

Filipino-American Historical Society of Hawai'i
Oral History Project
Interview #1

PETE TAGALOG (PT)

Interview Conducted By:
Melinda Tria Kerkvliet (MK)
with Amefil Agbayani (Amy)
and Nora Gozon Tagalog (NG)

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MK: Today is September 1st, and I am here in Ota Camp village or Makibaka Village with Pete Tagalog. You read the book¹ by Evelyn Hernandez, and you said that there are some things there that you don't agree or you don't like. Do you know which parts you don't like in the argument?

PT: It's not that I don't like, it's just that it's not strong enough to be called Makibaka movement.

MK: Not strong enough?

PT: Yeah, you know the newspaper [clippings]² that seem to be like the Makibaka movement, the struggling and at the same time the cultural stuff.

MK: So the emphasis for you was more cultural, the movement itself? What was the meaning of it all?

PT: It's cultural, together with all the struggling, how to help the people, and at the same time you are struggling with the politician, like that. And then getting to other communities, you know. Let them know about yours, let them know about the culture, too; they don't know. Waimānalo...they don't know that kind of stuff. So I think that was the movement in Kahuku...in Kauai.

MK: Was Ota Camp very different before...before 1972? Was there a community before?

¹ [editor's note] Hernandez, Evelyn Gomez. "The Makibaka movement : a successful Pilipino protest movement in Hawaii." PhD diss., University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, 1977.

² [interviewer's note] A set of news clippings on Ota Camp I gave to Pete.

PT: Different.

MK: Different, in what sense?

PT: Ota Camp was more poverty stricken, with little bit culture. The culture came in inside Ota Camp when the immigrants came in...Johnny Dombrique and all that. The old Ota camp people – that's us – is not as much as like Johnny people where you get really in touch with the Filipino culture, the immigrants, and you see them in action. The old Ota camp people, "oh well, it's OK, after you,"...like that. They've been in the islands too long already. You see some things about the culture, but not that strong. Maybe outside Ota Camp maybe strong, but not inside Ota Camp. But later on, pretty strong.

MK: Was there quarrel between Ilokanos and Cebuanos? Were they talking to each other? The book [Hernandez's] said that.

PT: All the adults was more Ilokano; more than half just recently came. All the young ones, you know, teenaged or less than that, all Visayan, local. That's how immigrant Visayan, like Nora (Gozon Tagalog) who came. But the majority of the adults was Ilokano.

MK: So, in the Hernandez book, it said no community, the Ilokanos and the Cebuanos were not talking to each other. Was that true before?

PT: You know, that's what they had, funny kind of feeling, the Ilokanos, you can see them, the immigrant, they display. They don't like the Visayans; they make fun. There's one guy from the time of the struggle until today, maybe better now, he never liked the Visayan. But the others, the Ilokanos were strong. Then we let everybody know about the Pangasinan Ilokano, what the Ilokano felt about the Visayan, how the Visayan felt about the Ilokano. Then we stopped making fun of each other, making fun between the one eat dog, and the lazy one, then pretty soon everyone come together. Then Visayans make fun of themselves; Ilokanos, same thing, you know. And one thing too we did, we helped each other, we helped clean the house.

MK: This is before the 1972 or after?

PT: After. When the struggle starts.

MK: Not before.

PT: No more.

MK: No helping each other.

PT: No, the only activity over there was mostly fighting chicken, mind your own business and plenty, what you call that, not too much kids, mostly old people, before the struggle. Young kids was not there too much. Until the Ota Camp start struggling or just before the struggle then I noticed kids started coming in. Became much bigger because we had a program for the kids, brought the kids together, get the YMCA, another from the office of immigrant center, then the night school, they come in one program where they bring all the immigrants touring, teaching about local. We worked with them in terms of, what d'ya call that, we go down the beach. On the last day of program, "you guys come down," so they got one big bus, cars, all went down to Mokulē'ia beach, and when they went there, big bucket of fish waiting for them, for them to cook [laughs] and they enjoy. They get the fire already, they pick up the fish they like, they clean 'em, they do that. That's the kind of stuff we did.

MK: So the struggle brought people together, the community together, more activities together.

PT: Yeah. One is that we make sure that, you know, everybody know what is going on in the struggle. So we brought the women together, try to figure out what they can do. The best thing they can do was decoration for the meeting hall, cooking...but the men did the cooking [laughs].

MK: [laughs] The men were doing the cooking.

PT: [laughs] Yeah. But the idea is that the women felt good because we're asking them to get involved in the struggle, about what they can do, they came to the meetings. You know, the funny part, for three years, every Friday, we got meeting every Friday now, but the Steering Committee they got meeting Friday and Saturday and sometimes other days. And they come in 100%. I don't think there's any place like that, for the three years the meeting hall was always packed.

MK: Why do you think they came to the meeting?

PT: What do you mean?

MK: You said all came. Reason?

