TRIBUTE

to

Harry Mamizuka

March 6, 1998

BY: Brook M. Mamizuka

[NOTE: Harry Mamizuka was too ill to be interviewed during the final days of his life, but his contributions to Pālama Settlement are many and it seemed only fitting that he should be included in this project. His daughter Brook Mamizuka wrote the following tribute to her father.]

Harry Mamizuka was born on January 12, 1922 on the island of Hawai‘i in Hilo. His parents were from Japan and came to Hawai‘i to work on the sugar plantation. Soon after he was born, his parents relocated to Honolulu. They moved to Kalihi where his father began a vegetable farm.

His father purchased the land from the Wilson Tunnel to the Burmeister Overpass. My father was proud to be a part of that land and often spoke of the forest, streams and mountains. He would brag that he “grew up in a barn amongst farm animals.” The family worked and lived on that land until they were tricked into selling it for $5,000. They were told that the land was kapu. They sold in fear and moved to Kalihi Valley, where they worked a small vegetable farm. The farm produced enough produce to fill a hand-pushed wagon. His father would go from house to house and sell fruits and vegetables.

At five years old, he began living a very independent lifestyle. He and his older brother were raised by his father. He explained that by the age of twelve, he cooked for himself, he walked to school unsupervised, he washed his own clothes, he cared for himself when he was sick, and he cared for the farm animals.

He attended Kalākaua Intermediate School and Farrington High School. He began working with Pālama Settlement at the age of seventeen, and assisted with their swimming and football program. He remained at Pālama Settlement until 1974.

While he worked with Pālama, he got married, began his family, and continued playing football. He managed to provide for his family by working a full-time job and several part-time jobs. He began his work history as a garbage collector and worked hard and became an electrician.

In 1946, he was the first Japanese ball player to play professional football. He played for the Hawaiian Warriors.

As the years went on, he played exhibition football for the Shriners. He played softball. He started the mountainball league for the Samoan community. He umpired. He coached football for St. Louis School, Kamehameha Schools, McKinley High School and Kalāheo High School. He coached swimming for Kaimukī High School, McKinley High School, Aulea Swim Club and eventually started his own swim club, Mānoa Aquatics.
Being raised by a single parent and living most of his life independently, he felt the loneliness and pain of the children of Pālama Settlement. He knew how easy it was for children to take the wrong path without guidance. He wanted better for the youngsters of the community. He wanted them to live an honest life and get a good education. This motivated him to work long and hard hours with the children of Pālama.

Children who were “doing nothing, getting into trouble, stealing cars” were his target. He wanted them off the street and in sports. He occupied their time with practice, school, and fund-raising activities.

The greatest reward for him was getting a child a scholarship for an education. He would tell us that education would get you ahead in life. He was so proud of the children he coached who became police officers, firemen, schoolteachers, athletic directors, school counselors, probation officers, and upstanding businessmen.

He would pick up the children and take them home after swimming meets and practices. He told us stories of dropping off the kids and entering their homes only to find their families without furniture and without food. He would later return with apple crates and would make them furniture. Food that he would “mooch or scrounge” would be distributed to families without food. While at practice or meets he would give the kids money to buy hot dogs.

Resourcefulness was a part of his character until the final days of his life. His “mooching or scrounging” would be from neighborhood merchants, navigational companies, and his friends. He had so many friends that wherever he went someone was sure to recognize him.

The philosophy of Harry Mamizuka was unmistakable. It was simple and uncomplicated. He carried it everywhere he coached and throughout his life. He believed in basic fundamentals—feet shoulder width apart, square up, stay low, and hit hard. He believed in respect for yourself and your family, honesty, hard work, “giving it everything you got” and “never giving up.”

He was aggressive, self-motivated, and always looked ahead. He learned by his own mistakes and gathered information from his life experiences. He was a leader. He read books, played the sports himself, and traveled to learn and develop his own techniques. He taught and coached by his own rules.
Reflections of Pālama Settlement

Volume I

Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

August 1998