BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Barbara Paresa

Barbara Matsuzaki Paresa, the third of five children, was born in Honolulu on November 28, 1943. When she was about seven years old she moved with her mother, Mildred Okazaki Matsuzaki, and siblings to Pālama to live with her maternal grandparents.

She was educated at Kalākaua Intermediate School, Central Intermediate School, and graduated from McKinley High School in 1961. She then attended Cannon's Business College for one year.

Paresa began frequenting Pālama Settlement along with her younger sister and brother when she was still in elementary school. She learned how to swim at the settlement and eventually participated in swim meets.

She worked as a teller for American Security Bank for a short time before she got married and became a homemaker and mother. She currently lives in Hawai'i Kai and has two children.
[This is an interview with Barbara Paresa.] It's October 7, 1997 for the Pālama Settlement project and the interviewer is Holly Yamada. [The interview took place in Center for Oral History office.]

Okay, let's start with when you were born.

BP: I was born November 28, 1943.

HY: And where were you born?

BP: In Honolulu.

HY: And where did you grow up?


HY: And maybe you could tell me about your grandparents, what you know of your grandparents?

BP: Okay. All I know is more my mother's side. My grandfather and grandmother both came from Japan. So did my father's mother and father. And my [maternal] grandfather worked with the railroad. Then my [maternal] grandmother was a housewife and she did laundry. You know the usual—laundry, cook for her family, cleaning house, and raised six children. And my mother [Mildred Okazaki Matsuzaki] is the only daughter with five brothers. Then from Waialua they moved to Pālama area. Then when my parents got divorced—I was about seven—we moved to Pālama with my grandparents and we started to go to Pālama Settlement to keep out of trouble, to be occupied really.

HY: Was this the O'ahu Rail[way & Land] Company?

BP: Yes. I think he was working the plantation. Then he got the job at the railroad then they moved to town.

HY: Do you know what plantation?
BP: No. In Waialua but I don’t know exactly where.

HY: Do you know about what time they came from Japan?

BP: I guess 1908, around there.

HY: Do you have---do you know what prefecture?

BP: My grandmother came from the [Kumamoto prefecture]. My father, [Thomas Matsuzaki is from] Yamaguchi—(Paternal grandparents—both are from Yamaguchi prefecture.)

BP: But I don’t know what my great-grandparents did.

HY: Okay.

BP: I know my [maternal] grandfather side—they were educators. They were teachers. I don’t know about my [maternal] grandmother side too much.

HY: This is all—you’re talking your maternal side.

BP: Yes. But I know my father’s side, they were nori pickers. You know, seaweed pickers and they would make nori.

HY: [tape inaudible]

BP: I remember my mom saying that he went back as a young boy to work there for the uncle for a little while before he came back. I think it was his teenage years.

HY: But both your parents grew up here?

BP: My father, I think, was born in Japan. And my mom is here. She’s first generation, I guess.

HY: You mentioned your parents were divorced and when you were . . .

BP: Seven years old. So, there are five of us.

HY: Where are you in the birth order?

BP: I’m the third. I have two brothers above me and I’m the third child, first girl. Then, my sister and another brother. So, myself, and my youngest brother Bill, [and] my sister June, we were the ones who attended Pālama [Settlement]. My brothers were already at intermediate [school]. Oh, I take that back. My oldest brother was intermediate, my other brother above me went to Likelike [School]. Then they went to ‘Iolani [School] and they played baseball and football. But we [BP and her sister] just continued, just stayed at Pālama the rest of—I think we were about eight or nine [years old]. I was eight or nine. My sister was little younger.

HY: When you started?

BP: When we started.
HY: Do you have memories prior to moving to the Pālama area?

BP: Yes.

HY: Can you talk about your home life there?

BP: Okay. Let me see. When my parents were together I remember we moved to Kam[e]hameha IV Road—from Pauoa Valley then we moved to Kam IV Road. Then, my father bought a saimin stand for my mother to work in. (Chuckles) And he was an alcoholic, so she did most of the work.

HY: What was the stand called? Do you remember?

BP: No, I don’t even remember. That’s a good question. I should’ve found out from my mom. I was about first grade when we moved by Nu‘uanu. Was right on Nu‘uanu [Avenue]. Actually, just where the freeway is now—because on the corner where Chock-Pang Clinic is right now used to be a Chinese mortuary. Then, used to be a two-lane [street] on Nu‘uanu. ’Cause we were quite close to Foster Gardens.

HY: [Foster] Botanical Gardens?

BP: That used to be our playground. You know, where it was half of the highway, was Foster Garden area. It was really huge. And, I think, it was beautiful then because you had more trees. Of course, you had more area.

And so my mom’s saimin stand used—one of the shops—were right near the Chinese mortuary. I remember there was a doctor’s office there. Then there was a couple of stores next to the saimin stand and we were next to a poolroom. That’s why I remember it. So we grew up in (laughs), I guess, interesting area and era. Then my parents got divorced then we moved over with my grandparents to Pālama.

HY: So you lived with your [maternal] grandparents?

BP: Yes. My mom’s parents.

HY: Do you remember what your father did?

BP: He had a trucking produce [business], a produce company. He was a trucker. And my mom was a seamstress, plus she would help him with the books and all that, and be a housewife before she had that saimin stand.

HY: Was that his own business then?

BP: Yes.

HY: Do you remember the name of it?

BP: No, I don’t know. Good question, another good question. (Chuckles) Funny we don’t even think about these things, you know.
HY: Well, you were...

BP: Too young, yeah.

HY: Yeah.

