Because you mention my last name, Dacoscos, “Oh, you mean Benny.” Yeah, they would know that. And then he did the same thing in Kaua`i, teach music. And even in this island, used to go to Waialua and Whitmore Camp.

JR: Now, how long would he stay in one particular camp to form the orchestra and all that?

RD: I would say about one hour at least. One or two hours probably.

JR: So he'd visit the camp for an hour or so.

RD: Yeah, and then go to this camp and go to another camp.

JR: And then he'd return a week later or what?

RD: A week later or—I didn't figure. Usually weekend probably, because the people had to go work on the plantation.

JR: On the weekend he would go.

RD: Yeah. When I came back, I attended Washington Intermediate School from seventh, eighth, ninth. And then it was in eighth grade, I took up clarinet. Ninth grade, I took up alto sax. And then we had vacation and go back to school. I attended McKinley [*High*] School. The bandmaster's name was [Benjamin] Doty, I think.

JR: Doty?

RD: Doty. He says, “I cannot put you in alto sax, because we have too many of them. If you play tenor sax, I'll put you in the advanced band.” And then, there were two different grades of

grading the musician. Either you S, satisfactory, or U, unsatisfactory. And I had unsatisfactory, because any time the band goes out [to] functions, play football game, I'm not there.

JR: Why weren't you there?

RD: Oh, carrying the tenor sax was little too big for me, I think. But anyway, after sophomore I left school. I would say you would consider it a dropout, yeah.

JR: Dropout.

RD: Yeah. But even though I was a dropout, I wasn't loafing or anything like that. I was always working.

JR: Now, when you were in school, did they give you the instrument or did you have to buy your instrument?

RD: Yeah, they had school instruments. They supplied you with school instrument.

JR: Did they give you lessons at school?

RD: Oh, lessons? Yeah. Of course, you have to know how to read already. Well, advanced band, they expect you to read music already, you know.

JR: Could you?

RD: Oh yeah, at the time.

JR: Where did you learn that?

RD: Well, my brother Raymond, he used to bring his saxophone home from work. And he was playing at taxi dance hall already, and it was called the Casino [*Ballroom*]. He used to work with Colored people. And he used to bring his saxophone home to teach me how to play the sax.

JR: Yeah, I was asking you before about the different family members. There was Benny.

RD: Benny, yeah, the oldest one.

JR: You mentioned Raymond.

RD: No, no. There was Salvadore or "Buddy." But then. . . .

JR: What did he play?

RD: He used to play the guitar and the bass, upright bass. But then he didn't really make his living in music. He used to work at the Gaspro. That was his regular job. And once a week he used to play with a group on a radio station.

JR: What radio station?

RD: I think it was KGMB. It was either KGU or KGMB, but mostly KGMB.

JR: Okay, so then that's two.

RD: And then Raymond. That's the one that after playing music at night, he used to bring the saxophone at home to teach me the fingering and how to read. So when I took it up in Washington Intermediate School, already I knew how to read and where the fingerings were.

JR: And what about your father, what did he play?

RD: He used to play the guitar, mainly the mandolin.

JR: So many of the kids came out to be musicians.

RD: Musicians, yeah.

JR: How did that happen do you think?

RD: Well, I guess we loved music, I think.

JR: But do you think it was your father that started all that?

RD: I think so, yeah.

JR: And your sister also, she was what, a singer?

RD: My sister, I don't remember her too much because I was too young then. But she entered—you know, Filipinos, they always having these contests, popularity contest. I think they still have it yet. Like they have Japanese and the Chinese contest.

JR: Like the Cherry Blossom [*Festival Queen Pageant*] and Narcissus [*Festival Queen Pageant*].

RD: Well, the Filipinos have that. One thing about the Filipino groups, they always have rival groups. You going to have one contest. This other guy don't like the way things are run there, so they make their own contest. Well, that's how it is. Filipinos are like that. Instead of backing each other up, they try to. . . . (Chuckles) Competition, yeah?

JR: Your sister won one of those contests?

RD: Oh yeah. One of the contests, she was the queen.

JR: Which sister was that?

RD: That's Florita. And of course, my second sister (Mary), well, she only plays the piano by ear. And I remember when I was young, she always played a song “Indian Love Call”. You heard of the song, “Indian Love Call”?

JR: No, I don't think so.

RD: It goes (RD sings). It's a song that was way beyond your time. Anyway, it's an operatic song, and she remember that melody. But she only played music for pleasure. Of course, my sister (Sally) that was just below me, she entered the KGMB contest. They used to call it the Listerine Amateur Hour. And she came on, she won the contest.

JR: What did they get to win something, money or what?

RD: I don't remember now what the prize was. It was way back in 1937—'36, '37. In fact, at that time, I thought I was good enough to enter the contest. But when the person who was in charge, Fritz MacGuigan—she's the piano player. She was active in the musician union. And I tried to play this song. . . . Maybe “Stardust,” I think, I played. I forgot the song. And I was nervous, so it didn't sound too good. So she told me, “Why don't you play something simple, like ‘Moonlight in Hilo’?” It's a simple song. You don't know it? It goes (Roland Dacoscos sings). I didn't figure that I wanted to play that *hapa-Haole* song, so I didn't make the audition. The second time I tried to audition, playing the ukulele [*ukulele*] and singing again, I got nervous, I didn't make it. I was only probably about fifteen, sixteen years old. I thought maybe if my sister could make it, I could try. But I got too nervous to sound good.

JR: You were telling me you left school at around tenth . . .

RD: Yeah, after the tenth grade, and then I started to play. Like my brother already was playing taxi dance halls, so they used to break me in since I'm not going to school. The first dance hall I played in, they called it the Liberty Dance Hall.

JR: Whereabouts was that?

RD: It's located where the Mayor Wright [*Homes*] is.

JR: Yeah.

RD: Yeah, that's where it is. There used to be lot of residences around, and there used to be a lot of tall grasses. And there was an area where they made a building. It was a dance hall at night, and daytime it used to be a place where people used to train for fights. In fact, that's why I was always interested in boxing.

JR: Oh yeah?

RD: As a spectator, not as a boxer.

JR: Did you ever get in the ring?

RD: No. In ninth grade, we used to put on. . . .

JR: Gloves?

RD: Yeah, and we used to box during physical ed. That's about all I did. My brother (Frederick) above me, he was going to try to be a professional boxer. But he only went up to the amateur rank, that's all. And his very first fight, they [*billed it as*] a semi-main event. You must be

good to be picked for that. But he lost, because he fought a really experienced guy.

JR: Oh, did he get knocked out?

RD: No, he didn't get knocked out. You know, when he ran in the ring, he forgot to put his. . . .
(Laughs)

JR: Oh, the cup?

(Laughter)

RD: So he had to go back and put it on. And I went to see that fight, but he lost. But he was pretty fast, you know. He was a good boxer. But when he got married, the wife said, "Forget boxing." He was another brother that worked at Gaspro.

JR: Were these clean fights they had, or were they rough boxing or what?

RD: Like amateur, the judging and regulation. I mean, you cannot be rough because you going to be penalized.

JR: What kind of guys? Was it all mixed?

RD: He fought a Japanese boy who was a seasoned amateur fighter. He didn't pursue the boxing career, because, like I said, he got married early and the wife said, "No boxing." So he worked at the Gaspro. That's two brothers that worked at Gaspro. In fact, my brother that taught me the saxophone, he also work at the Gaspro. You know, the people that supply the gas tank to hospitals and. . . . Gaspro is now—you know, right where the jail [*O`ahu Community Correctional Facility*] is?

JR: Yeah, Dillingham area.

RD: There's a cow in the front there. Gaspro they called it. Yeah, the company is still there.

JR: Was it there at that time?

RD: No, it was located Iwilei then.

JR: Tell me about these taxi dances. What exactly were they?

RD: Okay. Liberty Dance Hall was the very first dance hall I played in. And well, I didn't know about the money affair [*at that time*], but later on. They were charging ten cents a dance.

JR: So they would charge . . .

RD: The customers, they would buy tickets by dollar's worth or two dollars' worth, and they would dance with the girl. And if the girl not so good, they would change.

JR: These girls, they would make money by doing this.

RD: Right, yeah.

JR: Do you know---the tickets cost ten cents?

RD: Ten cents a dance.

JR: How much would the girl get?

RD: My wife, she used to sell the tickets. My wife told me it was sixty, forty. The management get 60 percent, the girls get 40 percent.

JR: And you were paid out of that sixty? The band was paid . . .

RD: Yeah, right.

JR: How were those places? Were they clean, nice, or kind of seedy?

RD: Well, you look at the movies, they give you that stereotype, yeah? Well, like any public dance hall. I don't know if it would be seedy. You mean something spooky going on there?

JR: (Laughs) I don't know.

RD: No, they go there for. . . . The bachelors, yeah. And even married men go there.

JR: Can you describe what the place looked like on the inside and on the outside?

