

Fourth Of July

A day of celebration!

Dad would wake up early in the morning and go up to the forest to gather greenery to decorate our Chevrolet sedan. Parking the car on our front lawn, he would drape his fishing throw-net over the entire car, then quickly insert the ferns and other green foliage into the eyes of the net and tie them securely. Once all of us kids got into the car by slipping under the net, Dad would tie the door shut (Hey! Wasn't that a safety hazard?) and we would have to stay in there until the parade was over.

Anyway, Mom had to get into the car also. Then Dad would put on the final touches by adding hibiscus, day-lilies, and other flowers that grew in the garden. Sometimes, brothers, Nāwai and Charlie, dressed only in malo, would sit on the front fenders of the car, holding wooden spears.

This was all taking place in Kalōpā; however, the annual 4th of July parade was held in Honoka'a, the main town about five miles away. The entrants gathered at the high school grounds and made their way through the town which was lined with people from the community and the surrounding plantation camps. At the end of town, the parade turned around and returned to the high school grounds for the judging.

Dad's friends, who watched the parade, would yell out to him, "Nāwai, take your car out of the parade—the flowers are dying!" They were absolutely right because by this time, the long drive in the hot morning sun and through the town had caused the flowers to wilt.

However, I had to give my dad credit for his efforts and ingenuity. Most of the entrants in the parade took the easy way out by decorating their floats with red, white, and blue crepe paper a day or two before the parade. Many of the floats were skillfully and artistically decorated. But Dad knew that there were always three categories of float decorations for 1) fresh flowers and greenery; 2) bunting (crepe paper); and 3) miscellaneous, which included horse riding and walking units. There were 1st, 2nd, and 3rd prizes in each category.

If anything, Dad knew that he would at least get 3rd prize (\$15.00) in the fresh flowers category. He would give us the money to play games (throw darts at the balloons, toss rings around the soda bottles, hit the wooden bottles with the baseballs, etc.). There would be baseball games for the adults; Dad loved to play baseball, and he was good at it. He and his brother, Ho'olulu, were star players; so was his cousin, Henry Keomalu.

Papa (Quintin Baroseros), who lived with us, rode our white family horse, Emily, to the parade. Decorating the saddle and bridle with red and blue crepe paper, which made it striking against Emily's white body, Papa would dress himself up in white trousers and a long-sleeve white shirt, and wear a red sash around his waist. He also made a red band for his

lauhala hat. He looked dashing on Emily, and he made her prance proudly in the parade.

One year, Papa started his preparations late and left the house late. You can imagine how disastrous it was. By the time he got to Honoka'a, Emily looked like a zebra with red and blue stripes.

Sister Myra surprised the family one year by entering the boxing ring and fighting with a boy. She wanted to win a prize. She was only about eight years old. I don't know who won that bout.

Fourth of July was always a fun time—eating shaved ice, popcorn, cotton candy, and hot dogs!

Christmas In Kalōpā

This was the best time of the year for me. Besides celebrating Christmas at school with the large Norfolk pine decorated with lights and ornaments, and Santa Claus passing out presents and candies before we went on vacation, there was also a special Christmas program at church. We all took part in the Nativity scene and sang Christmas songs, after which packages of candies with nuts and fruits were passed out to everyone.

Daddy grew our Christmas tree for the house right on our front lawn. Christmas lights were unheard of at the time, but candle holders with little candles in them were clipped on to the Norfolk branches and lit for a few minutes on Christmas eve.

We usually went to sleep early on Christmas eve, and Dad and Mom would wake us up at midnight. Dad would conduct a family prayer meeting; each of us say a Bible verse of our choosing then we would sing a Christmas carol. Dad would then relate the story of the birth of Christ, and then say a prayer. After that, we could open our presents while Dad made hot chocolate to drink with cookies or donuts.

Christmas day was usually celebrated with a big lū'au. Dad and uncle Henry Keomalu would take turns to kālua a pig, and the party would be at our house or his. Friends and neighbors gathered to celebrate with us. There was always so much to eat: kālua pig, lomi salmon, 'opihi, poi, sweet potato, raw fish, squid or chicken with lū'au, potato salad, rice, and haupia or kulolo; and sodas, of course, with some delicious cakes. Mama played her 'ukulele and sang, while us girls danced the hula. When Uncle Muller came, he played the steel guitar or the saxophone. Everybody had a grand time. Just thinking about those times prompted me to write the following song in 2001.