BP: I remember my mom saying during the war it was easy for my father to get rice and staples for the family and friends, you know, for the people in our subdivision, I guess. Mostly the family, his family and our family, and very good friends. It must have been about Kapalama area because, I think, my mom had a dressmaker shop there, too. So we always lived just in that area, you know, the Kalihi, Kapalama, Liliha [area].

HY: What kind of house did you live in? Do you remember?

BP: It was up Booth Road. So it was a three-bedroom [house], and I remember in the back, across the way, there was a dairy. Around that mountain area is Pauoa Valley. There was a stream 'cause you had to get to the stream to the dairy area. So all of our homes were by the stream and like a little hill. . . . It was—hoo, you had to walk. And they raised chickens. And I remember we had geese, dogs. I can't remember anything else, but I know had chickens. But my brothers had to tend to those [animals]. That was their chore. Because I was just little yet, only around five—four or five, yeah. And let me see. There was, I think, a three-bedroom house. Nice big kitchen. The front yard was really big, but we could play in the yard, but then my brother folks would like to ride—you know the road is steep—ride their bikes.

Then had farmers up the street. Was all mixed nationality there. Hawaiian family living in a Quonset hut, the Ayaus. It ended up that they went to school with my brothers and one of the boys worked with my husband as an air traffic controller. It is a small island.

But those [were] nice place[s] to live. I guess, that was a happy time for us. So four to about seven [years old], because I can't remember before that, you know, where else we lived. Then we moved to Kam IV Road. Then we moved [where BP's mother had] the saimin [stand]—back to Liliha side, I guess, Vineyard Street. Then my parents got divorced. Then we moved to Pālama. But that's all I can recall before then.

HY: What was that house like that you lived in with your grandparents after you mother got divorced?

BP: Oh, was small. Was only a two bedroom. Big—well, at that time, seemed like a big living room. And but she had two baths. You know, one with a tub and they had a furo. So she built a furo on the bottom. So that part wasn't too bad, but it was my uncle—my two uncles were single.

HY: This was your mother's brothers?

BP: My mother's two brothers—and my grandfather had just passed away already—but, my grandmother and five children and my mom in that house. Then later on, my uncle moved in with his wife, right before we moved out—with his wife and three children. (HY chuckles.) But when you're young you don't even think about being crowded. You just kind of accept things. But it's harder for the adults to live in that kind of. . . .
But we were happy when we moved to Robello Lane, even if it was two small bedrooms. The living room was small. And [there was] a very small kitchen and you had to share the bath. I mean the bath was like furō, but you had to walk [outside]. It was a house where a lot of people shared it. It was a camp really. And we shared—it was a duplex—the toilet with a neighbor, so it was just right outside. You know you had to go outside of the house to go to the bathroom. So that can be pretty scary in the wee hours of the night. Then we moved.

HY: How long did you stay at this Robello Lane [house]?

BP: We stayed there, let me see. At Likelike [School] I went second and third [grades] then to Kaʻiulani [School]. So must have been [through] fourth, fifth, and sixth [grade].

Let me see. Then we moved back a short while with my grandmother, very short, but it wasn't very good then. When you have freedom and you go back you're older, so it gets a little more crowded. That's when we still kept going to Pālama though.

Then we moved to Akepo Lane. And that was a---you know like they [have] duplex homes now. At least the bathroom was in the house, but everything was very small—two bedrooms, the kitchen, and the bathroom, and a living room, and a little porch. So that wasn't too bad. Believe it or not, was sixty dollars a month. I remember that (chuckles) because I was older, intermediate [school age]. Because I went to Kalākaua [Intermediate School] for [grades] seven and eight. We moved to Akepo Lane when I was in the seventh grade. Then my ninth grade year I changed to Central [Intermediate School] because my sister was going to that school, too, so we all just kind of stayed together.

Then we move to Kamaka Lane, that's right up of Lanakila. That's my high school year[s]. So that's tenth, eleventh, and twelve. Then I started to go to business school, then worked. Then, I got married.

(Laughter)

BP: After I got married I moved right by Mō'iliʻili, McCully actually for about a year. Then we bought a home in Hawaiʻi Kai, then we've been there since. So I was just fortunate that we were able to buy a home then. So we've been out there for about twenty-six years now. No, longer than that. About twenty-eight years. Twenty-eight years at Hawaiʻi Kai. So we just stayed in that area.

HY: Yeah.

BP: It's just because my husband is from Liliha, Kaimuki, ‘Āina Haina. So, he just wanted to stay near his—because he took care of his parents—mother and his sisters. So we stayed out that [Hawaiʻi Kai] way. So that was the only place I've stayed forever. (Laughs) Sort of being like a gypsy.

HY: Why did you move around? Was that kind of unusual to move around so much?

BP: I really don't know, you know.

HY: In the [19]50s, I guess, it was kind of unusual.
BP: Yeah. Well, being the time when my mom got divorced, it was really shunned on. It was hard for her, being a single mother, to get the support from the family was very hard. You know, because it was frowned on.

HY: Did you sense that as a child, or is it something you learned as an adult?

BP: Oh, yes.

HY: You felt it as a child?

BP: Yes. You did because the family... You were thought of as juvenile delinquents then. They thought we were really going to get to be juvenile delinquents.

HY: Did you feel that from your classmates and other kids?

BP: No.

HY: Or it was mostly adults?

BP: Mostly from—actually, mostly from our family, my mother's brothers.

HY: Oh, I see. Your uncle[s].