RD: Well, they used to have a bench on one side where all the girls would sit. And on the opposite end were the men. And the music is continuously. The music has to be continuously. It's not like a dance where you play two or three set and you stop. Because the business is the music. It's continual. The more dances the girl dance, the more she earns. That's how the business goes. And like the music, it's nonstop. And the men go across, pick up the girls and dance so many dances, and then drop her back. And they just interchange, you know.

JR: And you were on a stage or what?

RD: On a bandstand. Like I said, the music is continuous. The drummer, the bass player, and the piano, they on and on. Whereas the saxophone player can play and alternate with the trumpet player, or tenor and alto can alternate, so we would be resting in between.

JR: Whereas the drummer and those guys got to work.

RD: Work, work. And then everybody have to take a break, so they break. They have to go to the restroom, like that. And then everybody shift around. Whereas I didn't shift. I just played my sax, take my break, and come back and play my sax, that's all.

JR: What were the hours on a gig like that?

RD: We usually start nine at night to one o'clock in the . . .

JR: Oh, late.

RD: Yeah. Nine to one, roughly.

JR: Was that every night?

RD: Just about every night, come to think of it. Maybe one night off, maybe Sunday night. But I cannot remember what night we were off.

JR: What kind of money would you make doing that?

RD: Well, when I first started, I was making eighteen dollars a week.

JR: Was that good money back then?

RD: Well. . . . Because the rent was cheap, and bread, you probably can buy it at ten cents a loaf. Everything was so cheap then, so eighteen, not too bad. You probably pay rent about fifteen dollars a month, so you just barely get by.

JR: Were you living with your brother still?

RD: Yeah. And then there was another dance hall. My second dance hall, I think, was Casino [Ballroom].

JR: Casino?

RD: Yeah, it's a very popular dance hall, Casino. And then I went to Caliente, that's another dance hall.

JR: Now, these are all basically the same?

RD: Yeah. These are all different places now.

JR: But the idea is the same, ten cents a dance.

RD: Ten cents a dance, right. Caliente, Paradise Club, and Rizal. Lot of old folks who go to dance hall remember the Rizal Dance Hall.

JR: How do you spell that?

RD: R-I-Z. . . . You know, the Filipinos always celebrate once a year this Rizal Day?

JR: Oh okay, so it's spelled the same way. Would you guys have uniforms?

RD: Oh no, we dress any way.

JR: How would you dress?

RD: Well, aloha shirt. Nothing special.

JR: You didn't have to wear a tie, jacket?

RD: No. There was one dance hall where they was kind of—wear jacket, yeah. Let's see, I played about five taxi dance hall? Beside that, I also played with orchestras on the outside. Beside my brother's orchestra, besides the dance hall, I used to play with other dance hall. And we used to play the armory, Palama gym, `Ewa, and probably in `Aiea someplace. And all the old folks who's about seventy and eighty, they remember that. But that was all before the war. Outside of the dance hall, we used to play big dances. And at the time big band was the craze. And that was only weekend job probably. And then besides that, back to the dance hall.

JR: So you do that every night, so to speak, and whenever there was extra gig you'd go do that with another orchestra?

RD: And then I would have somebody take my place at the dance hall, substitute, and I'll play outside. Because you get tired playing that. It's monotonous playing one job, so we go out and play. And then while playing in the dance hall, two other nightclubs—beside that, I played in a beer joint. Well, that's what I called it. A saloon, yeah. A four-piece orchestra—myself, drummer, piano, bass—and a singer. And it didn't last too long. They used to call it the O`ahu Grill.

JR: Where was that?

RD: It was right on Nu`uanu [*Avenue*] and King Street. It was upstairs, and below was a furniture store. Upstairs was run by Chinese people, and they open this grill because a lot of servicemen like to go to bars and drink. I played there.

JR: You know, when you were playing those taxi dances and those things, what was the crowd made up of? Was it local people, servicemen?

RD: Local. I would say mostly Filipinos, Japanese, Chinese—and lot of servicemen too during the war. Yeah, a lot of servicemen used to go.

JR: What about before, when you first started, was there many servicemen? Can you remember? Or was it mostly, like you said, local people?

RD: Local. Local and a few servicemen, until just before the war. And during the war, there was a lot of servicemen go up there. And surprising, I think, my brother's—well, my brother used to run a dance hall. It was the Casino before we rented there. And another place was the King Ballroom. And both places were the only ones that would allow Black people to come up. Whereas the other ones, they were. . . .

JR: They didn't allow Blacks?

RD: They were barred, yeah. You had racism, even here.

JR: Were there Black people in the bands?

RD: Later on, yeah, they came.

JR: What about at your time—you know, before the war, the thirties?

RD: Say 1937, '38? Well, at the time already, they had a few Colored musicians that came from the Mainland to play.

JR: What was the makeup of the band that you were playing in mostly?

RD: They usually have three saxophones, a trumpet, three rhythm. But sometimes they have only two sax, a trumpet. They used to have enough men at least to have the music continue. You cannot have only two guys blowing all night, because you'd be out of wind.

JR: Were these mostly Filipino guys?

RD: Majority of musicians, yeah.

JR: I'm going to have to stop to turn the tape.

RD: Okay.

JR: You know, last time I came you were telling me about the vaudeville shows. What was that?

RD: They were people from the Philippines, entertainers. Entertainers more often, not actors. And the only one that I can remember, his name was Vicente Yerro. They used to call him the Harold Lloyd—you heard of Harold Lloyd?

JR: Harold Lloyd, yeah.

RD: He used to be the Filipino Harold Lloyd. He used to put the glasses on and imitate, comic. There were other ones that I can't remember the name, where my brother used to be the orchestra to back them up. And we used to go outside islands. Already, I was just starting.

JR: This was the camps again. You go to a camp . . .

RD: They used to go camps, yeah. But I didn't go too often with them, because I was really too young yet.

JR: When they went neighbor island, though, would they take a boat?

RD: Oh yeah, then was only by ship. I remember when I went to Maui, way back in 1933, '34, it was on a ship. Used to leave at night, ten o'clock, and arrive in Maui first thing in the morning.

JR: Could you sleep on the ship?

RD: Well, we couldn't afford the first class, so we were steerage—I mean, third class, whatever, the lowest you can get. So we were in the back where you can hear the propeller. You cannot sleep. But good experience, yeah.

JR: So you were playing taxi dances for. . . .

RD: The various place. Did I mention all of that?

JR: Where was that Casino? You mentioned that was a popular one.

RD: Yeah, the Casino is the one on Beretania [*Street*] and Nu`uanu [*Avenue*]. That's a very popular church now.

JR: Oh, used to be a theater.

RD: Yeah, a theater, a Japanese theater or something [*Empress Theater*].

JR: Yeah. It's Calvary [*Chapel*] now.

RD: Yeah, Calvary, and I hear they're doing good.

JR: So it was right there. Different building though.

RD: Yeah, of course. They had to break that dance hall. It was a big building that had bars on the bottom. And you had to walk up the step, and that's where the dance hall. It was made specially for the taxi dance hall.

JR: I'm curious, these tickets that they had, would there be a machine that would sell those?

RD: Oh no. My wife used to—just a big roll of them.

JR: You go up and say, “Five tickets.”

RD: Whatever. Five, ten, whatever, twenty.

JR: What kind of dancing were the people doing?

RD: They do a lot of things. They like Latin music—rhumbas, cha-chas, and some fox trots. You heard of the movie *Dirty Dancing*? Well, they did something like that. Little bit like that. And by doing that, the man would feel good and he would dance longer.

JR: What about the women that worked at these places?

RD: They were single girls, young girls, housewives. And I even heard there were some that attended the University [*of Hawai`i*]. They figure that's about the easiest money they could make.

JR: Did you ever get to meet them, being a musician?

RD: Oh, you mean the girls? The second dance hall my brother managed, it was the King Ballroom, and we did a favor to some of the girls that didn't have husband or—they were single parents, whatever. My brother had an extra car. He used to take girls home that lives this side, about three or four, and I had the other car where I would take girls home that lived in the Kaimuk_ area. And I used to take girls home.

JR: You know, for a while in Honolulu there was legalized prostitution. Were any of the—was any of that kind stuff happening at the taxi dances?

RD: If they did, I don't know. But at that time, or even before that time, I think, he said—you remember that [William] Gabrielson, that chief?

JR: The police chief.

RD: Police chief, yeah. He was involved with. I cannot say it's true, but this is what I hear.

JR: No, I've heard the same rumor. You're not alone.

RD: That he had a little piece of that—drug trafficking and dance hall and prostitute. I cannot verify.

JR: But as far as you know, the dancers, the girls that dance at these places, weren't prostitutes.

RD: They might. I cannot say. They might, because it's better than getting that forty percent (chuckles) of the share of the dancing.

JR: You mentioned that your brothers ran some taxi dance clubs. Was that a good business for them?

