

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: AMBROSIO MANDE, retired plantation worker

Ambrosio Mande, Visayan, was born January 7, 1889 in Bacolod Negros, Philippines. He came to Hawaii in 1913 and has lived on Kauai ever since.

He did not go on strike in 1924 as plantation camp police promised him a camp police position if he did not join. He served as a plantation guard and an interpreter for the Filipinos during the strike.

He retired in 1954 and with his wife is active in senior citizens activities in Kapaa.

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Ambrosio Mande (AM)

December 7, 1978

Kapaa, Kauai

BY: Ed Gerlock (EG) and Gael Gouveia (GG)

EG: This is an interview with Mande, Ambrosio.

You came from the Philippines?

AM: Yes. I don't know how many days it took us there in Honolulu [at Immigration], but I was assigned to Kekaha, to work; and boy, the work was really very difficult before. Back in the old days there were no trucks and no trains. You only walked, going towards the mountains. Five o'clock in the morning, you had to go. Not to the mountains but to the farms.

I went through all kinds of works. Kalai, cut cane, hapai ko. And then hanawai.

EG: When you came here, how old were you?

AM: I forget how old I was at that time.

EG: Do you remember the strike of 1924?

AM: Yes, I do.

EG: Where were you, at that time?

AM: I was here at Kapaa.

EG: Were you included in the strike?

AM: Well, I would have been included in the strike. I would have gone through with the strike. But the camp police promised me that if I didn't, they would give me work. They gave me the possibility of becoming a special police, and that's what I became. So I would be helping the police by being an interpreter for the Filipinos who were going inside of the plantation.

EG: So you were a policeman?

AM: No, I wasn't a policeman myself. I was actually only helping the police, to be an interpreter for the Filipinos. Like a go-between [for] the Filipinos and the police, for Filipinos going into the plantation. That's what they needed for the plantation. And they couldn't understand the Filipinos and so they got me.

So I would ask the Filipinos who were coming into the plantation, "What is your purpose for coming here?"

And they would say, you know, like, "We need salt," or "We need rice, we don't have enough to eat."

And I would say to them, "You can't go inside because this place is guarded and we don't allow people to go in for things like that."

EG: So in other words, you were like a guard, sort of a security guard also?

AM: Yeah, I guess you could say that.

EG: So you were aware of the fact that there was a strike going on?

AM: Oh yeah. I was very much aware of it. And the Hawaiians themselves, who were my co-guards, were talking about it.

EG: So what were your own feelings about the strike that was going on at that time?

AM: Well, a strike is a funny thing; sometimes it's good and sometimes it's not. A strike is okay sometimes, but the difficulty is when you can't win. So lot of suffering comes from that.

EG: While you were guarding there at the plantation, did you sometimes see the strikers?

AM: Oh yeah. Around 5:00, 5:30 in the afternoon, they would be outside there, walking back and forth. They would be going to other camps.

EG: Did you sometimes see the leaders of the strike?

AM: Yeah, probably I did. But right now, I don't remember. I used to know the leaders, but I don't anymore.

EG: Did you ever hear the name "Manlapit?"

AM: Oh yeah. I've heard it many times; he's the Mayor. [Meaning Kauai's Mayor, Eduardo Malapit.]

EG: Did you sometimes see the strikers meeting?

AM: No. I, myself, never did. Maybe they had meetings inside of their strike camp. But I, myself, couldn't go in there.

EG: Did you hear anything about the incident in Hanapepe?

AM: Oh yeah, I heard all about it. They had kind of like a war there. I heard about it, but I never saw it. My companions, the Hawaiians who were guards also, were telling me about the incident there in Hanapepe, and the strikers, and the police were fighting with one another. I just heard that there were many who died there, but I didn't see it myself.

EG: While you were the guard there at the gate, did you feel in some way that the strikers on the other side were enemies of yours?

AM: Well, I suppose [theoretically] they should have been our enemies. But in actual practice, they were not. So we had orders from the head of the plantation, not to allow people to go in.

EG: But Manong, is it not that during the time of the strike, there were people who were going from plantation to plantation, asking for food and support for the people who were out on strike?

AM: There were people who did go in, but I also told them that it's not allowed to go in and to be asking for things from the people. "If you must ask the people for things, you have to ask them outside of the plantation; not inside." Because if it became known that I was allowing them to go in and to beg for food and things, of course, I would lose my job also.

EG: So in other words, you didn't allow them to go inside to collect?

AM: No, I didn't.

EG: So there were no hard feelings over this, though?

AM: No, there wasn't. I knew them personally.

EG: [If you don't mind me adding a personal note here, this is typically kind of Filipino. You would think that the situation itself, he being sort of with management by being a guard and they being strikers and against management, that that would put him in a very delicate position. But actually, it did not. He was personal friends with them, they understood his position, he also understood their position. He wouldn't allow them to go in because he would lose his job, and yet, there were ways for them--seemingly to go in and to get things. Or they could get it by calling the people outside.]

