

FEDRICO OLLINO BIVEN

THE WAMPULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Fedrico Ollino Biven

(1897 - 1973)

Mr. Biven, who was born in San Mateo, California, came to Hawaii at the age of nineteen in January 1917.

In August 1917, at the request of Alfred Lowrey Castle, he left a clerical job at the Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association Experiment Station and went to France where he drove an ambulance for the French Army.

After the Armistice, he returned to Honolulu and was employed by the Waterhouse Trust Company from 1920 until the Depression of 1929 when he and twenty others in the stock brokerage department were dismissed in 1931.

In 1931 Alan S. Davis hired Mr. Biven to work in the new business department of the Hawaiian Trust Company. Mr. Biven handled his duties so successfully that he eventually became a vice president of the firm, a position he held at the time of his retirement in 1971.

A proficient tennis player, Mr. Biven won thirty-eight championships in Hawaii and the state championship in California.

Mr. Biven's personal history, business experiences and associations, and the methods he used to obtain business for the Hawaiian Trust Company are related in this transcript.

Lynda Wair, Interviewer

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INTERVIEW WITH FEDRICO O. BIVEN

At his Waialae-Kahala home, 4645 Moho Street, Honolulu 96816

August 17, 1971

B: Fedrico O. Biven

M: Lynda Mair, Interviewer

M: What I want to ask you about, Fred, is if you can go back to when you first came.

B: I can go back to the hour I first came.

M: Okay, and just start telling me the things that you did, what happened, who you met, what you did for a living, where you worked.

B: Would that be of interest to anybody else? Well, let me put it this way, when do you start recording so I'll know? Don't want to waste any [tape].

M: That's okay.

B: No, no, but is the machine going now?

M: Yeh. Yeh.

B: Oh, I see. Well, let's say that it all happened on January 8, 1897 when I was born in a small town called San Mateo about twenty miles south of San Francisco, [California] and went along as a youngster until the fire and earthquake in San Francisco on April 18, 1906 when we were forced to leave the city and go to the country, where my mother rented a house which consisted of about twenty bedrooms--rooms all throughout the house. And the refugees from the fire and earthquake in San Francisco, they all came down and moved into our home --a very rich group of San Francisco Jewish people--and among them was the Mr. M.J.B. Brandenstein of the coffee company and all of his friends from San Francisco that were in need of a place to sleep and eat.

Let's start at my boyhood days. I had a brother and a sister, Carolina, and a sister, Maye. We all grew up in this little town until I was nineteen years old, when I

set sail for Honolulu on January 4, 1917 on the S.S. Great Northern. I arrived in Honolulu on the 11th of January, three days after my nineteenth birthday. Upon arriving here, I was met by Mr. George Ii Brown, one of Honolulu's outstanding philanthropists and a great friend of my sister Carolina. I was taken into tow by his mother [Irene Ii (Mrs. Charles A.) Brown]; and her other son, Francis Ii Brown, lived with his mother and I moved in.

I applied for jobs in various places and finally found an ad in the paper [stating] that the HSPA [Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association] Experiment Station was looking for an entomologist. I immediately answered the ad by calling at the station and talked to Mr. Hamilton Pope Agee, director of the experiment station, and he hired me as an entomologist. Having been an excellent student in botany, I thought I could fill the bill. However, within a few weeks they found that I knew nothing about entomology but they kept me on in the office where I worked as a clerk. My pay was thirty dollars a month in gold. Our paymaster, Mr. Kinney, saw to it that I always had five-dollar gold pieces because I never could get rid of a twenty-dollar gold piece.

About August 1917 I was approached by Mr. Alfred [Lowrey] Castle to go to France to drive an ambulance for the French Army and I thought it a good idea and left for France on August 27, 1917. A week later I was joined in San Francisco by Francis H. I. Brown, William Wells and William Noble, all prominent Honolulu people. We set out for New York on the 3rd of September and were delegated to go to Allentown, Pennsylvania where we went to a school and studied mechanisms of automobiles and care for the wounded.

After a complete course, we sailed from New York on the S.S. Carmania on January 8, 1918. We arrived in Halifax just in time to see the destruction that was caused by a dynamite explosion in the harbor. Leaving Halifax, we arrived in Southampton, England fourteen days later. From there we were stationed in a small town outside of Liverpool called Winchester, the home of the Knights of the Round Table. After staying there for a few days, an epidemic of measles broke out and fortunately the Honolulu contingent was stationed in the right spot on the school campus.

We arrived in France about the 20th of January and were instructed to go to a town called Saint Auxerre where we assembled our ambulances and two weeks later set out for the front. Our first experience of gunfire was in a small town called Beauvais. From then on we spent the rest of the year with the 33rd Division of the French Army.

On the night of November 11, 1918 the German council

came across the lines, surrendering to the Allies. I personally got to know General Raun Vinterfield and learned of many interesting intrigues that had gone on during the war. From the meeting of the German council, we went back to Paris and later sailed from Brest for New York on a ship called the S.S. Mallory.

This isn't too long, is it?

M: Great! You're just doing great.

B: We arrived in New York on June 6, 1919 and from there [we went] to Camp Dix in New Jersey where we stayed until July 1919. That ended my experiences from childhood practically up into manhood.

I came back to Honolulu and fortunately had met some influential people, including Mr. Walter [Francis] Dillingham. He being a tennis enthusiast and I being a fairly good tennis player, I became acquainted with the Dillingham family and he set me up to work with the Waterhouse Trust Company. I started with them in January 1920. My experiences with the Waterhouse Trust Company were certainly thrilling. I happened to be appointed to handle such business as the Gay and Robinson plantations and through my connections with them I learned a great deal about the sugar business. However, I decided that I would move into the stock brokerage department and later on, in 1929, October, the stock market crashed and I was let out of the trust company along with twenty others.

Having no job at this time, I met a gentleman on the street by the name of Alan [S.] Davis, who had played tennis with me at various times, and he asked me to come to see him Monday with regard to work. I was hired and remained with the Hawaiian Trust Company from 1931 to 1971. I must say that my experiences with Hawaiian Trust Company were very interesting and exciting.

