

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
with
Rebecca Segovia Taitague

July 27, 2007

BY: A.C. Ching (*italicized*)

Rebecca “Becky” Segovia Taitague is a lifelong ‘Aiea resident. Her mother’s family were landowners and lived in ‘Aiea where the Aiea Public Library on Moanalua Road. She was born in 1921. She married Daniel Taitague in 1946 and they raised their children in ‘Aiea. She came to the interview with her great-granddaughter.

Roads in ‘Aiea

(At the beginning of the interview, Rebecca showed a hand-drawn map of lower ‘Aiea before World War II, between Halawa Valley and Nalopaka Street, and between Honolulu Plantation Company refinery, commonly called “‘Aiea Mill” and Kamehameha Highway.)

Rebecca: Wait. Let me see now. Hold on.

A.C.: I’ll come on this side. Okay.

Rebecca: Coming from Red Hill. Okay now, if you come down---you know Red Hill, before they did the freeway, they had—remember Button Hill? That’s where the road used to come down, come around and used to come around Red Hill. Then it came into Moanalua Road. Then, Moanalua Road, as you made the bend around this way, then, now---it’s where the jailhouse (Halawa Medium Security Prison) is.

A.C.: Yeah. But the Aiea (Naval) Laundry---

Rebecca: Laundry would be---it was over in this vicinity. Yeah. When you’re coming through here (on Moanalua Road), so the first entrance you would have going to Halawa. Halawa. And then, oh, maybe about a block or two, then you would come to ‘Aiea Elementary. And then, I forgot, they had an empty lot here. Then we used to have, uh, the train track used to come here.

A.C.: These were the train tracks for the mill, right?

Rebecca: Yeah, that used to come to the mill. But then, here, would be nothing but cane field. Then, here would be part of the Puerto Rican camp. You know, where Wendy’s (Restaurant) is now. So, this would be the main entrance going into the Puerto Rican camp. This would be mostly homes here.

A.C.: Was this like dirt roads?

Rebecca: No. It was regular.

A.C.: It was macadam?

Rebecca: Yeah. Just regular road. Then, after that, I'll do this side first. This is where Wendi's is now, but where the Korean (United Methodist) church is? This is the street here. And then, this is another street you would go into here. And it used to be blocked. They used to have single men homes here, plantation homes. Then, you make a left turn here. Then you would come to the, um, homes here, and right about here, they had Aiea Plantation hospital. And directly across that, they had a cemetery. Then we go back again, come back here, on this street, then right on this block here, they had Mizuno Store. From here, you come up to Kam (Kamehameha) Highway. Then, over here, I put this dark mark. It's a stream.

A.C.: Oh. Right alongside the road. Like a ditch.

Rebecca: Yeah. Right here. But it was the 'Aiea stream.

A.C.: Did you call it "river" or "stream"?

Rebecca: We used to call it "river." So this would be the "river." OK. Then when you come into here, the first right, they used to have the Nakashima---now we're going into 'Aiea town.

'Aiea before World War II

A.C.: This is Kauhale (Street).

Rebecca: Yeah. Kauhale Street. When you come in, on your left, would be Nakashima Store. Then, they had a barbershop. OK, after the barbershop, they had Chinese store called Chung Ching. After Chung Ching, they had a privately owned ---they used to run a pool hall. Then, right next to it was Tobaka Drug Store where we used to out and eat ice cream or what not. Then, Nagamine Store. Then, we had a little ice shop where you could buy your ice by bulk. Okay. Then, they had a little aisle here. And then they had a barbershop. Then they had Kazama Store. After Kazama Store, they used to have a little aisle here. A little street. It used to go around the area here, before they had Mikalemi Street. This is how we used to come in.

A.C.: This is the street that's named for your grandmother?