BP: Yeah and my aunts. Her sister-in-laws, just couple of them. Just the two sister-in-laws. But as a child you kind of overlook it because I think it affected my two older brothers more because they were older. You sense things more. You don't let things bounce off of you as when you're younger. But I was the oldest in that house, of the girls, so I had to take care of my cousins. They were big. I have cousin a year younger than me, between my sister and I. And she had a sister that was about my brother's age, maybe a year older. But then I had to watch both of them because I was the oldest.

HY: Did you have other responsibilities, chores, and that sort of thing?

BP: Yes. We had to sweep and mop that house about three times a day because my grandmother was a very particular person, which was good because there were a lot of us in the home. So she—we always had to have it spic-and-span. Not too much washing dishes that I can recall. Like my brothers had to start the fire for the furo 'cause you had to build the fire. So but what they did was, while they did it, they did their homework in between. Or my brother was in the band so he played his instrument outside while he did the fire. Then we had to sweep around, around the house—the raking. But I don't remember doing that too often because I did more watching my cousins, sweeping and mopping.

HY: What about cooking responsibilities?

BP: No 'cause I was too young and grandmother was a very good cook so she and my mom did more the cooking. Then when my aunt came, the three of them did more the cooking. So we had to help set the table because it was a very Japanese home, so the men ate first, then the women, and the children ate after. There were some days though that we all kind of ate together, depends who were home. So I remember everybody sort of eating together. And
sometimes the children would eat with the men, the uncles and brothers. My cousin and I, we would clear the table or set the table.

Scrubbing the furo down, the whole shower and the tub—those kind of [chores we did]. That's about it. Then we were off to Pālama, but we had to do that first before we left, and be home before dinner. So that wasn't too bad. But we preferred it when we lived on our own. [When] we lived on our own my brothers used to cook. My sister and I used to sweep and mop. So my brothers did the cooking, washing, and ironing when my mom worked, until they went to high school, then they played baseball and football so they weren't able to come home in time. So I was about eleven. My sister was about nine or ten. Then we had the chores to start cooking dinner. So we'd come home from school and start the rice. Then, depends on what dinner, the easy dinners maybe like pork tofu. That was the easiest for me to do. My brother hates pork tofu till this day (chuckles) 'cause that was the easiest. Then I got older. Whatever I learned from home economics, would come and cook that. So that was good.

HY: At school?
BP: At school. So whatever meals we learned we would make that.

HY: How did your mother support herself [after her divorce]?
BP: She worked as a seamstress on the side plus then she found a job at garment factories. So she was a cutter at the garment factory at the machine.

HY: This is different than her business that she had when she was still married then?
BP: [Yes—for] her business she was a seamstress plus doing bookkeeping for my father. So she still did, on the side, sewing to make extra [money] to make ends meet. I think that's why we took over everything [the chores] because then she would sew. I just remember her sewing a lot.

But [my mother was] very active in the PTA [Parent-Teacher Association], with my brother's PTA. She was, I think, secretary or one officer in there. So she was very active in the school, participating in school functions, carnivals. Or even like Pālama Settlement, she would be there all the time. And we would go to my brother's game, the football games, baseball games. So we did a lot of family things by going to activities, whatever activities. So she found time to still be with the children. So, I guess that part my mom instilled in us, too. You know, how you stick with the family. I think because her family didn't stick by her, she wanted to instill that in us to be a close family. You know, you help each other. So that part, we still do today.

HY: Being a single parent, was that an unusual situation in your neighborhood or was that pretty common?
BP: That was quite—our group—was quite common then. We weren't a big group, but it felt like it was common for us because, I think, three-fourths of us came from broken homes.

HY: You mean your group that you . . .
BP: At Pālama. Actually, I was the only one [of my friends other than at Pālama Settlement] that
my parents were divorced. But my girlfriends, they still had parents together, but it never affected our relationship. But we were all poor anyway (chuckles). You know even if they had parents, nobody had a great job. Everybody was still struggling, so we weren't really rich. Nobody was really, really rich, then. So, I think, that's why it wasn't too hard for us feeling bad that we didn't have money 'cause most of us didn't have money, anyway. So we didn't have too many things. So that didn't affect our friendship or anything. But at Palama, that's when, I think, we were more aware that—oh okay, there's more divorced or single [parents]. Some of them weren't divorced, but, I guess, just separated. Because I remember some of them didn't have their fathers mostly. I don't recall anybody not having a mother, but it was mostly not the father. And even the naughty ones, they still had parents, father and mother, so it just didn't seem odd that we didn't. We didn't feel out of place—I didn't anyway. And I don't think my brother folks . . . I don't know because they went to 'Iolani [School], so going to private school I don't know how it affected them. Because usually, I think, that time they had lot of kids that had scholarship going to those schools. I guess maybe they had a little more [money] than we did because you have to dress better [at private schools]. But my mom sewed so it wasn't too bad.

HY: Is that how they were able to afford 'Iolani [School]? Through scholarship?

BP: Scholarship. So they were lucky.

HY: Now did you have any contact with your father after that or . . .

BP: Gee, the last time I saw him, I think, we were at Robello Lane, so I was at Ka'iulani [School]. So I must have been about fifth grade.

HY: Last contact.

BP: We received the last contact, then we never did see him 'cause every time we'd see him he would be drunk anyway so . . . But he didn't visit that often either. But that was the last contact. Oh, I take that back. I was a sophomore in high school, he was dying of cancer. So he wanted to see us so we went to up to Maluhia Hospital. And that was the last time we saw him. But it wasn't a long visit because, you know how you're so distant. So you don't have that closeness. So it wasn't really, really sad. We felt sorry for him, but not sad. But that was the last [time]. And even with his family, we never came in contact with them. I just remember meeting his youngest brother. He lived in Pearl City and I think he worked for—I think was the IRS [Internal Revenue Service]. That was the last because [bill collectors were] hounding my mom, I guess, for my dad's back bills, bills that he didn't pay. I guess those times a woman still had to pay for [her husband's debts], still was in your [the wife's] name. But that's the part that was rough on her. Because they had the business. I think it must have been with the trucking business. But I was so young, you just hear pieces of [the story] so you don't really know.

