

KAME KANESHIRO

Kame Kaneshiro was born in Itoman in the 17th year of Meiji (1884), on March 15th. When he was four years old his family moved to Kumejima. He had no schooling in Okinawa. When he was 21 years old, he went back to Itoman for his army physical, was exempted from service, and returned to Kumejima. In Kumejima, Kame worked as a farmer, fisherman, and charcoal-maker. In 1907, he decided to go to Hawaii. He went to Itoman, to Yokohama, and departed for Hawaii on the *China-go*.

After Kame arrived in Hawaii, he went first to do sugar plantation work at Hamakua Poko on Maui. Three months later he went to Paia. He worked there for three months and then left to look for higher-paying plantation work at Kukuihaele on the Big Island, but found he was not needed. He then went to Paauhau, but again found there was no work for him. So he returned to Kukuihaele and did ditch work for three months.

Finally, he got sugar plantation work, and he stayed at Kukuihaele until 1911. He moved to Paauhau for the next ten years, working on the plantation and driving a taxi.

At the beginning of World War I, Kame's future wife was called to Hawaii by her father. Kame married her about six months after she arrived. Their four children were born in Paauhau. One son is still alive. The oldest child died in infancy. The second son died when he was 49 years old, and the youngest daughter died when she was a child.

About 1923, Kame got into Kona coffee work. He stayed in Kona for six years, but the coffee prices fell and he accumulated debts. He sold his coffee land to a store in the Lanihau area and moved to Honolulu.

In Honolulu, he worked as a fisherman out of Kakaako for approximately 20 years. During World War II, he was stopped from fishing and be-

came a dishwasher in a restaurant. After the war was over, Kame resumed his work as a fisherman. In 1950, when he was 66 years old, he retired. This year he will celebrate his 97th birthday.

What follows are Kame Kaneshiro's recollections of his younger days in Okinawa and his trip to Hawaii.

When I was small, I would get a leaf and make a *kajimaya* (windmill) to play with. This year I am 97. So this year is my year to celebrate. When you get that old, you become a child again, and so they will have a *kajimaya* party for me.

I was the fifth of seven children. I was born in Itoman, but my family moved to Kumejima when I was four years old. My father suffered from an ailment of his hands and feet and couldn't work. Kumejima was a big place, but only a few people lived there and most of the people had spare lands. They felt sorry for us because we were poor and gave my father land here and there. They also gave us some sweet potatoes because my father could not work.

Later, we were recognized as permanent residents of Shimajiri by the village office and received some land and some rice fields on which we had to pay taxes. We grew sugarcane, sweet potatoes, and raised some pigs, cows, and horses which we sold to earn some money. Sweet potatoes didn't sell however, because everyone grew their own.

My oldest sister, older brothers and I cut grass for the horses, cows, and goats too. We had about 100 goats. We carried heavy bundles of grass with a shoulder stick. I was small already, but that made me extra small. The Japanese start carrying heavy things from when they are young. I believe that's why the Japanese are short but strong. The *haoles* were smart from a long time ago. The *haoles* did not carry; they used horse-drawn carts. I believe that is why they became tall. But their muscles are smaller than the Japanese.

We did not have nutritious food, you know. The food in Okinawa was about the same as that of a dog in Hawaii. We ate a lot of sweet potatoes. When we caught cuttlefish, we pickled its intestines and ate them with sweet potatoes. The food was bad.

Our place was *aza* (village section) Shimajiri, which was a little far from the main village. There were about six houses. The people who had come to Shimajiri earlier than us were a little richer than us. One or two men who had come later and were not yet residents of the village barely made ends meet. The village office did not give them land because they were single.

Poor people used tree poles to make their houses. We dug holes and put in the poles, cut grass from the mountains and made grass roofs. The rich people, who inherited from their ancestors, built stronger houses. They used many poles, and placed stones under the poles. Their houses were heavy, so that strong winds—even a typhoon—would not topple the house. The richer people also built tiled houses.

I did not go to school at all in Okinawa. In our time, children went to

school and learned how to write. But when they graduated from school, they did not want to work. They became *moloa* (lazy). They hated going into the rice fields, cleaning the barn, and that kind of work. So parents thought they would suffer if their children went to school. Many parents felt that way and didn't send their children to school. If the parents themselves were educated, they would send their children to school, but only one or two children in the *aza* were sent.

Not one of my brothers and sisters went to school. I didn't have any hopes about what kind of person I wanted to be. I just thought I should work. My parents' wishes were the same with mine. They were satisfied as long as we were fed. Not only my father and mother felt that way. All the people in those days felt like that.

In addition to what crops and animals we raised Kumejima had many mountains so we cut bamboo and sold it in Naha. It was transported there by boat. I also went out to sea to work as a fisherman for about one year, but you cannot make money fishing.

We even made charcoal. To make the charcoal, you dig deep holes in the ground, about five feet deep. Then you cut and burn the wood. But if the fire does not go through the wood at the right temperature, there will be a big pile of dirt where the wood did not turn to charcoal. We made rounds checking the charcoal about twice a night to make sure the right number of air-holes were open. At the end of the process we stop up all the holes. Since no air could go inside, the fire gradually disappears, but the charcoal is still hot. If you put water over the charcoal you cannot sell them, so we put dirt over them. We put the charcoal into a *tawara* (a sack made of straw) and the people who had boats bought them and took them to Naha. The charcoal brought a good income. But it took a lot of time and there was so much other work to be done.

