

Conversations between D. W. Watson and Ben Ahakuelo

At the Honolulu Police Station

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 20, 1932 2:10-3:15 p.m.

W. Well, Ben. This is a hell of a mess you are in, isn't it?

B. Yes.

W. If you had followed my advice and stayed away from that gang on Bethel St. this would never have happened, isn't that right.

B. Yes. I have no job that's why I went there.

W. How long are you going to stay here in jail?

B. We were going home Saturday but my lawyer said to stay until investigator comes from Washington.

W. Ben, you remember I helped you get your release from parole and tried to look out for you when you came back from the mainland. I have tried to be your friend, haven't I?

B. Yes. You helped me many times.

W. When I gave you that paper--your release from parole--you remember what I told you? Remember I said if you got into trouble it would be bad for those who backed you up and got your release?

B. I remember.

W. How long were you out of jail before we got the release?

B. More than one year.

W. I wanted to make sure because some people think we should not have helped you. The way I feel, Ben, is that I would do the same thing again for you. I think you are a good boy, Ben, and if you ever get out of this mess you should leave Hawaii, go to some other place and start all over.

B. My brother told me that, too. He said its better for me to go away.

W. I have been thinking a great deal about your case, Ben. I can't help thinking that you may be shielding someone. Are you afraid to tell something? You know I helped you before and I will help you again. You don't need to be afraid to tell me the truth, you know that, don't you?

B. Mr. Watson, I'd tell you the truth. I don't know anything about this job. I never saw that haole woman.

W. Didn't you see her out at Waikiki.

B. No, I just saw her at the hospital.

W. Had you ever seen her before?

B. No.

W. While you were out of jail didn't you try to find out if someone else could have assaulted that haole woman?

B. Yes, I try all the time to find out. I told the detective about some boys but they don't do nothing. They just bring Joe Kalau down here and he tells an alibi and gets away with it.

W. What makes you think Joe Kalau knows something about this case?

B. He was a good friend of mine before but when I get into this case he don't speak to me. I pass him on street and he never look at me. One time I don't know whether during trial or after, but one time I saw Joe Kalau and I said to him "Lucky for you fellows, we have to stand in court for what you fellows did". He never say nothing, just walk away but he looks like he feels kind of funny.

W. Did you ever ask Kalau about the case?

B. Another time--next time I see Kalau I walk up to him and I just said "The detectives are looking for you". He never say nothing, just walk away like he don't hear. Then he come back to me and he said "What did you say to me" and I said "You know what I said. I said the detectives are looking for you". He never say no more. He don't get mad--he just walk away. That's when I went down to police station and told the detectives.

W. Did they arrest him then?

B. They go and bring him in. He told them he wanted to play football that night so they take him out from jail and let him play and after he change clothes from uniform they bring him back. But he told them lots of alibis and gets away with it.

W. What made you think Kalau knew about this case?

B. Because he was out to the dance that night. I saw him there with some other boys. I think some other boys know about this job.

W. Who are the other boys?

B. Ahakuela then named the following, giving the nationalities. Joe Kalau, Hawaiian; Six Toe, Korean; Duck Feet, Hawaiian who hangs around Rizal dance hall; Felicio, Silipino who works at the Hawaiian Pines; Kekahuna, who attends Kalakaua school.

W. Did you see these boys at the dance?

B. Kalau was there, and he has a leather jacket. Good one, too. Six Toe was there and Felicio was there.

W. What makes you think Kekahuna was with these boys?

B. Kekahuna told one boy, a friend of mine, that he knows about this case. He said something to this boy.

W. Who is the boy he talked to?

B. Boy On Tai. You know On Tai--his young boy. He told him at the dance hall

W. Did you tell the police all these names?

B. I told them. I told David Hao.

W. Did the police question these boys?

B. All I know is they questioned Kalau but he got away with alibis.

W. Ben--you are going to have a hard time getting out of all this. Lots of people think you boys are guilty.

B- All I say is I don't know about this job. I never touched any haole woman.

W.-- You boys have caused lots of trouble. All the haole people on the mainland think you boys are guilty and they are blaming the Hawaiians. They're not going to let you boys get off. You know what happened to Joe Ahahawai?

B. They killed an innocent boy. Joe didn't know about that case.

W. Ben, suppose you had a wife and somebody beat that wife and assault her. You would like to kill the man that attack your wife?

