

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Albert Sun Pui Wong

Albert S.P. Wong was born November 24, 1929 in Honolulu. His father, Lin Wong, worked at City Mill. His mother, Ella Mew Quon Ching, gave birth to 11 children, four girls and seven boys; Albert was the eighth child. His mother lived to be 102 years old.

Wong attended St. Elizabeth School from preschool through second grade. He then went to Robello Elementary and Ka‘iulani Elementary, followed by Cathedral School. His high school years were spent at St. Louis, followed by a degree from the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa in Psychology.

He remembers going to Palama Settlement for the first time when he was at Kai‘ulani Elementary and the students were taken to Palama to learn to swim. He was in the 6th grade on December 7, 1941, when World War II came to O‘ahu. Children were not allowed to go to the beaches, which were barbed-wired, or to play in the parks blocked by boulders.

He joined Troop 30 in the Boy Scouts, a troop that was only open to boys of Chinese descent. They met at Palama Settlement and learned many scouting skills. He also remembers summer camps under the leadership of Scoutmaster and Army Corporal Philip Panos.

Wong began his career at a Standard Oil service station in the early 1950s, and it expanded to a body and fender shop with 13 tow trucks. After 17 years, he segued into commercial real estate and developed a company called Palace Realty.

He is married to Maureen Ho Wong and they have three highly successful daughters:

- Gailene Wong, formerly with the Henry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation and currently with the City and County of Honolulu
- Lydia Wong Takazawa, MD, general practitioner with Kaiser Permanente in Honolulu
- Chrystal Wong, CEO of Palace Realty



Albert Sun Pui Wong

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
with
Albert Sun Pui Wong (AW)
November 15th, 2022
Palama Settlement, Honolulu
Interviewed by Paula Rath (PR)

PR: The interviewer is Paula Rath. The narrator is Albert Wong. Albert, what's your full name?

AW: Albert Sun Pui Wong.

PR: Okay and when were you born?

AW: November 24th, 1929.

PR: Happy almost birthday.

AW: Pretty soon.

PR: And where were you born?

AW: In Honolulu.

PR: In what neighborhood in Honolulu?

AW: I don't remember.

PR: (Laughs) Well, you were just born (laughter). Where do you live now?

AW: I live in Kaimuki in Wilhelmina Rise.

PR: What was your mother's name?

AW: Ella M Q--which stood for Mew Quon--Wong, or Ching Wong.

PR: Do you know what years she lived?

AW: I don't know what's her birthday? I need to work it backwards, but she died at a 102.

PR: My goodness. Okay. My grandmother lived till 102 also.

AW: Hmm.

PR: What was your father's name?

AW: Lin. L-I-N Wong.

PR: Was he as long lived as your mother?

AW: No, he probably died about 75.

PR: Okay. You don't know what year he was born?

AW: I don't know.

PR: Okay. Where did he work?

AW: My father had worked for about 14 years at a company called WW Diamond. I don't remember exactly what they sold, but it seems they just sold silverware and other household items.

PR: Okay. After those 14 years, did he take another job?

AW: I think he--I don't remember where he worked, but I think that was in the [era] of the Depression, so--and I never talked about it, but eventually I knew he ended up at City Mill.

PR: What did he do there?

AW: I think he was in sales and and he also worked in the warehouse.

PR: Well, as you know, the Ai Family Trust is a great benefactor of our archives. So I know Steven Ai. Third generation, third generation (laughs). Do you know where your ancestors came from?

AW: Well, we only know that they came from China. I'm not too sure of the words for the actual names.

PR: Okay. That was on your mother's side and your father's side.

AW: Yes.

PR: They all came from China?

AW: Their parents did.

PR: Okay. So they were born here?

AW: Yes, both were born here.

PR: Okay. Do you know what neighborhoods your parents were born in?

AW: Well, my mother was born in Punalu'u.

PR: Punalu'u, out in the country.

AW: Yeah, Punalu'u on the Windward side of O'ahu because there's a [Punalu'u] on the outside island.

PR: Okay. your father? Do you know what part of the island he was born on?

AW: I would assume that is somewhere in Chinatown because I am told that his father was a merchant.

PR: Okay. What is your spouse's name? Your wife's name?

AW: Maureen Ho Wong.

PR: Ho. Maureen Ho. Okay, Wong. Can you tell me a little bit about the neighborhood where you grew up? What it was like in your small kid time?

AW: I was raised in Palama at 809 Kanoa Street. That is one street above King Street across Ka'iulani School.

PR: So right across the street from Ka'iulani School?

AW: No one street above it.

PR: Okay.