When I was 21, I went to Itoman for the selective service physical exam. That was during the Russian war. Japan had only few people, and Russia had many people because it was a big country. Everybody worried that this was the end, that Japan would be taken by the Russians.

People told me, "Even if you are short, you have a duty to go to the war." So I went to the physical exam. I was very thin. The examiner said they would not take me and told me to grow sweet potatoes for my father and mother. But they did take a person who was short and husky. I felt relieved; I felt my life was saved. If I had been drafted, I would have felt that my life was at its end. Everybody felt that way.

I went to visit some people in Itoman. One of their family members had gone to Hawaii and he had sent money back home. After I heard that, I went back to Kumejima and worked. My parents were not in good health. There were three brothers, but the youngest was very small so only two of us worked. My father wanted to leave Kumejima and take us back to Itoman. So we thought, "If we go to Hawaii we can make money quick." That's why I came to Hawaii—to make money so my parents could go back to their hometown of Itoman as soon as possible.

In order to come to Hawaii, I needed money. I didn't have any so I borrowed the equivalent of about \$50. I was planning to return it as soon as I got to Hawaii.

From Okinawa to *Naichi* (mainland Japan), I took the *Okinawa-maru*. It was a beautiful ship. It took about four days, I think, from Okinawa to *Naichi*.

I came to Hawaii on the *China-go*. It was an old ship and took 11 days from Japan to get to Hawaii. There were mostly Japanese and Korean people and some Chinese as passengers. I caught a cold at the inn before I boarded the ship and developed a fever and diarrhea. I passed the eye exam, but since I had a fever and diarrhea, I waited for the next ship. I had to go to a doctor, which cost money. I was not completely well when I finally decided to board the ship. I thought if I stayed back for one more boat I would use more money and that would mean having to pay more money back when I returned from Hawaii. So I thought to myself, "I'd better go now even if I die on the ship."

I did not get seasick because I had been a fisherman, but the food on the ship was so bad that I suffered. They put minced meat in the rice and served it in a bowl. I was so weak. I could not even pick up rice with my chopsticks. My body was weak from the fever and diarrhea, so I felt I'd better eat and make myself strong. The cooks on the ship were Chinese. They made roast pork and roasted sweet potatoes, and came around to sell them. I used all my remaining \$10 to buy something to eat.

We all slept on a bed on the *China-go*. It was my first experience sleeping on a bed and I was not used to it. I do not remember if the bare floor or the bed was more comfortable.

I did not do anything on the ship. I just wondered how much longer it would take to get to Honolulu and what kind of good food we would have in Honolulu.

A Chinese woman died on the ship. The older people gave a sea funeral for her. They wrapped and tied her, using heavy papers. They asked everybody to come out for the funeral. Those who were seasick stayed inside. I was used to the ship so I went outside. We just went and watched them throw her into the ocean.

Three or four days before we arrived in Honolulu, I went to use the bathroom and met a man there. I told him about my illness. He said he had diarrhea too. He asked me why I came on the ship in that condition. I told him the doctor had given me medicine so that I felt well enough to board the ship. He asked me how much I paid for the medicine. I said I'd paid three dollars. He asked me to give him half of the medicine which I did. A couple of days later the man told me his diarrhea had stopped because of the medicine. He said, "You paid three dollars, so I will pay you," and he gave me three dollars.

When I arrived in Hawaii, I did not understand English or Japanese. I just knew the Okinawan language. I did not know what to do. I worried about it so much that I could not think about anything else.

The Immigration Office checked all of us. I did not know what kind of checkup it was because I did not understand English. They were checking passports and I was the last to be checked.

I had paid fees in Okinawa, so my expenses were paid for one week in Honolulu. I showed my receipt to someone because I did not speak Japanese. Without checking with the Immigration Office, I went to the inn. So the people at the inn kept my passport and registered it for me.

The next day, a person from Olaa Plantation on the Big Island, who was going to Paia, heard about me coming from Itoman. He came to see me because I had met him once. He said he was going to Maui to Paia. I said, "I am going to Paia too." He asked me when I was going.

I said, "I am going, but since I have no money, I do not know when I am going."

He said, "I'll lend you \$2.50."

So with that \$2.50, I went to Maui, and soon discovered that it wasn't as easy to get rich in Hawaii as I thought it would be.

The pay was cheap, and it was difficult. I moved here and there, got sick often, and twice, I could not get paid for my work. I thought if I worked for three years I could make my father and my mother live comfortably. But I couldn't even make enough money for myself to return to Okinawa. I got old . . . Only after many years was I finally able to pay back the \$50 and send some money home to my parents.

UCHINANCHU

A History of Okinawans in Hawaii

CENTER FOR ORAL HISTORY
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I AT MĀNOA

HAWAI'I UNITED OKINAWA ASSOCIATION



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