

## **BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Bettie Witzel Burner**

Bettie Witzel Burner, daughter of Earl R. Witzel and Bessie McMahon Witzel, was born in Groton, South Dakota on April 10, 1919. She lived in Wyoming, Colorado, Iowa, and Wisconsin, where her family settled when she was still in elementary school.

She was educated at Kohler High School in Wisconsin and at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, where she graduated in 1940. She eventually decided to study social work at Western Reserve University (now called Case Western Reserve University) in Cleveland, Ohio.

In 1945 she was hired at Pālama Settlement, along with two other women who had graduated from Western Reserve. She lived and worked at the settlement for the next two years, supervising playground activities and club and camping activities.

After she left Pālama Settlement, she worked for the YWCA and then the Junior Red Cross. She taught for one year at Moanalua Elementary School, then worked at the Pōhai Nani retirement home. In 1967 she was hired as a social worker for the state Department of Social Services and Housing. She retired in 1974.

Bettie Burner is married to Ray Burner and lives in Kāne'ohe.

Tape No. 27-9-1-97

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Bettie Witzel Burner (BB)

Kāne'ohe, O'ahu

February 27, 1997

BY: Holly Yamada (HY)

[The following interview has been rewritten by the interviewee, Bettie Burner. The original interview was conducted at her home in Kāne'ohe on February 27, 1997. The interviewer was Holly Yamada.]

HY: Okay, let's just start with when and where you were born.

BB: I was born in Groton, South Dakota, so they tell me, (chuckles) in April of 1919. It was a small, little town with nothing but prairie around it.

HY: And you have siblings?

BB: My brother was born four years later, and we had left South Dakota by then.

HY: And where did you go after you left South Dakota?

BB: After South Dakota, we moved to Laramie, Wyoming where my father, Earl R. Witzel, was a professor at the university. His main assignment was to start the University of Wyoming radio station. The first one in the state, if I remember correctly. I attended first grade at the university school in Laramie. Then a job opened up with the telephone company in Denver, Colorado and I attended second grade in Denver. Within a year a representative of the Kohler Company in Kohler, Wisconsin appeared in Dad's office at the telephone company. This man had gone to the South Dakota address and followed Dad to Denver with an offer from the Kohler Company to purchase his patent for an electric plant, which had been his college thesis from Highland Park College in Des Moines, Iowa several years earlier. That was good news! Soon my mother [Bessie Witzel, née McMahon], brother and I were on our way to Iowa to spend some time with my mother's relatives while Dad wound up his telephone job and went on his way to Kohler. I attended third grade in West Liberty, Iowa for part of the year.

HY: Can you tell me a little bit about what your childhood was like in Wisconsin? Did you live in a small community?

BB: I attended fourth and fifth grades in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. It was a town of 35,000, an average mid-USA-type town. Most homes in our neighborhood were two-story, two-family wooden constructions with big trees along the street, and flower and vegetable gardens and chickens in the back. Good sidewalks for roller-skating. [There was] enough snow in the

winter that our dad could make igloo-type snow house out of many buckets of snow/ice. This was before the era of snowsuits. We had ice skates that clamped on our shoes when we skated in the rink in the school yard.

We moved to a new home in Kohler, six miles from Sheboygan, where I entered the sixth grade and graduated in June 1936.

HY: What was [your dad's] patent on, specifically?

BB: It was a compact, complicated-looking generator-engine which provided emergency electrical service for hospitals, apartment complexes and high rises, summer cottages, boats, et cetera, and has continued on in modern days as basic equipment in motor homes, snowmobiles, stores, large and small farms, and factories and emergency vehicles. I'm sure they are involved somehow in the space program these days. Admiral [Richard] Byrd took several of these generators on his expeditions and later came to Kohler to tell about his favorable experiences. President [Calvin] Coolidge had a Kohler generator in his cabin in northern Wisconsin.

[BB recalls living in Kohler Village.] It was really an ideal place to live, and as I look back on it now, it was a very great place to raise children. It was called a "Model Industrial Village" and was something different for the 1930s. The Kohler family, who originated in Austria, found this to be an ideal location to build a factory to manufacture bathroom and kitchen fixtures from a special clay which was shipped from England to the harbor in Sheboygan. Attractive brick and stucco homes, two stories high, were built in an arranged pattern on winding streets. Elm trees lined the street until the "elm disease" took its toll some years later. All yards had well-trimmed hedges. Most of the workmen and their families lived near their work so transportation consisted almost entirely of walking and bicycles. The population of Kohler was about 1700 in the 1960s. The foundry was the largest part of the total complex. A brick office building with the village clock near the top kept us informed of the correct time every hour, a very friendly sound. In the 1930s, when we moved there, our shopping area provided us with a post office, grocery, drugstore, and shoe repair shop. For anything else, we drove our cars east six miles to Sheboygan, or west to Sheboygan Falls two miles. Also within the confines of our village, there was a very good K-12 school, three churches, two parks, one policeman—who knew us all by name—a fire truck, a gas station, and a walking mailman who made his complete circuit twice a day, rain, shine, snow, wind, and flood.

HY: What was the name of your high school?

BB: Kohler. K-O-H-L-E-R.

HY: And so after you graduated from high school, did you have any idea that you would eventually—I mean, were you interested in social work, or had you thought about that?

BB: Well, I'll tell you, nobody knew anything about social work (chuckles) way back then. I guess the only thing I knew about social work is what I read in a book about the famous Hull-House in Chicago, [Illinois] where Jane Addams had made a great name for herself. That was part of the idea I'd had.

HY: Where did you go to college?

**BB:** The University of Wisconsin extension classes in Sheboygan for my freshman year, and the other three years I was on campus in Madison, [Wisconsin] and took regular B.A. courses.