PT: You know, at first, they scared. They scared because they don't know where they're going. No more place for go. And, two, I was one dictator, too. I was strong and that's how Marcos, Filipino in charge, you do that for them, and I do the same thing. And you know, the funny thing, the supporters, they criticized me plenty, they criticized me every time the way I talked to the people. That one man, you know talking funny kine, distract people, might confuse people, and I stand up, and I scold him – blah, blah, blah – and "sit down." Then after the meeting, one guy criticized me, he said, "That's wrong."

MK: Who, Herb Takahashi?

PT: No, got one guy named, Gary Kubota.

MK: Oh, Gary Kubota.

PT: Yeah. Takahashi was in that meeting too. And I said, "You know this is not the first time I scold him. I scold him plenty of time but he keeps coming back. They come to meeting. It's not that I scold 'em and they don't come around. They come. I know. And I don't tell you about your Japanese thing. You don't tell me about...." Well, I cannot explain to them why I know [laughs]. And then the other people changed.

Before, when they came to meeting, did not pay attention, talked silly. I guess I was rough. But I was rough and same time I am looking if it's good. But the Steering Committee helped them to socialize, we offer loans for gasoline or bus money, cigarette money. we get funds for that one. Only about two, three families take, but it's there, for them. And they feel good. And lots of problem, personal kind of problem in every house and they come to the Committee. We don't like but we go in and settle them. Funny and I can say anything to them.

MK: Personal problems? For example?

PT: Like this one, a silly one: "I stay with this man, and I love this man, but I don't know if I like him live with me." I know they love each other, but they stay separately

so one time for pick housing over here, I put the two guys' name in for one house; they were happy. So they lived together. But not forever, because he got sick, but they were happy. Ilokano lady and Visayan man. They really care for each other. But the Visayan man got sick - Alzheimer's. They split up.

MK: Who were some of the women who were very helpful in the struggle?

PT: My intention was to make them understand why their husband is away from the house, make them understand it's the struggle, but make them feel they are involved. Bautista and Nora, they were the ones running the women.

MK: Bautista? What's the first name?

PT: Nora.

MK: No, not Nora.

PT: Nora, same like Nora.

MK: Nora also...two Noras.

PT: Yeah. I only sit down and listen, and one time if they cannot answer certain things, then they ask me. Otherwise, I just sit down. They have plenty of ideas, you know.

MK: Is Nora Bautista still here? Still living in Ota Camp?

PT: No.

MK: How old is Nora Bautista?

PT: Uh, about same age as Nora [Pete's wife, late '50s].

MK: About the same age as Nora.

PT: Uh huh. But they were young. At that time we had, you know the kind of problem, we call that Judiciary Committee. Get problem between two neighbor fighting and yet these guys they're not from Ota Camp; they live right on the borderline outside of Ota Camp but they are in the group. They had problem, and we make them sit in the judiciary group and all the Steering Committee they all talk about the problem. They criticize, they talk and then after that, at the end of the meeting, we come up with a solution

already for them.

This one guy own another house, and that guy in the house – that's his tenant – they are fighting. We told him: "You don't need that junk house. Why don't you, for the struggle, just give him the house." Or maybe we give him ten dollars, that's good, calm him down, and try to be more understanding of each other. And they gotta come to the next meeting and in the next meeting somehow another follow through. Then we, the Steering Committee, would warn them: "You guys if you keep up like this, we won't keep you up, we will keep you aside, we don't want to listen to you guys already, we get other things to do, we get struggle."

But they shape up...but the owner – the one that owned the house – just before we moved here [Makibaka Village], he already moved to another address in Waipahu, and the telephone he used the same phone as in the new house. He made me feel that he's still in the camp. When I found out, I took him out. I took him out, and I put the Ilokano guys, all the Ilokanos. I asked the Ilokano guys, "You guys know all about this?" "Yeah." But they don't like squeal. But they're mad at him, but they don't like squeal. So when I took him out, they are all happy. I told them, "You know why, this house supposed to be us struggling, hard time, no more place for go." When I kick him out already, he got mad. But when I kick him out already, oh, the other Ilokanos, Johnny Dombrique, they're all happy. They are all honest, you know these guys I'm talking about, the Judge – De la Cruz, Pate.

MK: Pate, who is Pate?

PT: Pate. When we first moved over here [Makibaka Village] somebody killed him. They stole his car. So he died. Pate was my strongest man. Pate Niebre. Patricio Niebre.

MK: Patricio Niebre, Dombrique and Judge De la Cruz?

PT: Johnny Dombrique.

MK: Judge De la Cruz?

PT: Judge...I call him judge because he acts like a judge. But Judge De la Cruz and Pate Niebre they don't like me for nothing before the struggle. They hate me.

MK: Really? Why?

PT: Because I don't bother nobody. They said I half-shit, and they think I no like Ilokano, yeah? But I said I don't understand. I understand the Ilokanos, they're always eating, and they're talking Ilokano, I don't understand. And they think I am sassy.