RD: Not bad, yeah. It was pretty good.

JR: They made pretty good money?

RD: Yeah, pretty good. And of course, like anything good, it dies off. And the people that were attending, they were getting older. And the younger kids, they were too smart. See, they wouldn't spend their money. And ten cents a dance, later on it came up to fifty cents a dance.

JR: Did you also play at nightclubs and things like that?

RD: Oh yeah. Besides that saloon, that beer joint that I played, there were two nightclubs that I played. One of them was the old Lau Yee Chai, and that was 1939.

JR: Where was that?

RD: That's on, let's see, (Kuhio Avenue). And the second nightclub was Pearl City Tavern. Pearl City Tavern, that's the last nightclub that I worked, and then the war started.

JR: Were these some of the better nightclubs to be playing at at that time?

RD: I would say so, better nightclubs. There were that nightclub, Kewalo Inn, they had Hawaiian Town, Leroy's. They were all nightclubs.

JR: These were all nightclubs around town.

RD: That was the last club I worked then when the war started.

JR: How was the---was the money better at the nightclubs than it was at the taxi dances?

RD: Oh yeah, really better. I think they paid me twenty-six dollars a week.

JR: Was the music better?

RD: Like nightclubs, you play a variety of music to please the customers that come. We used to play—not hokey pokey. There's a dance that you did. You see on TV, where the people hold their back. (Roland Dacoscos sings melody.) I getting too old, so I cannot . . .

JR: It's not cha-cha-cha or . . .

RD: Not cha-cha-cha.

JR: Tango or something, I don't know. (Pause) Oh, the rhumba line.

RD: Yeah, yeah.

JR: Where each person holds the other.

RD: Yeah, we used to play that. And we used to get the customers . . .

JR: Conga line.

RD: Yeah, that's right, conga. (Roland Dacoscos sings.) Yeah, that's a conga. We used to get the people join us, and we used to go around conga line.

JR: Yeah, and they march around the club.

RD: Another one that used to be popular during the war and right after was the LaRaspa. (Roland Dacoscos sings.) You dance around the circle and then go back again. They call it the LaRaspa. Yeah, the older folks, they like to dance to those kind of dances. And Pearl City Tavern was the last nightclub that I worked, and then December 7 came. We supposed to rehearse that morning at ten o'clock, and the Japanese came and attacked us. No jobs.

JR: Were you playing there the eve of the seventh, on the sixth?

RD: Right, on the eve.

JR: So you had a gig that Saturday night . . .

RD: Work every night except . . .

JR: . . . at Pearl City Tavern.

RD: Yeah. I think we were off one night, but I cannot remember what night was it.

JR: Where were you living at that time?

RD: I was living at Palama.

JR: Alone or . . .

RD: I was with my family. I was single then.

JR: How old were you then?

RD: I was twenty, twenty years old.

JR: So you worked that night, came home . . .

RD: And then getting ready for ten o'clock rehearsal, but then we hear all this bombing and antiaircraft gun that tried to hit the planes.

JR: Did you know what was going on?

RD: Well, after a while you hear the announcement. President Roosevelt mentioned that we were being attacked, and then he declared war on the Japanese.

JR: Were you surprised? Were you expecting the war?

RD: Oh yeah, surprised.

JR: You were surprised.

RD: Right.

JR: Were you frightened at the time, do you remember?

RD: Surprisingly, we were more curious. We were more curious than afraid.

JR: Because I've heard that there were rumors that the Japanese were going to invade, and people thought they had landed up in the mountains and so forth. But you cannot remember being scared that that was going to happen?

RD: No. What we did was, we figured that since we're at war and all these kids going to be drafted, so I volunteered, four days later. It was on December 11.

JR: There was obviously no rehearsal then on Sunday.

RD: Yeah. (Chuckles) The drummer came to my home, and he said, "Roland, we out of a job. They going to draft us. We better volunteer."

JR: Oh, this was a friend of yours.

RD: Yeah.

JR: Was he about the same age?

RD: I would say he was about a year older than me. We were in school together, yeah. He was of Chinese-Hawaiian ancestry.

JR: What did you think when he said, “We got to volunteer.”

RD: Well, you cannot say you don't want to. We're at war, and you have to defend your country. When we volunteered, was Hawai`i Territorial Guard.

JR: Where did you have to go to volunteer?

RD: At the armory.

JR: Where was that?

RD: Armory, which was a building where the state capitol is.

JR: Today?

RD: Yeah.

JR: So two of you went down there.

RD: Yeah, volunteered, raised our hand up.

JR: Did you know what you were getting into?

RD: No, no. When you go in the army, you don't know if you going to come out alive. You don't know where they going to send you. Just happened that I didn't go to the front.

JR: This was the Hawai`i Territorial Guard?

RD: Right, yeah.

JR: What did they---what was the first thing you had to do when you joined up?

RD: Well, they gave us—they [*i.e.*, *the Japanese military*] caught us off guard so soon that we didn't have the equipment, so they gave us what they had, and that was all First World War stuffs, like those flat hats . . .

JR: Oh, the tin helmets.

RD: Tin hats, and the old gas mask from World War I, and the rifle was World War I. Even the leggings, everything. You put it on, you thought I was in the First World War.

(Laughter)

RD: And then I used to do the guard duty. Guard all the important buildings, and guard the bridges

on Ala Moana. They think the Japanese going to bomb the bridge, so we used to stand guard.

JR: And you had a gun?

RD: Yeah.

JR: Had you used a gun before?

RD: Never fired a gun. Springfield rifle. I fired it though, once, at the governor's house. I was guarding the governor's house, and I was so sleepy—and never fired rifle in my life—and practiced inspection of arms. Didn't realize that it was live ammunition when I pulled the trigger. Sergeant of the guard ran up to me and said, “Did you see the enemy?”

I said, “Didn't see no enemy. I just was practicing the inspection of arms.” You crank it like that and you pull the trigger. But, you know, it was live bullet.

JR: You didn't hurt anybody?

RD: No, I shoot in sky. So naturally the sergeant of the guard had to report me to the colonel the next day. For punishment, they told me to clean the toilet. When I was about--I was in the the armory. Below, there is a—you wouldn't call it jail or whatever.

JR: They had you locked up?

RD: Locked up for a few hours.

JR: For shooting the gun?

RD: Yeah. And then they told me my duty was to clean the latrine. But my outfit never fired—we had to go practice. We went to Punchbowl, and I forget the cleaning of the toilet.

JR: Good for you. (Chuckles)

RD: Punchbowl was a firing range at the time.

JR: It wasn't a cemetery.

RD: I wasn't good in marksman. I always miss the target.

JR: Well, you're a musician, you're not a . . . (Chuckles)

RD: But anyway, about three months or so in the territorial guard, and then April 1, 1942, they had put me in a regular army.

JR: Let me just ask a few more questions about the guard. How soon after you signed up did they have you out there actually? Like you mentioned, you had to patrol bridges and stuff like that.

RD: Oh, just cold.

JR: Cold?

RD: "Here's a rifle. Go guard."

JR: Did you have a uniform?

RD: Yeah, we had a uniform, that World War I uniform.

JR: So you got this uniform, a gun, and you were just sent out?

RD: Hardly know how to use a rifle and doing guard duty.

JR: Were you given instructions like, "This is a bridge. Someone might come. If they come, you shoot 'em."

RD: No, you say, "Halt, who goes there?" You have to say halt three times at least. By the time you say that, by that third time, if he was an enemy he'd probably shoot you first.

(Laughter)

JR: You mentioned the governor's house that you had to guard.

RD: And then, all these big buildings on Bishop Street.

JR: Oh, the Big Five buildings.

RD: The Big Five buildings, yeah. [*The Big Five were the companies that controlled the sugar industry in Hawai`i.*] Telephone and Dillingham building and all these important buildings on that street.

JR: You would stand . . .

RD: Right at the entrance.

JR: At the entrance.

RD: Yeah.

JR: You and another guy?

RD: Probably, yeah. Either that or walk back and forth. And even we used to guard the palace grounds.

JR: Did you ever have any trouble?

RD: Never had.

JR: Did people ever give you a hard time?

RD: No, no.

JR: Did you ever see anybody you know when you were standing guard, like one of your friends?

RD: Come to think of it, no.

JR: What were the hours like?

RD: Usually supposed to be four hours. Four to six hours, and then they have to relieve you to have chow. Like I said before, everything so hectic, they forget to relieve you, so there were times I had to stand more than my shift. I had to do double shift like, so by the time I get back I was so darn hungry.

JR: Was it mostly daytime or nighttime?

RD: Day and night.

JR: Both.

RD: Day and night, yeah. And then, we used to have our meals—oh, there were two places that they used to house us, the armory and that little barracks. You know, the barracks? You see the barracks on palace ground, on the side?

JR: Oh, I can't remember right now.