What was your life like before, when you were working on the plantation itself?

AM: Oh, I tell you, it was really hard. You know, there were times when the salary envelope would come, it would just be an envelope. There wouldn't be any money inside, because they would take the money out that I owed to the store. Whatever you bought at the

store, they would put it down on a list of money that you owed, and then they would take it out of your salary. So the envelope would come without any money inside.

EG: Were you married at that time?

AM: Yes, I was.

EG: Did you have any children?

AM: No.

EG: What hours did you work on the plantation, before?

AM: From six till half past four. [6:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.] They would wake you up at 4:30 in the morning to begin. When I was still new on the plantation, they were paying us 75 cents a day.

When I was still young, and I just arrived here, I had the plan that I would go back to the Philippines once I made enough money. But of course, I never did make enough money; and so I have not gone back.

EG: If you look back at the two systems that you have lived under; in the Philippines and here, which one would you say is better?

AM: Well, I guess maybe it's a little bit better here because at least there's welfare and social security to take care of you. I'm free at the doctor's, if I become sick.

I haven't been back to the Philippines since I arrived here, and so I have no idea at all what the Philippines is like now. But at least here in Hawaii, if you have your grandchildren and then you have welfare and things like that, then you can be taken care of if you get sick, or if you have problems.

If I were to go back to the Philippines now, even to the barrio that I come from, I probably wouldn't know anybody there. All the friends that I had there before, I have forgotten them; and maybe most of them are dead.

EG: Where were you married? Here, or there in the Philippines?

AM: Here, in Hawaii.

EG: Your wife, is she a Filipina?

AM: Yes, she is.

EG: When she arrived here in Hawaii, was she unmarried?

AM: When she arrived here, she had a companion from the Philippines. But he found it very difficult to support her, and he went back to

the Philippines. And so that's when I found her and married her. I was fairly new here in Kapaa, when I married her.

And you know, it was very difficult for Filipinas, for women who were here in Hawaii, because there were many men and very few women. If you could get somebody, even though they were second hand, that was still quite an accomplishment. So the men were all looking for women. So I was lucky to find a wife for myself.

EG: Are your children here in Kauai?

AM: Yes, they are.

EG: [He said he retired in 1954; so it's almost 25 years since he retired.]

AM: A lot of people say it's not so hot to be retired because there's nothing to do. But for myself, there's small things that still can be done. And you come down here to the Senior Citizens Center; and as long as you can eat everyday, that's good enough.

EG: You and your wife, do you have a house of your own here?

AM: Yes, we do.

EG: [I'm just explaining to him what's going on; why this interviewing is taking place. That it's for the future, so that people will know what it was like for the first Filipinos who came here.]

AM: Yeah, you know it's a tragedy that today there's so many Filipinos who are local born, who cannot speak any Filipino language. I myself, I didn't go to school in the Philippines, but because I have been here for a long time, I've learned some of the languages of my companions. For instance, Hawaiian. Of course, it's not like in America, where people speak straight English; we mix our Filipino with Hawaiian, with Japanese, with English, with different languages. So with the Portuguese or the Japanese or the Hawaiians, we can at least understand one another.

It's hard for the young people these days to realize what it was like for the old people when they first arrived here in Hawaii. The big sacrifices that they had to make. That's why, sometimes people like to come here to Hawaii, to be able get a job and make a big salary. But if they had come here way back, when we first came, there were no big salaries that were being offered to anybody.

EG: How did you hear about Hawaii yourself, when you were there in the Philippines?

AM: Well, there were agents who were going around, from one barrio to another advertising, and getting people to sign up to come here to Hawaii to work. I was thinking to myself that I would like to

leave the Philippines, and go to some other countries to get some new experiences. And also, since my parents were dead, I thought, well, there's a chance to go to other countries and to make some money. Even if you can't read or write, at least you get to meet a lot of different people from different walks in life. And that in itself is some kind of education.

Even though I was on the plantation for quite a while, and the boss knew that I had no learning, no education; but he knew that I had some experience, and so he picked me to be one of the bosses. I told them ahead of time, "Don't choose me to be one of the bosses, because I don't know how to read or how to write.

But my friend told me, "Don't worry about that. As long as they are choosing you, and they are choosing you because of the experiences that you've had, it doesn't make any difference. And I can come and help you to learn how to read and to write."

So even though I didn't have any practical knowledge or an education, I suffered through it and I was able to become a boss.

EG: Were the strikers angry at you that you were one of the guards at the gate:

AM: No, we had very good relationship. We were friends, and they understood my situation; that I needed a job. And so almost like I left room for them and they left room for me also.

There were sometimes when there was help being given to the strikers, and it was being done in secret, and we turned our backs and allowed it to happen also. Because we realized that the strikers also have to live.

END OF INTERVIEW

**The 1924 Filipino
Strike on Kauai**

Volume I

ETHNIC STUDIES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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