But the guys don't like me, they became my number one. They found out that, you know, I am pushing more for the poor people. He [Pate] is a carpenter and Johnny is a carpenter too, but more on plumbing. Plumbing, carpentry, every house was fixed, touched the floor, everything all like all, electricity, some never had electricity before. I think that's why the people trusted the Steering Committee. We are all there to help, help them yah? And we collect two dollars a month, and some grumble, two dollars a month for the struggle.

And then after six, seven months, Nora Bautista's father-in-law...he accused me about. That's how some Filipinos, "why do you collect money?" But that's the kine, Ilokano hard to work with. I know Ilokano like that. I got to work with them so they stop thinking like that. Pate was a good one, give him leadership. After I got Pate, he can influence the single men, and then Johnny, he can influence the same family, and De la Cruz, same thing,

MK: What about for the Visayans?

PT: For the Visayans, only me. [laughs]

MK: Only you?

PT: Only me. They all young. The only Visayan came in, hard-head too, Nora...them. Nora's auntie, Nora's grandfather, Nora's father. They said plenty organization in the Philippines, they all turn to be real crook.

MK: They said?

PT: They thought us like that too. Nora never come right away and join us. Nora was watching us all the time from her house, watched meetings in our house. And finally she joined, she just made up her mind and joined. So, that's the unique part about Ota Camp. We never worry about outside yet. Mostly we waited inside the camp for, I don't

know how many months. About one whole month, then we demonstrate. And we demonstrate, we never have the right questions, we just wanted to tell the government, "hey we are to be kicked out, what you gonna do?"

What they gonna do for us, I don't know. But after three months, we don't bother nobody. We just worked over there, worked for everybody, even though we don't have much if get sick, like you know the old lady, Portun.

MK: Who?

PT: The old lady, they call her Portun-Manzano. Before the struggle, we go her house, she only stay in the house, in the bed, chair, she is sick. And then we talk to her about one, two hours a week and then sometimes we eat lunch at her house and then we go back again. Pretty soon, about one month later, she's outside already, she's coming out in the community and talking. And when Ota Camp moved here [Makibaka Village], she never got sick no more.

MK: Oh, really.

PT: Yeah. She even tell the community that when the bulldozer come, I go stay in front.

MK: She said?

PT: Yeah. She gonna be front of me [laughs]. "Yah, go ahead." [laughs]

MK: She changed.

PT: Yeah, become strong. That's why I like this kind of meeting. Every week, general meeting, four times a month. The whole town know about the struggle, what to do in the struggle, they know what's going on, and they know the weakness and what to do. No. 1, shut up, only one mouth, all of us one line, one mouth. Anybody come in, even Danny

MK: Danny?

PT: Danny Kihano. Remember him?

MK: Oh, yeah.

PT: He come in the camp. Nobody like talk to him. They know him; tell him to talk to me. He is my friend, too.

MK: The representative?

PT: Yeah. One thing good, make use of him to get Akahani, get other kind of people from the State Capitol to come and see us. He go arranged that.

MK: So he helped.

PT: Yeah.

MK: So who are the members of the Steering Committee?

PT: I can give you the names. Remember what I told you, for the Ilokanos: Niebre, De la Cruz and Johnny Dombrique. And then the women was Visayan and Ilokano. Bautista is Ilokano...local. And Nora was immigrant, Visayan. Another local - me. And my brother. My brother, he never get involved inside the Steering Committee, but he wanted to get behind because he noticed when I turned my back, wild guys behind, they're talking wild.

They [Hawaiians] take our struggle too lightly, like some manini [quite small] struggle. You can solve them anytime but I don't see anybody here. They [struggle in Kahuku] get money, but us -- we don't get money. I don't like get involved in money but I like know how much going out. How much going out, how much coming in and then what they use them for I don't bother as long as good.

MK: Who was the treasurer?

PT: That was Nora Bautista.

MK: So she kept records.

PT: The one who kept record - Nora, the other one, this one [Nora Gozon Tagalog]

MK: Before it was Nora Baclaan, isn't it? Then it is Nora Gozon.

PT: Gozon, that's the mother name. The auntie, them, they are mean to her but she is not minding them, just minding her own business. Maybe they will change their mind. You know, all these things that we are talking about, that's the key for the Ota Camp thing. I think when we took care of all that, people get stronger, and like the idea of we go fight but don't put them in the front.

MK: Don't put them in the front.

PT: Don't put them in the front; they don't like that. But they were a little bit behind and they said: "we will follow even you go through a fire." [Laughter] "Don't put us in front."

MK: You are be the one. [Laughter]

PT: Remember the story in the Philippines, when the Japanese attacked the Philippines and, then, the Japanese met one group of Visayans who got on horses, and they attacked the Japanese. All the Visayans -- all wiped out. So they're thinking the same thing. So they stay behind the leader: "What you tell us to do, we do."