AW: But my uncles--two uncles--had lots on King Street so our entry is usually on King Street through their lots and that would be the backyard of our parents home--or our home. In fact, today, one of the houses that my uncle, who was a doctor, is still existing. It's the only resident--or past residence, I think, if you came from Nu'uaniu all the way down to Kalihi, that's still used as a residence.

PR: Does your family still live there?

AW: No, no, no.

PR: Someone else has it--?

AW: Yeah, my uncle had a daughter--two daughters--and they sold it several years ago. But the people still use it as a residence.

PR: Wow. Must have been well preserved. So did you have lots of cousins around or did you know your neighbors?

AW: Our family was large and there was a lot of interaction with my paternal cousins. Many of them lived on Pua Lane, which is like, what, two minutes walk away. Especially the boys, because at that time the girls partner with the other girls and most of us were, as boys, we played together. We often played in the streets because we didn't go to the park at all. My cousin--I had several cousins that were active here in Palama. Tommy Wong was, I think, the leader--or he was the originator of a club called the Pirates Club. They played basketball. My second brother was on the team and for all of us who were younger, we were looking forward to also play[ing] on the team in the future.

PR: So many of the kids that you played with then were actually related to you, were cousins?

AW: Mostly.

PR: What was Pua Lane like in those days, do you remember?

AW: Pua Lane extended from King Street to Vineyard. It's covered, now--by the Mayor Wright housing. There were a lot of individual homes with lots. In those days there were no zoning, so sometimes the houses were built like two or three feet away from the

boundary. But one of the characteristics at that time was we we did not have shoes, nor did we have slippers. I don't know how we existed (laughs) without even slippers today. But anyway, the thing that is intent in my mind is that no matter where you go, it's always barefooted. So when you enter people's house, you enter really with a dirty feet (laughs). But the houses were really well kept because it was habitual that every household would sweep and mop the house daily, if not twice a day.

PR: In those days, you didn't have to wear shoes to school, did you?

AW: I didn't wear shoes to school until I was in the sixth grade or when I went to Cathedral school and we had to wear shoes and a necktie (laughs).

PR: At Punahou we didn't have to wear shoes until seventh grade (laughs).

AW: Oh (laughs).

PR: But that changed not too long after. So the kids that you played with were mostly either cousins or neighbors from the Pua Lane area?

AW: Well, most of the time, if I'm not playing with my cousins. I [came] to Palama Settlement. Especially after the sixth grade or after, right before World War II, I had joined a Boy Scout troop called Troop 30. Palama Settlement had two troops at that time. I think the second troop was Troop 70. if I'm not mistaken. Palama really had a great foresight. Troop 30 was exclusively for Chinese boys. The other troop was for anybody else. But around 1942, the people, the villagers of Palama, decided that they should desegregate. They had all the boys from Troop 70 join Troop 30. So we had only one troop after that. I certainly appreciate that in retrospect, because many of the boys in Troop 70 who I would never have met or played with had become my friends until we went to high school or went to school together. Several of them became my lifetime friends. We would be graduated from St. Louis and we would go to reunions and things together. So the desegregation became a very important part in my life.

PR: How many siblings did you have? You say you had a big family. How big?

AW: We had a family of--I had ten siblings. Four girls and six brothers. I'm about the eighth in the family.

PR: I'm trying to picture what mealtime would have been like with 11 kids (laughs).

AW: We had a long table. I would say six feet long like this [gestures], and maybe three feet a wide. So we could sit basically ten people. But we always had stools. When we had dinner, everyone almost sit together because the older people--I mean, the younger ones always ate first with the parents. Then the older siblings would come in later and I guess they did that and they can chat a lot with each other. So my mother was a homemaker, like most homemakers prior to World War II. She never went out to work. Most ladies never went out to work. But after World War II started, women started to promote the war effort, and that meant go to work. So I have had cousins, my sisters went to work at Pearl Harbor to do clerical work. My mother started to go to the California Packing Company, CPC in Iwilei.

PR: So who cooked dinner for this big family of yours?

AW: Generally, my mother would cook the dinner but my sisters started to learn how to do it. I would also help them a lot. So we prepare the dinner.

PR: So the boys helped?

AW: Oh, yes. I mean, there was no discrimination. We had to wash clothes, too. If there's a job to be done, you know, we parcel it among each other. So we would sweep the house at least twice a day and mop it twice a day after dinner.

PR: Let's talk a little bit about your education from elementary school all the way through college.

AW: I first started going to school at St. Elizabeth Church, and I think in retrospect, it was like kindergarten and first grade. My memory of that is that it's the first time I learned how to eat hamburger.