My job with Hawaiian Trust was new business and having a number of friends through my athletic ability in golf, tennis and basketball, it was not difficult for me to find myself productive for the Hawaiian Trust. Never having had a college education I did what I was told and how I was to go about to get new business, which resulted in a very successful career, not due particularly to my ability but the entree I had being associated with Hawaii's largest and most experienced trust company.

My life in the Hawaiian Trust Company brought many celebrities into the company, such as the Vanderbilts from New York, the Emersons, the brilliant Paleys, the Duke Johnstons and many others. It was not long before I was traveling throughout the world for Mr. Vanderbilt and I assure you my experiences with him were most exciting, having been sent off to the Orient at times, New York at

times, and it was most profitable for my company.

This tape going on, is it?

M: Um hm. Wait, Freddie, let's go back. Okay? I want to ask you some questions.

B: Oh yes, fine.

M: About stuff you've left out.

B: Yeh.

M: Okay? Let's go way back to the beginning. Can you give me your parents' names?

B: My parents? Yes. My mother's name was Georgia Tabor Biven. Her maiden name was Tabor. My father was John Francis Biven. My father's parents were direct descendants of De Anza in California, the early explorer.

M: Could you spell that?

B: De Anza? D-E capital A-N-Z-A. He was an explorer, a very prominent one, and many towns and cities are named after him in California. That was my early origin and my grandmother's side was the Van Renslers from New York. They were Dutch. But that's what their names were. You want the names of my family, my brothers and sisters, do you?

M: Yeh, you gave me your sister Carolina.

B: Carolina, and the other one was Maye. I gave you that. M-A-Y-E, that is. And my brother, John Racey [Biven]. R-A-C-E-Y. That was my brother.

M: What did your father do for a living?

B: My father was the president of Hills Brothers Coffee Company in San Francisco.

M: Oh.

B: He traveled between Rio de Janeiro and San Francisco. That's where he met my mother. He was originally a buyer for the Hills Brothers people and there were two Hills Brothers, one Hills Brothers in New York and Hills Brothers in California. My father was associated with the California Hills Brothers. He lived in Brazil most of the time. In Rio de Janeiro he was with the rubber company there. In Brazil, you know, was a great rubber producer at that time. And whatever you want to know I can tell you.

M: Were your parents divorced? Is that why he . . .

B: Hm?

M: Were your parents divorced?

B: No. No, no. Hell no.

M: He lived in Brazil, you said.

B: Oh yeh, most of the time because that's where his business was--the coffee business and the rubber business.

M: Oh, I see.

B: No, he lived in Brazil a good deal of the time and that's where he met my mother, on a boat between Rio de Janeiro and San Francisco.

M: I see. Okay. Where did you go to school?

B: Me? I went to San Mateo Union High School. I went to Stanford [University] on Monday and left for Honolulu on Wednesday. (Lynda chuckles)

M: Why did you decide [on] Honolulu?

B: Because Francis Brown was a very prominent figure and he promised me all kinds and he was courting my sister Maye. He was courting her and that's where we got the connection.

M: I see. How did he meet her?

B: He met her through Richard Smart--Richard Smart's grandmother, Tootsie Knight. That might be interesting because she's very well known. You know Richard Smart of the Parker Ranch? His grandmother was married to my mother's cousin. Fred Knight, his name was. That would be interesting because people would never know that. Fred Knight was a lawyer in San Francisco and my Aunt Tootsie Knight, she was a Dowsett--Dowsett family here. That's Richard Smart's grandmother and she had a daughter, Thelma, who was Richard Smart's mother. My sister Maye and Thelma were very close friends and that's how I happened to get the feeling about coming to Hawaii.

[Elizabeth J. ('Tootsie) Dowsett married John P. Parker, III and they had a daughter, Thelma Kahiluonapuaopi'ilani Parker (1894-1914) who married H.G. Smart. They had a son, Richard Smart, born in 1913. John P. Parker, III died at nineteen when Thelma K. Parker was three months old. Her mother then married Fred Knight. ed[KBA]

- M: I see. What was the name of the little town you went to in California after the earthquake?
- B: San Mateo.
- M: Is that where you lived after the earthquake?
- B: Yeh. We were living in that town when the earthquake [hit]. I was born in that town--San Mateo.
- M: Yeh.
- B: Yeh, but we moved in San Mateo. We moved from a small house to this big house where we took care of all these refugees from the fire and earthquake in San Francisco. A very rich colony of Jews came down. All of San Francisco's prominent people came down--the Lilienthals, the Miners, the Brandensteins, Fleischnakers. All of those people came and stayed with us.
- M: I see. Okay, that answers that part. What was the HSPA office? Where was it?
- B: It was the [Hawaiian] Sugar Planters' [Association] Experiment Station. Well, the plantations sent their samples of sugar to be analyzed. And finally I ended up by working in the office. I didn't get away with the entomology. (Lynda laughs)
- M: Where was the office?
- B: On Keeaumoku Street. It's still there.
- M: Same place?
- B: Yeh.
- M: Okay. Why did Alfred Castle ask you to go to France?
- B: Because he was asked by the United States Lawn Tennis Association who were giving ambulances to France but without drivers, so he came to me and asked me if I would go; and he was the head of the Red Cross here at the time and so we all went on that premise. And I wasn't very happy with my work anyway, but I wanted adventure. I was only nineteen years old.
- M: You were working for the HSPA at that point.
- B: I was, yes. I was working there. That's right.

M: And you left there and went to France.

B: That's right, yeh.

M: And then you came back and went . . .

B: You know, it's a strange thing and I could mention a part of my life, but it was a disastrous one for a very famous man here who embezzled \$750,000 from a company and he's the man that gave me the money to go. I didn't have any money and Mr. Castle didn't offer me any money, but I was going around with this man's daughter.

M: Let's see. Who was the president of Waterhouse Trust Company in 1920?

B: Robert W. Shingle. That's a good question.

M: Shingle?