Each summer I did something different. One summer, I worked with Mexican migrants in Minnesota, mostly from Texas, who were harvesting tomatoes. The project was sponsored by the Methodist church. An older lady, a Moravian with much enthusiasm and many skills, and I cared for children from three months to twelve years [old]. Other than physical work, we added storytelling, singing, games, English, simple crafts, and worked out programs for the children to present to their parents in the evening. A noon meal was provided and simple manners were taught.

**HY:** And what was that like for you, coming from this more suburban community that you had grown up in, and then being introduced to a whole different world, I suppose?

**BB:** Oh, I don't know, just like camping out. We did what we saw there was to do and for the most part enjoyed doing it—except for the hours we wasted opening boxes of clothing sent by “well-meaning” people that was often ragged, ripped, no buttons, et cetera. What bonfires we had!

That summer we felt we were camping out in our attic quarters without running water or electricity, but the roof didn't leak when the rains came. Also, we quickly learned how to iron our clothes before the days of drip-drys—with a gasoline iron with flames shooting out the sides. Have never found a use for that learned skill!

[Another summer] I worked at Dow Chemical Company in Midland, Michigan, which had absolutely nothing to do with social work. A friend was a nurse at Dow and she had room for a roommate. She found out about a summer vacancy in the polystyrene lab. I appeared on the scene, was hired, and went to work immediately. At the end of the summer, they wanted me to stay on permanently, but that didn't fit into my long-term plans so I returned to Cleveland, [Ohio], and the “Halls of Ivy” at Western Reserve University [where BB later attended graduate school. It is currently called Case Western Reserve University].

[BB discusses another summer work experience.] I don't remember how I learned about Marcy Center, a settlement house in Chicago, but I had an address and wrote to them for information. They sent it plus an application form. My parents studied the information, backed me up and drove my suitcase and me to Chicago. I was very fortunate. The summer turned out well and consisted mostly of a busy summer playground program for the city children in different age groups in a crowded Jewish district. Very good cooperation with other staff members and families.

**HY:** So then you graduated from the University of Wisconsin?

**BB:** Yes, in Madison in June 1940.

The next year, 1940–41 was a slim year in the U.S. depression, few jobs of any kind were available. However, there was a preschool in our church in Sheboygan where I worked for a while. Didn't make enough money to live on, but it gave me bus fare and some experience.

A friend from UW [University of Wisconsin] had an aunt in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin who

was a director of a private recreation center and was looking for a girls' worker. It wasn't long before my parents and I were investigating the situation firsthand. I was grateful to be a part of that staff and in that community. The usual group and playground activities were with a different group of children and young people in above middle-class surroundings. Two years of apartment living with another girl, bicycle trips, a bowling team, a course in radio, and being a Girl Scout leader, plus church activities, made those years fly by, even though the young men had not yet returned from the war [WW II].

[BB discusses her decision to attend graduate school.] Again, I was becoming interested in climbing the ladder. I had been reading about social work schools, so I wrote to the University of Chicago and Western Reserve University [WRU]. The latter won out. Dr. Grace Coyle, the main professor at the School of Applied Social Sciences [SASS] at WRU had written considerable social work material. One day, I filled out an application form, which had been sent to me, and put it in the mail.

The very next day I received a telephone call from the Neighborhood House in Madison where I had done supervised fieldwork [with Italian immigrant families] for two years while attending UW. Their group work director was leaving and they would like to have me join their staff immediately—all out of the clear blue sky! Twenty-four hours earlier I would have accepted, but for some reason I took it for granted that SASS would accept my application, so I turned down the Madison job. The end of that story is that the whole area around the settlement house was cleared for highway construction and I wouldn't have had a job long in Madison anyway! I continue to wonder where my dear Italian families went.

[BB is referring to her schooling at Western Reserve University.] That was a very good happenstance, too, as it was during the war and there were no men around to bother us with date life. (Laughs) We could concentrate on our studies and on our classmates and our theses; so that worked out very well.

HY: What kind of fieldwork did you do when you were at Western Reserve?

BB: The first year, I was assigned to the East End Neighborhood House in a mostly central-European immigrant district. Other community programs took over the naturalization-type programs; we did the socialization-type activities with education as a sideline when it could be worked in. I was responsible for some of the teenaged girls' clubs and their extra activities. One of my clubs chose the name "Wildcats." We had a great time with activities, et cetera. Near the end of the year I brought up the subject as to what they would like to do when they were grown up. One girl said, "I'm not sure about that, but I know that I want my daughter to be a Wildcat!" I wonder!

Spacious former bedrooms of this very large house made great clubs and classrooms for all ages. The [East End] Neighborhood House was two stories high and had an attic and a basement—photography, crafts and art were included in the activities as well as all types of games. The attic on the top floor was tremendous and ideal for all types of dancing and wet-weather activities.

The director and family lived in the main part of a delightful old and large home on another part of the property, which was built in the lumber baron era. It had been a gorgeous home in those days. There were three-dimensional angel heads on the walls next to the ceiling which



gave a very heavenly atmosphere. Also, there was a terrific kitchen. What wonderful banquets and dances those angels must have looked down on!

Another girl, who had graduated from SASS the previous year, and I lived in what had been called the "servants' quarters." We walked down a long, covered walkway and up a flight of stairs to reach our two rooms and bath.

HY: Was it right in the neighborhood you were serving?

BB: Yes, right in the center.

HY: What kind of neighborhood was it?

BB: Italian immigrants, mostly. Many grandpas and grandmas, *tūtūs*. I don't know about employment figures for the working age group. No problems with crime that I was aware of. The children learned fast, but I felt the younger generation didn't have much of an opportunity to advance in the world.

