

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
with
Kaoru Kawamura

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BY: Arlene Ching (A.C.)

Mr. Kaoru “Kuratsu” Kawamura was born in August 1924 at McGrew Pt. When his father died, his mother Kiyo raised the eleven children in ‘Aiea. He attended ‘Aiea School and started working at age eleven for his uncle, and at age fifteen for Honolulu Plantation. He retired in 1992 as a maintenance supervisor after working for thirty-eight years at Simmons Company in Kapolei. He married Dorothy “Dot” in December 1949. Their children are Milton, Wayne, Gayle and Lisa. Mr. Kawamura was interviewed by phone at his home in Wai‘anae.

A.C.: Mr. Kawamura, back in 2007, Alice Takehara gave me a list of about fifteen names of people, to learn more about oldtime ‘Aiea. Do you have a few minutes to talk to me?

Kaoru: Yes.

A.C.: Oh thank you. Do you mind if I put this on a tape, so I can listen to it later?

Kaoru: Yes.

A.C.: Okay. First of all, Mr. Kawamura, how old are you?

Kaoru: Eighty-five.

A.C.: Where did your family live?

Kaoru: Right where the [Rainbow Bay] park is now. Right in front there.

A.C.: Was there a name for that?

Kaoru: McGrew Point.

A.C.: Was it what the people in the village would call the fishing village?

Kaoru: Yeah, because father, my neighbor, all them used to be a fisherman.

A.C.: They didn’t work for the plantation?

Kaoru: No. Only I did. Before the war, I was working.

A.C.: You worked for Honolulu Plantation?

Kaoru: Yes.

A.C.: What did you do?

Kaoru: I was working, unloading the cane in the back of the mill, from the cane cars. Then they would go on the elevator and then they washed them and they go to the grinding room. Just unload and clean up the car, pick up all the sugarcane and then move the car back to the yard.

A.C.: How old were you then?

Kaoru: I was fourteen, fifteen years old.

A.C.: After you finished school, you started working?

Kaoru: Yeah, yeah. Ninth grade. I quit ninth grade. I start working because my father passed away, yeah? My mother was getting hard time too, so we all got to work.

A.C.: So you found a job right up the hill?

Kaoru: Yeah, yeah.

A.C.: Do you remember how much you got paid?

Kaoru: Shucks. Maybe 25 cents.

A.C.: Do you remember your *bango* number?

Kaoru: Shoots. I think it was 774 or 772. Something like that.

December 7th 1941

A.C.: So, what happened December 7th [1941]?

Kaoru: The only thing I can remember is, you see, my house faced directly to Pearl Harbor, see? My house front porch is long. So, that morning, my mother was up. "You have to get up! Pearl Harbor on fire!" So, we all woke up. We're looking from the railing. Then we start seeing the bombing coming. We saw the ship explode and everything. Just like one movie.

A.C.: Wow. It's right there. Right outside your house.

Kaoru: Yeah. Then just then my neighbor---he was in the Army but he had a discharge. He came home running. He said, "This is war!" Then we all get together and we all run up the hill. You know the Takafuji house, back then?

A.C.: Right. On 'Aiea Heights.

Kaoru: 'Aiea Heights. That's where we were. Then in the night, we came home. We gathered at our neighbors. I was sitting down next to my neighbor, when all of sudden I heard a big noise from the roof. Bak! Bak! I'm thinking, "What was that?" So I looked on the floor. I saw one bullet. Hot too, it was! Ho-o-oh. Then, I gave it to the lady. The lady gave it to her son. I don't know what the son did. Between me and the lady. It was a close one.

A.C.: Wow. Could have been you. Was anybody killed in 'Aiea?

Kaoru: No, no, no, no. They never shoot anything below. To me, it was just only Pearl Harbor. I didn't see anything else.

A.C.: Well, I read there were a few cane fires, up in the cane fields. There was a plane that crashed.