Rebecca: This is where you make a left turn and then this is where our swimming pool used to be. This was our pool and they had nothing but homes. And you go back up

here, go back up, on the left, used to be [Dr. Mannosuke] Komu. But this was a privately owned home. Right there, Kona. I think it was owned by Baptists or something like that. Then you have Komu property. Then this little shopping area, they had a photo shop, a Sakai Laundry.

A.C.: You have it written as Saiki but it's Sakai?

Rebecca: Sakai. Then you had Oba Barbershop. Then we had a saimin shop. Then we had a little walkway. Then we had the "Down Theatre."

A.C.: This is Down Theatre. Because you had two, right?

Rebecca: Yeah. Because the Up Theatre was right here. OK? Then, after the theater, then we had a little walkway. Then we had Filipino store run by Macadangdang. OK. Then we had a little walkway. Then we come into Santoki Store. Pizza place and Santoki. OK. Then we come, going up.

A.C.: Can I just ask one question about the Macadangdang Store? Before that, or after, was it the Dacosin Store?

Rebecca: They might have been.

A.C.: But you knew it as Macadangdang.

Rebecca: And then after, you came to Aiea Store. Then it was an adjoining thing. They had a Kurashige Store. Then they had the Aburao Store. (She talked about the Aburao daughters.) Then we used to have a little lane that came down to our area.

A.C.: Is it like the lane that comes down now to the library?

Rebecca: No. Not anymore. This is different. When you come down this way, then we rented out two homes. One to Kato. One to Yoshinaga. Okay. On this side, was an empty lot. We had nothing but sugarcane here. Surrounding the area. Then we had Onishi. Margaret Onishi used to live here. Then we had another old Japanese there. I forget what her name was. And then, that used to be our borderline.

A.C.: Yeah. Someone mentioned that there was a ditch over here, too.

Rebecca: Right about here. Right across. That's where some of the water still drains out, I think, out from the stream. And then there were homes over here. But no sugarcane. Only sugarcane on the Segovia side. Yeah, and right next, behind all the shopping center, remember I said they had a walkway or driveway. Then, on one side of the property was owned by Yoshimura. They had to have a way to drive in. So you know where the library is? Where the (Wayland Baptist) college is? I think you noticed it. There's a little parking lot right in back of mango trees? That's used to be owned by

the Yoshimuras. Because our property has come from where the mango tree is, all the way up to where the parking lot is right now. So, you come out this way. This is the main street on Moanalua Road. They had Ohara. Sale. Nagamine. Figueroa. Then, Oda. Then, Nakano. He was the supervisor for the surveyors. Nakano. Then you come out on Moanalua Road. You come out here to Nalopaka (Place). Then we make a left turn. Where you now have homes here. Then you come into Mikalemi Camp. So right here, used to be our private cemetery with an exchange for the cane field here. We had leased our area to O'ahu Sugar. But it was already exchanged.

A.C.: But it was in your grandmother's name?

Rebecca: Hmm. Yeah.

A.C.: And her name was.

Rebecca: Puuhina. P-U-U-H-I-N-A.

A.C.: So Mikalemi went all the way---

Rebecca: From Nalopaka Place. All the way down to here.

A.C.: Okay. Just like now.

Rebecca: So now, it's nothing but homes here. Then, when you come out here, where Kauhale ends, it used to be swamp, rice, and taro.

A.C.: I see you've written Lau.

Rebecca: Lau. Half of it is owned by Lau and Hoke. Then you come out on Kam Highway. You remember, across from Kam Highway, they have the Pearl Harbor Park? Okay. That used to be another camp. They called it the Mango Camp.

A.C.: Did there used to be a pier there? It's called Rainbow Park now. They cleared all the mangrove. It's beautiful now.

Rebecca: Do you know where they cleared off all around here? They used to have homes on the water? You know that Forty Niner (Restaurant) is owned by Chagami? Chagami used to live in one of those homes. Their parents used to go out fishing. So whatever they caught, then they would come into town and sell their fish. There were two other Japanese. I forgot what their names are, but I know one of them was Chagami.