HY: Why do you say that?

BB: The adults didn't speak even minimal English and they had only a minimal education in Italian. They had no place to plant gardens, but they were always friendly and smiled.

Some years later, my husband and I were in the area in our motor home and found the area 100 percent Black which was a shock, an uncomfortable shock. We didn't stay long. They just stood around and looked at us. Didn't respond to any questions or comments.

[Another] fieldwork assignment was at the West Side YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association], where I was responsible for several business girls' clubs, which had their ups and downs. Some leadership developed during the year, but nothing spectacular. What I remember most about that year was the one evening I was helping to set the table at the YWCA for a big dinner and the announcement was made over the radio that Franklin Delano Roosevelt had just died.

HY: [Nineteen] forty-five.

BB: And the long dark cold nights I waited on a street corner during wartime brownouts for a streetcar to take me across the city to my comfortable little room at East End Neighborhood House. There was no worry about the lonesome, semidark, cold corner in those times, but it was a great relief to hop on a streetcar and greet the streetcar man who kept a little fire going in a cute little stove which kept passengers warm.

HY: And so those were some of the experiences you had while you were at Western Reserve.

BB: Yes, right. If I had kept the records of my clubs you could learn the rest of the story!

HY: And then you graduated. What year was it?

BB: June 1945.

HY: And then what happened?

BB: From April 1945 on we were busy, busy completing our school assignments, our records, and working out our thesis problems. Seven of us worked together on a group thesis, developing the general topic of "The Youth Groups in Cuyahoga County, A Study of Existing Group Activities Available for Youth Six through Eighteen Years of Age in Cuyahoga County, Ohio, during November and December 1944 and January 1945." We divided the area into seven districts to make this study possible. Beautiful springtime descended on us and there weren't enough hours in a day!

Even more exciting than coming to the end of our schoolwork were the letters that appeared every day on our SASS bulletin board informing us of available jobs in the great, wide world! I had sent a few inquiries for myself, and then an airmail letter came from Hawai'i. Pālama Settlement needed two group workers on the staff for a limit of two years. They were sending two of their staff from Hawai'i to WRU to attend school and then return to Hawai'i to get their jobs back. That sounded very logical as well as interesting. Some time before this, three of us had talked about the possibility of the three of us working together. I don't remember how it all worked out, but suddenly Pālama had three of their girls to come to WRU and arrangements were made for a sort of exchange.

HY: Who were the other two?

BB: June Okerlund from Minnesota and Elaine Paulson from Illinois. In the past two years, we learned to know each other well and knew we could work together. So we wrote and said there were three of us! They surely must have written to our references to find out what kind of characters we were, but they let us come anyway! And, come to think about it, we didn't know a thing about them either. Ah, youth!

HY: And this was Pālama Settlement?

BB: Pālama Settlement, right. And so we accepted the jobs by mail with the understanding that in two years we would return home to the Mainland. However, there was a little clause in there: If there was any cause for us, or them, to be dissatisfied with the situation, they would pay for our return ticket. We jokingly discussed the possibility of having a wild party somewhere near the end of our two years so they would have to finance our trip home. (Laughs) But we weren't at all interested in that.

HY: Do you remember your salary?

BB: (BB shuffles through papers.) Here is a letter of June 30, 1945 telling us how they happened to change from needing only two staff people to [hiring] three. Billie Anderson, who had been on the staff for a while, was going to drop her job for a while. That way they would have money to hire a third person. The salary would be \$200 per month.

HY: What was her position?

BB: Her husband, Paul [Anderson], was the director of the group work department, and Billie had been the program director. She became the supervisor for the three of us. I'm looking for the quote regarding our salary. Oh, here we are. "I have received your personal papers from

Western Reserve, and they are in very good order, so the offer I made you by cable of \$2,400 for the position of Business and Industrial Girls' Clubs still stands." [However,] this projected plan changed.

HY: Now is that for the whole contract?

BB: I'm sure for the year. That seemed like a lot of money, not having had a salary for a long time.

HY: So the three of you then decided to agree to the contract?

BB: Yes, no question.

HY: Came out sight unseen?

BB: Sight unseen.

(Laughter)

BB: Yes, and they took us sight unseen! The whole thing was positively amazing. Here is a photo in my scrapbook of all the staff members who came down to meet us. I wonder what they thought of us! Another special thing was that this was the first ship since the war started that anyone had been able to meet. Before the war, the thing to do was to go down to meet the ship and share in the excitement of visitors—even if they weren't yours—and enjoy the music by the Royal Hawaiian Band and the dancing of the colorfully dressed hula dancers. However, the war disrupted the finer things of island life, and the great rolls of barbed wire had been rolled up recently to clear the way for the newly arrived visitors and their Hawaiian welcoming groups.

Our new multinational friends and coworkers greeted us in the true Hawaiian style wearing colorful shirts and mu'u[mu'u]s, wonderful smiles and giving us many flower leis and ditto kisses! We were completely overcome. We didn't know anything about this, but we quickly recovered.

(Laughter)

BB: So we immediately felt we were friends from the first moment.

June got more into swimming at first. She was a professional swimming instructor, and this was just one example of how, between the three of us, we could handle almost any kind of a job. Pālama's swimming pool was used much of the time by the U.S. military services for training purposes. The neighborhood children had their own schedules which June also taught.

[Elaine and I] took turns supervising the playground which was across a not-too-busy street, Vineyard Street at that time, which later became Vineyard Boulevard. At this time there was no particular danger to life or limb to cross over to get to Pālama. Also Pālama had a very good preschool on that side of the street. Elaine and I were busy with club and camp activities, and getting acquainted with the neighborhood.