But I had one aunt, my mother's second to the youngest brother, his wife. We were close to her, very close. So she helped us out little bit.

HY: Was she the one you lived with for a short time?

BP: No. Because she married. We had moved out then she married my uncle. But I think we got
close because she had children from her first marriage. My uncle was [her] second marriage. So, still frowned upon then. But he married her and she was... We've been close ever since. So she helped us out several times, for food and whatnot. So that's the help that we had, just from that aunty—that I can remember—that aunty and uncle.

HY: Now when you said you were about may be eight—or no, about ten when you started going to Pālama.

BP: I think we must have started from summer. It must have been during the summer, because I remember going there every day learning to swim. Mondays, used to be Mondays, 'cause Mondays was low tide. At Pālama they used to—because they had their own well, they drained the water every weekend, scrubbing the pool. On Saturday (afternoons) it gets drained. Sunday, it's complete. They clean the pool on Sunday. They must have because Monday the pool—the water starts filling up so when it would be—gee, about ankle-deep high. Then we would climb down and they used to have the beginners' swimming. That was every Monday. We must have learned pretty fast. You know, when you're young you learn pretty fast.

HY: Who were your swimming teachers?

BP: Nelson Kawakami and "Earle" [Kalau]. I don't know what Earie's full name is. We always remember Earie 'cause he didn't have a ear. Well, his ear was all cauliflowered. He was a Hawaiian fellow. But he really taught us how to swim. He was a patient man, that's why. Nelson was in charge of the pool area. I really don't know exactly how we got on the swimming team, but then, I guess, they would have meets there. So we say whoever wanted to try would... I was a terrible swimmer, but my sister was good. You know, some they're just natural [swimmers]. It took me a while to get there. That's how we started. You take swimming lessons, and on Saturdays they used to have the meets. Then you get a ribbon.

HY: So you swam together by age group?

BP: [Yes,] by age group. Although had more boys my age 'cause I remember all the classmates about our age. There was a bunch of them, about may be four years older than us. They were good. They were very good, the boys. But I don't know why we never could get more girls to get into the swimming team. But I think because we didn't have anything else to do, so it was good that it was a place to go to.

HY: Who were the girls?

BP: Let me see—my sister June and Colleen Kelly. Her parents were one of the—they were, I guess, in charge of something there. I can't remember.

HY: Was John Kelly [her father]?

BP: John Kelly. Yes. Oh, he was [teaching] music. Okay. Let me see—Colleen Kelly, her sister Kathy Kelly, then Lani Kimokeo, Trisha Shigemitsu, Gayle Harada.

HY: So those were the girls that were on your swim team that competed in meets?
BP: [Yes] We stayed together from age eight to high school.

HY: And was swimming seasonal or did you swim year round?

BP: Year round 'cause I don't ever remember not going to Pālama (laughs). You know I don't remember having a break from there. The only day we weren't there was on Sunday because the water was drained.

And we had wanted to participate in other things, but there was just no time. And of course, membership was ten cents then.

[What] we wanted to do was tap dancing, my sister and I (chuckles). Because when we were training [for swimming] we could hear the [tapping]. On Saturdays they would practice tap dancing. I think they had hula, and piano, and voice. But I think the tap dancing was—the rhythm—you could hear the tacking of the taps. I don’t know why but just always wanted to be tap dancers. (Laughs)

HY: But you didn't participate?

BP: No, we didn’t because there was just not enough time. Swimming just took up all our time really. But it was good because then we got to go to the other islands. We went to Maui, Kaua'i, and the Big Island—Hilo, not Kona. Was more Hilo side.

HY: There were boys on the team as well, right?

BP: Yes. There were a whole lot of boys. When I started there was Patrick Murata, Jeff Yamashita—Jeff, Larry, and Lincoln Yamashita. And Patrick and his brother Alexander, but Alexander didn’t stay too long. He joined the service and he got killed in Germany. So, let me see. Oh, the Harada boys—Mike Harada and his brother Andy. See there were a lot of families—[Edward] “Skippa” Diaz and his brother Ramon. Well, his brother Ramon didn’t last too long, just a short while. Oh, then the Akai brothers—Gilbert Akai and Eddie Akai. Eddie is older than Gilbert. Then, Charles Maki and Howard Maki. They were cousins. Oh, the Aku[s]—Ferron and Farden. Farden is known as this Hawaiian disc jockey. Oh, there's Vincente Tolentino. Oh, and Fred [Frederick] Hiapo. He was there, I remember. But he's very active in the volleyball. [Fred Hiapo has helped to recruit players for the University of Hawai'i.] You know, the volleyball team in the UH [University of Hawai'i] now? He is very active in the volleyball group now, not too much swimming. But they were all good swimmers though. I think Fred Hiapo was about the same time as [swimmers] Bill Woolsey and Ford Konno time. Gee, and then I can’t remember who else offhand now.

HY: Were these all people that were from [the Pālama] neighborhood?

BP: Yes. Some of them lived at Mayor Wright [Homes] and half of them—Jeff [Yamashita] folks—all lived near where we were, by Lanakila, near Kaumakapili Church. So we're all on that area. Then let me see. Oh, Larry Oshiro also was there, too. And he's the one that helps Harry Mamizuka coach at Mānoa.