B: Shingle. S-H-I-N-G-L-E. Robert W. Shingle was the president and it failed on account of the stock crash.

M: That's when they went out of business.

B: In 1931. That's when I went to work for Mr. Alan Davis, my savior.

M: Yeh.

B: I've been with him ever since. He's a lovely, finest man that ever lived. I haven't talked to him since he's been back but your husband knows him.

M: Yeh. Is the Alan Davis that you know the son of Alan Davis Senior? Was there two?

B: No.

M: No?

B: There's only one Alan Davis.

M: He's an old man now, then.

B: He is now the president of the trustees of the Campbell Estate and he was founder practically--he was the executive vice president of Hawaiian Trust Company for thirty years and he stopped there in 1936 to go to work for Castle & Cooke and I went to work for him in 1931.

- M: Did he used to live down on King Street and Piikoi?
- B: That's right. He lived on King Street in a cow pasture there, yeh.
- M: Yeh.
- B: How did you know that?
- M: I just got through writing a book about John Walker.
- B: Oh yeh, well, that's where he lived, next door to John Walker. Yeh, that's right.
- M: And the Parkers and the McCarthys and all of them.
- B: Yes, sure, that's right. And the Davises. Yeh.
- M: But that's the same Alan Davis, then.
- B: Same Alan Davis, yes. He's seventy-eight now. He's seventy-eight years old. That's the same one.
- M: Okay.
- B: Oh, he's a wonderful man.
- M: Who was president of Hawaiian Trust?
- B: J.R. Galt. And incidentally, I've worked for nine presidents. (Lynda laughs) Isn't that amazing?
- M: Yeh.
- B: That's including [Peter] Pete Russell now. No, let's see, eight presidents. Pete Russell's the eighth one I worked for.
- M: Wow.
- B: I'm still working for him but I . . . (recorder turned off and on again) I know the history of everybody here that you might ask me about.
- M: Yeh, I want to get to that. I want to finish with you first, okay?
- B: Yeh, okay.
- M: When you joined Hawaiian Trust you went to work in the new business department.

B: That's right.

M: Were you head of the new business department?

B: I was the head of it. No, I worked for Carter Galt. He was the head of the new business department and I worked for him.

M: And J.R. Galt was president.

B: President, right.

M: Carter Galt's his son?

B: And his son was the secretary. Carter was the secretary.

M: I see, and he was head of new business.

B: He was, yes, and I was his assistant. Then I became the manager of the new business department and handled all the advertising for the trust company. I wrote ads. Your husband has seen some of my ads that were really very wonderful ads, but they don't advertise the human side of life anymore.

END OF SIDE 1/1ST TAPE

. . . who started the Emerson Drug Company, which was Bromo Seltzer. You remember? Ever heard of Bromo Seltzer? Well, that's where they made their millions--on Bromo Seltzer. They came from, I think it was, Maryland someplace that they originally came from. [The Emersons were his clients at Hawaiian Trust Company.] But there's no end of things I could tell you. What is this book [based on this interview] going to be? Are they [The Watumull Foundation] going to sell it?

M: Well, not really, you know. The foundation isn't doing it for a profit.

B: No, I see. You may be able to buy one, won't you?

M: Yeh, and they'll put it in libraries.

B: Oh fine. Uh huh, that's what I mean.

M: And it'll be for scholars to use as a resource book to check about people, you know.

B: Well, I'm glad I had a chance to give you this information because very often Alan Davis and people like that have

asked me to see if I couldn't sit down and write something. My memoirs would be much different from this because I would go into detail of what I did for these people and how I got business. I got business in the most peculiar ways and no man in this world could have gotten the business that I got through the things that I did from the human angle and it was very profitable to Hawaiian Trust Company because I found these gold mines with all these different people that came through.

I didn't put in there that Mr. Davis put me in as the manager of the Niunalu Hotel in 1931, which is now the Hawaiian Village, and I was fourteen years the manager of the hotel, along with my duties in the trust company as a trust officer. And that's when I really 'garned onto' great experiences. Everybody was sleeping with everybody else.

M: How did you meet Vanderbilt?

B: I met [George] Vanderbilt. . . . His secretary called me at the Hawaiian Trust Company and asked me if Mr. Vanderbilt could use the tennis courts that I controlled. I'm a trustee of the Beretania Tennis Club which is land given to us by Mr. Alfred Castle. And I went out to see him play and he was so awful that I asked him if I could play with him sometime and give him a few pointers because he didn't know a damn thing about tennis, so I got to know him awfully well. His first wife was a darling person. Her name was Lulu Parsons, very prominent New York family, and they had a daughter, Lulu. She's a very prominent society woman in New York now.

Vanderbilt--we won the championship together later on in years and he became very much attached to me. He had this beautiful home in South Carolina called Arcadia and then I used to go down every year and shoot ducks with him on his property. It's three hundred and some-odd acres and they had about a hundred and fifty darkies on the plantation. I got to know him very, very well.

I got to know Vincent Astor very well. He was a tennis [player]. All this came through my tennis, you see, as years go on because I won thirty-eight championships here. And the funny thing is, I mention it because I just got a list of them in my cup Mrs. Castle brought me the other day. Harold [K.L.] Castle's widow [Alice H.S. Hedemann Castle]. He and I won a championship here in tennis and she brought me the cup that we won with his name on it and I happened to have inside the article of the championship match that we had and won.

Well, this is very interesting. I could keep you here for months on my experiences here but some of them are a little too 'frisque' [a coined word combining frisky

and risque, even 'er' and a little bit out of sort on account of the things that I did to get business.

M: Well, tell me a few of the clean ones. (chuckles)

B: Well, it might be interesting for you to know that in getting business for the Hawaiian Trust Company I became a Buddha [Buddhist], I became a Baha'i, I became a Christian Scientist, I became a Presbyterian and I became an Episcopalian. I joined all of those sects in order to get the business from the rich people. One of my clients just died the other day, Agnes [Baldwin] Alexander, and left six million dollars in Hawaiian Trust Company and I got her business through being a Baha'i. And I learned all these religions from their teachings and I attended. Mrs. [George] Sherman--I became a Christian Scientist with her and she lived up in Nahunu and left a terrific fortune. Her husband was the president of American Factors at one time. And those are the kind of things that I did to get business. [Laura Fish Dickson had married Dr. Frederick J. Nott who died. She then married George Sherman. Her father gave her and her two sisters each a home on Judd Street.]