B. Sure, but Joe's not guilty of that.

W. Suppose after someone attack your wife if you saw that man you wouldn't kill him unless you were sure?

B. No, I'd want to be sure.

W. The people who killed Joe are not dumb, Ben. They were sure before they shot him. They were just as sure as you would be before you shot anyone. And they think the rest of you boys are guilty.

B. All I know is Joe was not guilty and I am not guilty. They think Joe was dumb, but he wasn't dumb. This fellow Wight, he's a dirty guy. He puts lies into your mouth. He tried to get Joe to sign a paper of what he said. Just because Joe didn't talk much Wight thought he was dumb but Joe read that paper first and when Wight put lies into his mouth about Ida having a jacket, Joe scratched that out.

W. Ben, are there any other fellows besides those whose names you gave me that you think might know about this case.

B. One haole man says he knows about it but he no like to come down. A girl comes to see me and she told me. She's going to find this haole's name and tell me tomorrow.

W. Ben, I'm going to try to help you if you will work with me. I'm going to find out about these boys whose names you gave me. When this girl gives you the haole's name you write it down and I will be back tomorrow to get his name.

Conversation Thursday, January 21, 1932

2:05 to 4-10 p. m.

B. That girl didn't come.

W. You don't know the haole's name?

B. Maybe she come later. She told me she see me today.

W. Did you hear about Lyman assaulting that woman last night?

B. Yes, last night we heard about that.

W. I have been worrying about this trouble of yours, Ben. The more I think about it the more I think you are not telling everything.

B. What?

W. I think you are hiding something from me, Ben. Why don't you tell me the truth? Why try to protect those other boys. You are the only Hawaii left. These people shot Joe, and now there's only you, two Japanese boys and one Chinese boy. Those other boys wouldn't help you-- they are going to squeal, Ben. They're going to blame you just as sure as hell.

B. If I know anything I tell you. Even if I know about my best friend I'd tell on him.

W. I understand they are going to try you boys one at a time next time.

B. If our lawyer wants, they will.

W. Ben, they'll try you one at a time whether you like it or not. Do you know why? Because Ida is going to sqawk. He's going to tell. What do you think they killed Kahahawai for? Because Ida told.

B. No, I asked Ida many times and he say people tell lies. He say he never told anything. He said these men take him up to Pali and try to throw him over but they were afraid because one automobile was parked there. They didn't kill him because he never fight back-- Joe fought those people, that's why they shot him.

W. Ida wouldn't admit to you that he squealed. But those people are not killing Joe for nothing. They KNOW he was guilty. That Japanese put the blame on Joe. He's a Hawaiian, Ben, and so are you.

B. I know Joe is innocent and I am innocent.

W. All the haoles on the mainland are blaming the Hawaiians, Ben. And these people that killed Joe blame you fellows. They got one Hawaiian, and Ben-- you are going to be next. They're going to get you just as sure as you are alive right now. Even if it takes 10 years, you'll never know when you are liable to get it. Joe got off easy--they just shot him. The next time, Ben, they're going to torture you fellows. It's going to be hell.

B. I might as well die. I'm not afraid. If I was guilty I'd feel funny bu

I don't. I'm going home and if they want to shoot me, alright.

W. If you take my advice you'll stay right here. The thing for you to do is to come clean. Tell me all the truth. How much did you drink that night? Maybe you were drunk and don't remember everything.

B. No, I remember everything.

W. Did you sleep in the car--maybe these other fellows attacked this woman while you were asleep in the car.

B. I know when we left the dance we followed that other car. We never went down Ala Moana way. The only thing--maybe those other boys did this job before they pick me up. But I know Takai was not in it because he was at the dance with me.

W. Which boys to you mean?

B. Maybe Joe and Ida and Chang saw that woman before they pick us up. I don't think so though because Joe was a funny fellow. He was my best friend and I know he never care for girls.

W. Maybe he cared for girls after he had a few drinks.

B. No. He could have plenty of girls up school street but he never like.

W. This fellow Chang is a pretty tough hombre, isn't he?

B. No. Joe was tough. He was in plenty of trouble before. One time he almost kill one Hawaiian man at a house. This man kicked the dog and Joe Punch him. He broke that Hawaiians jaw.

W. What time did those fellows pick you and Takai up?

B. Just before the dance was over.

W. That was 12 o'clock?

B. Yes, but Ida say they came back to the dance at 11:30 and that haole woman say she left at 11:35. I don't know, maybe Ida bullshit about his time.

W. Didn't the other boys ever say anything to you about them being mixed up with this haole woman case.

B. They always said they don't know nothing. I tell them maybe they do this job before they pick up me and Takai but they always say no. I always keep asking them, because even if my best friend do this thing I'd tell.