HY: And Harry Mamizuka was also your coach?
BP: Yes, he was a coach. It started off with—gee, I forgot his name. We always called him Coach Nose [Walter Nozoe] because he must have been nosy or something. (Laughs) I don't know why. But he was there a short while. He was our coach—my coach—well, my sister and my coach a very short while, maybe a couple of years or so. Then Harry Mamizuka took over. Then Bertha Lee [Nahoopii] came, then she became like our counselor or advisor really. So we always considered her as our woman coach.

HY: Was that different having a woman coach or was it . . .

BP: It was, but was better. We kind of liked it better. 'Cause you know you could kind of talk to them little more, they understood you more. She was tough, so you still mind your p's and q's. And I think it was just like having a big sister there that's why.

Then Pat [Patricia] Okamura [Rodolfich] then was there. She was in charge of the locker room. So she really became our big sister, too. So we kind of grew up with her. She was our really big sister. She took care of us. I think she must have been at the university also. Then they [some of the workers and volunteers] work their way through [school], just like Bertha did before she became a policewoman. I still remember [when I was] in high school she was a policewoman, but then she still would go to each school and kind of check up on us to see how we were. Make sure we're not into trouble. But she didn't coach us after that, [she was] so busy working. But she would still come around [for] swim meets. So I guess that's why we always thought of her as still our coach, too, 'cause she was always visible. And I still see her once in a while at volleyball games at UH and basketball games. So that part we're kind of still in touch.

HY: Let me flip over the tape.

BP: Okay.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

HY: Talking about [how] Bertha was still around.

BP: Yes, still there.

BP: She was, that's right. But Harry Mamizuka was always there. We weren't too visible with him, I guess because we were girls. But they protected us—we were like their sisters.

HY: Oh, the boys.

BP: The boys.

HY: How do you mean?

BP: Like they always made sure when we were at the swimming meets that—'cause it was an all
day thing—that we were really never really by ourselves. The girls would all stay on one area while we were resting in between heats and events, and for lunch they [the boys] always come by—I don't know, maybe to meet the other girls. That may have been an excuse. (Laughs) But they come by to see how we were. We were considered almost like outcasts because most of us were from the projects, I guess. And you know what[‘s] the funniest part now that I think about it? We were talking about this one day. We didn’t have bus to take us to the swim meets. We would have a big truck, and we called that the cattle truck (chuckles) 'cause we would sit in this really big truck and they would have benches on the side and you sit on the floor. And, you know, like the banana trucks we call. You know you have the sides all wood. We used to sing all the way though. But when we thought about it, when we were older, we said, “Gee, they transported us like cattle.” (Laughs) But you know we had humor in that. We didn’t mind 'cause it was going somewhere away from Kalihi or Liliha. Went down to Wahiawa, to Punahou School, to University of Hawai‘i. They have swimming meets at their pools, too. The other day we were talking about how we got transported. We didn’t have the bus, but we were considered—I guess you can call it—the bad eggs, especially the boys 'cause they were stealing. You know you get the reputation.

HY: Did you feel that from the other participants at the swim meets or from the adults?

BP: Well . . .

HY: Or is this just in retrospect?

BP: Actually, we are---the club that we became close to was Hawai‘i Swim Club, and it’s probably because [Soichi] Sakamoto [swim coach for the University of Hawai‘i and Hawai‘i Swim Club] was good friends with Harry Mamizuka. Hawai‘i Swim Club [members] came from Kamehameha [Schools], some from Punahou [School]—not too many—and gee, [La Pietra] Hawai‘i School for Girls, and University [of Hawai‘i]. So they had a whole mix of. . . And some from Roosevelt [High School], but Roosevelt was an English-standard school then. It was like a—we called it a private/public school because you had to take a test to get into that school. And my girlfriend—I worked with her after, jeez, maybe about eight years ago—and she said her mother was a teacher at Roosevelt. And the reason why they started it that way—and it never dawned on her then—she’s a Caucasian, local girl that went to Roosevelt—she said it was like a Punahou School, but it’s just that [the students] couldn’t afford to get into Punahou so these teachers started this English-standard school. Because that’s a rough area, too—Papakōlea area. And she said it never even dawned on her that it [English standard school] was sort of racist, being that. . . But she never felt it there. I said, “Yeah, we never really felt it.” So funny, yeah, nobody mentioned it before until now, I guess, with everybody being so vocal that they’re bringing all these things up. Because I said, I’ve had cousins that went to Roosevelt and they weren’t Caucasians, they were mixed.

We got along with quite a bit of the swim team. Not too [many] of the girls on Punahou though—those teams. We never really got close to any of them. But the boys got close to the boys at Punahou. And I think it was because they—the boys from Punahou—never got to be loose. You couldn’t be how you wanted to be at that time. But the [Punahou School] parents did not want the boys to really hang around (chuckles) with our boys. So maybe the girls were the same thing, too. But we never felt it 'cause we never really got close to any of the girls. Even like Colleen Kelly. I can’t remember what school they went to. And although her father came from a quite wealthy family, but he’s activist. Very nice people, down to earth, really
down to earth. Colleen and my sister June are close. Very, very good friends. So I remember going to their house. My sister had—before she got married—we went, they [Kelly family] were up at Black Point. And then I didn’t know that they got divorced after that. Then we got together, I think it was Harry Mamizuka’s—I guess must have been a testimonial or like a fund-raising for him. That was the last time we got together with everybody which was nice.

HY: Now did you socialize with those guys outside of your swim club? You know you kind of grew up with them.