I didn't have an office like a lawyer and in those days, Lynda, it was not necessary to have a relationship between the testator, or the one who makes a will, and the trust company. The trust company paid for the drawing of the will and they made the will from instructions that I gave from the client. Nowadays you can't do that. The Supreme Court ruled that the client must talk to his own lawyer and then go to the trust company, which makes it very much more difficult. I got eighty-six wills up there in Hilo in less than a month. Eighty-six. All the sugar plantation managers made their wills with me.

And then I had a famous sister who came here with Richard Smart's mother, Thelma Parker [Smart], and she came here as a mate of hers, she called her. And she was a dental hygienist and every place I went on the other islands they'd say, "Are you Totsie's brother?" Her nickname was Totsie. And I said, "Yes."

M: Which sister? This is Maye.

B: Maye, the one that just recently died. Yeh. Oh, she's an adorable person. She died of cancer. Well, you know, I have every symptom of trouble and I can't say anything because my situation is really very serious. I can't say anything to that situation at all because it's of no avail, it's no good, it's no. . . . (recorder turned off and on again)

M: I want you to tell me some more stories about people here that you knew--local people.

B: Oh, local people. Well, you might make note of this. One of my closest relationships here was with Mr. Ernest Wodehouse who was the father of Cen [Cenric] Wodehouse. He was one of my acquaintances and I played tennis with him for twenty years and he was very helpful to me in my success of life here.

The next one was Frank [Cooke] Atherton, Pug [Alexander Simpson] Atherton's father, who was my golf partner and I learned to know him--played golf with him when I was playing tennis with Mr. Wodehouse the same time. I'd play Monday, Wednesday and Saturday with Mr. Wodehouse; and on Sundays and Wednesdays I'd play golf with Mr. Frank Atherton. And Mr. Frank Atherton was very kind to me and helped me a lot and gave me a lot of business. Frank Atherton.

Then I became very much acquainted with Lester McCoy and Lester McCoy gave, as you know, a million dollars to the [Ala Moana] Park down here to be building a pavilion in his honor. Then I became very close with Lester McCoy and Richard [Alexander] Cooke, who's the father of Dick [Richard Alexander, Jr.] Cooke, who was the president of C. Brewer & Company. He was my tennis partner.

And then John [Thomas] Waterhouse, who's president of A & B [Alexander & Baldwin], was also my tennis partner. And Mr. [Francis Kelvin] Bottomley, who's dead and gone, was president of the Bank of Bishop and Company [now First Hawaiian, 1981]. I knew all of these people, got to know them through my tennis ability. I could teach them all because that was my [skill] and they liked to win and so they'd always get me as a partner.

And then I became very associated--close relations--with Mrs. Walter [Francis] Dillingham. She was my tennis partner and we won several championships. And she was my tennis partner at La Pietra.

So I've had a terrific background of experiences with people here that I got to know intimately. By intimately I mean I stayed in their homes. I lived at Mrs. Dillingham's house for a number of months. I stayed with Mr. Wodehouse, and Waterhouse was a great friend of mine. Waterhouse, you see, was the president of Alexander & Baldwin and his boy was Henry Waterhouse who started the Waterhouse Trust Company, and they were really plantation agencies for Gay and Robinson.

And I got to know the Robinsons, a very difficult family that lives on Kauai. They came from Australia and they own the Island of Niihau. I got to know them well. I used to go down and stay with them.

I knew people on every island. And then the Baldwins on Maui were very close to me. I played golf with Mr.

Baldwin's wife and I got to know them very well. It's through my athletic prowess, you know, that I knew these people because the years that I was here nobody knew anything about these things. That's why it was easy for me to win all these things. I mean I didn't have much competition. The only competition I had in my early days would be the Army and the Navy. They'd come through here, you know, from West Point [Military Academy] or someplace and Annapolis [Naval Academy] and they were good tennis players. Every once in awhile some guy would just beat the hell out of me but I'd never tell anybody about it. (Lynda laughs) That's the way it went.

But I think if you bring into your book [transcript] the fact that my mother's cousin was the husband of Richard Smart's grandmother--that was Fred Knight--that's very interesting in this whole setup. You must remember that because that was important because Richard Smart we all know. And I have people now ought to know who the hell I knew like that because, you know, they probably thought I was a phony and didn't know Richard Smart from a jack rabbit.

M: How did you learn how to play tennis? Where?

B: Hm?

M: Where did you learn how to play tennis? Not here.

B: Oh no. State of California. I won the championship, State of California.

M: Oh really?

B: I learned in San Mateo when I was a kid and I never took a lesson. Then I got to play golf almost as well as I did tennis. I got down to a four handicap in golf. You see what I did, I played a game honestly but I had a motive. Everybody has a motive. My motive to cultivate all these people was to get their business into the Hawaiian Trust Company. That's why I did these things.

I had some of the weirdest experiences in getting business. I had a man in Hilo--Pepeekeo Sugar Company. I went to see the manager and he wanted to know what I wanted him for and I told him what I was there for, that I'd like very much to interest him in making a will with Hawaiian Trust Company. Then he said to me, "Do you know Totsie Riven?" and I said, "Yes, that's my sister." "Well," he said, "She's the most adorable girl and she comes through here doing dental hygiene work and my wife just loves her and I do." So I spent about a week in his home and while I was there he said to me, "Fred, we have

an old man by the name of Anderson that lives up in the back of the plantation. He's retired and he raises nothing but cats. He has twenty-eight cats and he has all kinds of money."