RD: There's a little barracks [*i.e.*, *Iolani Barracks*] that they had moved it brick to brick from where the armory is. The original location of armory and the barracks was there. And because they was going to build the state capitol, armory have to go down and the barracks have to go. So they took it brick to brick and they moved it to palace ground.

JR: Are you talking about those little brick buildings?

RD: Right in palace ground.

JR: Oh, oh. `Cause there's *Skygate* sculpture, that's down a way. That's by Honolulu Hale.

RD: Yeah.

JR: And there's brick buildings there, but those aren't the same?

RD: No, no.

JR: Oh, oh.

RD: It's more on Richards [*Street*] and . . .

JR: That would be King [*Street*].

RD: Yeah, King, Richard, and Bethel Street.

JR: Oh, oh.

RD: No, Hotel Street.

JR: Hotel Street.

RD: Right on the corner, you can see one big building there. Look like one barrack, little fortress like. The building go like that [*i.e., crenellated*], where the rifle can shoot down.

JR: Yeah, yeah.

RD: Yeah, that's the barracks. We used to either sleep in that barrack or the armory, and we used to get our meals at the YWCA [*Young Women's Christian Association*]. You know where the present YWCA is [*on Richards Street*]?

JR: Yeah.

RD: We used to eat all our meals there—breakfast, lunch, dinner.

JR: Were you getting paid too for doing that?

RD: Yeah, like what, twenty-one dollars a month, I guess.

JR: Oh, little bit.

RD: Buck private pay.

JR: How was the food?

RD: Oh, food was good.

JR: Yeah?

RD: Oh yeah, real good, real good.

JR: What about the other guys? Was it people your age pretty much?

RD: Mostly my age and university people. But then there were---I was twenty, there were some people who was about thirty. Surprising, there were lot of Filipino men. I don't know, they must have been American citizen to be in. They were much older than me, about thirty [years old] at least.

JR: Was there many---I cannot remember whether the Japanese guys were allowed to be part of the guard. Were there Japanese?

RD: In the early part, yeah.

JR: There were Japanese?

RD: Yeah, in the [Hawai`i] Territorial Guard there were. I think newspapers mentioned about this story, where they had to take 'em out later on. [*All members of Japanese ancestry were discharged in January 1942.*]

JR: Yeah, yeah. And that's when they formed . . .

RD: Formed their own, yeah.

JR: . . . the VVV [*Varsity Victory Volunteers*].

RD: Yeah, 100th [*Battalion*] and 442nd [*Regimental Combat Team*].

JR: That lasted for a couple of months, you said.

RD: You mean the [Hawai`i] Territorial [*Guard*]?

JR: Yeah, three months?

RD: December, January, February, March—yeah, about three months. Three months and so many days.

JR: Were you expecting to be put into the regular army or was that a surprise?

RD: Well, I guess in my mind, eventually. That was only temporary, yeah, [Hawai`i] Territorial Guard. And then, Father [Kenneth] Bray—he was a coach at `Iolani School. You know where `Iolani School is now?

JR: Yeah.

RD: Well, it was in a different location at one time. And he gave us that speech, a pep talk, that from the [Hawai`i] Territorial Guard, going to the regular army.

JR: Was it a whole group of you guys that were transferred at one time?

RD: In fact, the whole Hawai`i Territorial Guard.

JR: All at the same time?

RD: I think, just majority anyway. The majority, yeah.

JR: Around April 1?

RD: Yeah, just switch from [Hawai`i] Territorial Guard to regular army. And from that, we had to take that basic training, boot camp.

JR: You mentioned this `Iolani person. Was there a ceremony or something?

RD: Yeah, we all stand up in ranks, and he's in the front of us, talking to us.

JR: And he gave you that pep talk.

RD: Yeah. And then right after that—or was it before or after?—we had a good physical. Because when we're in the [*Hawai`i*] Territorial Guard, the physical was so fast, whether you were sickly or not, they grab you and put you in. But to get in the regular army, they gave you a regular physical. And the guy that I told you, that guy that volunteered with me.

JR: The drummer?

RD: Yeah. He didn't pass the regular physical, because he had that venereal disease. And then, so they had to let 'em go. And then after several months, I guess he got cured.

JR: Yeah, yeah.

RD: Draft him again, and he was sent to Europe. But in the meantime, he said, "I'll go back to boot camp." (Chuckles)

JR: How was boot camp?

RD: Well, they get you up reveille, first thing in the morning. You know, the bugle. And then the very first morning, they go alphabetically. Because my last name, Dacoscos, which way in the front, he tell, "You assigned to be in the mess hall to be a waiter for the officers."

I said, "I wasn't cut out to be a waiter in the army."

So the very next morning, "Hey, who want to volunteer to be in the medical department?" I raise up my hand. That's the reason why I got to be in the medical department for so many months.

JR: Where was that boot camp?

RD: In Schofield [*Barracks*].

JR: Oh.

RD: In Schofield, one of the oldest barracks out here. We stayed in certain quadrangle later on.

JR: Did you have to get special training then when you volunteered for the medical?

RD: Yeah, we had basic, very basic training.

JR: Was that also at Schofield?

RD: Schofield, yeah. After taking that, then we were assigned to different companies. And I happened to be assigned to Company G.

JR: Company G.

RD: And then we were stationed at Kahuku. And then, oh, I can go on. There are lot of other interesting story. As an aid man, we used to be stationed up in the mountains. Well, Waipi`o, from there we used to hike up way in the mountains, and we used to be stationed up there. We used to guard the trail, Company G. Just a small group, a squad or whatever. At least, as an aid man, I used to go. They used to tell me to go with them. And then, it was way up the mountain. If you go little bit to this side, you can see Kahana Bay. And then you walk little bit further on up the top of the mountain, I can see Pearl Harbor. You see the location I am, right in between. So we're sort of guarding the trail in case the Japanese paratroopers—we would catch 'em on the trail.

JR: You never saw 'em though.

(Laughter)

RD: No, never saw, never saw. It was fun for me, you know, living in the mountains and drinking mountain water and putting chlorine.

JR: How long were you up there?

RD: It used to be about a week, and then a different group goes up there. Then I wouldn't go, then I go. And then later on, I had a call to be transferred in the band.

JR: What was your job as the medical aid person?

RD: Well, before that I used to work in the dispensary, help the doctors and dispense pill. And little cuts like that, we used to dress them. And then, we were taught, like, in case they had broken leg and then how to splint. You know, temporary things like that. Just basic first-aid things until the doctor come.

JR: How did you get along with the other guys?

RD: You mean, as the aid man?

JR: Yeah.

RD: Oh, that was funny. Because they used to go on maneuvers on the mountains, and I have to follow them. Those National Guard there, they were all seasoned already. And me, I'm just . . .

JR: You're a rookie.

RD: . . . a rookie. I used to get all blister all over my feet, you know.

JR: They don't wait up for you.

RD: Well, they told me, "What is this? This aid man is supposed to give us aid. We giving him aid instead!"

(Laughter)

RD: And they were funny, good fun. And like I said, later on this guy from the 298th [*Regiment*] band heard that I was in the army. He said, "Eh, I want to get him transferred." He wants me to be in the. . . .

JR: You were in the band then?

RD: Yeah, yeah. Most of my time was in the band.

JR: The thing [i.e., discharge papers] you showed me said you were basic training three months, medical aid man seven months, and bandsman thirty-two months, yeah?

RD: The main reason he wants me to be in the band---okay, there were two bands. There were the 299th [*Regiment*] and there were the 298th [*Regiment*]. See, 299, I think it was an outfit that was on the outside island. They were the 299. But they had disbanded that 299 [*band*] and pick only the best guys to join the 298. And the guys that weren't so good in the 298, they used to throw 'em in the infantry. And the guy that was playing the saxophone, they threw 'em out in the infantry. (Chuckles) And they replaced him [*with me*], because the guy was just getting by playing saxophone.

JR: Had you been able to do any playing since you joined up with the [*Hawai`i*] Territorial Guard, or had you stopped?

RD: Oh, no, no. The territorial, they no more no time to, no time.

JR: So you really hadn't done much playing.

RD: Yeah. In the service already, you cannot be playing music.

JR: You were probably glad to get in the band, yeah?

RD: Oh yeah, I was glad to be in the band. Mainly he wanted me to be first alto sax player in the orchestra. He was a staff sergeant, the bandmaster. And there was a first sergeant, he was a flute player. The staff sergeant, he was a solo clarinetist, and he was billed as "Hawai`i's own Artie Shaw." He used to listen to a lot of Artie Shaw records and imitate.

JR: Was he a local guy?

RD: Yeah, local guy. And he used to play "Begin the Beguine" and lot of Artie Shaw songs. And he wanted me to play in this orchestra, to be the lead alto sax player, lead alto man. That's the reason why I got in the band. And overseas, we sort of like an orchestra. We used to entertain the troops. And then, Jack Benny and Martha Raye.

JR: Martha Raye.

RD: Yeah, they used to come. And Red Skelton. They used to come, you know, all over there to entertain the troops.