Kaoru: I know one crashed way up the mountain. Then, I don't know how long---my neighbors, Filipinos, were living here too. One of them brought one soldier over, you know. He asked for drink! When he asked for drink, he get one knife. I can see the blade. He's telling me, he'd like one drink. But I told the soldier, "We no more drink." Because my father passed away long time and nobody drinks. And then, that was it. That was a close call. I have plenty of stories, because I was right there. (Laughs) In 1942, we all got to evacuate, eh, only the Japanese. So, I was working the plantation at that time, so we had plantation housing. You know Aiea Shopping Center? I was living in the back there. There used to be one old Japanese store. I was living close to there. remember the Fuji Store? I was living right below that building over there. From there, I moved to, above where the ballpark was.

A.C.: The plantation housed you?

Kaoru: Yeah. I was living in there with my mom. She was living there until she passed away.

A.C.: So you were working [for the plantation]?

Kaoru: Yeah. I was working after the war *pau*. Then I switched jobs, yeah? After that, they said they were going to close the plantation. They sold the houses to the workers. (Interview stops)

A.C.: You were talking about how you moved when plantation housing was being sold.

Kawamura Family

A.C.: Could I get back to when you were working along the shoreline?

Kaoru: Yeah.

A.C.: Your father's living (livelihood), was that as fisherman?

Kaoru: My father was fisherman.

A.C.: Well. What kind of boat? What did he catch?

Kaoru: Mullet. We used to get plenty of mullet. *Omaka* (tastes like *akule*). Then we used to go ride around Ford Island. We used to go to Sand Island. We used to go at night and lay net. I used to go with him when I was small. I saw him make his living. At nighttime, my father and my mother used to go out at night and then start and lay their nets inside to catch fish.

A.C.: Um-hmm. Would they sell it?

Kaoru: Yeah, yeah, yeah. My mother used to sell, in those days, they had two bamboo baskets, you know? With the stick on the shoulder. That's how she was selling them up to the camp like that.

A.C.: Oh. She would go up to the camps and sell. Not to, like the Santoki Store?

Kaoru: No, no, no, no. We didn't have no car. No nothing. She used to get that. She used to sell, same thing like that, when the neighbor man would go out with his sampan at night and they'd come back. They catch *menpachi* (squirrel fish) or anything. My mother used to take that and sell it to the village.

A.C.: And people would pay cash?

Kaoru: No. Those days they hardly paid cash. So they charged.

A.C.: You mean, just like the stores, where you charge it and then when paycheck (came)?

Kaoru: My mother used to let them charge. But after the war, she cannot collect all the money already after that.

A.C.: Yeah. What would you use for bait?

Kaoru: No. (Used) net. Net. But the fisherman next door with the sampan. They used to take the *kine* shrimp. They used that for bait. Those days had plenty shrimp. But not anymore.

A.C.: You mean, like shrimp, you could scoop it up in the salt water? Fresh water?

Kaoru: Salt water. Yeah. I used to go with him. We used to go outside the Pearl City Peninsula, outside way back before when where the [Pan American] Clipper used to land [in Middle Loch]. Right behind there. I used to go over there. I'd go help him go drag net and catch shrimp like that.

A.C.: But he knew where to go?

Kaoru: Yeah, the man knew where to go to get shrimp. So I just tagged along with him.

A.C.: And who were your neighbors? Who lived next door?

Kaoru: My neighbor was Kondo. (Harushi Kondo died in Italy during the war.) ['Aiea Community Association monument on the library's lawn lists his name.] And Hirano. And Onishi. [Shizuo Onishi Pavilion at Rainbow Bay marks the homesite.] Then, the other one up, close to the track was Yamamoto.

A.C.: You know, up above you guys, there was an 'Aiea Landing and there were some fishponds there?

Kaoru: Yeah, yeah, yeah. But you know, where the people lived, close to the river, my grandfather used to raise rice. He used to raise rice, and outside he had ponds. Even in front of my house, had one small pond. Then, my grandfather, he was old already, he used to work around the ponds... Sometimes, he'd walk down the track and go way down Pearl City way. My uncle had to go look for him. He used to raise rice and I used to hear the can ringing.

A.C.: So, if he was raising rice, did he have to find a way to scare away the birds?