So I went up to see him. He was sitting on the floor of this terrible old shack and he was all un-shaven, just like I am now, but he was just filthy dirty and awful. They let him live there because he'd been on the plantation. The plantation was originally owned by Chinese by the name of Afong and that's whom he worked for. And so I told him I would like to talk to him. He was a well-educated, well-bred man from England that came over as a recluse--just nothing, you know; drifted away from the world. And I saw all these cats. There must have been twenty-five cats all over the place--measly-looking, mangy-looking things--and I said, "I see you're interested in cats." "Well," he said, "it doesn't take much to figure that out." (laughter) I was being very dumb about it. But then he said to me, "What is your business?" and I said that I am a trust company salesman, selling Hawaiian Trust Company, and I want to talk to you about making a will. He said, "I'm not interested." Fine.

So it was almost two weeks before Christmas. I went back to Honolulu and I was determined I was going to get that man's business. My father used to tell me, "Perseverance, and you've got to keep it up." So I went back to Honolulu and I bought him a little Santa Claus like this and I bought him a bunch of little stuffed cats and I put a little tree in the box and I sent it to him.

He got this present and about a month later I went up there and he was in the bedroom. I went into the bedroom and he was urinating in the washbasin and I said, "I'm awfully sorry." "Oh," he said, "come on in, come on in." He said, "I got your little present. I'm an old man but I have feelings and nothing could have made me happier. That's my first Christmas that I've ever had in thirty-five years."

So about a week later I said, "What do you feed the cats?" He said, "I feed them anything, anything I can get." "Well," I said, "my brother manufactures Puss 'n Boots cat food, one of the world's greatest labels." So I sent him a case of cat food--a case of cat food!--and then about a month later I got a note from him and he said he wanted to see me. So I went up, made his will. He died about two years later and we were looking all over for his money and couldn't find it. Finally I went to his trunk and found thirty thousand dollars in gold.

M: Oh my gosh!

B: Isn't that something?

M: He had it right up there in the shack?

B: Had it all in gold---in twenty-dollar gold pieces. Thirty thousand dollars. It was stacked all over the place in this thing. Well, I won't say it was all gold. In there he had about twenty thousand dollars in certificates of deposit in a bank in California called the Bank of California. Isn't that something? He'd been sending his money up there all this time. Carter Galt was the trust officer and I brought back all this gold and stuff. But those are the kind of things that you. . . .

And then my becoming associated with religions of these wealthy people, like Mrs. Sherman and Mrs. [Miss] Alexander and all of these people that, you know, just didn't have anybody paying attention to them.

M: How did that work, joining the different religions?

B: It worked fine. I made their wills and they all died.

M: You mean you just went out and cold-bloodedly joined their church. Is that what you did?

B: No, I had a very wonderful approach. Mrs. Alexander said to herself, I guess, "Well now, we've got another parishioner coming along and he's enthusiastic," so I became enthusiastic and I asked her for her pamphlets on her religion and things. And then I dropped that off after she went to Japan and I went to see Mrs. Sherman about Christian Science. I knew she had money and she'd talk to me about. . . . Then I'd say to her, "Well, I understand you're a Scientist and I don't know a thing about Christian Science. I'd love to learn." That's the way you get them, just by being curious, you know.

That's the way most of these people, like Anthroposophists. . . . I tried to become an Anthroposophist, which is a German religion--Anthroposophy. My ex-wife became an Anthroposophist and then I couldn't. It was too farfetched. I couldn't understand it; I couldn't get the gist of it. It's headquarters were in Dornach, Germany or Switzerland, I think, and it's a German religion of Anthroposophy and they have an Anthroposophical (Lynda laughs as he labors to pronounce the word) faith up in Ma-noa. [Ex-wife: Ethel G. Harvey (Mrs. F.O.) Biven]

M: I know.

B: Yeh. Charlie [Charles] Davis became one and my ex-wife became one and that was one of the reasons of our divorce, because of that reason, because I couldn't fathom it.

I found ways to [get business] and that's what makes

me angry, Lynda, because today if I had youth, you know, I'd just love to be going out to work and to get business. I know business is all over this town. Don [Donald Mair] will tell you. I've given him new accounts too, you know, that I've set him on. For instance, a lady by the name of Mrs. Hall called a friend of mine who I helped once-- loaned her some money--and she called me. She sold Mutual of Omaha [insurance] and she said, "Freddie, if you go up and see a Mrs. Hall she might make a trust with you." So I took Don with me, knowing that I was leaving the trust company, and Don made a trust for her. So I still go along with Don in many, many ways but he's young, you see, and he's learning but sometimes is not ambitious as I would be. You know what I mean?

Alan Davis took me from the gutter, right from the gutter. I was getting a thousand dollars a month when the trust company folded that I was with and I started to work for him for three hundred [dollars] and I had a wife and a child. And then he put me in to manage the Niumalu Hotel which I sold for \$350,000 after being there fourteen years. I did everything to keep that hotel running. I used to empty the cesspools with my own buckets and things like that to keep it going for the trust company. But it kills me to think that I still want to do it, you know, and I can't. I can't lift anything.

My daughter, Suzanne [Frances Biven]--you know her-- she lives here and I call her once in awhile to give me some help--my morale, you know. I get awfully low, Lynda, because I don't get any help here at all. I mean there's just nothing.

Well, tell me, what else can I tell you? (recorder turned off and on again)

M: . . . wise in turning it off.

B: Oh well, no, that's all right because you'll probably find some bright spots in it, you know.

M: Yeh. Well, you know, some of it I won't use.

B: Oh yeh, sure.

M: I'd want to know when you got married the first time.

B: Me? When I was married the first time? I was married on May 1, 1922 and I was married the second time July 24, 1944. My first marriage I had Suzanne who's been married three times [first to James Angus McKellar; then to Richard R. Campbell]. Suzanne [Mrs. Alister W.] Macdonald, her name is now. Did you get that?

M: Yeh.

B: And then my second wife, Frances Leslie.

M: Leslie was Frances' maiden name?

B: Leslie is her family name and that's why we named our boy Leslie. And then my mother's name was Tabor so we named Leslie, Tabor. Leslie Tabor Biven. My father was Biven. Those are the two dates that I was married and I can't tell you anymore about my family and ourselves except that I started in the Hawaiian Trust Company and ended up as a vice president of the company, which you know.