The rest of the Pālama buildings were on the *mauka* side of the street. The main Pālama building was very attractive and looked beautiful to us, especially from the front with many grassy areas and great trees. We referred to it as the "Pālama Country Club"! Our offices, club and activity rooms were on the second floor. Some years later a fire changed a section of the profile of the building. The other buildings included a marvelous, well-used gym and locker room with rooms upstairs used at one time for a music school. Several two-story frame buildings behind the main Pālama building had multiuses at different times—living quarters, staff kitchen, staff offices, sewing and cooking classes, et cetera. Our living quarters were on the second floor of one of the buildings. The lower floor of "our building" was used as a VD [venereal disease] clinic under some sort of health department auspices. A long, two-story building at right angles to Vineyard Street served, at least during the time we were there, as a dormitory and the Strong-Carter Dental Clinic.

There was a craft room at the end of the hall [of the main building] which was very well programmed by Alma Watanabe and her assistant, Dorothy Yoshimura. The business offices were there, too. Julia Desha spent her working hours there. She and her dear, kind husband, David, were high on our unwritten list of wonderful people. They were loving Hawaiians who took us under their wings, entertained and fed our relatives when they came to visit, and gave a wedding shower for me. Everything gracious and lovely.

And there was Nelson Kawakami. He was in complete charge of the many sports activities. What he said was *it*. His able assistant was a sort of night watchman, and I don't know what else. There was some racial tension in this part of town as far as military—Caucasian—personnel was concerned so he was nice to have around when our servicemen friends, including my brother, visited us. One young Caucasian, not in uniform, who worked on the staff part-time, arrived at our apartment door late one evening after being quite well beaten up en route to his room at Pālama [Settlement] from the Liliha Street streetcar stop. We had enough medical supplies to care for him. He recovered rapidly, but after that he arrived back at Pālama premises before dark.

[After I left Pālama] I didn't see him [Nelson Kawakami] again until I attended his wake. I still feel badly every time I think of that giant of a man, our short Japanese friend, lying in a huge casket in the middle of much fluff and white satin pillows. He didn't even have a ukulele with him! How uncomfortable he must have been. I wouldn't have been surprised if he had walked out of there and returned to Pālama where he belonged. The two Christmases we girls were there he included us in his annual "Santa Schedule" and gave us lovely, thoughtful gifts. I don't remember the gifts, but it was the love with which he gave them that we remember. Fifty years later my eyes are teary with these remembrances of him. Also, every time one of us had a family visitor, he took us all out for a Chinese dinner!

I was just thinking about [the ethnicity of the staff at Pālama Settlement] and realized that we really were a mixture. I hadn't thought about that before. Phyllis Leong, Chinese, was a friendly and fantastic sewing teacher for children and adults; Alice Barnes, a Mainland Haole, was a very talented musician and I remember her mostly because of the way she charmed the restless Summer Activity children when she taught them many delightful fun, and more serious, songs. John Kelly, part Hawaiian, taught music of various kinds. Eleanor Burrell, what I suppose we would call "African American" now, was also great with children and singing.

Mr. Theodore, Ted, Rhea was very important to me. He was the director of the Pālama

Settlement [1942–1948]. He and his wife were marvelous people. He is especially remembered because he served as best man at our wedding, as my own father was unable to be there. I especially remember the story he told about his mother scolding him when he visited her in Denver and took off his shoes when he drove her car. What would the ambulance people say if he were in an accident and he didn't have his shoes on? Two other special Pālama people included Esther So and Mildred Fukuda who were a part of the staff at the Pālama Preschool staff in the preschool building before the freeway cut the neighborhood apart.

And then there was [Reginald] “Reggie” Hailele who worked in the sports area with Nelson. I have no idea what his age or nationality were. Had never even thought about it until now. Some years later he worked as a bellboy at one of the Waikīkī hotels. We greeted each other as long-lost relatives, and I still remember the shocked look on the faces of the incoming hotel guests—a very dark-skinned bellhop and a light-skinned Haole so glad to see each other!

[BB discusses the employment of social workers when she first arrived in Honolulu.] That was the time of shortage of professional workers. Social work was coming into its own, as it were. Our board members were glad to see us. To further prove there was a shortage of trained workers, when my two years were up on August 31, 1947, I stayed because I was needed, and then began working on January 1, 1948 at the YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association] as the Y-Teens director was pregnant and they needed a replacement.

HY: So there was a lot of work for social workers.

BB: Yes. There was.

HY: Now were they mostly women that were social workers then?

BB: I can't think of any man that was a graduated social worker, way back then. At least not where I was.

HY: You'd mentioned [in the original interview] that this was the first ship [that the public was allowed to greet] had come into Hawai'i because of the war. What was the passage like?

BB: It was exciting. Still blackout travel on the old *Matsonia*. We were told there were [thousands of] servicemen on the upper decks. We women and children were on the two lower inside decks. If we wanted to lie on a deck in the sun, there was a little, small space available on our level and we had to take a blanket off our bed and find an empty spot. A serviceman constantly patrolled our passageway. All night we would hear the click, click of his heels which was sort of unnerving. We were “filed” alphabetically—six occupants to a cabin, two triple decks of beds per cabin. We had to take turns getting dressed as no way could we wave our arms around except one at a time. My other friends with initials of *P* and *O* were way down at the other end of the ship. I was a *W* but no one snored in our cabins so that was a plus.

We had a wall fan, a little puny one with three blades, the fourth was missing. And it was very stuffy so we had to sleep with our door open. We would have suffocated otherwise. It wasn't what anyone could call a glamorous stateroom. Also, our ship was zigzagging. We were completely blacked out, and there were still mines floating around.

