

INTERVIEW
Alice Sanpei and Ellen Wakabayashi

September 22, 2009

Alice C. Sanpei was born in Waipahu in 1913. She married Takeo Sanpei and raised three sons and two daughters in Pearl City and 'Aiea. Their children are sons Charles H., Francis T. and Edward M., daughters Ellen E. Wakabayashi and Shirley C. Fujimoto. Her husband worked at a gas station and learned how to do auto repair work. In 1949, he started Sanpei Auto Service Station in 'Aiea. The service station was located at 98-289 Kamehameha Highway near Chagami's Forty Niner Restaurant. The station closed in 1970.

Alice never learned to drive, she said, because they were busy. If her husband and eldest son were making repairs underneath cars, and a gasoline customer came up to a pump, she would pump gas. They had three pumps, one ethyl and one regular gas. It was Standard Oil® (first was Tidewater Oil®) gasoline. Most of the business was automobile repairs, not gasoline sales. At the end of the month, some of the good customers who had made charges would pay a monthly total. She said that she tabulated the charges, which she would do at night or in-between work. They were open every day, even New Year's Day, when they would open half-day. She was happy when she could sleep in on holidays, because the gas station usually opened at 5:00 A.M.

Alice is well known to members of Aiea United Methodist Church and Aiealani Seniors at the Aiea District Park, who recommended that she be interviewed for the project. (Interviewed at Pearl City Nursing Home in September 2009 by Arlene S. Ching)

Alice Sanpei's ninety-sixth birthday, September 2009.

Family in 1951 (Family photographs)

Her daughter Ellen wrote:

“In my observation as I worked at my parents' service station, I must give credit to Mom for being the first person who greeted customers when they first arrived. If they needed to wait for their car being serviced, she would “talk story” with them in a friendly manner. For some regular customers, the service station was a place to socialize---there was a long bench where the husband, wife and sometimes children could sit, relax and “talk story.” Some of these regular customers became very good friends with my parents, and we siblings knew who they were, because we would see them on a regular basis. Although sometimes it was busy, cars were lined up, and we were running back and forth to pump gas, clean the windshield and collect the monies. There were times when I was able to complete my homework before I returned home. Dad required that at least one sibling work with our parents after school and on weekends. So we all took turns and

planned according to our own schedules. I would say I learned a lot about business while working at the station.”

(Photo)

Sanpei Auto Service, December 10, 1949 seated: Yasaku and Rin Anzai, parents of Alice Sanpei
standing (left) Alice Sanpei, standing (right) sister-in-law Yukie Anzai (Family photograph)

(Photo)

Sanpei Auto Service “Grand Opening” December 1, 1949, Takeo and Alice Sanpei (Family photograph)