A.C.: So the houses were on piers because it was above the water? It was on the shoreline. So they could actually fish from their houses?

Rebecca: They used to go out fishing.

A.C.: Oh I see. They had their boats tied up then.

Rebecca: On the other side, you know where they have the Captain's Gate (Admiral's Boathouse)? Where they have the pier? On that side. Now it's cleared. There used to be a home. Just before you get to the pier, we used to go out there. We had friends. We used to go clamming. Yeah. (Tape stops) (Talking about 'Aiea School) At that time, they didn't have this abuse thing. But sometimes, they (teachers) get so impatient. So what happened, she used to hit my head against the blackboard. So I got so angry, I walked out! I walked out and I walked all the way home. I forgot what grade it was. Then, Mr. Dizon (the principal) and (the teacher) came to talk to my parents. My parents said "Well, she had no business hitting her head against the blackboard, you know. She's not supposed to do that." But he was so apologetic. He apologized and finally said, "Come on, Rebecca, you got to back to school. You can't miss it. OK. When we go back, I'll talk to (the teacher)." And then, from then on, she and I got really close from that time on. I remember that there was Mr. Dizon that was there. When we were going to school. The plantation was over there, especially the Filipino families, they would let the children go up to the ninth grade. But after that, the parents wouldn't let them continue.

A.C.: But they had to work.

Rebecca: No. But that was the girls. But you know what they said? Because no use sending them to high school, because as soon as they get to high school, they're going to get married! They were more interested in men going to high school because they are the breadwinners, they said. They told my father, why is he sending my sister and I? We were girls. But that's one thing my father did. He really thought about the education. So that's how we got to go to (high) school.

Mikalemi Camp Home

Rebecca: (Tape turned off) Our area. When you come into our area, we used to have what you called an arch.

A.C.: An arch?

Rebecca: There used to be a little gate. You used to come on the street. You used to come in. Then they used to build this arch. On this arch, they had buttercups. They had my mom and my *tutu*, I think, planted buttercups. So, they had nothing but buttercups on the top. And on the bottom, they had nothing but *la 'ae* hanging on the walkway, when you're going to the stairs to the old house. When you're going up to the old house. On both sides, nothing but *lau 'ae* hanging. On one side, we had a guava tree, then we had two mango trees with a little swing on it. And then, when you go up to the house, we had this old-fashioned veranda that came from one end of the front of the house, clear across to the other side. Then we had a big, big yard. Then on the other side, that's where we

had the houses. Rooms rented out.

A.C.: Was the property level or was it sloping?

Rebecca: It was level. Uh-huh. Especially going up to Nalopaka (Place). That's where they had a little hump. Right about here. There used to have homes here. And this way, the plantation homes used to start.

A.C.: It sounds huge. How many bedrooms?

Rebecca: Surprisingly, only two. Two with a large living room. Then my father and my mother decided that it was more like a plantation (home). With two bedrooms, living room, and then we had a kitchen, a plantation kitchen. So my father decided to enlarge it. He added a dining room. And the other one was supposed to be another bedroom. Then when you walked out, then we used to have our bathroom outside. Then we had a little wooden tubs.

A.C.: Yeah. The *furo* kind? (Laughter)

Rebecca: We had that. Then we had our own bath. Then on this side of the house, my father added another bedroom. My *tutu* said, "Never build when someone's in the house. Because you're ARE going to lose someone." So when my father built the addition, the dining room and the extra bedroom, that when we lost my *tutu*. When we added the larger one, that's when we lost my mom.

A.C.: So who passed away first?