JR: And you'd back them up?

RD: Some of them, but mainly they used to bring their own group. We used to play sort of pre[*liminary*].

JR: Oh, you were sort of a warm-up.

RD: Warm-up group, yeah. Then after---we left this island, see, in November 1943. Already, I was in the band. And then went in the troopship. It was converted. A regular troopship, yeah.

JR: Yeah.

RD: And then, when we went on the ocean—you know that zigzag? Take longer than going straight.

JR: You have to zigzag to . . .

RD: Special reasons for the submarine.

JR: They don't want anybody to follow them.

RD: Yeah, to sort of throw off the submarine. But I don't know how you can throw 'em off. We stopped by Samoa, Pago Pago, refill. And then we went to New Hebrides. They had changed the name. Now it's not New Hebrides. [*It is Vanuatu.*] But we went to Espiritu Santo, and there were a lot of navy people. And we were there for one month only. And that's where I saw a lot of bats and crabs, and these fireflies that light.

JR: You never saw fireflies [*before*]?

RD: Yeah, fireflies. And then the whole year of 1944, we were in Guadalcanal.

JR: For the whole year?

RD: Yeah, 1944.

JR: And what were you doing there for that year?

RD: Well, we were sort of like entertainment. We were connected with the USO [*United Service Organizations*]. That's all we did, play dances for the officers and play concerts for the marines and the army camp to camp. In fact, we even went through on a PT boat. We went to the island of Savo. We saw lot of natives with their breasts hanging down, and we played a concert there. And we went to Tulagi, the island of Tulagi. They had a big naval battle over there, and we went there to entertain too.

JR: How was it, being in the band?

RD: Oh, it's about the best place to be in the service, the best place. In any branch of army, the band is.

JR: Were you treated pretty well?

RD: Yeah, pretty good. See, when we went Guadalcanal, there was a Company G. We were attached to them for food. We used their cafeteria. And at the time, there were a lot of *Haoles*. Somehow they were combined with a *Haole* group. And then, they like to eat potatoes. They don't care for rice too much.

JR: Was it hard to get rice?

RD: Oh, we used to get rice and potatoes. We used to get a lot of lamb, though, because we were close to New Zealand and Australia.

JR: Oh.

RD: We had a lot of lamb and lamb stew. We used to catch fish. We used to be stationed right along the shore. We were so close to the shore that we didn't realize that when the tide get, you know, that the water would go right under our tent. So we had to move back a little further. It was a picnic being in there.

JR: Really?

RD: Yeah. 'Cause we not like the infantry. Get up in the morning, we're gonna practice, eh? And before that, we used to take off our clothes and just run in the water.

JR: Just go for a swim.

RD: Yeah, and the water is so clear.

JR: Sounds like a vacation.

RD: Yeah. And instead of hooking fish with a net like that, we used to get grenade, throw 'em in the water, and then, explode, and the fish all get stunned, and they all floating up.

JR: And you just walk in there and pick them up. (Laughs)

RD: Yeah. That was really funny. So the only prisoner of war that I ever saw was in the stockade, where there were all barbed wires. You see a few Japanese, that's about all. Because the action was all over already. The marines did all the hard work.

JR: So by the time you got anywhere, there was no fighting going on.

RD: No fighting over there. There probably were Japanese in the mountains. You know, they were afraid to come down. We were sort of like an occupation, yeah, occupy in case the Japanese change their mind, they want to reinvade, you know.

JR: Yeah, yeah.

RD: But we're there just to protect them.

JR: Being in the band, did you ever have to handle a gun or anything?

RD: Oh yeah, they assign us. They gave us the carbine, a very short rifle. I don't know if I even fired it. Yeah, carbine. And then, the band, if anything really happened, they would transfer us to the medical department as a stretcher bearer.

JR: Oh, I see.

RD: Yeah, but we never get to that stage.

JR: How did the infantrymen treat the band people?

RD: Oh, they were envious of us.

JR: Envious?

RD: Yeah, they really. . . .

JR: What was the makeup of the band? Was it mostly Mainland-type people or . . .

RD: They were mostly National Guard, and there were all these mostly Hawaiians, Koreans, Chinese.

JR: So it was largely a local . . .

RD: Local outfit, yeah, local National Guard. And I would say there were two White men. No, three.

JR: Three.

RD: A trombonist, a flute player from Indiana, a clarinet player from Nebraska. Yeah, there were three of them—trombone player, flute, and then the clarinet player.

JR: When you did meet *Haole* people, did they understand that you were Filipino from Hawai`i?

RD: I guess after being in the band quite some time, they would know, yeah. In fact, in the band, I think there was me and the barber. The french horn player, he was the barber in the band. He was a Filipino.

JR: He was a barber?

RD: Yeah. Probably he was a barber as a civilian. But I think he played the french horn, and he was Filipino. I was the only other Filipino I think. The rest was all Hawaiians, Koreans, Chinese, but mostly Hawaiians.

JR: Was there good camaraderie between the guys?

RD: Yeah, yeah. Well, wait, wait. There was this orchestra. George Lopez, he had an orchestra. And this guy, Bill Werner—I don't know where that Werner came [from], but he looks Hawaiian to me. And then there were two competing small groups. Outside of the band,

Werner had his own—he plays the trombone and had his own combo. And then I was with George Lopez's orchestra, and sometimes I switch over to another group.

JR: This is just for fun?

RD: Yeah, for fun, just to go play.

JR: So there's a little bit of rivalry there.

RD: Yeah, rivalry. Two different small group playing pop, swing, and jazz, whatever. And then we're all in the National Guard band, yeah.

JR: Looks like I gotta turn the tape over again.

RD: How fast that forty-five minutes.

(Laughter)

JR: Mr. Dacoscos, how long were you in the army altogether? When did you get out?

RD: I got out November 1, 1945. That's a total of close to four years, I think.

JR: Where were you when the war was *pau*? Were you still in the Pacific?

RD: I was still in the army yet.

JR: Yeah, yeah. Do you remember hearing that there was . . .

RD: Yeah, let me see. When the Germans surrendered, I was in Hilo. The band was in Hilo. Then we came back, and they bombed Hiroshima, right?

JR: Yeah.

RD: I was still in the service yet.

JR: Where were you?

RD: Stationed either at Fort DeRussy or Kam Fort [*i.e.*, *Fort Kamehameha*].

JR: And you were still playing music?

RD: I was still in the army band, yeah.

JR: When you were on O`ahu, where would you be playing?

RD: We used to go on the trucks. Yeah, we used to go to the different service place to play concerts. And then, when I was stationed Schofield, we used to play concerts over there. And then had the big arena there that they used to have shows, USO shows, to entertain the troops. And they used to call our orchestra to back up, but I wouldn't say name performers. But we

played at Schofield, and then our orchestra used to play for the officers. Officers get the dances, yeah. Officers' club, play for them. That's about the only thing we did, just play music. That's what I did as a civilian, and that's what I did in the service after a while there.

JR: They would pick you up and take you somewhere, and bring you back to your barracks, that kind of thing?

RD: Or because it was in Schofield, we used to get our car. Everything is so close by, yeah, from where the band room is. We used field trucks, army trucks.

JR: And you said Hilo, you were in Hilo?

RD: Hilo when the Germans surrendered.

JR: And you were doing the same kind of thing in Hilo?

RD: Yeah, over there. Just a very short while we were there, then we came back. It's a good thing we used that atomic bomb, or otherwise the war would still be lingering.

JR: Had you heard anything about an atom bomb or anything like that?

RD: No, never heard of that thing. That was, what, Truman, President [Harry S.] Truman? Because when we came back from overseas, it wasn't long before Roosevelt died. But after he was in office for so long, yeah.

JR: Yeah, yeah.

RD: So Truman was a vice president, and he became president. And he was the president to say, "Go ahead and bomb."

JR: Drop the atom bomb.

RD: Yeah. There were two places, yeah, that they bombed.

JR: Nagasaki.

RD: Nagasaki and Hiroshima, yeah.

JR: Those USO shows that you used to do, after you played, did you get to then sit and watch the rest of the show?

RD: We usually do that, yeah.

JR: How did you like those shows?

RD: Pretty good, yeah, entertaining.

JR: Do you remember what kind of a show they would have?

RD: Usually singers, and there was a harmonica player—I forget his name—Larry Adler, I think. I'm talking about overseas now.

JR: What about when you were playing in Hawai`i?

RD: You mean . . .

JR: You mentioned some USO shows. You know, you go and perform for the troops, that kind of thing.

RD: Yeah, yeah. It was mostly overseas when we did that.

JR: Oh, oh.

RD: Over here, not too many, because there were lot of bands, yeah.

JR: So over here, it was more just performing concerts?

RD: Yeah, concerts, and dances for the officers. Yeah, that's about all. And then when we came back from Guadalcanal—that was in '45, January 1945. Came back, and there was a newspaper clipping, and I saw my friend who told me to volunteer, and I saw his picture, and he was killed in action in Europe.