But one thing good about that thing is a good idea but you gotta get them, like we meet once a week. We meet, the Steering Committee and general meeting. So we meet all the time, so they're all in contact, the whole struggle. They know, they appreciate a lot, the cultural thing.

People with education, they're scared. I was afraid, too, hardly talked to them, my way of talking. But then just go ahead and talk and I noticed, as long as the people understand what I'm saying, as long as people know what I'm saying, I feel that's important. That's how I start making my speeches. And you know have some other kind of community, like down in Aiea, all Filipino and the way I gotta talk: "You know if you no can sabe, by and by, yeah," they understand. Herb Takahashi said, "Good you can talk like that." "That's the only way I can talk!" [laughter] Plantation kine. I appreciate it more now.

MK: But you went to Leeward [Leeward Community College].

PT: Leeward, yeah.

MK: What were you doing?

PT: What you call that...marine tech. And then about three more months I gonna finish, I gonna go meeting, Ota Camp. I got confused, Ota Camp thing, then I go marine tech, then I tell myself, "Don't bother." I told my social worker, "I gotta go, do something community work."

MK: What did you do before? Were you working before?

PT: I was doing refrigeration.

MK: Repair and installing?

PT: Repair and install, but then that's the one I had accident.

MK: Where?

PT: I go pick up, you know the pick up truck, right by the airport. Oh, after that I'm walking around like I don't know where I'm going. My arms, my legs, my head.

MK: Did you go to a hospital?

PT: No, I never like that. No, I just want to go home. And the next day, no can move. But stupid you know, I could have gotten help from the insurance but they trick something else. I got \$4,000 from the insurance. "If you don't settle then they're gonna throw mud on your name, and the Ota Camp thing, you better watch out." And then after that I was not supposed to settle, they took the \$4,000 back. And then Herb Takahashi worked for my work comps, that one about \$3,000 something. You know, I find out yeah, what the biggest success in Ota Camp, to do all these things, and how can I, I'm never like that, but then I find out, if you like change the world there's some kine change from within.

MK: Inside?

PT: That's it, yeah. I don't like old people before. They look at me, and they call me stupid. I cannot understand them.

MK: The old people.

PT: Visayan one, I'm talking about here. And then the Ilokano, I not bother too much. I don't know them. I don't understand. So I don't look at them too much. But all of a sudden, something – it took me about three, four months before the struggle started, four months, even though I was in charge, I never really fully took over.

Again after four months, I decide, "OK, I gonna take over." But then take another three, four months before really get that fire inside. All of a sudden I like the old men. All of a sudden I fighting for the old men. I take up one guy because mistreating the old people.

"You listen, you listen." I said, "You don't talk to the people, I got a hard time getting them come out then you talk rough." So that's one, fighting with them, really concerned about them, medication, sickness, all kine. And then go have fix up house, puka screen, electric, any kine.

MK: What made you change inside?

PT: I don't know. It's the struggle, I think, because I going house to house all the time. I listening, and it's like my mother, same thing, yeah. I go the other house, same kind, but only thing different kind of experience but same kind of suffering. So I just keep on working.

When I get the experience outside, the politics of bull shit, that's the guys I used to get scared and distrust, you know, they all lie like a bull shit, they all like money. Then I start meeting with you guys, support groups, and then going to Chinatown, and all this other kine of thing like Waimanalo. When you're happy and people they feel good and things work, and you feel the, oh, the feeling you get, I mean - oh, good.

MK: Inside.

PT: Yeah. And come back to Ota Camp. More, what you call that, stronger, and you then get more touched telling them, then you can even, what you call that now? Propaganda: "Ah, no worry, they'll never do that." [Eviction]

MK: Make them strong.

PT: Make them strong. Because they feel that, you know: "You're the one always talking so we've got to believe you. You know; I don't know. I don't know what went on, so I cannot talk. You know what's good."

They follow me all the time. I felt them following me. That's what make me strong. I took care of people.

MK: Took care of people. That's from the heart.

PT: Right, yeah.

MK: That's from the heart. Because in the book [Hernandez's], said you do that to manipulate.

PT: Yeah, yeah. I mean, you can just use the people though,

you can use, like what's this all armed struggle, they use the people for themselves. I'm the only one who helped.

"Sally [Pete's first wife] take the house. This one take the house." I never have house. I never take land. I never - "Oh this one, I like this because I work hard." I never do that, you know. But I feel good for what, even though never get money but I no need the money. But one day I'm gonna be the guy found \$140,000 [laughter] But I feel really good because then, just like now, all the houses, mostly all new people now. Young.

MK: Young people.

PT: But the ones strong with me, the ones in Ota Camp - Johnny Dombrique, De la Cruz, Patricio - all the Dombriques, what you call that, Nora auntie - strong, makibaka. My brother...really proud man.

MK: He was in the struggle too, your brother? He was Vice President in Steering Committee.