I Remember Christmas

I remember Christmas, many years ago

Candles on our Christmas tree, without any snow

I remember Christmas, those happy days are gone

When Daddy grew our Christmas trees, right on our front lawn

(Chorus) All the neighbors gathered for a big lū'au

Lomi salmon and 'opihī too, and some great laulau

Mama strummed her 'ukulele, uncle played his steel guitar

All the keiki did the hula underneath the Christmas star

(Chorus) Then the gifts were opened, everyone would share

Daddy said, "Let's bow our heads", and he'd say a prayer

I cannot forget those Christmases many years ago (in Kalōpā)

Candles on our Christmas tree, without any snow.

When I was a teenager, during the week before Christmas, a group of us from the neighborhood (Manuel Freitas and his brother Lawrence, William and George Ferreira, Moses Gomes, Johnny Kamauoha and his sister Ella, me and cousin Ella and Myrtle, and Cozy Rodrigues, and others) would stroll through the neighborhood to serenade. We had so much fun thinking up what songs we would sing when we got to the different houses. Besides the regular Christmas carols, we sang Hawaiian songs, and anything else that was popular at the time. We were compensated in various ways: some people gave us money; most gave us food and drinks, non-alcoholic, of course, although some people wanted us all to celebrate with champagne. We asked for sodas instead.

I used to love stopping at the Portuguese houses because I knew they always had hot, fresh, sweet bread or malasadas. It tasted scrumptious with real butter.

We also went serenading on New Year's Eve. I remember one year when we were out real late. Cozy's mother, Mary, came looking for her. Cozy was in her twenties already, but her parents were very protective of her. We were at somebody's house enjoying ourselves when Mary came in and somebody noticed that she had her dress on inside out. When they mentioned it to her, she said, "Well, it's Happy New Year!" and everybody laughed. Here's a song I wrote in 2001:

A Christmas Serenade

*A Christmas serenade
Seems like only yesterday
That we tuned our 'ukulele
And strummed the old guitars*

*A Christmas Serenade
Strolling down the country road
Singing all the Christmas carols
Beneath the twinkling stars*

*(Chorus) Christmas comes but once a year
Bringing love and joy and cheer
Sharing gifts with everyone
Friends, both far and near*

*A Christmas serenade
Makes me feel so sad and blue
How I wish that I could spend
A Christmas serenade with you*



Amy Kekoolani in the front yard with Christmas tree in background. 1946.

The War Years

On Sunday morning, December 7, 1941, as Daddy was driving us kids to Sunday school in Waimea, the news about the bombing of Pearl Harbor was announced on the car radio. We had at least 10 more miles to go, but Daddy pulled over to the side of the road, and there beneath the tall eucalyptus trees in Ahualoa, he said, "Children, let us pray." When he finished praying, he turned the car around and we headed home to Kalōpā where Mom and some of the younger children had remained.

The civil defense notified everyone to pick up gas masks for the family, and to blacken out the windows of our homes. Along with that, we were all instructed to build air raid shelters near the house and stocked it with supplies in case of enemy attacks. I was only 12 years old and brother Henry, the baby, was two. Daddy built an air raid shelter by digging a 6 by 10 foot area behind the garage, which was about 25 feet away from the house. He stocked it with food and water, bedding, and extra clothing for the family. Even though we had some flashlights, I was deathly afraid of going into the shelter. The inside of the shelter was just dirt walls and it made me feel like I was being buried in a grave. Daddy eventually strung some electrical cords from the house so we could have more lights in the shelter, but I still wouldn't go in when the sirens were tested each month. Daddy said I could stay in the garage at the entrance to the shelter. Fortunately, the war came to an end in August of 1945, and the air raid shelter was sealed up.

During 1944-1945, the Victory Corps program was organized, where students could work on the plantations or other places on Fridays of each week. This was to supplement the work force left vacant by the men who were called to serve in the military armed forces.

My cousin, Myrtle Coelho, and I signed up to work in my uncle Henry Keomalu's cane fields by hoeing the weeds. It was hard work in the hot sun even though we wore straw hats. We had to wear long sleeve shirts and trousers tied at the ankles to keep the centipedes from biting us. We also used heavy rubber boots, because the fields got very muddy when it rained.

The rows of cane stretched as far as half a mile. We had to hoe on one side of the row, then turn around at the end of the line and work our way back on the other side of the row. Usually, when we got to the end of the line where the gulch ran down to the sea, we sat under the guava trees and took about a twenty minute break. Sometimes when the guava was in season, we took the time to pick some to eat. And sometimes, when we were in the middle of the field and the fog settled down low so we couldn't be seen by the old man, Kapeliela, who was supposed to be supervising us from his front porch, we took a bonus break.

The best time of the work day was when we ate lunch. We usually had rice, spam, takuwan, fruit, and a cold soda. We earned about 75 cents an hour, and we looked forward to payday at the end of the month.