PR: So that would have been preschool at St. Elizabeth's?

AW: Preschool or first grade. I'm not sure what grade it was, but I know I went there and suddenly I'm at Robello School and I was in the second grade. In the third, fourth and fifth grade, I was at Ka'ulani.

PR: And then intermediate school?

AW: Well, from six, seven, eight I was at the Cathedral school on Nu'uaniu, which is right next to the Japanese consulate.

PR: And then high school?

AW: Cathedral was run by the Marianist Brothers. So automatically they went into St. Louis after that.

PR: And you were--was your family Catholic?

AW: We were not Catholic.

PR: No. Okay.

AW: Actually, none of us were involved in religion except my mother and she was a Taoist. We would often take her to the temple at least twice or twice a year. But she religiously had an in-house ceremony on that date for all senior relatives, like my grandmother, my uncles--that was part of her religion. So our involvement was taking her to the temples. Then we just watch what they did. So over the years we all became more--what I would say, [anglicize]--we go to three different religious sects today with my siblings. One goes to the Congregational Church, I go to an Episcopal church. But my orientation is Catholicism.

PR: And then college?

AW: I went to UH and I spent four years there. I got my bachelor's in psychology. When I was a junior, I wanted to become a school counselor. I took every counseling and guidance course that was offered at UH. So I became friends with the dean of students, the dean of counseling. Sadly, when I became a senior, there was a doctor from the mainland who--his name is Dr. Reuel Fick. Sitting in his office, he told me, "You know, Albert, in order to be a school counselor, you're going to have to be a schoolteacher." I said, "Oh." So with that in mind, I said to myself, "I cannot go to school forever." I got to start going on and getting--start earning a living. So I set that aside and decided, okay, graduate and go and look for work or start to earn some money. So soon after I graduated, my uncle, who was a carpenter, was building a house for my sister, which is right around the corner from here, in fact, it's right where the--under the freeway where the churches is?

PR: Yes.

AW: That was the location. So I helped him build a house. Before I knew, I was doing this and that. Then eventually I met this fellow by the name of James Smith from Standard Oil. He said to me, "Do you ever think of opening a service station?" And I said, "Oh, gee, I don't know. Only thing I know is I drive in there, they wash my windshield, they check my tire, they check my air, they check my battery, they check the oil. That's my acquaintance of the service station." But he said to me, "You know, the rent is very cheap and actually you can start it with just buying the gas, the gasoline. So I said "What kind of dollars are we talking about?" So he said, "Probably about \$2,000." So I gathered my brothers together--

PR: That was a month--?

AW: Yeah. I said to my brothers, "Gee, you know, we can get---open a service station." We were so naive. We didn't know how to run a service station (laughs). We didn't know anything about the service station business.

PR: This would be about what years?

AW: Oh, that would be about '52 or '53.

PR: Okay.

AW: We never knew there was such a thing called Business Administration, and that involved more things than just putting gas in a car. So anyway, I had a service station for about 17 years. But--

PR: Where was it located?

AW: At King and Sheridan Street. Presently--it became, I think, a Taco Bell and today it's a Japanese restaurant. Then during the interval, my friend had a tow truck and he had no place to put it. So he put it there, at the service station. I didn't know how to operate these things, but I just know the theory of it. So he left it there. Eventually we--or the city decided to put the bid out for towing. Prior to this, whenever there's a tow to be made, it was the discretion of the police to just call back and said, "Hey, we need a tow truck." We don't know how tow trucks got there, but tow trucks got there. So at that time we put in

a bid to tow the tow-away zone cars close by, which represented from, I think, Punchbowl Street up to Kalākaua. Then we hear at the end, after a year or so, that the city was going to have three different zones and we also heard that some of the competitive companies would be bidding in our zone. So what we did was we decided that we're going to bid on all three zones with the intent that we get one. In case we don't get the first one, we get that--if we didn't get our choice, that we might get another one. Unknown to us, we outbid all the other companies for every zone. So I talked to--I try to call the people who were doing the work in that area. I said, "It's not our idea to do all three. So why don't you folks, you know, if you will pay the amount that I agreed with the city, then you take the whole thing over like you did before." But I guess they felt that, well, they didn't want to join me. So none of the companies that had tow experiences here in Hawai'i or in Honolulu would join me. So I said, "Okay." We started to hire more people. We went to the mainland and bought about four or five tow trucks and by the end of two or three years we had like 13 tow trucks.

PR: I need to go back to something for a second before I forget. The name of the man who kind of helped you and inspired you at UH. Was it a doctor or a Mr. 'Think'--?