PT: He was always Vice President. And another thing too we did, strong, we go Kauai and help them organize.

MK: Kauai?

PT: Kauai. They asked us, that's why. So we organize. Also in Waimanalo.

MK: But in Ota Camp, the idea of relocation as a community was good, wasn't it? You kept one community and go to one place.

PT: Yeah. It worked you know. It's just that, like I said, before we do anything outside, we did planning inside. For three months, worked at ourselves, take out all kinds greed...within ourselves. Because if you don't do that, you stop organizing. "Why, why do that?" I know, we get that kind of question in our family. They don't understand. But we get together and explain them and we bring out for example question, like Kokua Hawaii they like bring the kind, pictures from their struggle.

MK: Kalama, Kalama valley.

PT: Yeah, had police yeah? I tell, "No bring the pictures in our place. If you put them in another gym, I tell Ota Camp people, if you like, see them, go see them, but don't bring

them to Ota Camp." All that kine, the police kine, they show. I never like show that to Ota Camp people. We like avoid that one, get arrested, and all that. One thing, the people no can take that.

MK: Scared.

PT: All Filipino, no can take that. But if you exhaust everything else already, and they know, they gonna fight, you know. They know you tried everything, they gonna start fighting. That's why you know, that was three months, after we demonstrate the first time, just to let them know, "Hey, we're over here now, what you gonna do with us?" And then, three months later, we don't do nothing, no news, we don't talk to reporter, nothing, just only work. We work, the hard-head ones, get plenty hard-heads, we work long time. The lady was the hard head one.

MK: Why?

PT: Portun Manzano.

MK: Very hard, why?

PT: Hard-headed, the kine. Strong...fighting kine.

MK: Fighting you?

PT: Eviction.

MK: Ah, fighting the eviction.

PT: Fighting the eviction. They gotta get the picture first, and then, how she became strong - she took out all her experience out from the old plantation, and we tell her, "That's right, that's right, that's good, that's good." Then she feels good, yeah?

MK: Is this the sick lady? Manzano, who come out.

PT: Yeah, sick lady who come out. She forgot all that sickness already. [laughs]

MK: Where is she now?

PT: She dead already. She died. She's, she's just like my mother, that one.

MK: Your mother was a fighter?

PT: My mother, fighter for the kine, not this public kine, but more, anybody mistreating children, she can fight. My father is, he's not too much a fighter but he, something no good, he hates men with pencil in the pocket. [laughter] Plenty men like that.

MK: Yes.

PT: And there's plenty Visayan like that. And so what kind job they got? Hmmm, regular job. But they follow their regular job, change clothes, they put their shirts, they put pencil and walk around. [laughs] My father hate that. All his kumpadre like that. [laughter] Uh, you know, I wanted to really talk about this thing, but maybe one day we can talk about what I said, because I even tell myself many times, you know.

"How come Ota Camp so successful? How come?" And I don't know, I never think nothing but, "How do you think Pete, how come," somebody said to me. I don't know, maybe later on I gotta go school and find out how come. [laughter] But now I find out, when I go out and do the struggle and all that, no more. I go Kalama -- not Kalama -- Waiahole-Waikane, same thing. I don't see Ota Camp thing there. When I had De la Cruz, and Pate and Johnny, when we leave them to the group and another group, they stuck to the group. They take care of the group. And I no need worry of them.

MK: So you had good people.

PT: Yeah. And I don't know what make us the kine like that. Before I never like listen Ilokano.

MK: But you became close to these old guys. Johnny Dombrique, De la Cruz.

PT: Yeah, we tight. That's why they come with me all over the place. They come with me Waimanalo, they come Chinatown every time. One time, we make the kine, we go demonstrate, protest, sometimes I brought 30 guys, that kine of people, in Chinatown. Then we go Waimanalo, we make one show for them. All the Ilokanos came.

MK: They come?

PT: Yeah. They holding the signs, and facing the Ilokano guys

while we talking to them – the Waimanalo guys – facing them, while we telling them about propaganda. When you show that you know what's going on, and then you scared, you stick together. Talk any kine of way, and when they look at the ladies, they believe already [laughs] 'Cause sometimes, you know, I got hard time talking to them but, my problem is the kine, too, I like talk good but you know.

When Herb Takahashi told me, "You know, Pete, you talk good." "Talk good, what do you mean? I no can." "But everybody understand what you are saying. You are talking your language."

MK: Your language.

PT: Oh yeah? [laughter] But the work with downtown, the old people there, they get their own property and then the state government, the city county, gonna take in their property. The old people talking good English, I cannot talk like that. By and by I asked them, "Hey, I cannot talk like that, you know [laughter], I gonna talk to you in pidgin." "Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah."

That's how, when I 'm talking like, "OK, you know I gonna talk to you nice and slow OK but you know me, I no sabe." Like that. [laughs] Good fun, I had fun in the struggle.

