BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Edward Hussey

"Like I told my men before we left the plantation, there's life after Pioneer Mill. Pioneer Mill was not the buildings. Pioneer Mill was the people, and as long as we're around, Pioneer Mill will be around, and the good times we had there will always be with us."

Edward Hussey was born in 1951, in the Wahikuli area of Lahaina, Maui. The third of eight children born to Arnold K. Hussey and Abby Waiau Kimokeo Hussey, Edward attended Sacred Hearts School and Lahainaluna High School, graduating in 1969.

That same year, Hussey began his career with Pioneer Mill Company. After two years on the job, at age nineteen, he was promoted to a full-time supervisor, primarily in the irrigation department.

In the 1990s, amidst industry and company downsizing, Hussey was named Irrigation Coordinator/Department Head, a title he would hold until Pioneer Mill Company closed down in 1999.

He lives in West Maui with his wife, Amy Nagamine Hussey, and their two children. He is currently active in a number of community organizations, most notably the Lahaina Restoration Foundation and the Lahaina Wo Hing Society.

Tape No. 39-23-1-03

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Edward Hussey (EH)

Lahaina, Maui

February 5, 2003

BY: Maria Orr (MO)

MO: . . . February 5th and it's about 1:10 and I'm at the Lahaina Courthouse with Mr. Ed Hussey. And this is Maria Orr.

So start with telling me where you were born and raised.

EH: I was born in Lahaina at Pioneer Mill Hospital, which is now at the other end of Front Street, where the . . . . what's the name of that restaurant there now? Anyway, the Pioneer Mill Hospital. I was born in 1951. My mother's name was Abby Waiau Kimokeo, she was born in Kā'anapali in the 1920s. My father was Arnold K. Hussey. He was also born in Lahaina. Both of them were born at the Pioneer Mill Hospital, my father in 1918, and my mother, I think it was 1927.

We lived in an area called Homestead, which is situated outside of Lahaina in the Wahikuli area. Our home was a acre property, two homes, one my grandfather built which was a large plantation-style home, and my father built his home on the back side of the property. I come from eight children, four boys, four girls. I am the third oldest and the oldest son. I attended Sacred Hearts School from kindergarten through the eighth grade, which is the only Catholic school on the west side. Graduated in 1965, then I attended Lahainaluna High School, graduating in 1969.

Basically, when we were growing up, [Homestead] was not part of the [plantation] camp system. We lived in an area where people had big yards. We all went to the Catholic school. Like all kids, we went to the beach and we had chores to do. Coming from a big yard, an acre yard, we grew up knowing what yard work was, picking up mangos, cleaning, cutting the grass. We also took care of animals: ducks, chickens, which my grandmother raised. And always we had a garden. This is why I do not like raising animals now or even garden work 'cause that's what I did when I was a kid. Because I was the eldest boy and big for my size, all the digging that had to be done was done by me, especially since my father was working or doing other things.

When we had our opportunities on the weekends and then again in the summer months, like most of the local kids here, we spent our time at our respective beaches. Our beach, we called it Sandbox. It was basically where the Wahikuli Beach Park is now. And we had our football games. We did sand sliding, all types of water activities, and we also formed teams and we would challenge other areas. We picked up football games. It was not flag football, it was a type of a touch push-down-and-tackle football. And normally we won 'cause our team was the bigger team. Until the other camps, other teams, turned

around and started using kerchiefs or handkerchiefs as flags, and then it was a little different because it wasn't the size that would win, it would be how agile you became.

In Sacred Hearts, our teachers were nuns, Franciscan Nuns. They taught us—we already knew work ethics from our parents—they taught us right from wrong. What I also saw there was a form of prejudice that stayed with me for the rest of my life. A lot of the island [i.e., local] nuns really had a thing where they would call you ethnic names. "If you don't study you'll be a stupid Hawaiian digging ditches for the rest of your life," things like that. I never forgot those things. And the difference that I found in nuns that came from the Mainland, who where from Syracuse, New York—they were nuns who were typical, what you would say, religious people—never spoke like that. And the Franciscans are supposed to mirror Saint Francis of Assisi. He was a pacifist and did not like violence. We did have corporal punishment, but then again, was a island thing to me. The nuns from Syracuse, basically two very important ones: a Sister Steven Marie and Sister Grace Anthony, kind of shaped our thinking 'cause they showed us a nonviolent way of dealing with things. Where a lot of the island kids were brought up, if you hit once, you hit back two times. This was changed. We being people who learned martial arts, or a form of martial arts, when were young and [in spite] of our size, we were not known as bullies because we were taught not to use [violence]. First by our parents, but then by these gentle nuns from the Mainland. As I grew older I respected the difference and I wondered why the islanders didn't think that way, didn't teach that way. Why they would use racial terms? And I guess it was the way they were brought up themselves, and to them, they were not being racial, they were just pointing out what they considered obvious. And till today, I still have friends who remember those remarks, and they're not Catholics anymore because of that. I, on the other hand, was taught by our parents that you don't blame the religion for the misjudgments of the people who were supposed to be religious people, like priests or the nuns.