BP: I think more in high school. We would go to the movies and whatnot but nothing really serious, was more like a buddy. I think was more like trying to see if we could be more than buddies but we never were. They were just like our brothers. But we used to get together once in a while, go to the movies together. But that was not till high school because, of course, we weren’t allowed to go out on dates anyway when we were younger. That was about it. And some of the boys went to 'Iolani [School]. Some went to Farrington [High School] and McKinley [High School]. We kind of dated, too. I mean go to proms when we don’t have—couldn’t get a girl or a guy. They cover up for each other. (Laughs) I was more comfortable. Was fun that way because somebody you’re familiar with. But after that, no. We got together couple times and actually, the person who’s very instrumental in this is Jeff [Yamashita]. He would do it periodically, get everybody together. So if it wasn’t for him we probably would never get together.

HY: Were there other activities that you got involved in or was it always just swimming?

BP: Just swimming, but in school. . . . Oh, let me see. Just for PE [physical education] we’d kind of work with the PE teachers. Then [I] tried out for cheerleader which she, the PE teacher, made me, but I didn’t make it. But my sister was more active, being sponsor and . . .

HY: At Pālama?

BP: No, this was after in high school. We tried joining clubs like 4-H and all that, but just wasn’t our thing. I hate going to meetings. I just didn’t like doing that, so it wasn’t our cup of tea. I guess because it was so structured and we had enough of that swimming.

My sister was active in clubs. She joined a club. My brother and my sister. But I was the only one in my family that wasn’t a JPO [junior police officer]. Believe it or not, because I said I didn’t want to be a servant to anybody. (Chuckles) But I got my due when I started working at school, in charge of the JPOs. I said, “It would have to be. It’ll get me some time.” (Laughs) It was funny. But I was so funny because my brothers would be so upset with me because I didn’t want to be a JPO. (Laughs) But I was kind of quiet and shy then. You know when you’re so visible, you. . . . I just didn’t want that.

HY: Were there organized social events that you participated in at Pālama?

BP: Oh, sometimes we would go to tumbling to practice for diving. So the tumbling teacher was—I can’t remember—was a Chinese fellow. And was Saturdays, we used to go tumbling. You know tumbling and do the trampoline and the, you know, those rings. That was hard. So I [don’t know] how those guys. . . . They’re strong. But some of the boys could do it. So we
all did that. We all went. Harry Mamizuka had us go through that. Which was fun, was something different, too. And what else? The boys were lucky 'cause—you see we didn’t have any other activities for girls sports to try out for, except for tennis. So the boys, besides swimming, took up basketball and football. Some of them, not all of them, just some of them. And coach was good. Harry Mamizuka was good because he let them do whatever. I guess 'cause he was umpire and he was in activities that called for other sports, too. So the boys were lucky they could do other things.

We never swam at Pālama [for] a while. It was just high school, your own school. But most of us went either to Farrington [High School] or McKinley [High School] and just a handful went to 'Iolani [School].

**HY:** You went to McKinley?

**BP:** McKinley. Then Harry Mamizuka was there coaching.

**HY:** So you didn’t actually compete for Pālama Settlement while you were in high school?

**BP:** No.

**HY:** But you continued to use the facilities.

**BP:** Probably just up to intermediate school.

**HY:** Now you mentioned that you traveled neighbor islands to compete. How did you get funding?

**BP:** Our fund-raising was—we used to have this Chinese man [Frederick “Buck” Lam] that owned a sweet bread [shop], Buck’s bakery [Buck’s Bake Shop]. That’s the best sweet bread you ever ever ate. It was near the stadium, the old [Honolulu] Stadium. And his breads were like the Punalu‘u loaf. You know those loaves? It was square and long. Of course we were young, it seems really big. It must have been about, may be two pounds or so. So we’d pick up [bread on] Saturdays... . It must have been Saturday and Sunday that we had to go out. So we’d go to Buck’s bakery and pick up the sweet bread and the best part was sampling the sweet [bread]. Mr. “Buck”—nice man—have couple of loaves, hot loaves, and he would cut it up and he would have it buttered and we would have a sample of the bread. And we’d sell the sweet bread. We had to bring it home, everybody had to sell, I think. But we made my kid brother do it because he’s a good salesman. And he sold all my sister’s (laughs) and my sweet bread for us. Some of the fund-raising came from when we had swim meets at Pālama. We’d have concession booths and our parents would work in there and the proceeds went to the swim team. But I remember selling a lot of sweet bread. We’d go from house to house, but we always go in groups though. And that was the best sweet bread, too, so we had no trouble selling it. We had a good profit from it, too. Must have been a good profit.

**HY:** So did your mom go with you on these trips?

**BP:** No. No, she didn’t. She wasn’t able to. Most of our parents didn’t go, just may be a handful. Mr. and Mrs. Kelly were always chaperoning on most of our trips, when we were younger. But my mom was never was able to come with us. But I think it was a good break for her, too. She didn’t have to worry about us.
HY: What events did you participate in?

BP: I swam the butterfly.

HY: Ooh.

BP: Yeah that was a hard one, but that was my specialty. Butterfly and relays. I wasn’t really that strong in the other. . . . I did free style too, but wasn’t that strong in that. And let me see. Mostly relays.

HY: Were the events the same for the boys and the girls?