Kaoru: Yes, he used to scare away the birds with the five-gallon can. That's how it was doing.

A.C.: Yeah. Did he take the rice to a rice mill nearby?

Kaoru: I don't know what they were doing. I know he had one part with cement. He used to get the animals go around and around. I don't know what they were doing. I

thought they were raising it.

A.C.: Yeah. They were probably husking it or milling it. They were doing in 'Aiea?

Kaoru: Yeah. Right before the road came up.

A.C.: Do you remember when it used to be just the train tracks?

Kaoru: Yeah. I remember. I know that because I was a naughty boy when I was younger. (Arlene laughs) One time, the train stops, see? You know where Forty-Niner's [Restaurant] is? They used to get one bridge over there.

A.C.: There used to be one what?

Kaoru: Bridge. Overpass bridge before it goes to McGrew Camp. Then, under the bridge, when the train went stop, I'd climb up on the train. (Chuckles) I was dumping all the pineapples, you know, the big ones! Then the brakeman grab me, you know, "I'll get you!" (Laughs) So he tell me, "Go pick them up and throw them inside the boxcar." But you know it was *kinda* high for me to throw them over? So I put one on the train, and I'd jump up. Just like one basketball player, with one hand, I shoot it inside the train. I jump on the one side when he jumped one side! I jumped the other side and ran to the cane field! (Both laugh) I still remember that.

A.C.: Oh, my goodness.

Kaoru: We used to stand on the bridge. Guys would make spear with a rope, and they would spear one pineapple when the train was going down. That's the fun we had!

A.C.: Yeah? Free fun, huh?

Kaoru: We don't go out, don't steal, no nothing. We make our own fun.

A.C.: Do you remember clamming in 'Aiea Bay?

Kaoru: Yeah. Plenty clamming. Right in front of my house. On the sides. What we used to do was walk along the shoreline on McGrew side and we used to lift clams and my mother used to do clamming and sell them. We used to make a fire and put galvanized roofing on top, uh? We'd put the clams on top and that way we'd eat it. Then, you know where Cutter Ford was? That had plenty clams. My mother used to work for the man that owned the pond over there. Yamamoto. She used to go dig clam. They used to send them from there. To downtown.

A.C.: There were that many clams?

Kaoru: They had plenty clams!

A.C.: Instead of just selling it to Waimalu people? It would go to town?

Kaoru: The *kine*, they were all going to town. After the war, I remember at nighttime, me and my brother-in-law, we were going over there because a lot of people were going. So we went too. Ho! The clams we take. We'd take by the bag! Then the plantation started to throw the mud water and everything. That's how the clams disappeared.

A.C.: Oh. How big were the clams?

Kaoru: Good size, good size. They're wide. Over one inch. Yeah, something like that (Manila clams). Those days, the water was clean, too. When the plantation start to rake the dirt, and everything, and they washed the cane at the mill, and then water run down. That's how the water got muddy. Even now, when you look at the park over there, on the left side, by the river side, it used to get all mud over there.

A.C.: You know, I still see that there's some poles sticking out [at 'Aiea Bay at Rainbow State Park].

Kaoru: Yeah, yeah. You know where the pavilion is? My house was right in front there. They had one pond over there. You see the poles sticking out? That was the bridge. You know, where we come in. We dock the boats. I used to come home from school. When I was small, in the back of our house, on the side, they had cane fields. We used to chew---we'd go all inside there, take bunch of cane, and we'd go on the pier and go chew! Those days, we never go dentist! I still remember, I still got one scar on left side on the finger. I cut my finger. With a knife. Almost chopped it off. I still get the scar. Cane knife or a kitchen knife. We all were kids over there, chewing. That's the pole! Every time when I pass that and it reminds me of that!

A.C.: Do you remember, like, people called 'Aiea a village then?

Kaoru: Yeah. Because it had a community over there.

A.C.: But you lived in the fishing village part (of the village)?