I don't remember where we went to eat—perhaps trays in our cabins. We were fed very well. I don't think June ate even one meal that stayed down the whole trip. But she made it.

HY: So you came to Hawai'i, then all three of you worked at Pālāma Settlement and you lived at the settlement.

BB: Right at the settlement.

HY: Maybe you could describe your living facilities.

BB: That was nice, too. There were several buildings on the Pālāma grounds as described earlier. Our three-bedroom apartment was upstairs over the VD clinic. Quite a topic for conversation although we never told our families! We think that area was rented by Pālāma to a public health clinic. Our upstairs area had been well cleaned before we arrived. There was one bedroom and a bath on one side of the rather large living room and two bedrooms and a bath on the other. As we approached the harbor we—I don't know whose idea it was—it was decided that in order to avoid any kind of hard feelings, that we should pick a number—one, two, or three. Whoever drew the one would have the room and bath on the one side, and numbers two and three would have the two rooms with the one bath on the other side. So the minute we went up the steps to our apartment, Elaine turned left to her room and bath, and June and I went to rooms two and three, and that was it for two years.

HY: So did you say you had cooking facilities?

BB: No, no cooking facilities. It was interesting that fifty-some years later I had an opportunity to meet Mr. Bobby—Robert—Rath, who had been born and brought up right on the Pālāma Settlement grounds, because his father [James Arthur Rath] had been the first director [1905–1925] of Pālāma Settlement. When he was a kid, Mr. Rath had for his bedroom the bed and bath which Elaine occupied some fifty years later!

And I tell you it is different now because an elevated highway, H-1, goes right past the corner of the building. Almost could go out and shake the hand of people driving by. Terrible! Anyhow, it was interesting to find out the history of Elaine's room. Preparing for us, the Pālāma staff had done a good job of cleaning, but they hadn't done much about furnishings. So they gave us money—I don't remember how much—and they loaned us a Pālāma car. We went to navy housing and to garage sales and bought used furniture. We got our apartment fixed up nicely, and I believe we had a little money left over. We soon had friends to share our new home with, and also to help with window washing when the time came. As far as eating was concerned, the building next door where the Andersons lived had a kitchen downstairs, which had been turned into a group kitchen. Almost any of the workers could eat there. We drew lots for kitchen jobs, so we went over there for meals.

HY: So you took turns cooking?

BB: We took turns, yes. Fortunately, several of the girls liked to cook more than others so we worked out little deals. And that couldn't have been more fortunate. I don't remember a single problem or argument relating to the kitchen.

[BB discusses meeting her husband, Ray Burner.] We met at First Methodist Church in

Honolulu, summer 1946. He returned to the Mainland for his discharge from the [U.S.] Navy and returned to Honolulu in December 1946. We were engaged and he went apartment hunting. The best place available was right on the Pālama Settlement grounds—a room and a bath and the co-op kitchen solved our immediate housing needs. We were married on March 8, 1947 and four months later moved into our first real home. Another thanks to Pālama for taking such good care of me.

HY: I know you didn't work with the VD clinic, but did you have a sense of who in the community they were serving?

BB: As far as we could tell, the patients were all old men—never did see service personnel. It may have been a service for Pālama neighborhood. We never inquired about that.

HY: Maybe you can talk about specific work that you did. I notice in the letter that you read something about industrial group. I forgot what it said, but it described your position.

BB: (Reading) At present, we have five groups in this section of the program Business and Industrial Girls' Clubs.

HY: Now what does that mean?

BB: I believe the "industrial group" emphasis wasn't as important as first thought and the program emphasis changed. Pālama had a camp along the sea near Waialua which was very, very nice. The groups would go out to camp and have to have an authorized person go with them. The groups planned their program with a little help. It was recreation for them and learning to cooperate, which worked out very, very well. I think that's what the original program was, but I believe it turned more in the direction of younger teenagers and children that needed programs more. Groups would go places, and we could take the Pālama banana wagon anywhere—within reason—that the group wanted to go. I remember one time I had a wagon full of teenage girls. I heard the girls whooping it up. I looked around and saw a car of teenage boys trying to run us off the road. I was real cross and hollered, "Girls, don't look at those boys or we're going to end up in the ditch." They did what I said and the boys gave up on us. That's the only time I was really frightened.

HY: So what was the banana wagon?

BB: It was one of those wooden-sided station wagons of the 1940s and [19]50s. Oh, here, here. [BB refers to a photograph.] That's our banana wagon.

HY: So it's kind of open air?

BB: Yeah, kind of. So I thought [it was the end of] my days and the girls', but anyhow, we pulled through that one. We had responsibilities for summer camp at Pālama-by-the-Sea [Waialua] camp with the children, and day camp on Pālama grounds. Along came one of the big tidal waves [at Waialua] and washed away the dining room/kitchen building and did other damage.

And we'd have little parades. I wish I had kept the minutes of my club activities. We'd have sewing projects, too. One of the other staff members, Phyllis Leong, was the sewing instructor. She helped us with the projects—things they could take home to their mommies or for

themselves, nice things. They finally got accustomed to coming on time, which they weren't used to doing. So I think in that way we helped them get accustomed to doing things properly and have fun at the same time.

HY: Well, who were these kids? Maybe you could discuss—maybe like a profile of who you were serving.

BB: I can tell you it wasn't like it is now. The housing situation has changed, I'm sure. The area of little gray houses with orchids isn't like I remember the living conditions long ago. I haven't driven past there to check on details, but it surely isn't a street for little children to run across as it was in the old days. Now many of the Pālama participants arrive by car. Pālama's gym and swimming pool have always been well used by the community, and, I mentioned earlier, it was used by the armed forces during wartimes.