BP: Yes, they were. I didn’t have to [do] too many relays, because I was the only [girl] my age, unless it was like a combination. Because after a while it was my sister’s group did more of it. So I was more the butterfly. So that was just mine, you know, that thing. So I guess I didn’t swim that much, thank goodness. (Laughs) But actually, when I think about it, I would kind of rest, especially when I was in high school or may be intermediate. I would get kind of bored and I would just rest for couple months and don’t go. Then I’d go back again. Anyway, it was kind of a relief because for my sister ’cause then she didn’t have to do too many things [chores] before she went to practice. I call it R and R, I guess. But my sister folks, she just stayed right through. And my kid brother didn’t stay too long. He’d come when we’d go on trips so then he would . . .

HY: To the neighbor island?

BP: To the neighbor islands and he would join the swim team so he could go on trips. (Laughs) But it was fun. I mean it was fine because you know he would sell [items for fund-raising]. He was a good salesman.

HY: What was that like going to the neighbor islands?

BP: Was fun because we’d stayed either in the gym, where there were cots, or we’d stay—in Hilo, we stayed in barracks, the army barracks was right near the airport. So had those homes, like duplex homes, and there was about six of us. But seems like all of our girls stayed all in one room. We were never separated that I can think of. And when we went to Kaua’i we stayed at the school gym, we stayed in there and the cafeteria, I remember, one year we stayed in there on cots. So that was fun because everybody was all in one room and we shared it with other teams, too. We were there with other teams. So you got to meet other people, too.

HY: Was there ever any kind of real rivalry with the different teams or was it . . .

BP: Only with Punahou [School]. I think that was the only one. Yeah, because they were always winning so we all want to beat them all the time. And HSC, Hawai’i Swim Club. They were good too, that’s why. So they were really our biggest competition. But Punahou had so many kids so that’s why they could win easily because they always had a big group. So the bigger [the group] the more you qualify and you can accumulate your points. But that was the biggest thing, is to beat Punahou and HSC. So that’s the two. But mostly Punahou because they always won so, we always want to beat ’em, right?
HY: What about the neighbor island teams? Was there rivalry?

BP: Let me see. Kaua‘i wasn’t too much, or Maui. Maui swim team, they had a handful of good swimmers. And the Big Island, Hilo. But we all became good friends with those teams. But they were small like us, our team. They weren’t really big. So I think that’s why we got along because we were all in the same, I guess, predicament, or same boat. The teams were smaller. But even if it was small, you still had a handful of good swimmers, but not where you could really make a difference. But each group had like, maybe one group that was really good. But for us, it was mostly the men. But my sister’s group, they were pretty competitive. And we beat Punahou for relays for couple of times, so that was wonderful. You really just felt so good.

But in Hawai‘i we, at that time, we didn’t have that much competition, not like now. They have more competition—the kids. Oh, I see my niece when they go. . . . They take swimming. It’s way longer and it’s so hard to follow because there are so many kids swimming. Have you ever been to one of those?

Okay. Our time, in the morning, used to be the trials to see if you qualify. And the afternoons would be the finals. But now, you have it where they qualify [on] their own. Maybe their coach times them and they submit their times. So you go into heats and it goes continuous and continuous. You cannot follow who [is] swimming—I don’t know how they keep track of them. Like our time, you’re cheering—it’s just that [single] event you’re cheering for. Now it’s so hard. To me, it’s kind of a madhouse now. It’s so different. And I kind of like it [better] before, because you get to be friends with other kids, too. And I think they do too now, but not as much.

HY: Was there other—you know, you mentioned tumbling—were there any other social activities that you did there? I mean, did they have dances and that kind of thing?

BP: They probably did but we were too young to attend anyway. And we’d have sort of like the year end party. But used to be at Pālama Settlement in one of the rooms, the main building. And dinner was provided for, but it wasn’t an all night thing. We’d play charades and the parents would come, too. So that was nice. A banquet, I guess you call it.

HY: So, the kids from the different clubs and all the other activities, did you interact with them very much?

BP: No. I don’t know [about] the boys but not the girls. I think, because our life was so structured, that’s why. I mean, you couldn’t do too many things.

We had our girlfriends, but still was [socializing] only with the swim team girls, not too much with anybody outside.

On Sundays, we would sneak off to go to Waikīkī to swim. We’d go periodically, we’d get together, catch the bus by ‘A’ala Park—cause that was like a main station near the depot—and go to Waikīkī. In fact, used to be San Souci and Queen’s [Surf] Beach.

HY: Oh, by the [Waikīkī War Memorial] Natatorium.
BP: Yeah. We had swim meets at the Natatorium but the Natatorium was not a place we would really go swimming on the side. You know, like a side activity 'cause the water was so dirty. And, of course, the boys would tell us had barracudas, so we really didn't want to go in there. But we used to go to the Natatorium though.

HY: For meets?

BP: For meets, but only to practice, really, just to get kind of used to the water. And they used to have those diving boards. They don't have the diving boards anymore. Seemed like thirty feet up, and we used to jump from there. Touching the bottom, it feels like mud, really. That's was the most spookiest part. But I can't believe we jumped from that tower—we call it a tower. That was the highlight, I guess, when we went there.

HY: Was that the only salt water place that you would swim in? So everything was pool swimming.

BP: That I can remember, yeah. Of course, Punahou [School] had the best pool—their water. The pool was easy swimming. Some water seem[s] heavy. Farrington's pool seems heavy. Maybe because they had a shallow part. You know, now that I think about it, we say how the heck [are] your times different? But we liked ours the best because our water was always cold. We had fresh water all the time. You appreciate that. You appreciate that when you get older and you try different pools. I don't remember it being highly chlorined like the others. I think because we were lucky we could have it drained every week. But I don't think they can do that now.

HY: Now did you do other things in the neighborhood, playing with the other kids outside of just going to Pālama Settlement? [And] what kind of things would you do?