Rebecca: My grandmother. My mom died in 1938 after my brother Michael was born. The day he was born, she passed away and she was only 38. So when she passed away, my sister and I---my sister was nineteen and I was seventeen. We went to Farrington (High School). So now I have---her brother (indicating her great-granddaughter, who is present at the interview), great-grandson. My two older brothers go to Farrington. My other brother starts on July 31. (All laugh.) Her grandmother is my number four daughter. (Laughs) (She mentions that her granddaughter works at *Arizona* Memorial and her great-granddaughter spends some time with her during the summer.) So A.C., this is one of more forty great-grandchildren! (Laughs) That's out of my twenty grand(children). Now, thank God, I have one that's a great-great. That's why I showed that map to my son-in-law when we're getting (here). He said, "What! You know, I give you credit that you still remember all this!" I say, "Well, we were quite active." That's the reason, probably, you know I could remember all the way back. I used to love the old days, oh God. My sister and I. There used to be four of us. The Aburao oldest daughter---her name was Tamoye. Then, she had a sister that's married to Tokuno now. Then she had another sister who was married to the taxi driver. I think they used to call her Yoshaye. Then they had another sister named, uh, Kay. She lives right down on Mikalemi Street. And then the youngest one was named---her Japanese name

was Tokutu but her name was Helen. (Laughs) I think she's a widow. I haven't seen her----

A.C.: But the one who is closest to your age is---?

Rebecca: The oldest sister. Tamoye. We used to call each other by initial. Like her, we'd be calling her "T" and Dorothy Onishi, we used to call her "D." Then my sister Lilinoe----her Hawaiian name was "Lilinoe." We used to call her "L." With me, they didn't call me "Rebecca." They called me "Becky" so they'd call me "B." Yeah! So the four of us used to just hang out together. Just neighbors. Aburao used to own the store. (Tape stops) We'd stay together, and then, uh, matter of fact, Tamoye died early. She had TB. They used to live on this private road. They used to live right in this area. We used to have this little stream that used to go by here, that even now when you---It used to be an empty lot. The place used to be right here. The sugarcane ended right about here.

A.C.: Did the road cover it up, so there was a (drainage) pipe?

Rebecca: No. We used to have a little bridge. So when you come down, when you entered out property, we used to have a little bridge here that you used to come over. (Laughs)

A.C.: You know there was so much water in this area. People don't realize that. They see there's a pond there.

Rebecca: Yeah.

A.C.: There was a place where you could fish, too? Or they would empty the reservoir so you could get fish? But this was up in the plantation area.

Rebecca: Oh, that's probably up that side.

A.C.: In the town area, they had quite a few ditches and streams.

Rebecca: Yeah. I know. Yeah, because right over here, now, some of the homes, when it rains hard. The house shifts. And we wondered, how come every time it rained hard, then the house would shift and sometimes, you couldn't close the door. Then I remembered, oh yeah, this used to be a swampy area. I remembered, yeah. Because we were not even allowed, even to come near that swamp area. Yeah.

A.C.: So, your family cemetery that is down over here---finally, when they built all the houses, is there a house that's on your cemetery?

Rebecca: There's a house. Yeah, there is. If you go down Mikalemi Street, on your left hand side, there's a house with a mango tree in the front. That's where it is. See, and then, what they did, they dug up most of the graves. I think some of them they didn't,

because, when we go up to Mililani (Mortuary and cemetery); you know where the flagpole is? That's where most of the family is buried there. They have a little plantation monument. The *makai* side, where the flagpole is? Okay. If you ever noticed there's a little monument, cement monument, on one side. Because at the same time that they dug up the plantation at Waipahu. You remember? They had buried them in the front. My parents and the ones they dug up here, were in the back. So they have their names in the back there. Then we looked for my two sisters and my brother. I guess they didn't find them because they were not even listed on that monument. So they don't know whether they're still there or not. Once in a while, we heard, that the family that lives above them...they say, once in a while, they hear some knocking, especially on the ground! Well, I say, there's people still in there. The cemetery had a big monument they call Kaawa. Kaawa, yeah. I think my *tutu* man was called Kaawa but we hardly saw him because he made trips from Big Island and here. We hardly saw him. My *tutu* was one of these old medicine woman. That's her reason that my sister started school late, because she's, uh, two years older than I. She used to travel with my *tutu*. My *tutu* used to go to the Big Island. Before she goes out and healed someone, she used to go and talk to *Pele*. She'd tell a story that she---you know the old folks used to wear scarves? Okay. She said she'd throw her scarves in, and she chants to *Pele*. She said when the scarf blows back, and it's all torn, then don't do nothing. But if it's kept back there, then you go ahead and do what you're supposed to do. So she'd go back to the Big Island, and Maui---was the only two islands that she traveled.