Kaoru: That's right in front of Pearl Harbor. You know, when some people, they talk and make a story, yeah? I don't even believe them! (Referring to December 7th 1941) Because, to me, they (Japanese planes) came on that morning, and that was it. They never came at nighttime and attacked again. But, the soldiers themselves were shooting up in the air. Anything that fly, they going to go shoot.

A.C.: Sure, because they thought they were going to get invaded again.

Kaoru: Yeah, yeah, yeah. But nothing happened after that. Then the next day, I see them bringing up the dead bodies by the Navy pier over there.

A.C.: Yeah. It must have been horrible to see---

Kaoru: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, the stuff blow up in the air. I was standing right there on the porch and looking directly (at it).

A.C.: And it happened. (Discussed sending the transcript for his approval to put it on the shelves at Aiea Public Library.)

Kaoru: Right on the side, were Japanese folks over there. Nomura. They were fishing too. They had houses over there. (There was a well for drinking water. When the tide came up, the water in the well rose up too.)

A.C.: I forgot to ask you. What kind of boat? And were you living on a house on stilts so that the boat was *kinda* outside?

Kaoru: No. Get the boat in the water. Sometimes, we put rollers and roll them up. On the side. Flat-bottom boat with an outboard engine.

A.C.: Okay. The boat was on the pier. Who in 'Aiea had a sampan?

Kaoru: Just Chagami. Shingawa, the one (who lived) by my uncle who had the service station, over there by the river. [Kawamura Service Station was at the corner of Honomanu Street and Kamehameha Highway near 'Aiea Stream. It was a Shell Gas station next to Kuroda Service Station.] Shintaku had one sampan. Kondo and Hirano had sampans. But Hirano had sampan longer than Kondo. [Along with other Japanese families who were evicted from their homes during World War II, the Kawamura received an apology and redress from the federal government for the loss of their home and livelihood. They recall meeting other 'Aiea and Waiiau residents when they registered at the Hawaii Okinawa Center. Mrs. Kawamura still has the letter.]

Pearl Harbor Dredging

And then, before that, Standard Dredging came over there.

(Photo)

You know where they dredged the water? The ocean? Well, Kondo used to live way down by the bushes on the hill. Then when the standing dredging came, they moved the house close to my house, right next door. Then, they built the pier. They built the warehouse. Then the big standing dredging came over there. Then, they had plenty floating pontoons. You know, they get the pipe on top of there on the big round tank. Then, when the dredging go to dig the (mud from the bottom of the) ocean, they connect it to that. You know, by where Radford High School is? They used to be one pond there.

A.C.: Yeah. It was a big pond. [Makalapa Crater, also known as Aliamanu Fresh Water Pond mentioned in Archaeology of O'ahu by J. Gilbert McAllister]

Kaoru: They used to fill up in there, what they were dredging. They bring everything over there too. In the ocean, in Pearl Harbor in those days, yeah? They used to pump the dirt inside, by Radford High School. Had one pond over there.

A.C.: Were they dredging Pearl Harbor for the Navy? Or for the plantation?

Kaoru: No, no, no. I guess Navy. It was private contractor.

A.C.: This lady [Marguerite Peach in another interview] says they were pumping molasses.

Kaoru: No, no, no, no. Of course, way back, way, way back. Then they stopped that, because they had the cement hoses over there, and they were loading molasses over there. I know about that. We used to lay fish traps over there. Then, the plantation village run their sewer lines over there, you know! That's where all the fish stay. They had the sewer line over there.

A.C.: Okay. So did this go into 'Aiea Bay?

Kaoru: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

A.C.: Between McGrew Point---

Kaoru: You know the 'Aiea River? From there, straight out, you know. I used to eat fish. Swim over there. Everything there. Until I was about eighteen years old!

Honolulu Plantation during World War II

Then when the war came, I was working for the plantation, and I used to volunteer with the soldiers. Then I volunteered for the 100th and 442nd but just then, when we volunteered, they had enough soldiers already. So we didn't go. Then they said, that all the boys working the mill were going to get drafted, so we had to go agriculture, they said. So that's when they needed the young boys in the agricultural fields. So we used to work in the plantation fields. We used to cut grass with the hoe. I remember we carried tanks and we used to shoot poison on the weeds.