MK: But in the early months you had to contact the students? You asked the students to come? Johnny Verzon, Kokua Hawaii.

PT: I don't know why they came. Some come, kine good but...

MK: Did you contact them?

PT: Johnny Verzon? No.

MK: Who did you contact?

PT: Somebody contact the Filipino guys, and then they came down.

MK: OK. What happened there? Johnny Verzon, Leon Dagdagan...

PT: They get friction with the other group. Remember...

MK: Kokua?

PT: No, not Kokua. Ota Camp one.

MK: Ota Camp?

PT: Ota Camp had one group...student. And then Kokua Hawaii. Some of them went join Kokua Hawaii, but I tell them, "If you like join Kokua Hawaii, that's up to you guys but you gonna do exactly what we tell you."

MK: So Kokua Hawaii, some are from Ota Camp, the students?

PT: Yeah, they joined. Not many, maybe two.

MK: And there was KK.

PT: Yeah, the KKK. The KKK one good, like you know, Dagdagan...

MK: Leon?

PT: Yeah, took pictures. Dagdagan, Johnny Verzon, they're the one more like running the show. But I like them, to me, they show, when the people look at them, they feel proud, look at the Filipino, young kine. And then when I go Waimanalo, same thing. Whoa. Plenty power Ota Camp. [laughter]

I no care if they working for us or not but just them being there, was good. Because some of them, most of them, the Filipino ones, they asked good questions, more like cultural kine, and more fighting thing. But I was proud on that one because I don't know how to use them anyway. I was proud them just being there. I feel good, yeah. The other one, the Ota Camp one, they stay with us all the time. They stay with us and after that they join Kokua Hawaii. They give us all the information. The main thing about the Committee [Steering], it really helped people.

MK: So do you still have records or documents, no minutes of meeting? Are they all gone?

PT: But one day, you know, I just hope all this kine of stuff that...I talk about that in Kahuku. Kahuku lately, get guys think that's good idea, you know the kine, help the people kine. Sometimes some guys no can clean the yard, help them clean. They don't like that job. But at Ota Camp, we did that. Mostly the house. And we clean, not the yard but the whole camp. There...about seven and eight junk car, we drag them by the developer's land, you know. Uy, mad at us.

[Nora Gozon Tagalog joins conversation on Hernandez's book]

PT: But him, Pate Niebre, was the guy who hated me the most. Hard to talk to him.

MK: Before the struggle?

NG: Before the struggle and he become one of the best.

PT: Strong. You know get standing over there guys not doing nothing; he scold them. Everybody move, the Ilokano. They moving.

MK: What's his full name.

NG: Patricio Niebre.

MK: N-i-e-b-r-e.

PT: The Steering Committee like go in and help. Everything. And then when we had community – we get chicken, we get the youth raising chicken, raise their own garden, and raising hogs.

MT: Oh, even pigs.

PT: Pigs, big kind of pig, we raised too. But then since we get pig, we kill the pig, I noticed that the people love pig, so we make fund-raising every time, every week. We take order.

MT: Take order.

PT: We take order how many pound they like. And when we get order, we take the pig. Sell them, just like every week. They throw the intestines in the fire. Yah. That's one put the Ilokanos all together, you know. Every week you look forward to cut the baboy [pig]. And the pig head, you know, you just chop them up, all of them work. Oh, I used to eat baboy, at that time I can eat. Oh, I like those days. I'm always in touch with them. Sometimes early in the morning, "Eh, boss," the Ilokano De la Cruz, "c'mon we cut now." [laughs] I like that you know. But I miss all that too.

MK: Uh-huh. You don't do that anymore here.

PT: No, most of them gone. Johnny, me and my brother only ones one left already. [Johnny Dombrique died a weeks later.]

Pate died; the judge died.

MK: What about the children?

PT: Johnny. Get four boys. The boys are all born Ota Camp. They're good. They're all just like Johnny. They do construction. But I don't know. Some Filipinos come, they're from the Philippines and ask, "Pete can you tell me the mechanics of organizing?" What is he talking about? Just like he wants me to explain to him blow by blow, I don't know. It's something you gotta down and really sit down. It's hard to picture. Right now I'm thinking of that one as the main one.

MK: The one, pig?

PT: No, the one helping guys.

MK: Helping.

PT: The one, go help them, any kine in the camp. The three months we don't go out, we clean up the village. Oh plenty rubbish. We finally found big truck for 200 dollars, we load up that truck, plenty of junk. We clean up the camp, look good. But the cleaning up of Ota Camp is not just to work, clean up but when you're cleaning up, the people watching. They watching.

"Ah, Makibaka cleaning up this; Makibaka must be something. Must be people listening to Makibaka." They all see, I guess their faith grow stronger in Makibaka when they see that, cleaning kine. So all of them mostly is to work on the people; you gotta show them something too.

MK: Uh-huh.

PT: You gotta show them that you're not afraid; you got to show that you care for them too. If no can show that, they not gonna come out.

