

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

May Goodwin Huber

September 16, 2009

BY: Arlene Ching (A.C.)

Ronald Oba mentioned the Goodwin family in his article, "A Journey to Aiea Town," published in the January 5, 1996 issue of The Hawaii Herald special edition. Mrs. Huber was four years old when the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor occurred. Her family lived near Kamehameha Highway and 'Aiea Bay. Mrs. Huber and her husband lived in Roseburg, Oregon. She was interviewed by phone.

Goodwin Home near Mikalemi Camp

May: We used to call it, at the time, the village where all the little stores are... and there's a...Buddhist or that type of church (Soto Mission of Aiea)...I don't remember the name of the street now, but it's on that main road that goes down, with the little shops (Kauhale Street). Down there. Well, I lived towards the right. Go down to the right, and it was on...

A.C.: Were you near the Lau's place, where the rice farms were?

May: Oh yeah. They lived---more like, towards Pearl Harbor. I lived further inland. But the main street, that went down past the stores and everything, and then it curves to the right? Then you would just take a left-hand turn. Our house was not---when we were living there, all the houses around there were...plantation homes. We were the two homes that were owned. My mom owned her property and her foster brother owned the other property. And beyond that, was where the Laus lived. We used to walk back and forth to each other's house.

A.C.: Is your house still standing?

May: It's still standing. We were there. My whole family was there, maybe ten years ago. I guess it wasn't more than ten years ago. My mom was in her late nineties. (She discussed how the family came to see their mother.) But we all went down to see that house. The house was still there. The lady, who lives there, came out of the house, and she knew all of us when we were kids. We told her, "Oh, we just wanted to see the

house. We used to live there.” She said, “No, you didn’t. The Goodwins lived there.” We said, “Yes, we know. We’re the Goodwins.” “No, no, no, no. I know the Goodwins.” But she used to walk through our yard, to go back into the village. We had to convince her we were the Goodwin children. Of course, we’re all grown-up, in our sixties, seventies. (laughs) That was so funny.

A.C.: Wow. Was your house below the soda works?

May: The end of our property, my mom had, like, just short of an acre of land. The house, the front of the house, was the grass, water and grass, and at the end of that, was the soda factory. They made the best orange soda there was! There was a coconut button factory there. They used to make coconut buttons, right next to the soda factory.

A.C.: That’s the first time I’ve heard of that.

May: We used to go over there and you know, the discards, they would just leave it outside, you know, on the ground and everything. Every once in while, we would be passing by there, and we’d see a nice button. We would pick up several buttons from the ground. (both laugh) ...This was sixty, seventy years ago. My goodness.

A.C.: So, were the fields next to your house, the marshy land?

May: Next door was my mom’s foster brother. He had the same amount of land that we did, I believe. Like I said, beyond that was Pearl Harbor, Kam Highway side. The Lau’s house. In fact, we grew up with Edwina Lau and we used to go to each other’s house to go through the property line there.

A.C.: My goodness. It’s changed so much.

May: Yes, yes. In fact, we weren’t sure, even sure how to find the house, because they moved some of the houses and the roadway. The road used to go right into---you know, we would turn left and go right into our property. Now that’s all closed up and the houses all moved around over there. A little bit different.

A.C.: So, I wonder why... they closed it up. To go to Kamehameha Highway... you have to go... down behind some restaurants...but it’s through a parking lot.

May: Well, we used to get to Kam Highway, we went up to where the post office and the Aiea Store used to be. We would go up the main street, take a right where there was a gas station (Kuroda) on the corner, which wasn’t there before (it used to be houses). We used to take that road and go right to Kam Highway. That’s how we used to do it.

Village knew ‘Cowboy’

A.C.: And would people know your family?

May: The old-timers would, because my dad was in the Navy. Everybody would call him "Cowboy." He was kinda bow-legged. Everybody called him "Cowboy." In fact, my sister's brother-in-law came to town, looking for the family, because my sister had moved away with her husband. Her brother-in-law was [tape speed changed from 2.4 to 4.8] in the Army, stationed at Schofield. He was looking for us. All somebody had to do was ask for Cowboy. They would tell him how to get to our house. He never even had to use the Goodwin name. (both laugh) But I think, everybody, almost everybody knew the Goodwins, because there were seven of us kids...I don't know about my older sister because I'm second to the youngest, my goodness, everybody knew May and Joyce.

A.C.: Yes, your name has come up in several of the pictures I've seen for Aiea School...and some people in the Salvador family....

May: They lived several houses from me.

A.C.: So they had some pictures from school days and St. Elizabeth's Drum and Bugle Corps.

May: Oh yes.

Goodwin Family

A.C.: Your family had their land then, from being part-Hawaiian?

May: My mom was Japanese; she was born of a Japanese family who were from Japan. Her mother died at childbirth and her dad decided to leave, go back to Japan, left my mother with his brother. His brother was very good friends with this Hawaiian family. When he decided to go back to Japan, he left my mom with this Luhe family. L-U-H-E. So she grew up as a Hawaiian.

A.C.: Like hanai?

May: Spoke Hawaiian.

A.C.: A Japanese woman who spoke Hawaiian?

May: Yes. Well, she didn't live as a Japanese. They were gone. Yeah, she was raised by the Hawaiian family. She spoke Hawaiian. We had a Hawaiian lady who lived above the hill from our house (we called her *Tutu*) [May's sister Frances recalls that *Tutu* used to walk to St. Elizabeth's Catholic Church everyday to go to mass]. And my mom would go up there all the time and sit and talk to her in Hawaiian. My sister Joyce, the youngest, she and I would sit on the porch and listen. And every now and then, we'd hear our name. "Uh-Oh! They're talking about us!" (Both laugh)

A.C.: Wonder if we're in trouble?