JR: Oh, he was the drummer.

RD: Drummer, yeah. And then, naturally I went back to the playing nightclub, and dance hall too.

JR: Once you were out of the army?

RD: Yeah. I went back to playing taxi dance hall and nightclub. Okay, let's see. The first night, it was a bar or something. Like Ted Lewis Inn, you remember? Soon as I came out from the service, that very week I had to join the [musician's] union to play in that inn. And then, naturally there were a lot of servicemen. And they had, what, I think more than three bouncers. And the three bouncers weren't enough to take care of the rowdy sailors.

JR: Oh really?

RD: Yeah. When they were so drunk they wouldn't allow them to come in, they would go outside and get bricks and throw it at the building. On the roof you can hear, yeah.

JR: And you're in there trying to play music, and there's a riot outside. (Chuckles)

RD: Business was good, 'cause, oh, the service, they just like to drink and have good fun, eh?

JR: Yeah.

RD: But when they get rowdy, then you have to let 'em out.

JR: As a musician, when business was good, did that mean that you got paid more?

RD: We were paid every week. Then at one time, they mentioned that they want the musicians to—you know this time clock where you punch in when you in and punch out when you work? And we had arguments, said, “Hey, we professional, we're not janitor.” So they didn't get us to go punch time. (Chuckles) We're professional. We're musicians. We belong to the union. We not going punch in, punch out like a regular worker.

JR: You had to join the union once you got out of the army?

RD: Yeah, to work the nightclub, you have to be union. We're already unionized already.

JR: But before the war, were you in the union?

RD: No, union was weak then. In fact, I don't remember there was a union before the war. There probably was, but wasn't strong, yeah.

JR: Yeah.

RD: During the war and right after war, then it start to unionize, yeah. You know, we're affiliated with the Mainland one [*American Federation of Musicians*].

And after that, the next nightclub I went to [*was the*] Pago Pago. Played there several months, and then I went back to the place where I came from, Ted Lewis Inn, but by then they had changed it to Blue Lei. From Blue Lei, I went to Lau Yee Chai. No, no, I'm losing track now. At Lau Yee Chai was 1939, that was before the second war. Oh yeah, I went back to Lau Yee Chai again after the war.

JR: Yeah.

RD: Yeah. I went back again, couple more times, several months, back and forth. And then I went back to Pearl City Tavern again.

JR: Had these places changed much after—I mean, were they . . .

RD: After the war?

JR: Yeah.

RD: Well, later on, there weren't as much servicemen who regularly came. They were getting discharged, you know. And then, like I said, there were taxi dance hall. And then if there were better jobs for me in the nightclubs, I would go play the nightclub. Oh, I played in the service clubs. Like chief petty officer [*club*], I played there several months. That was 1948, '49. I played for the warrant officer club so many months. And I played for the officers' club—Pearl Harbor, now, I'm talking about—and then back to the taxi dance hall. Just music over and over.

JR: Was this sort of a circuit that other—like if one gig *pau* . . .

RD: Well, no, no. We played this for several months, and then after—we contract. We union already, see. Then after so many months, we go to the warrant officer club, so many months

there.

JR: Was that good work for the local musicians, playing for these military clubs?

RD: Enough to get by, yeah. But eventually--I got married in '47, yeah, which was my second marriage. My first marriage, I didn't consider it a marriage, because I got married during the war, got divorced in the war.

JR: Oh, oh.

RD: So after the war, in 1947, I married to my wife now. Since '47 we've been married.

JR: Where did you meet the first wife?

RD: Well, now, where did I meet? Not too many houses away, few houses away.

JR: But when you were in the service, isn't it hard? I mean, you're living on . . .

RD: Buck private pay, eh?

JR: But you weren't living on a military base?

RD: I couldn't live out.

JR: Yeah, yeah.

RD: So my first wife have to stay with my parents, my folks. When I left her, my daughter from my first wife was ten months old. When I came back from overseas—I was still in the army—she was two years old. That's this one here. (Roland Dacoscos points to a family photograph.) She was two years old. She's in her teens already.

JR: In that picture, yeah?

RD: Yeah. Then I divorced her. I wouldn't consider it a marriage, because I was in the army all the time. But I want custody of my daughter, because I thought. . . . And then I met my [*present*] wife. And then she [*already*] had two girls. We got married, three girls. And then we had this one here about 1948, my daughter Rona. My son, 1950. And he lives with me. I think you saw him.

JR: What's his name?

RD: Roland.

JR: Roland.

RD: But the name is different. He is Roland Anthony, whereas my name is Roland Gonzales. Gonzales is my mother's last name.

JR: Were you a single parent for a little while?

RD: Very short while, very short while. Cannot take care my daughter while working nighttime.

JR: Yeah, yeah.

RD: So I met my wife, yeah. And then, let's see, 1949, my wife said, "Eh, you better learn another trade, because music, you don't know how long you'll be playing (here and) there—three months, six months, one year."

JR: Yeah, yeah.

RD: But fortunate I was always working, you know, just lucky. And then the dance hall was a standby job. If I not working a good job, the dance hall was there.

JR: Was that because your brother was owning it, or just 'cause you were a good . . .

RD: (Chuckles) Yeah, in a way. Yeah, because my brother own the club.

(Laughter)

RD: Anyway, where am I in the story now?

JR: You were gonna mention your wife . . .

RD: Yeah, telling me to learn another (trade).

JR: Yeah.

RD: So being in the service in the Second World War, I was entitled for four years of [*education*] by the bill of—what they call it?

JR: They call it the GI Bill [*of Rights*].

RD: GI Bill, yeah. The first one I took was a correspondence course in piano tuning and repairing. They need . . .

JR: How do you do that by mail?

RD: They send you a kit, a little kit, and they name the part, and how to put the pad. Naturally, you needed a real . . .

JR: Yeah, you gotta be able to hear for that.

RD: And half of the lesson, my wife was doing it.

(Laughter)

JR: Oh.

RD: So I got diploma, and then I work at Metronome Music Store. When they sell a new piano, I used to tune. When they move a piano, a few keys get out of whack, so I'll just bring out a pitch. I don't play piano, I'm a saxophonist. But I just play chord, you know, that's about all. Then it sounds right or not. It didn't last, 'cause I wasn't cut out to be a piano tuner, repairman. So the second course I took was electrical job—I mean, I took up electrician. And after one year of that . . .

JR: Was that another correspondence?

RD: No, no, it was here. Actual . . .

JR: What school?

RD: A trade school. They call it Electrotech. I don't know if they still have it. It was located right across Ala Moana Center. You know where Ala Moana Center is . . .

JR: Yeah, yeah.

RD: . . . and Ala Moana Park? They were located there, and then they moved. They were called the Electrotech.

JR: It's a trade school.

RD: Trade school. You learned refrigeration and air conditioning, electrical, things like that. I took up electrical. While I took up electrical, they paid me about hundred something a month. And in the meantime, I was playing taxi dance hall at night.

JR: So that's the GI Bill, you were given that money.

RD: Right, yeah. And already I was married, see. I get that hundred something from the GI . . .

JR: Plus . . .

RD: Dance hall, yeah. And then after one year of that, 1951 and '52 I work at Pearl Harbor as an electrician helper.

JR: That's the . . .

RD: Work on the ships, while they doing their electrical works. And there were two RIFs there, reduction in force. The second big RIF caught me. They reduction in force when there's not enough work, so they have to lay the people off.

JR: Yeah.

RD: So the second one got me. That was 1952.

JR: So you . . .

RD: So back again to the dance hall. And I used to even play Shafter, their Zebra NCO

[noncommissioned officer] club. Weekends I played music outside, and weekdays back to the taxi dance hall again.

JR: Oh, oh. So the taxi dance was like Monday through Friday night?

RD: Yeah, and then weekend I used to go outside and play with different orchestras. And where am I in the story now?

JR: Well, this was already back in the mid-fifties then—'53, '54—that you were . . .

RD: Yeah, yeah.

JR: You said you got laid off in . . .

RD: Fifty-two, yeah. I'm talking about '53, '54.

JR: How was the music at the taxi dances and that? Did it change very much?

RD: Oh, it was still going.

JR: Yeah?

RD: Yeah, it was still going strong. Oh yeah, after I was laid off, back to that dance hall, nightclub, whatever I could be working. And then in the meantime, my wife said, “Why don't you try out for the Royal Hawaiian Band?”

I said, “You can't get in the band until there is an opening.”

JR: Yeah, yeah.

RD: And then, there were lot of guys in the band that was with me in the National Guard band, so probably my wife thought I would have some pull, you know.

JR: But if it's all young guys . . .

RD: But no, no. In the Royal Hawaiian Band, there were plenty old people.

JR: So you gotta kind of wait for them . . .