W. Ben, you know what Kaikapu did-- you know who he is?

B. Yes.

W. You know he attacked that woman on Wilhelmina rise--that girl--and he beat her and assaulted here.

B. Yes, he told everything. He admit all.

W. Don't you think that fellow should be killed. Would you help string him up--hang him?

B. Sure. Anybody that's guilty should die. If I was guilty I'd rather die.

W. Ben, can't you think of anything that you have not told me? I am afraid you are trying to shield these other boys. Why should you be here in jail when you might just as well be out of here--away from Hawaii?

B. I wouldn't shield even my best friend on a job like this. I know nothing about it. They asked me what I did that day. They wanted to know where I was from six o'clock until three o'clock in the morning. I told them I was home at six o'clock. After that I went down to the joint where I met Takai and Siki. Takai was going away so he says "Let's have a farewell drink. So we had a drink of beer and then I had another one. Then we went to Correas place where they were having a luau and they brought some plates of food out to us and some beer. Those fellows had beer and they ate pig for chaser. It was about 8 o'clock when we went there. After while we go out to the dance at Waikiki. Takai and me stayed at the dance and the others went back to the luau. They said they would pick us up later. When they came back for us it was just before the dance ended. They said they had to take Siki and another Chang home because those fellows were too drunk. When they came after us there was just Ida, Kahahawai and Chang. We drove right down and followed that other machine. They left me off and I went home. I was home at 12:15 o'clock. We never went down Ala Moana.

W. Did you see this haole woman after the dance?

B. I never saw her. Maybe those guys saw her before they picked us up. I ask them that many times but they say no. They said to me that they swear they never touch that woman.

W. Maybe they are lying. You know they wouldn't admit it to you.

B. I know what I say is true. I am a catholic and when the father came down here he asked me if I touched that haole woman and I told him the truth that I never touched her. Joe Kahahawai was a catholic too and his father made him go to confession every four days and Joe always says the same thing that he was not guilty.

W. Ben, maybe you didn't touch the woman. If the others touched her and you were just there and didn't take part in it, don't be afraid to tell me.

B. I don't know what you mean.

W. Here is what I mean, Ben. Maybe you were with the other boys when ~~when~~ they attacked this haole woman. Maybe you didn't touch her but you are afraid to tell what you saw. Now look, Ben. If that is the case you can tell me about it. There are big men in this town, who want to get this case cleaned up. If you know anything at all don't be afraid to tell because if you tell you can probably get a short sentence, you will then be free, there is a reward offered in this case and you can go away and start life all over again.

B. It wouldn't be easy for me to go away. I'm just the same as married.

W. That's all right. You can get married and take your wife with you.

B. All I know is that I don't know about this job.

W. Why don't you try to find out from Ida and Chang if they and Kahahawai attacked this woman before they picked you and Takai up at the dance?

B. I try to find out. Everyone thinks we boys are good friends but I've got no use for those Japanese. They think they are too good. You ask the people upstairs and they will tell you that about five days ago I fought with Takai right here in jail.

W. What did you fight about---over this case?

B. No. We fight over cards and I took a poke at Takai.

W. Will you try to find out something from these boys?

B. Sure. Yesterday when you come here they want to know from me where I am going and I told them I was going home.

W. What did they say when you came back?

B. They want to know where I have been and I said I was getting ready to go home. I fool them. They said if I'm going home they are going home too. Then I told them my friend came to see me and they don't say any more.

W. Did you know Lyman and Kaikapu when you were in jail before?

B. No, I never saw those fellows there.

W. When you were sent to jail the other time how long did you stay?

B. The judge gave me four months. He shook hands with us and said he would let us go but the society people pay too much attention.

W. How did they treat you in jail?

B. They treat me all right. You know those fellows can get out of jail easy. One boy down there wanted me to run away with him but I said no because I had only four months to do. I said I was a short timer and he said he would have to serve three years. I told him I would wait until the four months were over and if they didn't let me go then I might run away. But they let me go alright.

W. How could you get away from the prison.

B. That's easy. When they take prisoners out to work around town do you think the guard watches all the time?

W. I'll bet the guards go to sleep.

B. Sure they sleep. All you have to do is walk away while they sleep. If I wasn't a short timer I would have run away.

W. Well, Ben. I have to go now. I'll come to see you again. You find out what you can from Ida and Chang but don't trust those fellows because they won't help you at all.

B. I'll telephone to you when I can tell you something.