A.C.: She'd have to take a boat over?

Rebecca: Yeah. What they called the steamer. Yeah. I remembered, because, we traveled with her once. And then we wouldn't get on in first class. We'd be on the bottom. We used to say, "Oh my God! I don't know how many people all squashed, you know." But they always say, "There's no bed, so get your mat" and you'd find a spot and lie down. And that's how our house was. That's why we used to say, our house is big, but it had only two bedrooms! So when we'd have family come over, we'd have this big living room, you know. So my mom and dad would say, "Well, bring your mat or find a place and lay yourself down, even if you have to lie down in the bathroom. Find a place!" That's how we got together. (Tape stops) When they'd come down the street where we used to live, then, when they'd come by the gate---we'd have a little gate, you know. They'd open the gate, and from the time they entered the gate, until the walkway to the stairs, they'd go "Hoo-whee! Hoo-whee! Hoo-whee!" and they'd speaking Hawaiian. You know, it's so fun that I never---because of the intermarriage between my dad and my mom. We spoke nothing but English at home. Of course, my *tutu* spoke Hawaiian but then I would catch a little bit. But my sister was the one who really understood it. So when they'd come and they'd say, "Hoo-whee!" then my mom (would say) "Oh, *hele mai, hele mai!*" and then they'd say "Come and eat, come and eat." The first thing they'd say "is come in," and "go and eat," and then they'd say "Okay." They'd speak in Hawaiian, and then they'd stay overnight. Then, when we'd get up next morning, they gone! (Laughs) I told my *tutu*, "How come, *tutu*? How come they come in and they eat and then they sleep, and then they gone?" She'd say, "Becky, that's how it

is.” You know. And then, we were coming down from Tripler. Old Moanalua Road. When you go back to where Tripler is. When it comes up to Red Hill. The road used to come around. You know where they have all those big homes? There's a road. But when you come on the old Moanalua Road. My mom and dad. They used drive to a lot at night. They said that anytime, when you see someone on the road. You stop and ask them. It can be a pretty woman. It can be an old woman with a dog. Then one time, my mom and dad were coming home from Waimanalo. They said they stopped, right near where that water pump is? They had a woman standing. They asked her, “Oh, where you going?” She said she was going to come this way. So then my mom said, “Come, come, come.”

A.C.: You mean Wai‘anae side?

Rebecca: No. Coming from town toward ‘Aiea. They were coming home. So they said, “Come, come, come.” So she sat in the back seat. Then just before they came down Red Hill, just before they made the turn, they looked back and asked her how far she was going to go. They turned around and looked for her. She’s gone. (Laughs) Oh my God. We always sat in the back, my sister and I, because we had this old car, all open thing and what not! I don’t know. My grandmother, my *tutu*. They say when you have Hawaiian blood; be careful! (Laughs)

A.C.: I’ve heard people talk about, you know, that there’d be spirits around Red Hill. And then, of course, after World War II---because of the burials. You were mentioning the day after Pearl Harbor. (Turning to Rebecca’s great-granddaughter) Have you heard her say that she saw the bodies?

Rebecca: Yeah. Where we used to live right here. The porch, the high part. The railings. So my sister and I were getting ready to go to church.

December 7, 1941 and World War II

A.C.: This is on December 7th (1941).