Lahainaluna was a public school. I played football. I was a wrestler. Did pretty good in wrestling, two years I was a Maui heavyweight champ. I went to the state two years. My second year I placed in the state, fourth in my weight division. I only lost one match. I should have been the champ but because I lost my temper and I basically hurt someone else in the process, I was disqualified. And that dropped me down to the fourth level, which again gave me a good lesson—the person could not beat me because I was stronger and faster but he beat me with his mind. He made me mad so I used an illegal hold on him. And basically he was told by his coach to do that. Twenty years later I gave the same advice to a boy who I saw in a similar situation and I told him you make sure you do not lose your head because it will cost you your tournament. The boy did listen to me and he lost one match but he lost it to a better opponent. He took third place. At least he had the chance, at least he wasn't sucked into it like I was. I regretted not listening to what I learned. I just reacted to animal instinct.

My years at Lahainaluna were very normal. I belonged to certain clubs, I was in the auto shop club, different volunteer things. It was sort of like a Hawaiian civic club. We would have civic projects, clean up, pick up rubbish on the road.

After that, during the summers we all worked. A lot of us worked for the pineapple companies, which I never did. I worked for the school one year during the summer. My junior year I started working for Pioneer Mill Company. When I started working for Pioneer Mill Company, after two weeks of working in the fields, they had me take care of a student gang. Basically what I did was watch the gang, make sure everybody did what they were supposed to do. Collected and turned in a roster to the supervisor, who would

be called a temporary *luna* or temporary supervisor. The second year I came back during the summer. It was my senior year. I graduated from Lahainaluna in 1969. Again, after working in the fields they had me supervise a student gang. A lot of these students were people returning from college. Some of them resented the fact that someone who just got out of high school is telling them what to do and they are like third year in college. Some of them felt that they should have been the supervisor, but they didn't show the qualities, according to management, of keeping people in line. Because a lot the workers, especially the students, had bad work ethics. They worked real diligently when the supervisor was around but stopped when he's not around.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

EH: What I didn't know at that time was that they were trying to see if I was able to manage crews, because the plantation had a policy of training young men. I had to come back as a permanent supervisor.

At this time the Vietnam [war] was going on full blast, I volunteered for the navy but I was not eighteen yet. My father refused to sign the papers because he did not want me to go into the service. And when I did turn eighteen, I had two weeks before I was going to leave to go to boot camp for the navy. I was called into Pioneer Mill's office and they offered me a full-time job with full benefits and with the possibility of going into their supervisory training program. There was really no choice there, as a eighteen-year-old being told by Pioneer Mill that they would pay for my education. Basically, my father knew that the opportunity was coming up but he couldn't tell me 'cause he knew if I felt that he had anything to do with it, I would not have accepted it. He did not have anything to do with it. In fact he was contacted by the general manager, for that time his name was Jack Seimer, and I accepted and I did not sign the final papers for the navy. So I rescinded that and that started my career at Pioneer Mill.

MO: What year was this?

EH: This would be 1969.

MO: Oh okay.

EH: I basically worked in a rank-and-file capacity learning different jobs, intermittently being used as a temporary supervisor. Again this was part of a training process which I wasn't really aware of 'cause I got bored during all this added work and really not getting compensated. Then I was hired in the beginning of 1971 as a full-time supervisor with all the benefits, and I was just nineteen. I also applied for the police department because of the benefits that they would get. My uncle was a deputy police chief with the Maui Police Department. But because at that time there was no [police] union, we made forty dollars more as a starting supervisor [at Pioneer Mill], so forty dollars made me pick Pioneer Mill over the police department. Looking back, I should have joined the police department because after twenty years you can retire. But at that time there was no union so it was just the same as any private industry. But once I became a supervisor for Pioneer Mill, my training started where I went to different jobs and like everything else, you have to pay your dues, which I did. I did go to night school on my own. I took up whatever courses I could take which would help me in my job. But those courses cannot get you ready for the fieldwork.

Human relations really played a lot in my tenure at Pioneer Mill. You had to know how to get along with people, especially people who were brainwashed in union tactics, where they could go to sleep and they could still have a job. But luckily I had mentors, like my dad, who had a lot of experience dealing with people. And I said, "The guys who do not respect themselves will not respect the work ethics."

So he says, "To deal with them, you go to the union and you tell them this is the problem. 'You guys deal with it. If I have to do it, then you know somebody has to go.'" The union always stepped inside 'cause they did not want to see any of their men dismissed. I learned that from my dad when I first came in, and I used that right through my years working at Pioneer Mill.

There were times when I was learning that I almost gave up because I figured all the long hours, getting up at four thirty in the morning, not getting home until five thirty, six o'clock, wasn't worth it. But I was sent to the HSPA [Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association] training center, which is a postgraduate [training center]. HSPA does all the research for the sugar companies. They also train their supervisors, and yearly, some people go over there to learn new techniques. When you graduate from their school, which is only a couple months, you come out as a sugar technologist. As a sugar technologist, you have access to their data. See, if you ever had problems at your work area, all you need to do is go through your company and call these experts in, which I did many times through my tenure at Pioneer Mill, and they would come and help you solve the problems. They would also call you and ask you for information, because lot of times we'd do things not knowing that it was a problem on another plantation. Going to school at the HSPA center, which was located at that time—I'm talking about '71, '72—at Ke'eaumoku Street [on O'ahu]. I found out there's a whole different thing. I was lucky because I had field experience. Now I could come back and use the theories that I learned there.