RD: You gotta wait 'til they die (chuckles) or retire. But even 'til now, there are still musicians, they still try to get in the band. I talked to the man there who was the assistant bandmaster in the army band and who also was the assistant bandmaster in the Royal Hawaiian Band.

JR: Oh, what's his name?

RD: John Mendiola was the assistant bandmaster. I met him in town. I told him, “Eh, there's an opening in the Royal Hawaiian Band?”

He tell, “Oh, Roland, there's no opening. You have to wait 'til they publish in the newspaper,

and then there's an opening.”

They finally got an opening in the band, 1956, in August, so I auditioned.

JR: For a sax player?

RD: Saxophone player. But not alto sax, it was a tenor sax player.

JR: Had you been playing tenor sax?

RD: At the time, I was playing both.

JR: Oh, okay.

RD: There were four guys audition for the position. And there was a Hawaiian guy, good jazz player. He was already in the band. He would be good for the band, because he's Hawaiian and he could sing Hawaiian songs. But in the nighttime, he was playing a swing club. And they swing and drink a lot. So the next morning, when he go to work with the Royal Hawaiian Band, he would smell like alcohol. And he was always late for job. That's was one strike against him right there, and then when he auditioned the job, he didn't pass it.

JR: Oh boy.

RD: Though he was a good jazz saxophone player, he didn't make it. I got to be the one to get in the band.

JR: All right.

RD: From '56, '57, '58, '59, 1960—when was President Kennedy shot?

JR: Sixty-three.

RD: Okay, I was already playing alto sax in the band, in the Royal Hawaiian Band. I remember I was new in playing alto in the band, and then that happened to Kennedy, when he got shot in Texas. And when I auditioned for the second time, there were ten other guys auditioning for that one position. Though I was in the band already, I still have to audition. It's a civil service job, and it's open to the public. And surprising, the Royal Hawaiian Band guys—I mean, the Royal Hawaiian Band itself, not too many Hawaiian people audition for the band. I guess they're not instrumentalists, they're more of . . .

JR: Singers.

RD: . . . singer and hula.

JR: What was the makeup of the band when you were . . .

RD: Well, when I went in the band, they were a mixture of Hawaiian, Japanese, Portuguese, and one-third was Filipino.

JR: Oh yeah?

RD: One-third was Filipino. And that one-third were people who retired from the service band.

JR: Your buddies.

RD: And they were good musicians, see. I hate to say it, but they were one that sort of holding up the band.

JR: Oh, oh.

RD: The Filipino men, they're good musician. But like I said, when I went in the band, they were elderly already. They were all old.

JR: Oh, these guys were older than you.

RD: Yeah, they were much older. See, I went in the band, I was thirty-five. Those guys were up in their fifties, sixties already, all retiring. So who comes in the band, more Japanese. But anyway, then they start to get *Haoles* come in. The first *Haole* was a flute player, Susan Gillespie.

JR: Who?

RD: First *wahine* to get in the Royal Hawaiian Band as an instrumentalist. There were vocalist girls, ladies, but not a musician. She was the first, and she was a *Haole* too.

JR: She was the first *Haole* in the band?

RD: First *Haole*.

JR: Oh wow.

RD: And now they get about five now, about six, in the Royal Hawaiian Band.

After I got in the band, I played. It was through the band that I did a lot of travelling. We tour from one end of Canada—Vancouver, Victoria, Winnipeg—and we ended up Toronto. And twice that we played at Toronto, '74 and '78. And on this trip, my wife came along with me. I saw Niagara Falls twice.

And my last trip with the Royal Hawaiian Band was in 1983. And also my wife came with me from London, Amsterdam, Austria, Switzerland, Germany, Liechtenstein. That was good. But that was a working vacation, working tour. We never was a place too long.

JR: Yeah, didn't have many days off.

RD: And usually by the hours that we stayed to enjoy whatever. But it's better than nothing.

JR: Yeah, yeah.

RD: Free for me, anyway.

JR: Must have been pretty excited then, when you found out you passed the audition.

RD: Audition was surprising though, because—well, I had ninety-two. My score was ninety-two.

JR: Out of a hundred?

RD: Yeah. And because I was a veteran both times—the last audition, because I was a veteran, they had added five. For being a veteran, they give you five extra points. So my score was now ninety-seven.

JR: Did they give you those five points because that showed that you knew how to be in an official band, or just 'cause they . . .

RD: No, I guess because I was in a veteran, being a veteran.

JR: Just a thank-you or something?

RD: Yeah, yeah, that's right.

JR: When you started playing with the Royal Hawaiian Band, did you stop playing in clubs or did you continue doing that?

RD: I did. I did, yeah.

JR: You continued?

RD: Continued. Because most of our jobs were in the daytime, and I could play in the night. And in 1959—late '59 or early sixties—I was working at the Dunes. First, there were two clubs there. There were the Casbah—you know the kind names they get, Casbah—and the Dunes.

JR: They were right next to each other?

RD: Yeah.

JR: Whereabouts?

RD: Right on Nimitz Highway.

JR: Okay.

RD: Casbah, I played with a smaller group. And then that group break up, then I went to the Dunes as a house band. And then we had different groups of name entertainers that came over to sing, and we used to back them up. And Wayne Newton was one of them, and he played twice. He was in his teens then. He was a young kid. Already, he knew what kind songs to sing to please both the younger crowd and the older ones. He just knew, just knew. Because right now he's making it so big.

JR: Oh yeah.

RD: Wayne Newton and who else? Pearl Bailey was another singer who was a big-timer.

JR: So you would sort of be the pick-up band for these people?

RD: Oh no, no. The band is there already. We play for the dancing. We play for the dancing, and then in the meantime, between dance, they have entertainment from the Mainland.

JR: Would you play with the entertainment from the Mainland?

RD: Yeah, we would. They would give us the music for them, so we would back them up. Back up Wayne Newton, Earl Grant, an organist, and Sophie Tucker, and some others. I cannot remember all their names. Yeah, they used to bring their music, and sometimes they would bring their key man. They would bring their piano or their first alto sax player or something like that, and they would throw me on the third or—otherwise, I would be playing lead. For several months over there. And then on the outside, on the army circuit, Kay Starr. I don't know if you heard Kay Starr.

JR: I've heard that name, yeah.

RD: Yeah, an old-timer. And then I played for her at the CPO [*chief petty officer*] club, warrant officer club, you know, as a band to back her up. Patti Page and Harry Belafonte at the [*Waikiki*] Shell. That's about all that I can remember. And then after that—I was still in the Royal Hawaiian Band. And then after thirty years and three months, I got out of the band.

JR: What year was that, '86?

RD: December '86 was my last concert. And I just happened to be—I was already sixty-five years old. I was thirty-five when I entered the band. I told myself, see, if I be in the band thirty years, I'll be sixty-five, just in time for my social security and all that. So I'm sort of like—not bad, I'm getting by.

JR: I wanted to ask you some more questions . . .

RD: On?

JR: Well, one thing was lessons. Did you ever give lessons to kids?

RD: I used to, but not too often. In fact, I've always had calls to give lessons, but I'm not. . . . You know, a musician can be a good musician, but to be a teacher is something else.

JR: Oh, I see.

RD: Like me, I never had formal training. I probably could teach if I want to—basic, I mean.

JR: Yeah. The other thing, did you ever think about leading your own group?

RD: Oh yeah. In fact, I bought music stand, I bought lights for the stand, and I had some special

arrangement made. But then, you might get an orchestra, but if you don't have an agent it's pretty hard. It ended where I just be a sideman.

JR: It's easier that way.

RD: Yeah, no problems. Being a leader, oh, you have to worry about if the guy can make the job. Or he might say, "Oh, I cannot make the job." So I have to look for another guy, then all that headache.

JR: (Laughs) Did you actually play gigs though, with the group?

RD: As a leader for myself?

JR: Yeah.

RD: None. I won't say with a group, with my *karaoke* machine, yeah.

JR: If you had the group though, with the stands and all, what would you have called it?

RD: In fact, I didn't have a name for myself.

JR: It wasn't the Roland Dacoscos . . .

RD: No, no, no.

JR: . . . Orchestra or something?

RD: But I had even made a calling card, yeah. With my *karaoke* machine, with my trio or big band, mine is the soloist. I used to go to all McDonald's. I went to several McDonald's, because my daughter works for McDonald's. They told me, "Go play for Ala Moana." Then Makiki, Waiakamilo. There were about six or seven McDonald's. When they had a grand opening here, McDonald's, they paid me two hundred bucks [\$200] for two nights.

JR: You and some other guys?

RD: Just me and my *karaoke* machine.

JR: So you play sax and you play along to the . . .

RD: With the tape music, just put a tape in. But the musicians' union frowned on that, because you're taking the drummer, the piano. They're not . . .

JR: You're stealing other people's jobs.

RD: But then, this was more for my pleasure, just to keep in touch, learn how to improvise, you know, to ad lib. And I'm in the back there, with my backup band in tape, and I play.