Most of the students, whose parents were plantation workers, had the opportunity to work for the plantation as truck drivers or in the fields cutting, planting, hoeing, and spreading fertilizer.

During regular school days, we gathered under the nearby bridge when the air raid sirens sounded. Since Dad was a teacher, I always looked for him because the boys liked to scare the girls in the semi dark areas under the bridge. The drab olive colored gas masks were also cumbersome, but sometimes we had to wear them during the drills. We looked like aliens from outer space.

Graduation From Pa'auilo Intermediate School

In June of 1944, while the war was still on, I graduated from the Pa'auilo Intermediate School. I remember not having a decent dress to wear, and I didn't want to nag my parents for a new dress because I knew that times were hard.

My dear cousin, Ella Keomalu, came to my rescue. She loaned me her lavender chiffon printed dress. It had a sweetheart neckline with a form fitted bodice and low lined gathered skirt. It fit me perfectly, and I was so proud as the boys and girls paired off walking down the aisle in the school cafeteria to the music of Pomp and Circumstance. Someone had given me a fragrant gardenia lei. In September of that same year, I would be off to start the 10th grade at Honoka'a High School.

Dad and I worked at the Dole Pineapple Cannery in Honolulu during the summer of 1944. Dad was a security guard. I envied him because all he did was walk around the area while I stressed myself out trimming the pineapples shooting out of the machine all day long. We had to catch the pineapple with our left thumb, and while spinning it around, trim the uncut portions and return the pineapple on the conveyor belt to be sliced and taken to the packing division. At the end of the first day of trimming, I could not move my thumb. I decided to quit, but Dad talked me into transferring to the packing division; It was just as bad. There, we had to grab each pineapple with the middle fingers of our two hands, then release the right hand and balance the whole pineapple on the left hand. Then, with the right hand, slide off the end with one or two slices that was not a perfect slice. These, you threw back on the conveyor belt to be taken to be made into juice. Across the conveyor belt in front of you were placed empty cans, which you had to fill with the remaining pineapple slices in your hand. The tricky part of this process was being able to sort the best looking grade of slices into certain cans, the next best looking ones into other cans, and the not so good looking ones into still other cans. Then the ends could just be thrown on the conveyor belt to be taken to be made into juice. All of this required split timing action because if you were the first of five girls on that table, be assured that the first pineapple coming along the conveyor belt when the next group of five

pineapples come out, is yours. If you don't pick it up, the girl next to you will shove it back to you because she has the second one to contend with.

And while all this is going on, the forelady of your table is watching all the girls to be sure each one is doing her own thing. The minimum wage was \$1.10 an hour; it helped me buy some new clothes to go to school.

Mom was a forelady at the Libby's cannery some blocks away.

On August 15, 1945, while working at the cannery in Honolulu again, the news that the war had ended (VJ Day - Victory over Japan) was announced over the loudspeakers. Everyone in the cannery shouted for joy, and I almost lost my index finger when I shoved a pineapple into the machine to be trimmed. We all got the day off, and I remember going to the movies smelling like pineapple.

When we returned to Kalōpā, I returned to Honoka'a High School to be in the 11th grade.

Our House In Kalōpā Burns To The Ground

In June of 1946, a few days before school ended for summer break, our beautiful home in Kalōpā burned to the ground. Mom was home alone with baby Royden, who was about 15 months old. Dad and the younger kids were in school at Pa'auilo, and I was at school in Honoka'a.

During our lunch break, my good friend, Irene Chong, and I were sitting on the concrete steps leading down to the main road. A police officer passing by saw me and stopped to tell me that our home had burned. I didn't even bother going to the office for permission to leave the school. I grabbed Irene's hand and told her to go with me. As we started to run the five miles or so to my home, the police officer saw us and turned his car around to pick us up. By the time we rounded the bend before our house, I could see through the branches of the ironwood trees that our house was gone. I couldn't believe that our family home was no longer there. Of course, my main concern then was for Mom and Royden. They were both all right. By then, Dad had been notified, and he and the rest of the kids had come home. Dad was trying to console Mom, and we all found out from her what had happened. She had put a pot of Royden's milk on the kerosene stove to warm, but went into the bedroom to change Royden's diaper. The milk had spilled over, and sparks from the fire caught on to some kerosene that had leaked from the stove. Dad had bought a new electric stove, but was waiting for the electrician to install the proper line for it. He had also just repainted the whole kitchen, so it didn't take long for the fire to spread to the rest of the house. Mom said she only had time to run into their bedroom to gather up some important papers and run for the front door. She yelled to a truck driver passing, and he stopped to help. Because there were French