HY: How would you compare your working experience with Pālama Settlement with what you experienced in Cleveland? You know, you were talking about that settlement where you lived there, and these people were poor [BB had discussed poverty in the original interview] and it seemed somewhat hopeless to you. How would you compare them?

BB: Well, kids are kids. Young people are young people and we should never really give up on them. It would be easier to compare it to what it would be like now. I don't know whether I could cope with some of the thinking of children and young people today. Of course, I'm older, but I don't think I ever could go along with some of the current ideas. Like the fourteen and sixteen year olds living across our street now. I don't know what I could do to interest or please them. Not really uncivilized, sort of disconnected. It seems like the kids in the 1940s and [19]50s had a little more connection—not with the world, but certainly they didn't know about all the bad things going on in the world as do the kids across the street thanks to TV.

HY: Did you feel a sense of hopelessness for their, I guess, lot in life?

BB: No, no, because their parents were interested and everything was low-key—Hawai'i, you know! And, no, I didn't feel as badly about them as I did the ones in Cleveland. I had never thought about that before.

HY: What about the level of poverty that you were aware of?

BB: I've worked a lot with poverty, and I'm sort of used to it. Like I worked in the settlement house in the Italian neighborhood in Madison when I went to the university. They really were poor, poor, but their parents loved them. They came to talk with me about all kinds of problems and I felt a real warmth there. But I thought, "Well, kids hang on. (Chuckles) I guess you'll turn out right." But kids now, I wonder about them.

HY: How was that for you, coming from really outside of the community? What kind of adjustment did you make, or did you . . .

BB: Adjust to Pālama?

HY: Yeah, how did you . . .



- BB: Well, that was just like any other outside place that I'd been to. Like Chicago, that was sure different. I guess I don't feel like an outsider very long.
- HY: You felt comfortable.
- BB: Oh, yes. And then I think I told you the other day that we three new staff members were very busy with assorted activities. Then one night we sat down and figured out how many hours we'd been working. We had put in seventy-two hours the previous week. One of us said, "We don't recommend this for anyone else. Poor planning! We shouldn't do it ourselves." So we didn't say "yes" to everything that came along.
- HY: So you shaped your own programs?
- BB: Pretty much. Billie Anderson was very, very good about getting our feelings on things, advising us, saying, "Well, listen. How can you do that and that, too?" How could we, indeed? We were young in those days and nothing seemed impossible!
- HY: Were some of the other social workers there from Hawai'i or were they mostly from . . .
- BB: No, we were the only social workers at that time.
- HY: So it was just you [and June Okerlund and Elaine Paulson]?
- BB: Yes. And then when the other girls [Ruby Dewa, Janet Kuwahara Nakashima and Michiko Uno Higa] returned to Pālama with their master's degrees from the School of Social Science at Western Reserve University, June and Elaine returned at the end of their contracts to find other interesting social work on the Mainland. I stayed on at Pālama to fill in a temporary vacancy and then moved on to my next Hawai'i job at the YWCA.
- HY: And I remember you said something about you would take turns cooking. Was this between the social workers, or all—everybody at Pālama?
- BB: Whoever happened to be living there and wanting to eat. Several university students were around and some part-time workers.
- HY: So you were exposed to different kinds of foods?
- BB: Yes we were, but as I remember the important thing wasn't so much what we ate but as long as it was edible and served on time there were very few complaints. One of the nicest things that Pālama did to welcome us into their family was on the very first night we were there the board members met at Pālama. A wonderful "local" meal was served—don't remember whether Hawaiian or Oriental—and that is where we learned to use chopsticks right off—no fork! We had to use chopsticks, and then anywhere we went we felt right at home. (Laughs) The food tasted even better that way, anyhow. The board members were right in there pitching and we were immediately with friends—a great feeling. I don't think any of us would say it out loud, but we never particularly missed our families!

(Laughter)

BB: Except we had to write letters, you know, which was time consuming.

HY: Now did you do counseling with the parents of the kids and older kids that you worked with? Did you meet their families and have interaction with them?

BB: Not very much. I mean if things got sort of bad then we would, but things didn't get tangled up like they do now. We didn't have drugs; didn't need "no smoking" signs; didn't have babies—at least that I knew of.

HY: What kinds of problems, if you did have problems, were there that [you ran into]?

BB: Oh, let's see now. Offhand I can't remember any real problems. We were fortunate to have Billie Anderson who was very good at guiding us through situations and helping us detour around or find a substitute for a troublesome situation. The Pālama people were mostly friends to begin with and there weren't many outsiders that broke in 'cause they wouldn't have felt comfortable.

HY: By outsiders, you mean . . .

BB: People that didn't really belong.

HY: In the community?

BB: Yeah.

HY: Did you work at all with other agencies?

BB: By that time, there were more social workers and more official social work jobs, as well as a statewide, or at least an O'ahu-wide, social work organization with officers, scheduled meetings, et cetera. I don't remember the official name of this organization. Yes, we did cooperate with other social work organizations, but that is a whole other report.

Overall planning for the community is what I remember [as the focus of the social work organization], and workshops on various topics were set up. Real social work was starting to come into its own.

HY: When you would take these groups out, like taking the girls out in the banana truck for some activity, what size group are you talking about?

BB: Small groups that could go in the vehicle.

HY: So these would be after-school activities.

BB: Usually a weekend.

HY: What about more academic-type activities? Were you involved in any of that?

BB: No.

HY: So it was mostly recreational and social?

BB: Right, recreational and social. However, there were learning experiences going on, too. For a while, John Kelly taught music in the music school area. I don't know details. And Alice Barnes—oh, she was a dear—she was a music person, too. And she knew many of the cute and clever children's songs. She was a sort of older lady, and the children thought, "Who is she?" But she won them over with her first sentence. (Laughs) I marveled at her.