May: Yes, right!

A.C.: But, the Goodwin name has come up in several conversations, because it doesn't look like there were a lot of people who lived down in that area because the rice fields, which used to be taro fields, yeah?

May: Well, we didn't have the rice fields there, right there. This was all plantation homes. They all worked at the sugar plantation.

A.C.: So the plantation had built those homes?

May: You know the plantation was up on the hillside. It's closed now. They were all plantation homes, except our property, and like I said, her foster brother had the property next door. His name was Green. In fact, I think--I met someone in his family (Winston Lum) last year, after all these years, and he said he's living there now. So he still has his property [Mary Kauhane Goodwin was Grandma Lum's aunt, who was hanai by great-grand-grandmother, Kailiahi, according to Winston Lum.]

A.C.: Oh. That's very nice. There's been a lot of changes to 'Aiea, but that lower area, you can still see plantation houses, the original houses. Do you remember Dr. Komu (who had property and a house before 1941)? And a pond? Or a fishpond with lotus plants? Or a beehive?

May: Uh. No. I don't remember that. Maybe my oldest sisters would.

A.C.: And your father was in the Navy then? And your mother was she like a housewife or did she?

May: She was a housewife.

A.C.: And you would walk to Aiea School?

May: Um-hmm. I'd walk there for six years. Then, my seventh grade, I started at Sacred Hearts Academy. All five of us girls went to Sacred Hearts Academy... But my mother sent us one at a time. When the oldest one graduated, then Kaye went to school. When she graduated, Frances went. When Frances graduated, I did. Then Joyce did. She could only afford to put one of us in the Academy at a time. So, that's what happened. All five of us went to the Academy.

A.C.: What was it like going there, compared to Aiea School?

May: Oh, well, I only went 'til the sixth grade. I think my brothers both went

through the whole ninth grade.

A.C.: But you'd still go to church) and play, yeah, in 'Aiea?

May: Yes, we all went to 'Aiea. My sisters. Three sisters all got married there in 'Aiea, but by the time, I got married, that's when she sold the land and we went to Pearl City where my younger sister still lives. I was the first one to get married in Pearl City.

A.C.: There's a lot of connections with Pearl City and 'Aiea. (She mentions another family.)

May: We went to St. Elizabeth's Catholic Church, so we knew lots of people. Lots of people knew---like I said, my mom and dad would always volunteer for things at church. At that time, when I was growing up, everybody knew the Goodwins. Of course, having seven kids, everybody going to Aiea School would either knew my sister or knew my brother or I knew them. That type of thing. They knew the Goodwin family!
(laughs)

A.C.: Yeah. So your family, if they needed hospital care, did they go? Did they work at the plantation?

May: No, no. My dad was, like I said, in the Navy. So we went to---we had military care. you know, at Sub-Base because he was a submariner. Then, if we needed a hospital, we had Tripler Army Hospital.

December 7th 1941

A.C.: Does your family have any memories of December 7th?

May: Oh yes! Yes. My memories, or if it's from hearing it so much from the family you know, both of my older sisters went to school half-a-day and worked at the hospital after the bombing, so they got involved in that. I was only, what, four, three years old. I was four-and-a-half. But I remember us going---at least, I think it's my memory, because I was so young. But I remember us going up the hill to---my mom wanted us to get the lady up on the hillside. The Hawaiian lady who didn't speak English. To go with us. We were all leaving to go up to 'Aiea Heights. They were telling us we had to leave, because our house was so close to Pearl Harbor. We went up there. "Come on, you've got to go." They didn't have a car. "You must go with us." And her son kept looking up at the sky. "Oh no, they're dog fighting," because they used to practice with their planes. "Oh no, they're dog fighting," until all of a sudden, they saw a plane burst into fire and starting going down. You could see that big red zero. "Uh-oh, something's really gone wrong." That's when they believed.

A.C.: Did your house have like a porch? And did the porch face the harbor?

[Her sister Frances said the porch faced Diamond Head even when the house was moved.]

May: We had a two-story house. No, our house, the front of it faced the soda--- the end of the property line. The soda factory... We couldn't really see what was happening at Pearl Harbor because we were at the same level that they were, you know. Beach level. Unless we went to the top of the roof, you could see it.

A.C.: (A.C. offers to read an excerpt from "Journey to Aiea Town" by Ronald Oba.) He seems to group your family with the *haoles*.

May: We were the *haoles*. I think we were probably the only *haoles* there.
(Laughs)

A.C.: He mentions your family and the Dexters. I'll just read it, "Below the stores were Oahu Soda Works owned by the Kaya family who also ran the Aiea Theatre. Toward Pearl Harbor was the wetland. Helen Shimamoto who is of the Lau family told me that her father Sui Ken Lau started the rice fields just mauka of Kamehameha Highway." Then he writes about how they would fire on the birds on the rice fields. "And the Laus also raised ducks and harvested their eggs. Nearby was the Onaga family who had a small tofu factory."

May: That was my next-door neighbor. My very next-door neighbor.

A.C.: "On the ewa side overlooking the rice fields was the plantation horse stable managed by George Ornelles. He was a good leather man and fabricated saddles and pouches."

May: I think he lived above us.

A.C.: Then it said, "Field supervisors rode the horses to see the workers and the mules were used to plow the fields. The Suzukawa and Schmidt families also lived in the neighborhood. Somewhere along the periphery were the Goodwin and Dexter families. I mention this since there were only a handful of haole families who had no ties to the plantation."

May: (Laughs) Right. Oh. Well.

A.C.: Thank you. It was very helpful talking to you. (Discuss address so transcript can be mailed for approval and release form.)

END OF INTERVIEW