M: Tell me some more stories like the old man and the cats.

B: Oh, well some of them are not very clean so I won't tell you. I've had so many experiences that I can tell you one of the accounts that I received--he died recently--was up in the three million [dollar] mark on the Island of Hawaii. I was told to go see Mr. George C. Watt who was president of Kohala Sugar Company. And I went to see him.

M: When was this?

B: That was in 1931 and I went to see him. His reputation was [that of] a very gruff Scotchman with no feeling for anybody in the world but himself.

M: Yeh, that's what I heard.

B: And he didn't make friends with anybody because he didn't want to, but I learned that like everyone else that he did have a heart and he did have something in him that I could find. So I went into his office to see him in 1931 or '32 and he's a tremendous man. I walked in; he said to me, "What do you want?" I said, "I want you" and he just--knocked him over. "Sit down!" he said. So I sat down with him and he was smoking a cigar called MacArthur, a five-cent cigar that a Scotchman would be smoking.

M: Wait a minute, Fred.

END OF SIDE 2/1ST TAPE

BEGINNING OF SIDE 1/2ND TAPE

Yeh, okay.

B: I sat down and he said to me, "What do you want again?" and I said, "Well, Mr. Watt, I've come to ask you if you

would do business with the Hawaiian Trust Company." And he said, "You better wake up. I do business with the Hawaiian Trust Company." I said, "Well, this is different. I'd like very much to discuss an estate plan with you with regard to your will," and he said, "I'm not interested." And I said, "Okay, Mr. Watt." He said to me, "It's getting late at night. It's getting late and I don't want you to be going home in the dark." This is this man that's been so tough. He said, "I want you to come and have dinner and spend the night." I said, "Well, Mr. Watt, this is wonderful. Do you have any children?" and he said, "Yes, I have a grown daughter, Elizabeth." [Elizabeth Louise Watt (Mrs. William) Wylie] And I said, "Well, isn't that nice." "And she'll be coming home from school pretty soon." And she came home from school and she came to me and she said, "Your name is Biven?" I said, "Yes." "Well," she said, "you have a sister, Totsie Biven, that teaches dental hygiene? She's one of my best friends."

So then, instead of spending one day, I made my headquarters there and he took me around and introduced me to plantation managers such as a Scotchman by the name of Webster, and Mr. Webster took me to meet Mr. Middleton, and Mr. Middleton took me to meet his cousin up the street. And so, that was my entree with Mr. Watt and on my next trip I brought him a box of cigars and then I came back with a yellow pad and asked him if he'd tell me what did he put in his will. In those days we didn't charge to make a will. He'd have probably never made it, being Scotch, but he made his will--and finally he died--and made many, many wills after that with me and the trust company. He was very fond of Alan Davis, like everybody else was, and so it was easy for me to get along.

That was an account I got from a man that they said no one could get any business out of, but that's because of perseverance and not fearing--no fear of anybody. Because most salesmen, you know, are very--they hold back a little, you know; they can't be too forward. But that was my experience and that turned out to be a very wonderful account. I kept going on and doing these things for the simple reason that it was my bread and butter and I just had to keep going. But, oh, I had so many different experiences.

You see, my point in getting business is to find out what the prospect is interested in, whether he's interested in tennis, polo, botany--he's interested in flowers or interested in anything else. So an example, one of the biggest accounts in the Hawaiian Trust Company came through over my getting a man from Bestill Nuts. You know what they are?

M: I know what a bestill tree is.

B: Well, a bestill tree has nuts. They look like chestnuts. Well, when I went to work for the Hawaiian Trust Company Alan Davis said to me, "There's a man out in Kalihi." I think he lived out there, a German by the name of. . . . He had a daughter. It wasn't Hoffschlaeger. He worked for Hoffschlaeger Company. He was a German. I'm trying to think of his name. Well, I've got to think of his name; I will. Well anyway, this man, a great big German ran Hoffschlaeger Company which was a commission merchant house here. It sold all kinds of hardware, linen. In those days, you know, the ships would bring in all of these different varieties. And so, I heard from Mr. Davis that he was interested in bestill nuts and that he sent them back to Germany where they extracted a fluid that was good for cancer. The German people had a formula. So I went up to a cemetery in Kalihi near a whole forest of bestill nuts and I picked up two big sackfuls and took them to his home and he couldn't understand what it was all about. [His name was Robert Frederic Lange.]

So finally, one day I went down to. . . . He even had a coffee grinder that you grind by hand, you know, in his office on Bethel Street. I went in and I talked to him and I said, "I'm very inquisitive about these bestill nuts--what you want them for and what are they good for. They're poison to eat." And I tried to warn him, "Don't let anyone eat one." Being at the experiment station, I remembered that they were poisonous, so I got some good out of the experiment station.

But then I waited for quite awhile to go see him about his will and his daughter's will. We had a German working for us by the name of Frank Mahn--M-A-H-N--who was a very fine gentleman. Unfortunately he got little out of life but he told me about this German that he knew, so Frank Mahn helped me make a will for him in German. His name was Lange. L-A-N-G-E. His daughter gave us her business and Peter Russell in our office took over the account and handled it beautifully and that's the end of that one. That's how I got that through bestill nuts. [Nora Emily Lange, president; and Anna Geraldine Lange, vice president of Hoffschlaeger Company Limited]

Through cats, bestill nuts, religion. And Mr. Davis knew everybody in Hawaii on every island and every port of call where he could give me a lead, you see. And Mr. Davis would say to me, "Freddie, I'd like to have you see if you can't get this man's business," whoever it would be, and I'd go right after it. I wouldn't do anything else until I landed that account and if it was hopeless, why then, I would come back and discuss the matter with him and tell him why I thought it was, why I had to give up because of certain family relations, you know. But the accounts that I brought in ran into the millions and that

was a lot of money in 1931. That was a lot of money and anything was a lot of money. Everybody needed money and I was fortunate enough to have a big following in the Waterhouse Trust Company outfit. And I didn't mean to do it but it was my bread and butter and I just brought, oh, so many accounts from my competitor who took over that the money just poured in.