HY: At that time were you thinking that Hawai'i was going to be a place [where] you're going to make your home?

BB: After I married Ray, I found he liked Hawai'i as much as I did. Then we talked about where we wanted to go. (Laughs) Ohio or Wisconsin—our home states. Neither of them sounded too good. We really hadn't thought that far ahead.

HY: So you just continued doing the same type of work that you had been doing?

BB: That's right. I should mention here that we had the joy of working at Pālāma at the time of its fiftieth anniversary. We had the opportunity to meet many of the old-timers as well as to decorate the hall. I had no idea I would be attending the hundredth anniversary celebration this year! So that's when I suddenly realized that I've reached the point where I'm a historical character around here! I can't imagine a more fortunate situation to have found myself in without trying.

HY: So after you left Pālāma Settlement—you mentioned you worked for the YWCA.

BB: I had several different jobs with the YWCA from January 1948 into 1955 as different kinds of staff vacancies occurred. I pinch-hitted as Y-Teens director for a friend who took maternity leave. As time went on, weekend dances [which were part of BB's job responsibilities] didn't appeal to my husband so there was a short-term opening in the Windward YWCA in the Kokokahi area. I still remember those miserable rides over Old Pali Road. I drove a YW[CA] car; the vent leaked and my foot and shoe would be soggy when I got home. I was always grateful to arrive home in one piece in the dark.

About then the YW Honolulu business girls lost their leader. There still weren't enough social workers looking for jobs so I was asked to take back the business girls job. I don't have any dates on this.

Another time, I worked at the YWCA when the Wahiawā branch of the YWCA was opened. I had a nice office; the community was very supportive; the young servicemen's wives were delightful and we accomplished some worthwhile projects. Driving to Wahiawa every day wasn't my favorite way to spend my time and a good replacement for me was found. So I enjoyed some time just being a full-time homemaker.

HY: So throughout your career, you really worked with a variety of ages and types of people?

BB: Yes, indeed. Another organization that I worked with was the Junior Red Cross. I happened to sit in choir practice next to a friend who worked with the Junior Red Cross. She needed an assistant. I'd never heard of that before, but she gave me the necessary information and soon I

was wearing a blue uniform and taking school artwork up to Tripler Hospital, teaching leadership training courses to elementary school teachers during their required extracurricular class time, et cetera; and was even sent to a Junior Red Cross training center Mainland camp at Flathead Lake, Montana in July of '54.

[After receiving a teaching degree from the] University of Hawai'i, I taught fifth grade at the new Moanalua School for one year. I planned on teaching another year, but I talked with the school administration and told them my husband and I were going to be taking a trip and we weren't returning to the island until October. They said they couldn't hold a Windward teaching position for me. I didn't want to run the chance of having to drive to Wai'anae, for example, every school day of the year. I wasn't interested in that. Besides my husband and I were interested in jobs at the Pōhai Nani retirement home [Pōhai Nani Good Samaritan Kauhale]. So it was "good-bye" to teaching. Although I had an elementary teaching certificate which would have made me eligible for a school counselor job.

HY: Why did you decide to go into teaching after so many years of social work?

BB: I was getting more interested in a more. . . .

HY: Structured?

BB: Yes, a more structured life. One never knows when a weekend camp or a late night of dancing will be coming up. Such irregularity didn't fit into my family life.

HY: So it was more for your home life.

BB: Right. And some of the time I was trying to get pregnant. The doctor thought a vacation might help. That didn't help either, but I learned that working wasn't my main goal in life at this time.

[BB refers to Pōhai Nani.] It is a retirement complex with twenty cottage units, a fourteen-story apartment building and a nursing unit. Ray worked there for ten years in charge of the maintenance responsibilities, and my job description adjusted to the various situations as more and more people moved in and required different services—sort of a social services person. I welcomed new people moving in, talked with their families, helped them get settled. Then I started programs for them—once a week had movies or a speaker, then added excursions, until gradually the residents were taking over the committees.

Gradually I managed it so the residents were taking over the committees including writing the monthly Pōhai Nani newspaper. Thus I worked my way out of the original job, and when I realized that most of my time was now being spent driving the Pōhai Nani residents to and from doctor and dentist appointments I knew it was time to move on. I hadn't gone to graduate school for this! (Chuckles)

About at this point in my life a dear coworker at Pālama suggested that I look into a social work job with the state—better pay, better insurance, better everything.

The next think I knew I was the director of the O'ahu day-care licensing unit with a nice office in Honolulu and a nice staff of two very efficient young women and a secretary.

HY: What year did you start working there?

BB: (Looking through scrapbook) Here's my first paycheck, January 1967.

HY: So you were licensing day-care [centers on O'ahu]?

BB: Yes, my staff and I worked with the inspectors from the fire, public health, and building departments to see that all state safety and health regulations were being met. Quite a challenge in some cases!

HY: And you worked there and retired from that job?

BB: No, not from that job, another job! (Laughs)

HY: Oh, I'm sorry.

BB: That's why I need my book.

Then along came a job in the regular social services department in the Windward office. There was an opening in the Kāne'ohe office a lot closer to home and I didn't have to drive to town, so I took the job. That's when I had my one and only legal case, very exciting.

HY: What was that about?

BB: (Looking through her scrapbook) Oh, the poor little boy.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

HY: Okay, you were talking about the Joshua Kaminski case that was in the papers, I guess.

BB: Yes, it was in the papers.

HY: In August '69 [through '71].

BB: My mother was living in Pōhai Nani at that time. Let me tell you, everybody living there was interested in that scandal and saved all these newspaper clippings for me! (Chuckles)

HY: Now what happened? Who was Joshua Kaminski?