Drip irrigation in the sugar industry was in its infancy. I was there when it first started. When I came back, we had all different types of fields [i.e., departments]: harvesting, mill technology, cultivation technology, and irrigation. I liked the cultivation and mill technology but we did not choose the fields we are going to go into. It was the company who saw what your strongest side was and where they needed you. Because of my human relation skills they put me in with the irrigation department, where I worked basically from that time until our company closed down in 1999. Irrigation department, basically, we were the farmers of the sugar company, we grew the crop. Like other bigger plantations we did it all, and in a big plantation like HC&S [Hawaiian Commercial & Sugar Company] they had special crews to do, what they call, "first water", how to prepare the field after it's harvested. For Pioneer Mill, since we were a smaller area, the section supervisors did that all, which I was a section supervisor for a long time.

By the 1980s I became what they call a trainer. Basically I would train new irrigation people in our irrigation techniques, and I also would train the different supervisors. Because a lot of time during the off-season, we would use supervisors from the cultivation and harvesting department to relieve irrigation people when they left. But they needed to know our different systems, how to set up irrigation schedules, what to look for in case of storms, and especially during the storms they had to know what to do, where to go, what is safe. And I put a program together, which made me kind of like the second in command. Unofficial second in command. That's a way not to pay you for what you're actually doing.

In the [19]90s, our companies were basically split up into different sections. I ran the north end of the plantation, which basically is just being responsible for the area. We had higher tonnage than other places because of our—I would like to think—efficient use of our resources. A lot of people said it was because we had better soil. When we made some changes in the mid-90s, I became the head of our department. We had eliminated all of our superintendents. It was called downsizing, so they gave us more than one hat to wear. I was given the title of Irrigation Coordinator /Department Head, which meant I ran the department but I didn't carry the superintendent position because there is a law, if you eliminate a position and you hire somebody else for it, the person who is eliminated can come back and sue the company because you can't eliminate a position and then put somebody else inside. One way to do that is just change the [job] name. Which we did.

During the days of the plantation, it was a very good life to me. I made very decent money. There were long hours, especially when I got married in 1975 to the former Amy Nagamine and I started having my children. What we would do is, I'd have my family come with me, especially on the weekends when we went out into the fields. My oldest son liked going into the mountains and cleaning the ditches. They knew all the places. We always would pack our picnic lunch, and we'd take hikes up into the mountains. They not knowing that this excursion into the mountains was my way of checking my irrigation systems, where I'm planning for the next month, if I need to send crews up or how much of the people I would have to send up. My wife enjoyed those things 'cause I ended up packing out all kinds of orchids, all kinds of plants from in the mountains. Also my family would ask to take out things like *māmaki* tea, *ko'oko'olau* tea, which I knew where some of them were growing. And ginger, a lot of ginger, which was the mountain ginger, which could grow here but it's more abundant in the mountains.

When we shut down in '99, we had such a close rapport with our men, and over the years, a lot of our men, who majority of them were Filipino, I got to know them and their families well. They would utilize us to help them with personal problems. I would not get involved with their problems but when one of my men acted not normal, I would pull him on the side, ask 'em what it was, and if they needed my help they could always come to me. Nine out of ten times we would do that.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

EH: Then many times the men would come and I would be able to find out what is wrong and send them to different agencies within the county to help them. A lot of problems stem from drugs that their children were experimenting with and they had no way of knowing what their kids were doing. One man in particular was so distraught because his son was the first one to be kicked out of Lahainaluna. This was in the late [19] 90s where the legislature passed a no tolerance law. And they used that to kick his son out. He was very upset, but he did not understand that his son was what they call a lord in one of the local gangs. When I investigated I found out what the son was doing, of course he always lied to the mother and the father, and I explained to them [i.e., the authorities] that they have no evidence. But because of his fights within the school they did kick him out. He had the option of going to a private school if they wanted to, he was sixteen at this time, or they could hire private tutors. From what I heard, even the private [schools] didn't want to pick him up because of what he was doing. I told him his son needs to go get some professional help, if not, he may end up in jail. He finally realized, through some of the social services of the county, what was going on. People who understood them who spoke Ilocano helped them and the son. The last I heard, in 2001 he was attending a

college on the Mainland. He cleaned up his drug act and he broke away from the gangs and he wants to be a lawyer.

So there were some success stories. Some of the kids I still see today hanging around in town, being the bums that they became because of what they did when they were in school. Like I told my men before we left the plantation, there's life after Pioneer Mill. Pioneer Mill was not the buildings. Pioneer Mill was the people, and as long as we're around, Pioneer Mill will be around, and the good times we had there will always be with us.

END OF INTERVIEW

PIONEER MILL COMPANY:
A Maui Sugar Plantation Legacy

Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

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