There was a young man that came here from Stanford by the name of Heaton [Luse] Wrenn, who was a classmate of mine in school, and he used to go with me over to my competitor and bring back all this wealth and it ran way up into the millions. So that was my first new business for the trust company, you see. Then after I got all of that rolling along, then Mr. Davis said, "I want you to travel now," so I started and I went to all the different islands and I went to all the managers. Then I used to gather together the assistant managers and the office staff and the chemistry staff and lecture to them about why they should have a will. By that time I knew why they should have a will and I knew the cost of estate--what it would cost them--but in those days, which made it very easy for me, they had no expense in making a will and that's why they'd listen. And then I had to go back and have them sign, to execute it you know, which took about a month of my time. I traveled a lot and I really loved it.

I was living at the Niualu [Hotel], you see, all this time and my sister was the manager under me, so I could travel and she would handle everything, and it worked out. And then, when I was in the Niualu I found several wealthy people that came here to live and I talked to them about making business with Hawaiian Trust. So I have had some very wonderful experiences with human nature--people--and I was never destroyed by any of their crudeness and rudeness. Some of them were rude to me and some of them would swear at me to get out of their office and they're not going to die--whoever heard of dying and didn't need a will; a will wasn't necessary and, oh, I forget everything anyway--which was all crazy, you know. And now everybody's educated to the point that they need a will. So I went on and on, Lynda.

Is your name Lynda or . . .

M: You keep calling me Brenda.

B: Brenda or Lynda?

M: Lynda.

B: Lynda. Yeh, because I have a Brenda friend, awfully nice. She's a nurse and her name is Brenda. And then [John Scott Boyd III] Scotty Pratt -you know, that's who I thought

was going to interview me; Scott's wife, Brenda [Cooke Pratt]. I didn't know it was you. I talked to your husband one day and he said, "I hear you have a date with my wife."

You know, this is all very interesting because I talk about these things to myself--the experiences and they were so wonderful--but I don't know. I had another [client]. He's dead now but his name was Spalding and he lived on the Island of Kauai and he came up here [to Honolulu]. Oh, this was forty years ago and he came up here to a Wild West show they had at Aala Park and I went with Harold Castle, who was a great friend of Mr. Spalding's. The Spaldings were very wealthy people and I, all the time in my whole lifetime, it was Hawaiian Trust and Hawaiian Trust, and every wife I had said, "To hell with Hawaiian Trust." That's the way it went. "You spend more time with them than you do your own family." Okay.

So this fellow Spalding, I talked to him about his will about a week or two before we went to this rodeo. And they called for riders to ride a little donkey and he got on the donkey and rode the donkey and it didn't buck him off. It was a sawdust ring, you know, so I got onto this little donkey. I think his name was Rufus or Phil [Philip E. Spalding] or something. I don't know what it was. And I got on and the first buck he bucked me right off and I fell into the sawdust. And the next day he came into the Hawaiian Trust Company, I guess it was--yeh, to see me and asked me if I was all right. So I said, "Yes," and he said, "Well, next time you come down to Kauai, you come and talk to me." And that's one way I got his business, so we became very friendly.

M: That was Philip Spalding, huh?

B: Could have been Rufus or his brother Walter.

M: There's a Philip Spalding that was in construction.

B: I know who knows what his name is, if you needed to know. Jimmy [James Christian] Castle would know his name. He was a great friend of the Castles.

M: Can you remember any stories about plantation managers?

B: Oh yes. The manager of the Hilo Sugar Company's name was Alec Fraser and he had a daughter, Ella Fraser--very attractive--and she was a trained nurse. I went to see him at the town of Wainaku. It's in Hilo. I went to see him about his will and he said that there was no necessity for him to have a will. So I said, "Mr. Fraser, you have this lovely daughter and two sons." And incidentally, one of

his sons is the manager now of the largest sugar plantation in the world in Puerto Rico or someplace. His name is Richard.

I became very much amoured with this little nurse. She later became a mother of seven girls (chuckles) and lived over on the other side of the island.

Well, I wanted to get his business in the worst way and he used to smoke a pipe and the pipe that he smoked was the most terrible pipe that I've ever seen, so the next visit back to Hilo I brought him a pipe. He said, "How in the hell am I going to break this thing in?" You have to break in pipes, you know. "Well," I said, "maybe we will, Mr. Fraser. I saw you smoking this old pipe and I thought it would be so nice." He said, "Now, young man, you were talking about a will and I married a woman from Scotland and she was listening to your conversation." Her name was-- oh, I can't think of her name. Her name was Locke. L-O-C-K-E. He told me that she said that it was the proper thing to make a will and then when he asked me how much it was I said, "Nothing," why, he went along and made his will. And Ella, the daughter, told her father that that was the thing for him to do, so I got their help there.

And then he was so kind he took me to several plantations on the Island of Hawaii and introduced me to plantation managers and doctors. I did a very big business with doctors of the plantations. Every plantation had a plantation doctor and the doctor had an office. I became very friendly with a Dr. Tabrah--T-A-B-R-A-H--who had a lovely wife, incidentally. She was just adorable and her name was Ruth Tabrah. [Dr. Frank L. Tabrah]

M: They're getting divorced, you know.

B: They are? (recorder turned off and on again) I became very much amoured with his wife, she was so lovely. Her name is Ruth Tabrah and he is still at the plantation they're closing up in Kohala.

Well anyway, they were trying to get the doctor but didn't think about a will. I knew he had money. So they were trying to get a piece of property on the beach at Mahukona which came by way of right of eminent domain in the one sense, and the other it came by adverse possession. These people had lived on it for about fifteen years and they never could find the owner so they claimed the ownership, these Hawaiians. And I arranged for them to get that land and they have it to this day and it's worth over a hundred thousand dollars, right on the water at Mahukona. Well, he gave me his business and then she gave me her will and she inherited--Don handles her account now. Her name is Tabrah and she just came into fifty thousand

dollars and I think Don invested it for her. I don't know just what he's doing, but he handles the account now. But that was another plantation that I became very well acquainted with.