MK: Yeah.

PT: The old people here now, Johnny, strong Makibaka. Stronger than my brother. Johnny, then me and my brother we're the only ones left. Johnny's wife, Johnny's sister-in-law, that's it.

MK: That's it.

PT: Everybody...

MK: But the children, the children...

PT: The children, they...Makibaka is something, the sons, you know the older one, say, "Oh, Makibaka don't work already." "Of course, don't work, you guys don't know nothing about Makibaka, you not involved in the struggle, you get plenty money, you never kicked out."

So I guess going to people who really suffering. And that's kine hard to organize too, that one. I know I never feel I had hard time, I had these three guys, that's why, the Ilokano guy. They make them good for me and they have plenty followers.

MK: Was Herb Takahashi very helpful during the first phase of the struggle?

PT: Takahashi...I never know he was doing Marxism kine. Communist kine. And then he said: "Oh you are studying Marxism." "No, what is that? I don't know what is that." But then he mentioned some, "When you march with the people you are supposed to be right, not too far behind." [MK laughs] "Oh yeah? Well I'm not in front," just joke to him, "I'm not in front of them."

MK: How did you get the name "makibaka?"

PT: Well, I think Johnny Verzon them talk about makibaka and I never care for that makibaka, weird, hah, that name. [laughter] Then I saw one picture in the Philippines, struggling with big word "makibaka." I thought I like the makibaka.

MK: Uh, that's the Marcos, against Marcos.

PT: They was protesting.

MK: "Makibaka, huwag matakot." (Struggle, don't be afraid)

PT: Yeah. And from that time I always use makibaka, until today. It's coming to that stage when they're calling me the "makibaka man." They don't like makibaka anymore.

MK: So what do they call this place?

PT: No more name, they call this Ota Camp.

MK: Ota Camp still.

PT: They still call this Ota Camp. And sometimes Makibaka Village. No more name. I never put name. The only name I maintain is the organization name, be sure everybody remember how we got this place.

MK: So there's still an Ota Camp Tenants Association?

PT: Yeah.

MK: And do you still have elections?

PT: They make elections, yeah. Like me, I make myself permanent board member.

MK: Oh you're a board member.

PT: Yeah. Always. I tell them why, because I like to watch this organization. You know, no more monkey business. When the reporter [Gregory Pang] came down here, remember, the Star Bulletin article [15 April 2001], I think, "Ok, I like talk to Makibaka." Nobody talk, nobody can talk. So they have to come my house; I was in wheel chair. Nobody can, because they're all new.

[Amy Agbayani joins the interview.]

MK: Amy wants to know how you met the students. Johnny and the rest, how did you meet them?

Amy: And Ethnic Studies.

PT: Yeah, they came down.

Amy: How did they know about it? Who told them?

PT: I don't know.

Amy: You don't know. OK.

PT: I think, you know the other group, student group - Brian Tani...

Amy: Brian Taniguchi.

PT: Yeah, I think when they came they probably heard about Ota Camp. And Ota Camp, we have big publicity already. The students that come, Johnny Verzon - are all educated, yeah. They're educated and they don't know whether they like get

involved or not. They're thinking about it.

MK: Uh-huh.

PT: Yeah. I had one guy, he told me, "Oh I come over here and every time listening and I don't know if I'd get involved or not." But he was sharp; he was good, at least he told the truth.

MK: Filipino?

PT: Pinoy. He worked with Johnny Verzon them.

MK: Uh, maybe Mariano, Jim Tuyay?

PT: Nice-looking guy.

MK: Oh maybe Rod.

PT: Dagdagan, he helped me. He was doing all the translating.

MK: Was Virgilio Felipe with you?

PT: Kine of familiar.

MK: Familiar the name?

PT: Familiar. Sometimes I used Cardona, uh, what's his name now?

MK: Lito?

PT: Carlito.

MK: Where is he?

PT: He in California, lawyer's office now.

MK: Really?

PT: That guy he struggled and everything, had a hard time. I helped him inside our place, you know the headquarters.

MK: Uh-huh.

PT: I make him stay inside. He no more place to stay

MK: Ah...

PT: He always buy canned, his favorite, canned squid.

MK: Ah, so he lived in Ota Camp too for a while?

PT: Inside the headquarter; we had everything. We clean them up, we...and fixed them out, we paint inside and out and Carlito stayed there. He no more place. Had a hard time, still thinking about going law school. He was selling books, encyclopedias like that and I saw him getting by. If he don't sell nothing, starve. But look at him today, he get an office and is practicing now.

MK: He's practising now. Does he write you?

PT: I'm glad for him.

MK: Does he write you? Is he in contact with you?

PT: Only one time.

MK: How did you meet Herb Takahashi?

PT: Herb, sometime he send me birthday card. He give money too. [laughs]

MK: No, but before, in 1972.

PT: About Takahashi? You know the funny part is that he's been working for us three years, he never charged nothing, you know.

MK: No charge?

PT: No, he never did.

MK: Good guy.

PT: '75, I think '76...he said he was gonna go on for his work. But he did plenty.

MK: Plenty for you.

PT: Every time I got to go up his office, and plenty stuff. I guess Bouslog like Ota Camp, too.

MK: Harriet Bouslog?

PT: She the one put...assign Takahashi in Ota Camp.

MK: Oh.

PT: She's strong. Plenty of us belong to the union before,

yeah. But after that the last time we was together, we working Waimanalo. He was the lawyer; I was doing the organizing. One year after that the Steering Committee said "hey, too much Waimanalo, come back." So that's why, pau, one year.

MK: You said you belong to a union before?

PT: The Teamsters.

MK: Teamsters, uh huh.

PT: Teamsters. Not the plantation one. Plantation time, I think we never had union, I think.

Amy: ILWU

PT: Ah yeah. Never had when I was...or maybe they had, but it's a long time. I was young. I was about 120 pounds, I remember.

MK: Did you work at all in the plantation?

PT: I did.

MK: What did you do?

PT: I work Waipahu plantation, Waialua, and little bit in Ewa, yeah.

MK: What did you do?

PT: I never like.

MK: In the field?

PT: Mine, fertilizer.

MK: Fertilizer.

PT: Not only cut grass but, the kine, poison the grass, and you know that time, I was about 120 pounds, same weight with me, and I kept falling down every time. [laughs] The guy would pick me up.

MK: And then after that?

PT: Pearl Harbor, Schofield, and State Library. I quit them all.

MK: Why?

PT: I don't know, I was looking for construction job where they pay more.

MK: OK.

PT: And I look back and, oh, I was going for the wrong thing. I had good job – after Pearl Harbor, Schofield. Plenty time: "Why you quit?" "Ah, I don't like that kind of job." If I stayed that job, I would better off. The other thing, I won't be makibaka, too.

MK: That's right. [laughs]

PT: I would get maybe a little bit better living than go Ota Camp. Ota Camp...I was injured in, I was working in Japanese milk company. I was working in the hospital that take care sick kine milk, but all that chemical, it all splash on my hand. I get all rash, I had to quit. Then I stayed home, I don't know how long I stayed home, almost one year. Then I went back to work again. And then I work about twelve years, twelve or fifteen years, then I get accident. That's one the Ota Camp one. That's why I stayed Ota Camp every day. I wasn't working. I was under vocational rehab.

MK: Oh. But you went to school. You were at LCC.

PT: Yeah. I just dropped that for community work.

MK: Who paid for your tuition?

PT: Vocational rehab paid for that. Sometimes I felt good, talk to your husband [Melinda's husband, Ben Kerkvliet] earlier because I felt like I going school but I not finding out what I doing. Ota Camp. After that, you know, I want to learn.

"What am I doing?" So I go to school, maybe I can find out. I always get the kine feeling when I'm listening community kine, "Oh, this guy stay far behind." So what I did I take any kind, different kind.

MK: Classes.

PT: Courses. Any kine of stuff, I cannot finish the work. And Ota Camp, a handful. Oh, I cannot. Ben teach me how to go

– every semester take one – I could have done one like that but then the Ota Camp thing was too much. I have to take care of my family too. I don't know what to do. So that's why I knock off the school. And then I stayed Ota Camp.

MK: So what was your income for the family?

PT: About 6-700 a month.

MK: A month?

PK: Only, yeah.

MK: For the whole family?

PT: I was under welfare.

MK: Welfare already?

PT: Yeah. So I was welfare because the income for the workmen's comps out already. That's why when you guys, Operation Manong...

MK: Oh, that's right, the ACTION, the VISTA.

PT: That's extra 300. [laughter]

MK: Correct, I forgot that. You were employed as the VISTA.

PT: But as soon as I get the money you gave me, I bought one truck. That's what I use go Waimanalo.

MK: One last question, about Fasi and Ariyoshi.

PT: Fasi and Ariyoshi.

MK: Yeah, because both of them wanted to help.

PT: I know Fasi...they like use Ota Camp yeah?

MK: They like use Ota Camp.

PT: Yeah, they like use Ota Camp. I think Herb help me that one. He said, "Whatever you do, do not go opposite." So we hang on to Fasi. But Fasi spent plenty money on us. You know this place.

MK: Uh huh, West Lock.

PT: They make the National Guard dredge up all this area. The

National never can do too good, so the City and County came. They put extra 60,000, sewer and all that. But Ariyoshi, he was in the right place -- union. I told Ariyoshi, but he know that already.

"For you get elected, the union must be all Filipino, you gotta help a Filipino. Ota Camp is all Filipino. You help this one, the Filipino go that way." But he know that already. But one thing good, though, I never talk rough with him. I talk rough with Fasi. Fasi and Burns. Stupid. He [Burns] talk about rabbits...the carrots.