A.C.: And this was up on the Honolulu Plantation fields?

Kaoru: Yeah, yeah.

A.C.: And was this in the fields in Pearl City too?

Kaoru: Yeah. Wherever. We worked only in the district, 'Aiea side. They had another group do Pearl City side.

A.C.: Do you remember the managers then?

Kaoru: Mr. Scott. [Alvah Scott]

A.C.: Do you remember Stafford Austin? Richard Penhallow?

Kaoru: Penhallow. I remember him!

A.C.: Yeah? He was manager during the war.

Kaoru: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

A.C.: And then things closed down.

Kaoru: Yeah. I remember before that, before it closed down, they had the strike. (Laughs) Then I was in the fishing group. We used to go fishing. Outside Sand Island, bring them in, for the members, yeah? That's what we would do.

A.C.: This is around the strike time?

Kaoru: After the war, I think. You know, I forgot already when we did this—before the war or after. This is what we would do.

'Aiea Businesses and Churches

Then, you know where the 7-Eleven is? Used to---Right on the freeway had the Ohara Fish Market. (After my father died, I used to squid with my family near John Rodgers Airport and we'd sell it to the Ohara fish peddler.) Then, where Ohara stayed, right up at Stable Camp; then, from there, they opened one store over there. That was on top of the freeway. Next to 7-Eleven. To think I used to walk all over the place over there. We used to walk to school, 'Aiea School.

A.C.: So going to 'Aiea School from where you used to live on the shoreline, would you walk through---?

Kaoru: Puerto Rican Camp. Yeah. Before that, they had Mizuno Store over there. We used to cut from there and then go to there. Then the Japanese School was by the Filipino Camp. The ('Aiea} Hongwanji over there.

A.C.: Okay. But the Hongwanji was in Filipino Camp, right?

Kaoru: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

A.C.: But below Moanalua Road, was there another Japanese School?

Kaoru: Soto Mission. It's right below 'Aiea Shopping---you know where the old Speedy's [Market] used to be? You know where the 'Aiea Post Office is? Right across.

A.C.: The Soto Mission. Was it always there?

Kaoru: Yeah, yeah. Always.

A.C.: Can I just ask you a question about Down Theatre? Was Down Theatre kind of a big building with a roof with--?

Kaoru: A galvanized roof. There used to be a lot of fights there, with the soldiers. I no forget. Even inside the theatre, get fights. Then, you know, Up Theatre? I remember a lot of guys from the hillside used to rock the roof. (Chuckles)

A.C.: (Laughs) You mean, they throw rocks on the roof?

Kaoru: Yeah! On the roof. On the theatre. In the theatre, they're watching the movie, one would start, "Boom Boom!" (Both laugh) Now everything is improved. Everything's different over there. There's no hill there. That's the ['Aiea] Medical Center now.

A.C.: Do you remember when Dr. [Mannosuke] Komu built a house where the post office is now?

Kaoru: The only thing I remember is the 'Aiea Store and the [bank and] post office. No other new building was there. I never see any. We used to go pass the Komu house. There wasn't any new building.

A.C.: What was the Komu house like?

Kaoru: Oh, regular old house (with two stories. There was a big lychee tree.)

A.C.: With a porch in the front?

Kaoru: I guess. Yeah. [The two-story house later became available for rent and the Kawamura family lived there for several decades.] In his lane, he had some buildings. I guess he was renting it out to his nephew or relative.

A.C.: Yeah. Everyone knows now, when you go down [Kauhale Street] to the post office, there's these two old palm---

Kaoru: Palm trees. Yeah, yeah.

A.C.: Were those palm trees already there?

Kaoru: All was there. Then, the ['Aiea Soto Mission] Bon Dance was over there too. Had a lot of big crowds in those days. Plenty people.

A.C.: There was a time when the village had two thousand people.

Kaoru: Not only that, but in those days, it was a community. You know the people. You know them. Not like today.

A.C.: Well. Thank you very much. Okay.

Kaoru: That's what I remember.

A.C.: You remember a lot. I really thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW