

The following oral history is from a recorded interview with George Arizumi (GA) conducted by MHC Executive Director Jessica Welch (JW) and a Mid-Pacific Institute student (MS) on November 23, 2021 online via TheirStory. This interview is part of Mānoa Heritage Center's oral history project name.

Please keep in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The following transcript has been reviewed, edited, and approved by the narrator.

George Arizumi: Of course, and it was more rural. There were a lot of farms in the back of the valley and I lived I was fortunate to live across the street from the Texas family, who got a younger generation still lives there and their great grandfather was a pound master. So he was allowed to have a- like a little ranch and corral, even if it was a residential area. Because when he caught stray animals, he had to put 'em in his corral and not cats and dogs, but you know, cows and horses and so forth. So we were lucky to live across like a farm in the country when you're actually right in the middle of Honolulu and that was my neighborhood. So we played all around the area in that type of setting.

Student: What were some special days you celebrated with your family in Mānoa? I'm sorry I actually (unintelligible).

George Arizumi: I'm sorry, can you repeat that?

Student: What was your special days or things that you would celebrate with your family in Mānoa?

George Arizumi: Special days that we celebrated? You know, the typical American holidays, of course Thanksgiving and Halloween and things like that. But also some Japanese things especially on New Year's Day was very supposed to be pretty traditional eating Japanese food and you know, things like that. But we weren't so, I mean, we're a little bit too westernized for- to be a true reflection of the Japanese in Mānoa, because I know some other families were much more traditional, and I wasn't too interested in that much tradition. So I was outside playing all the time.

Student: Okay, which- where did you go to school? And like, how was your school life like? Cause I know you went to school in Mānoa.

George Arizumi: Yeah, I first entered, Mānoa Valley Church, had a kindergarten. So my parents sent me there for my kindergarten because I think maybe even Mānoa school didn't have a kindergarten yet, I'm not quite sure. Because the old Mānoa school is where the fire station is now, that- and from there to the Japanese school that was the Mānoa- the first Mānoa school. But when I was like in the second or third grade, they built a new Manoa school, which is further up the valley where the park is. And if- they moved us grade by grade to the newer school. So that's where I went to Mānoa School in both- two campuses. And then later, I went to Stevenson which is out of the valley.

Student: Do you remember any businesses in Mānoa and what they might have sold?

George Arizumi: Yeah, there were- there were- there's a whole list of- I had a- I had a list of businesses that were there when I was young and growing up and walking around and riding my

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bike. And then later, when I drove a car, I would go to these businesses and there are lot- lots of them are changed now and there are new tenants in those buildings. And some of are complete new buildings. But there was like, where the- what's that name of the restaurant, Joyce? That one..*Feast* Huh? *Feast* Yeah, where Feast is there was a Mānoa Cleaners and there was a Mānoa Bakery in that building and my auntie owned that Mānoa Bakery. And then there was a- a pharmacy there, Warren's Pharmacy, and further down where the townhouses are now there was a- a Big Way supermarket and a gas station. And where Andy's is now that's- that ar- that building was still there and- and there was a, like, a Chinese supermarket and dry goods. Yes, where Starbucks is now was the Chinese supermarket, but when Safeway came in new across the street they had to close that market, because there was no competition. I mean, so much competition from Safeway that they turned it into, that same Chinese family, turned it into a Chinese restaurant. And where- the other business used to be a barbershop and a dry good store, actually. A dry goods store where they sold fabric and sewing materials and then they had- the- where the fire station is now, that was my grandparents' first house.

And that was where Mānoa school is and it didn't, the school did not have a cafeteria back then. And when the- they had surplus from farms on the Mainland they would send surplus food. Big cans of beans and things like that *cheese* cheese, big blocks of cheese. But they needed a place to distribute it so what they would do is they would distribute it to public schools. But there was no cafeteria so they had to build a cafeteria at that empty corner of the school where the fire station is now and so they force my grandparents to move up- move out of there and move further into the valley. And later on, when the school closed because they moved up to the new school they didn't need that cafeteria, obviously anymore and they close all the build- they took away all those classroom buildings, but they turned that old cafeteria into a fire station because we didn't have a fire station up here and the nearest fire station was in Makiki. And by the time the trucks came from Makiki to Mānoa the houses were half gone [laughter]. So they built a fire station for us. And it was perfect because the cafeteria had cooking facilities where we all know firemen cook their own meals and the big seating area where the cafeteria tables were turned into rows and rows of bunks for the firemen.

And further down, just past the Japanese school, they- there was two small little mom-and-pop stores. One was Yano Store. Japanese family ran it and they sold anything from you know, little snacks and things. And this- they actually sold- they had a kerosene pump because in the old days, lotta houses, way back in the valley, didn't have electricity and they lived by kerosene lamps, so they needed to buy kerosene. And then next to that, the last business was a Chinese store, a crack seed store, and that was run by an old Chinese lady. And after Japanese school or before Japanese school and after American school, I would go in there and buy all these snacks because I was always hungry for snacks and sweets. And across the street from that is where Asia Mānoa is now, was Toyo's Superette that was run by the Okumura family. And that was a pretty popular store. They s- they had a meat market, they had a liquor department, they had canned goods, produce, everything.

And next to that where Bank of Hawai'i is now was Tanabe- 76 gas station that was just on the ocean side of the graveyard there by Mānoa Valley Theatre Church. And right, mauka of that graveyard was Mānoa grill. That was my dad owned two buildings there, one in the front on the street and one in the back row. And the front building had Mānoa grill, one of the few places to eat back then. And next to that was Mānoa Barbershop and in the back of that was a beauty shop. And the fourth tenant was a tofu factory. And mauka of that where Safeway is now and the big parking lot, that was what we called Japanese Camp. It was some cottages there and lot of Japanese families lived in there and there was a little taxi stand in front of it and another Chinese store that turned into a pool hall later. *That's where the Safeway parking lot is now* Yeah, that's where the Safeway parking lot is now,

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and like- mauka of that right before the stream and the bridge, the gas station there was owned by Kimura family. And then mauka of the river was a Texaco station, run by Mr. Tengan, another Japanese businessman, went to school with his daughter. And the lot was quite big so it's besides the gas station where that morning glory or morning cup of coffee place *Morning Glass* Morning Glass and what's that other restaurant? *Bangkok Chef* Bangkok Chef, he had a laundromat installed back there. Coin-operated laundromat, first time we ever saw such a thing and that's, you know, where that little business is now. And those- those are the businesses that you wanted me to try to recall and so you have any other questions about business? I mean, you know, people sometimes are interested in what was there before the current business, and I can fill them in on that fairly well cause I- I lived in this valley up- almost all my life except when I went to college and went to Vietnam I lived in Mānoa most of my life. I'm sorry I rattled on so much. *It's okay*

MS: I was going to ask if you remember there being like a manapua man, ice truck, or yasai truck and what were your interactions with them?

GA: Yeah, like I said back then the ped- we used to call them peddlers. They would come around the neighborhood and just the truck- the Japanese man had this truck that he opens up the side flaps and lot of the- like my mother didn't drive way back then, so it was convenient because he would come by and park in front of one of the houses on this street, toot his horn, and all the housewives would come out and buy what they needed for dinner that day or night or whatever. He sold fish, tofu, other kinds of things, meat. And then there was a manapua man who came, a Chinese man with a long stick and two stainless steel barrels on each end full of steaming hot manapua. And my mother was a little finicky, but she would tell us don't buy from him because he had to go to the bathroom in the bushes because there was no other way for him to relieve himself. Sorry about that. Pardon, my wife is kicking me- she's [unintelligible] but she's still kicking me for saying that but that- those are the things that made us kids because you remember those little things, you know. And that was the manapua man and he would go up and down the street yelling, "Manapua! Pepeao!" And we- we all got hungry and wanted to go there. And ice cream man would come too, he had a little ice cream jeep type vehicle with a icebox in the back, it was full of ice and he had all kinds of ice cream. And that was my favorite one, of course, cause still today, I have a sweet tooth. So, you know, I remember their- the bell ringing and he would announce his arrival on the street with his bell clanging already. That's about it for that.

MS: I think that's all the questions we have for you.

GA: [laugh] *and where you went to school* I did I did. Yeah, I'm sorry I took so long. Maybe you had more questions, but we run out of- you ran out of time. So I used up all your time by talking too much. Sorry.

JW: No, you didn't talk too much at all George. Do you guys mind if I ask a couple questions? *Sure* *Go ahead* What- George, who are your parents and what were they- what were- where did they come- were they from Hawai'i, or what is your story? *Yes*

GA: Well, like, starting with my grandparents. I guess they came from Japan. I'm not so clear on them, but they came from Japan and they were, I guess they all came on a plantation and the life was too hard there. So what they did was they sort of ran away and came to Mānoa Valley, but they still worked hard. My grandfather was a cook for for, we used to call it the- the rich haole families on the other side of the valley. And he was a cook which I have a hard time believing that because my- my understanding is that Japanese men, real Japanese men don't cook. And my wife will testify to that, that I don't ever cook but- and my grandmother was a laundrywoman. And she would go around the

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big mansions across the valley and pick up their laundry and do their laundry and deliver it back. And then that side of the valley where Ferdinand is and stuff is pretty hilly, but she would lug that- push that cart full of laundry up and down those hills gathering and delivering laundry. Now that was my grandparents. My father was born in the valley, of course, in that house where the fire station is now. My mother came from- my mother was a city jack, she came from Palama back then, and they owned a mom-and-pop store. But- after they got married, my dad built a house in Mānoa in the front yard of my grandparents' new house on Kahaloa Drive. And that's where I was born. And me and my three sisters. And my dad, he was a- first he was a contractor and then he became a city and county building inspector. And my mom was a housewife, most of the time until later we were all in school she didn't have anything to do so she went to work at the University of Hawai'i in the dispersing department.

JW: Interesting

GA: Oh, not that interesting, but you ask what we- what- about my parents [laugh] *You swam in your* Oh yeah, well I- they didn't ask me that but growing up in Mānoa, I forgot to tell the girls that we used to go swimming in the river down there. Across of Long's there was a place called Girl's Pond where we swam from big ropes tied to the trees on the deck and went in the river and made campfires down on the river bank and made lunches there. *that's where the faculty housing is now* Yeah, where the faculty housing now is Mānoa School for- I mean Mānoa Housing School because all in that flat area now used to have a- they call it a war housing or whatever, that was Mānoa housing. And they had to have their own school because people in the valley, and I- don't get me wrong, I'm not prejudiced because my wife is half haole, but the haoles didn't want their kids mixing up with the poor housing kids. So they had to have their own school and their own cafeteria even. And later on, that's exactly where the Girl's Pond was. It was a deep part of the stream that you could, you know, really swim and dive off the trees into. And it was, it was a lot of fun and I didn't live in the housing, but I played with the housing kids because they were more mischievous and more interesting and it was a good experience growing up with them. And I don't want to be prejudiced again, but most of- a lot of them were brown-skinned kids, which to me, they were the tough guys and much more interesting *Mhm* The Japanese kids were sometimes too much of nerds or too shy or whatever and that's how I became friends with the housing kids. That was why growing up, yeah.

JW: If you had to think of like a few words about what it was like growing up in Mānoa. What- what would you- what would you say?

GA: I would you say it was very healthy living. We, you know, we didn't have shopping centers, or Nintendo games to be stuck with. We were always outdoors roaming the mountains and neighborhood yards for free fruits. Lychee, mangoes, whatever we could- *guavas* guavas, whatever we could sort of steal. But in those days, they didn't mind kids coming in their yard and picking their fruit off the branch. And wed go up in the mountains where the mountain apples were where it was you know, nobody's land, so to speak. And just played in the streams, hiked in the mountains up to Mānoa falls, and caught crayfish in the rivers and you know, the whole valley was our playground. We rode our bikes all over the place and there was a healthy living. Yeah.

JW: I wish I'd grown up like that. That sounds amazing.

GA: You're too young to have, you weren't born yet.

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JW: And so the Cooke House was obviously still- was he- was around then. What did you guys like as a child growing up, what did you think about that- the big house on the hill?

GA: Well, what happened was the Cooke family had a Japanese family as caretakers and sort of like butlers or whatever it was and that was the Kawashima family and the daughter was my classmate. You know they lived on the Cooke property on a cottage further down, you know towards the ocean side of the big mansion. And my parents were friends with the Kawashima's so I- I got to know the place really well, because I used to go over there and sometimes, my father would visit the- Mr. Kawashima and I'd be going along with him and I got to roam around the place and it was to me, it was like almost magical. That big house because you can imagine back then the houses were not like they are today. They were- it was like a castle, you know, just to see all those rocks and no other house was built like that in the whole valley. So it was very magical myst-, you know, mystical almost and that- that was a fabulous place. Later on in life when I became a board member of Mālama Mānoa and we had meetings there with Mary Cooke would host and stuff and to have been able to go into the house that I used to only look from the outside before, as a kid it was even more, you know, amazing.

JW: Well, that's nice. That's a nice memory. Thank you for sharing that. I had a question and it just- oh, we spent some- we interviewed Clifford Araki and his brother Paul Araki, and they used to work here when they were teenagers. *Yeah* I think their older sister worked for the family.

GA: Yeah, obviously the Kawashima family. Maybe they got older and another family maybe came and took over cause something like that I recall. But by that time, my parents were either gone or weren't associating with Mr. Kawashima because, you know, he had passed on too probably.

JW: I don't, I don't think I have any more questions. Do you my dear?

MS: I had one more question about Japanese culture being passed down. What were the as- aspects of Japanese culture that your family taught you?

GA: You know, the typical Japanese things where you sort of have to be humble and respect other people and that's why I said, we didn't really have any prejudice to all the different nationalities in the valley. We are supposed to be humble and respectful to adults and to other kind of people even if they weren't Japanese or whatever. Everybody being woven enjoyed each other actually, rather than feeling, you know, segregated or whatever you want to call it. And we had the typical Japanese foods that were not eaten every day, but for certain occasions we would have, you know, New Year's, what's the name of that soup in the morning and all this stuff? *ozoni* ozoni and the mochi things. And things like that, but like I said, we were almost too westernized that we didn't have the real real old-fashioned traditions like in Japan. In fact, my parents were Buddhist, but they sent us to Christian schools like Christian church first. Yeah.

JW: Thank you so much for your time, George. And Joyce too. Thank you.

GA: Happy Thanksgiving to all of you. *Happy Thanksgiving* Yeah, I'm happy to help you in any way. If there ever is any more questions that you think of it you can call me. Don't email me because I'm not an emailer or a texter, okay. I need a phone book. I hide from no one call me and I can help you. *you can email him, I'll get it* *Okay* Just call me I'll answer any questions any time, you know? Be happy to hang out.

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JW: Thank you so much. *Thank you!* *Bye bye* Aloha *Have a good day* Bye