JR: One of the things you mentioned before was that you worked at the Metronome [*Music Store*] for a short . . .

RD: Oh yeah, right, as a piano tuner. But not too long.

JR: What were the music stores that guys would go to back then?

RD: There were the Metronome.

JR: Where was that?

RD: At first it was right across Hawai`i Theatre. You know the Hawai`i Theatre.

JR: Yeah, yeah.

RD: They were located there. And then, they had moved on Hotel Street. And then the owner died. The relatives moved—a very small Metronome Music Store, but folded up. And there were Metronome, there were Bergstrom [*Music Company*], there were Thayer [*Piano Company*]. And in the Metronome there—you say you know that Yasui?

JR: Oh, Byron Yasui?

RD: Yeah, his father [*Shigeo Yasui*] was one of the salesmen there. And several salesmen that were there, they branched out and make their own music store. And the biggest one right now is Harry's Music Store.

JR: In Kaimuki?

RD: Yeah, he [*Harry Yoshioka*] was a salesman there. In fact, I saw him last week, I talked to him, and I mentioned to him about that funeral.

JR: Yeah, tell me about that.

RD: That funeral job where, I would say, most times a rich Chinese elderly person would die, and they would hire live musician—Chinese band, oboe playing. And then they would hire these mourners, professional mourners. And they would hire an American band playing *Nearer My God to Thee* and several other churchy music. And we would march from the funeral parlor, which is located on Nu`uanu [*Avenue*] and Vineyard [*Boulevard*], and we'd march all the way up to Beretania [*Street*], and up toward Bishop Street. And we would get in our car, and we would rush to the Chinese cemetery and play a few songs there, and that was it. And we used to work twice a . . .

JR: And they'd pay you to do this?

RD: Yeah, they would pay us. They would pay us seven dollars for that. I was playing clarinet. Clarinet was light to carry, eh.

JR: Yeah, yeah, yeah. No tenor sax.

RD: After playing so long, you didn't need music already, just memorize it. Yeah, and Harry—that man, that owner—he was in charge of rounding up the guys to play for that.

JR: In the times that you were playing, what was the relationship like with the different managements and things like that? Was it pretty easygoing, or was there . . .

RD: You talking management of . . .

JR: Clubs.

RD: Being a sideman, I wouldn't know. It's the leader who would be talking to the. . . . All I know is, when you work in a nightclub, when the customers is not as crowded as to make money with, they figure the band is not drawing 'em, so they change band.

JR: It's the band's fault.

RD: The band's fault. (Chuckles) Yeah, I've been in the music business long enough to know, well, if I'm not working there, there's another place I can be working.

JR: One thing we didn't get to talk about when we're talking about Royal Hawaiian [*Band*] days was the boat day.

RD: When I first entered the band in 1956, more than half of the jobs were at the pier. They had the Matson liner, like the *Lurline*, *Matsonia*. They had *Mariposa*, *Monterey*. And they had the big ships, like the *Canberra* and the *United States* or the *Princess*. Big ships used to come, all these big ships. Sometimes there used to be two big ships, big cruisers, right at Aloha Tower, one on this side, [*one on*] the other side. Used to play there for the morning and as they leave. And in between, we used to play for hospitals—the Royal Hawaiian Band I'm talking about.

JR: Yeah.

RD: And then if we're not playing for hospital, we play for conventions. And actually, Royal Hawaiian Band is a public band. I mean, we're public servants. Where the people wants the band—schools, [*for example*]—it has to go through the mayor's office. Because mayor is our big boss, and the Royal Hawaiian Band bandmaster is under him.

JR: Under the mayor.

RD: Yeah, head [*of each*] department—of water, the garbage collector—all under [*Mayor Frank*] Fasi.

JR: So what would that . . .

RD: Oh, like the [*nightclub*] management now. If they say the band is not drawing, they would change the band, you know. I had something in my mind on talking about management, but I cannot remember now.

JR: Maybe it'll come back. What would a---that would be a typical day for you with the Royal Hawaiian Band?

RD: Mm hmm [*yes*].

JR: Do a boat day in the morning and play some hospitals or schools or . . .

RD: We used to average---let's see, we would rehearse in the morning, if a boat not coming in seven o'clock in the morning or six o'clock or eight o'clock. If the boat weren't coming in, we'd rehearse at nine. And then the band room was located on Waiakamilo [*Road*], right here. So it took me---nine o'clock rehearsal, quarter to nine I can leave my house. Take about two, three minutes to get there. But then they had moved to Waikiki Shell. And then, the Shell is where the headquarters is. That's a typical day. At most, we have a boat come in, we had a rehearsal or we play a hospital, and we play for the boat going out. Typical day. And then, the because we in the union too---well, not the union. We have a---you know the president [*of state senate*], Wong?

JR: Oh, Dickie . . .

RD: Richard [Wong], yeah, that one. He used to be an agent before.

JR: Oh really?

RD: For the union, UPW [*United Public Workers*], and he used to service us before. That was in the late fifties, yeah, before he got into politics. Now, look what he is now.

JR: Now he's a big shot.

RD: Yeah.

JR: I just wanted to ask one more question, then we can---you know, *pau*.

RD: Yeah.

JR: There aren't that many clubs today.

RD: Yeah, right. If there are clubs---like the music trend is always changing, right? They had flapper days, we had the Charleston. We had the big band, big orchestra---Artie Shaw, Benny Goodman, Jimmy Dorsey, Glenn Miller and all that, Harry James. And then after the big band, they had fade away after the war, 1950. And then they had the bebop era---Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, the bebop. You know, that zoot suit.

JR: Yeah, yeah, real fast.

RD: Okay, after that, then the rock and roll came, and then big band was kind of failing, no nightclubs. So they had all this rock and roll. Or the clubs, they feature only top twenties or top forties and that kind of music, which is---I'm too old for that now.

JR: Yeah, yeah.

RD: But I still---some of them are pretty good. Not all of them.

JR: When did you notice a change?

RD: In?

JR: In the number of---like you mentioned before that you were playing for the Royal Hawaiian [*Band*] during the day, then nights you, you know, go play clubs or whatever. Can you remember at what point that those evening gigs became less frequent?

RD: After the Dunes, then I played at the Cannon Club at. . . .

JR: Fort Ruger.

RD: Fort Ruger. It was a non-union. I got called on the carpet.

JR: Oh, you did?

RD: I had to face the union, because I played with non-union members. But now that group, that orchestra that I played with—his name was Emerett Ishikawa, and he finally became unionized. I played with him every weekend. Play taxi dance hall [*weeknights*], and I played with him weekend. And after I was reported playing with him, I was turned in to the union. What happened is that club had hired a union orchestra, Duke Heatherly, and they had hired a non-union band the very same night. I played with the non-union band, so the union band came and saw me.

JR: They turned you in.

RD: They look at me, “That’s union member there,” turn me in. So I had to face the board of directors, and I knew most of them. Even way before [the tenure of current union president] Milton Carter, I knew all those guys. Reuben Yap, he was in already. They gave me a---they fined me twenty-five dollars, but I didn’t pay the twenty-five dollars. What they call that word? There is a word for that. They fined me. I didn’t pay, but I had to be good boy for one year.

JR: Probation or something?

RD: Yeah, yeah, probation. Even though I was on probation, as soon as I make twenty-five years in the union, I became a gold card member, lifetime member. I get along with the union real well. And then I still play Cannon Club. Oh, and then I played with a group, they call it Elegants. A Chinese guy (Charlie Lum) that I played with.

JR: Elegants.

RD: Yeah, that’s the name of the orchestra. One sax, one trumpet, three rhythm, and a singer. Six of us. And we play lot of--we played for weddings, we played for conventions from Mainland, and retirement party. I played with him for almost twenty-five years. At Elks’ Club, any kind [*of*] place. And we played when they have a contest. Narcissus Queen, we played twelve years in a row for that contest. We played at Blaisdell Center, that concert hall, we played for them, backing up them. Some of them—singers—they use the orchestra. We would write special arrangement, we would back up the singer. But some of them did something else besides singing, so they had their own.

JR: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

RD: We played twelve years for that.

JR: And then, after a while, they started to use taped music.

RD: Taped?

JR: Tape music, so we were left out of a job, yeah.

JR: What's your involvement with music today?

RD: Now that I retired, I belong to the Lanakila [*Multi-Purpose*] Senior Center, and once a month, there is a jam session where we play music for them to dance, couple hours. Yeah, that's about all, besides care homes. There's about six of them that I go to twice a week, sometimes not.

JR: And you play there?

RD: The reason why I go to the care homes is because my mother-in-law was there. She passed away, and then my wife and I continue (to volunteer). And they appreciate it, they like it.

JR: It seems that music's been pretty good for you. I enjoyed talking to you.

RD: Think you got enough to write a story?

JR: Yeah. Thank you.

RD: Yeah, okay.

END OF INTERVIEW