Then another manager. . . . There were two brothers called James Campsey [and William Campsey] and [James] Campsey married, as you know, a Cushnie.

M: Oh yeh? (recorder turned off and on again) Naalehu.

B: Naalehu Plantation and his brother, Jim, was the manager of Pahala Plantation. There were two managers and two brothers and William Campsey is related to your husband by marriage. William Campsey's daughter is Mrs. [Alexander] Burso. Do you know Mrs. Burso [the former Margaret Cushnie], Dr. Burso's wife?

M: No, no. [He has confused the names Campsey and Cushnie and actually is referring to William Cushnie's daughter.]

B: Sure.

M: Huh uh.

B: I bet you my life that Burso's wife is William Campsey's [daughter]. Not William. What the hell's his name? Ahh. Who is her father?

M: William Cushnie.

B: Cushnie! What am I talking about, oh yeh. William Cushnie was the manager. Yeh.

M: Oh, okay.

B: Yeh. Cushnie. What's-his-name died. Jim Campsey died and left his brother, William Campsey, at Naalehu [Plantation]. And then he introduced me to William Cushnie, right?

M: Right!

B: And his daughter married Burso.

M: Right.

B: I was getting Campsey and Cushnie mixed up. And they had a large family and lived in Pahala.

.: Yeh.

B: And I breezed into that town . . . (recorder turned off and on again) . . . friends, and Dr. [V.B.] Appleton, being at one time a very famous physician here, and so I tried to set my cap out to find out just the best approach to this house to go see her. So I thought it all over and on a Sunday morning I went up to the house and rang the doorbell and Dr. Appleton came to the door and she said, "Yes?" and I said, "Yes, I've come to see you. Our dear little friend, Mrs. Makai, told me that you might be interested in what I have to say about business," and she said, "Come right in." She was very gracious and I went in and there was her little sister in a walker and I sat down. Of course, I don't hear well and I couldn't hear what the sister was saying but I could hear the doctor. I didn't have my hearing aid on. I don't have it on now, as a matter of fact. I don't like it. I can get along pretty well without it.

And so I went in and sat down and I admired their home and porch and gorgeous view of Diamond Head and so forth and so on. Then I looked around the house and she said, "For heaven's sake, Mr. Biven, don't look at this awful wall. It's so dirty and I'm ashamed of it and we are contemplating on having some painters come very soon." She said, "You know painters are rather expensive," and so forth and I said, "Well now, wait a minute. I'm a painter. I've been painting for years. Do you mind if I come up next Sunday--next weekend--and do the painting? And I have some wonderful marine paint." She said, "You're fooling me, aren't you?" I said, "No. I'm a plumber, a painter and a carpenter but I'm not an electrician because I was always afraid of electrical work."

So I came up the next Sunday and got up the ladder and I painted the room all glossy white. Oh, it was beautiful. And then, about a week later I went up to see them to see if the paint had dried and that was just a come-on. I brought them each a beautiful sponge cake. I said, "I was just passing this place and I looked in the window and I saw this sponge cake and I thought, well my, these two nice little people up here would like to have a piece of sponge cake and I bought it." They laughed and thought that was a great idea to have this sponge cake.

Well then I started and every Sunday for two years I'd leave here and drive up and go to the bakery. And then I heard that she liked--what the hell was it? Oh, chocolate wafers with stuff inside. Anyway, I got the right wafers and I took them to her and she said, "Where did you ever find them? We couldn't find them anyplace." "Oh," I said, "you can find them."

Well, time went on and I brought them a watermelon and so forth and every Sunday. So finally she took me upstairs and she said, "This rampant that goes around the

wall is dirty, just like the one downstairs." And I said, "Well now, look! I'm not going to let a painter come up here and walk around on this floor and probably cave it in. Do you mind if I paint it?" She said, "Why no, but you let me buy the paint," and I said, "I won't buy any paint." So I painted that.

And so time went on and her little sister became quite ill. And then she couldn't eat the things that I'd bring her--the vegetables or anything else or sponge cake --so I brought her flowers instead. I'd just stop at, you know, these little florists along the road up here and pick up some flowers.

So finally her little sister came to me and said, "I haven't very long to go. Do you mind if you help me make a will?" So I made the will for the little sister and she left each one of the boys a thousand dollars. She wanted to give it to me and I said, "No, I can't take anything. I can take it but I won't. I'd like it to go to the boys." Well, she died and left \$2,500,000 and I administered the account in the trust company with Buddy Knudsen and his outfit and I kept a separate set of books in pencil. So every week I went up to see her I'd let her know how the estate stood and one savings account was \$198,000 and another savings account was about \$40,000 and all this money. And so I was so proud of that estate coming in.

So then she passed on, unfortunately. She died and she left everything--\$60,000 to the Mid-Pacific Institute where she was a teacher fifty years ago. A teacher, and died and left almost two million. [Herbert Buddy Knudsen]

M: Where'd the money come from?

B: Well, her mother came from Minnesota and they owned terrific, large tracts of land and when they left there to come to Hawaii they sold these long tracts of land to people in

. . .

END OF SIDE 1/2ND TAPE

END OF INTERVIEW

Re-transcribed and edited by Katherine B. Allen

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THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

In May 1971, the Watumull Foundation initiated an Oral History Project.

The project was formally begun on June 24, 1971 when Katherine B. Allen was selected to interview kamaainas and longtime residents of Hawaii in order to preserve their experiences and knowledge. In July, Lynda Mair joined the staff as an interviewer.

During the next seventeen months, eighty-eight persons were interviewed. Most of these taped oral histories were transcribed by November 30, 1972.

Then the project was suspended indefinitely due to the retirement of the foundation's chairman, Ellen Jensen Watumull.

In February 1979, the project was reactivated and Miss Allen was recalled as director and editor.

Three sets of the final transcripts, typed on acid-free Permalife Bond paper, have been deposited respectively in the Archives of Hawaii, the Hamilton Library at the University of Hawaii, and the Cooke Library at Punahou School.