BB: He was living in a communal home with his young mother and his communal family. He was a few months old and not getting proper food. I mean, he was in bad shape.

HY: How did they discover him?

BB: A neighbor had seen this very young infant buried up to his neck in the sand on the Punalu'u beach and had reported it.

So we investigated. Judge Samuel P. King took him away from his mother and gave the Department of Social Services temporary custody. Later he was returned to his mother when a



fuss about rightful rights of mothers came up. [Joshua Kaminski's mother], Noreen [Kaminski], had a strong contingent of backers in the courtroom. She decided to leave the island so the baby was returned to her. He had gained a few pounds. Later, I heard that his mother and he had been walking along the highway in Arizona, and he had been injured by a car. That is the last I will ever know about him.

HY: So this was several years after you had worked on this [case].

BB: Oh, yes.

HY: Did you interview the mother?

BB: Oh, yes. Interviewed the mother and the communal "father." Joshua's real father evidently was someone that Noreen had met up with on the Mainland earlier. I made a report on the living conditions for the state or whoever needed it. I drove around with Joshua in the car quite a bit when I took him home from court. It was quite an experience for me—especially the day when the policeman and the public health nurse and I visited the home and Noreen tossed the baby across the table. Fortunately, the nurse caught him! Also, the day when I left the court building and one of Noreen's friends walked behind me and yelled at me for some distance. Also, I received one nasty phone call. I do think of him occasionally. He would be twenty-eight years old now, if he is still alive.

HY: Was this the first time you were actually working as a caseworker? You [had done] group work before.

BB: This was an official casework job—front page news coverage and all.

HY: So you just jumped right in?

BB: (Reads from a newspaper clipping) "Parent Arrested." Here is my little Kaminski boy. On March 13, mother didn't appear in court and she should have. Nineteen seventy-one.

HY: So this trial, from the time it became public knowledge, this went on for a couple of years?

BB: Hmm, yes.

HY: And ultimately he was returned to his mother?

BB: Returned to her, yes. But then (reading from newspaper), "She was arrested in January. She told police she did not know where Joshua was. DSS [Department of Social Service] also did not know where he was...the social workers had not been able to locate the child or his mother for several months." And then what's this? March 18, "Woman Gets Jail Term on Vice Charge." Why he was returned to his mother is my question.

HY: [You worked at] this job until you retired [in 1974]?

BB: Yes. After a total of seven years with the DSS. Joshua's case has been in DSS storage files for years along with records of hundreds of other young people who started life under great hardships. Even all the state money that was spent on their rehabilitation, I'm afraid not much

was really accomplished. We really did have many successes although the story of them didn't usually hit the front page.

- HY: So after you retired, you and your husband [rented your Kāne'ohe home and] took off for the Mainland for about fifteen years and just travelled.
- BB: Right. We bought a twenty-two foot long motor home and traveled all over the USA, Mexico, Canada and joined a group of twenty-two couples who bought VW campers and took a 15,000 mile, 5½-month trip around Europe, North Africa and the British Isles, so we had a roving and educational good time!
- HY: Did you always know you would come back to Hawai'i?
- BB: Well, we differ about that. We never really talked about—just looked so far ahead and that was it. Our families were in Ohio and Wisconsin. Neither of them compares with Hawai'i. We still had our home here so it worked out that we returned here and have been happy for fifty-two years.
- HY: Is there anything else you want to add?
- BB: I'm so glad this project is being done, and I want to assure the readers that in all these many jobs I was never fired! I want to thank the Lord that he took care of me in all of my goings and comings. I am thankful for my parents who let me do them and also for my husband who has been a great helpmate and fellow traveller. And my brother and special aunts who encouraged me. And my good health.

I have known a wonderful group of people. We have had a few cruises and we look forward to more. If a person saves money and doesn't have credit card bills, I tell you, it is surprising how much money one can keep from spending. So we are careful with our money, but happy.

Since this project really centers on Pālama Settlement and I have gotten off the main subject so often because of my other activities, I would like to share three "word pictures" with you about special Pālama moments.

Word Picture 1: I believe that earlier I mentioned that June and Elaine, of Norwegian and Swedish backgrounds, had lovely blonde hair. One afternoon while June was sitting on the edge of the Pālama playground sandbox, a little girl who was playing in the sandbox said, "Miss June, may I please feel your hair?" I suppose until that time the only blondes she had encountered were store-bought dolls. How happy and gentle the little girl was!

Word Picture 2: June and I were staff on duty at Pālama camp one weekend and the older teenage boys continued their lively activities, singing, et cetera, way past curfew time. For the second time we went out to calm them down and were sort of disgusted with them. But when we turned around to return to our cabin there was the most beautiful, spectacular, colorful moon bow in the black sky over the ocean, which we would not have seen if the boys had been following our directions! The only one we ever saw! But why didn't we call them out of their cabins to share this wonder? I really think we were in a case of shock!

Word picture 3: This pertains to June again. June told the story about the time she was taking

a group of interested tourists around the Pālama campgrounds. She gave them the history of the camp and Pālama, then asked them if they had any questions. One woman spoke up. "Yes, I have one. How long do you have to live here before you can walk barefooted on these little pinecones?"

Word picture 4: The very first day I was the playground overseer and it was time to close the gate, I tried to call the scattered children together so I could close the gate. "Children, it is time to go home. Come on, children, let's go," et cetera, [which] brought no response. I thought I might be in for trouble. I wasn't making any headway until a little girl came up to me and she said, "Do you mean *pau*?" That is exactly what I meant, and the children came running. My first pidgin word! How many times I have used it since!

# **Reflections of Pālama Settlement**

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