BP: Ride bikes, their bikes (chuckles)—we never had a bike. We got some of the kids to go to Pālama, come to Pālama to participate in swimming. But they didn't last too long. Some of my girlfriends—let me see—somehow we just hung around a little bit after school, for a short while, but then I would have to go to practice. Some of them were brains—this one girl who played the violin. So we'd walk home together and she'd practice her violin. And we'd talk story. So this was besides the swim team, for me anyway, because I never had anybody on the team that was older like me.

But I had to go home kind of early because I still had my brother to take care of—my sister and my brother. So, socializing outside wasn't really a long thing.

On weekends was good 'cause Fridays we'd go movies at Pālama Theatre. Used to have samurai—oh, Saturdays used to have the samurai movies, Japanese movies. So we'd go to those. That was really popular our time. Lot of nationalities would go. Have you seen the old samurai movies?

HY: I have [seen] a few.

BP: And that was a big thing then. Too bad they don't have that anymore 'cause that was fun.

We had a lot of theaters around and used to be kids' show in the morning. I think it started
about ten o'clock or so. And for ten cents you go in. And they have movies. And you sign up [for] a chance to win a birthday cake or participate on stage before the movie. And you have your cartoon, your news, and some kind of movie—cowboy movie or whatever. That was one Saturday activity besides swimming we would go to.

HY: What would you do on stage?

BP: Play musical chairs, or some games.

HY: Oh, games.

BP: Games, yeah. And gee, I never win anything. My kid brother did. He won a cake for his birthday. And so that was our other activities.

HY: What year did you graduate from McKinley [High School]?

BP: Nineteen sixty-one.

HY: And then what did you do after high school?

BP: Then I went to business school for a year. I didn't graduate though because I had to start work already. And I think I worked about four or five years before I got married.

HY: Where did you work?

BP: At American Security Bank but it's now known a First Hawaiian [Bank]. First, was American Security then it became First Interstate [Bank]. But I, after I got married a year after I didn't work. I was lucky to stay home, I guess.

HY: Did you leave home after you graduated from high school?

BP: No. I lived at home to help my mom financially until I got married. My brother had already graduated from high school. My sister went to the University for a couple of years. And my brother Bill went one year then he got married. Everybody started to work then. I worked about a year after I got married, then I just stayed home after.

HY: What did you do at the bank?

BP: I was a teller. First, I worked at the machine, call it a check sorter. Then I worked as a teller for about a couple years. When you work at the branch you have other responsibilities. Your statements that the machine does now, we had to file it by manually, by hand. So hours were long and we opened in the evening twice a week. I was working quite a bit.

HY: Did you ever participate at Pālama Settlement then after . . .

BP: After?

HY: High school?
BP: No. Because I was just working. Then just about, oh, couple months before I got married, then I moved out a little while—my sister and I. Which was good, but too bad it was just a little too short though (chuckles). Then I got married. Then she got married. If you didn’t finish college, [in] our time was either you were a nurse, teacher—mostly those two [professions]—some stewardess and very small amount for businesswomen, but you were either a teacher, a nurse, or a housewife.

HY: Why did you think to go to business college?

BP: Because I knew I couldn’t go to school too long because I had to help support the family. So I said, okay. I didn’t think I was that smart to go to UH. So I said, well I’m going to business school and I took up bookkeeping and accounting.

HY: Where was this?

BP: Cannon’s Business College. It was just a two-year program because I really didn’t know what I wanted to be. So, then our friend said there was an opening at the bank that I could [apply for]. So I said, okay. So then I started to work [and] I helped my sister go to school for couple of years. Then she didn’t want to go to school. So, then I said, “Time to work then.”

HY: Did you ever think to continue your interest in swimming?

BP: No, but we used to—my sister and I—used to go down to Ala Moana and Waikīkī and swim. You know, on the weekends, whenever we had time off, we’d go before we do our housework which was not very bright, but we go down because it’s cooler, right? We go to the beach, swim, come home. I guess maybe because I never had a car so we had to by bus. But we did swim a lot. And even with our children, when we had started to have children, we always would go to the beach until the children began high school, I guess. Then they could drive [themselves].

I haven’t been in the water in many moons now, which is kind of sad. I just don’t have the interest now like before. I think it’s just too many people at the beach, so it’s just so crowded, you know, to find parking, and just up and go like before. But it’s good that we instilled in our kids the ocean is still great. So that’s about it.

HY: Do you have anything else you want to say about Pālama or anything else?

BP: Well, I think it’s great, was great for us. Although kind of sad I didn’t get to participate there as an adult to help out. You get so involved in your own family, trying to keep your family together. But when I see how the kids at Pālama—[Pālama] actually help them more now by feeding them. They do a lot for the kids there, and I think it’s good to have someplace like that for children to have—I guess like a second home. You know, feel safe there. I don’t know how the children feel about it now, but our time [it] was like a safe house, some place to go to, like a second house. You feel secure there. ’Cause they did take care of us, too. But yet sometimes you don’t want to go back to that because it brings back memories of the struggle. But sometimes it’s good to have that too, go through that and you appreciate your life. If it wasn’t for them, what would we have done then? ’Cause the YMCA [Young Men’s Christian Association] was expensive for us. We couldn’t afford it really. So I’m grateful that we had Pālama Settlement. Still have good memories, really good memories. And thanks to Jeff.
Yamashita keeping it up. Because even his brother Larry said, "Yeah. If it wasn’t for him." He’s the—I guess like the father, keep everything together. It must have been really, really good memories for him, too.

HY: Okay. Thank you very much.

BP: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW
Reflections of Pālama Settlement

Volume I

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

August 1998