Rebecca: Right. And we were ready to go to church, and then, we wondered. We saw this plane coming in from this way. This way. And we wondered, “Gee, it didn’t sound like one of ours.” Then, next thing we knew, we stood up, “What!” It was so noisy. So we saw them coming in. We saw down there that there was this big explosion! We thought, “Oh my God! What’s happening?” So we wanted to *ni‘ele* so we tried to go down to Mizuno street to get over to see but we can’t. They stopped us. They came on the radio and says, “Everybody stay in your house; this is the real thing.” Because they thought it was maneuvers. But then they said, no, no; everyone stay in. This is the real thing. So what happened, my father took us back home. And then, we said, “My God!” The area where the U.S.S. *Arizona* was, oh my God! All the black smoke. And they even had on this side of Ford Island. But then, a couple days, or three or four days after, because they were waiting for them (the Japanese) to come back to attack us again. So

they waited. So I would say, three or four days after, maybe within the week, they had the military with this big gig, this big ship that used to go around the shoreline and pick up all the dead bodies. And where the pier that you see down there? That's where they use to lay them there. There used to be like about, five, six high until they took them to Tripler---not Tripler but where they had the old Navy hospital up at Halawa (Heights). That's where they used to take them. It was so pitiful. And that night, we were going to stay. We were so afraid. We thought they were going to come back. We thought we heard planes sometimes. Oh my God. We thought they were coming back and we're so close by.

A.C.: Yeah, because it's practically your back yard.

Rebecca: Yeah.

A.C.: You're hearing everything.

Rebecca: I know. Because when the planes were diving, you know, you could hear it. I'd say, "Oh my God!"

A.C.: So that night. Of course, they had started blackout already, and you were afraid they were going to come back. Were you able to stay in your home?

Rebecca: Yeah. We stayed. What happened, is that they had the civil (defense) and my mom forgot to close, uh, one of the shades. (Laughs) There was just a little opening. They came and (Knocks the table) knocked the door, "Hey! Your light is showing. Close!" My mom was pregnant with my brother. No, she just had my brother. She was only 38.

A.C.: Your grandmother---

Rebecca: My mom was already dead. That was my grandmother.

A.C.: They were buried in the cemetery that was close to your---

Rebecca: Yeah. The one right there. My mom, yeah.

A.C.: That's nice because you could just go---

Rebecca: Yeah. My mom. My *tutu*. (Both) were buried there. Of course, we had other family members that were buried there. You know, aunties and uncles that were buried there.

A.C.: I'm going to turn the tape over.

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE

Rebecca: (Conversation about her sister and herself) More, more. (Laughs) When she attended school, it's funny, we had the same classes but on different periods. You know, across from Farrington. They used to have the old Kamehameha girls' school. That's where we attended. The first class. The first class in '39 graduated from that building. Then, we were class of '40 where the building is now. But then, when we (Laughs), we both had the same type of classes, different periods. So I was not for education, no. I just went there because my father wanted (it). So my subjects the first two years (that) I liked, was Homemaking and Physical Ed.

A.C.: Oh. Okay!

Rebecca: Those were my two main things. I took it from sophomore up to senior year. (Laughs) And then of course, my education, I loved sports! Because I started playing sports when I was eleven.

A.C.: So here in 'Aiea, you were playing sports. But the sports, were 'Aiea School sports? Or on your own?

Rebecca: On my own. Then we had---

A.C.: You said you met your husband---

Rebecca: No. I had my husband---Well, he'll say that I'm lucky I met him! I said "You're lucky! You came here!" Because he was in the Navy. So, I said, "You came from Guam." But I lived here. "You're the lucky one, because you found me." But this was way back in '46.

A.C.: But you weren't dating 'Aiea boys?

Rebecca: Well. My father was so strict. Even when we went to Farrington, we couldn't go to football games or nothing. He wouldn't let us. It's education and home, you know. You know, our senior prom? We had it at the YWCA.

A.C.: You mean, downtown?

REBECCA: Yeah! That's where Farrington (had it). Do you know that my father drove my sister and I to the prom, and do you know that he waited for us outside? (Laughs)

END OF INTERVIEW