AW: Oh Doctor Reuel Fick.

PR: R-U--

AW: R-E-U-E-L Ficke.

PR: R-E-U-E-L F-I-N-K? I think?

AW: Reuel Fick, F-I-C-K, I think. I'm not sure.

PR: Okay. All right. Thanks. So you went from a station to 13 tow trucks.

AW: And then meanwhile, we opened up a body and fender shop.

PR: Were your brothers working with you on these projects?

AW: Mostly we work in terms of creating the strategy. But I was the person who would be the implementer.

PR: Okay. You also got into real estate, I believe?

AW: Yes. Eventually, I said to myself, "You can't do this forever. Your body is not going to be able to hold it up," and so you have to be thinking of something else. So I thought about going into insurance, but I said, "No, I'm not too interested in that." I thought about stocks and I thought it was just too complicated for me at that time to know about it. So I said, "I'll go into real estate." In those days, it was quite simple. There was no real estate school in town. So what you do, there's a book called 'Semenow's: 1,001 Questions in Real Estate.' So I read the book and the book basically was teaching you a new vocabulary. So I took the test and now they gave me a license to kill. After doing that, I said to myself, after six months, I said, "Something is wrong here. Why would someone call me to represent them, to sell or buy a house? Why not the other fellow who's at ten years experience?" Fortunately for me, the National Association of Realtors [NAR] had a

subdivision called Commercial Investment Member--Certified Commercial Investment Member [CCIM]. The NAR is broken up into several interest groups: property management, securities management and so forth. So they had a class here and that cost \$225 for a whole week. It starts at 8:30 promptly and goes to 4:30 and you have homework every night and at Saturday you take the test and if you pass it, then they have another one [class]. So fortunately, I took the test and I made up my mind that I will be spending \$1,000 every month on education. After this first class, I was able--I met someone from San Diego and he wanted me to represent him to buy the fee under the YWCA property next to Fort Ruger--no, Fort DeRussy--it's the first big building. At that time it was a co-op and that was on the ground floor the YWCA use it for like a day camp. The girls would go out there and then they have a locker room and all those things. We came up with a bid that was \$15,000 less than Harry Weinberg.

So with that in mind, I felt, "Gee, our way of doing things must be pretty correct, what they taught me." So I kept on taking classes and eventually I became what is called a certified commercial investment member. Most of us were interested only in helping people build an estate. In other words--at least that was my orientation. Fortunately, my counseling and classes really came in handy because I used that learning in my real estate practice. So I became a certified commercial investment member. In order to do that, you have to join the local chapter--the State chapter of NAR, which is the Hawai'i Association of Realtors. At that point, I started to learn about things that they did on the mainland. One of the things that they did on the mainland was they did what is called Section 1031 tax deferred exchange. The law was passed in 1966, but nobody knew about it here for at least ten years, except those of us who took the CCIM classes. What the tax deferred exchange meant was that you can dispose of a property and not pay capital gains and not go to jail. You tell the government, "I owe you the money," and you can completely do that for an indefinite number of times. The difficult thing is that if you pass away, the government say, "That's okay, don't pay." They don't go after your estate. So the 1031 tax deferred exchange for me was the financial advantage that I had against most realtors. However, as I became president of the Hawaii CCIM Chapter--. So we will become--we will sponsor classes for free. We will go to the Hawaiian Regent in Waikiki Waikīkī on Saturday mornings and whoever want to come, can come. We were teaching 1031 exchanges. So that was possibly the highlights of what I did in real estate.

PR: Okay. So let's let's turn to Palama Settlement.

AW: Okay.

PR: What brought you to Palama Settlement initially?

AW: My first acquaintance of Palama Settlement was coming here on Friday afternoons to learn how to swim. At that time, Nelson--

PR: Kawakami.

AW: --Kawakami was in charge of the locker room, and he really preserve our material--I mean, whenever we changed, he gave us a little number and we left all our clothes and

everything with him. Of course, we had no towels (laughs) and so we went to swim. But the interesting thing was that they want us to take a shower before we get into the pool. Before you get into the pool, there was a foot bath. I think you have to step into the footpath. I'm not sure what was in that footpath, but probably some chlorine or some material. And then now we can swim. So they taught us how to swim there.

PR: I know that you spent a lot of time at Palama during the war. What can you tell us about Palama Settlement during World War II? Because it's my understanding that the military basically took it over.

AW: The military did not take over Palama Settlement.

PR: Oh, okay. Thank you for correcting me on that. Yay.

AW: The military--the first thing happened was that most--a lot of the schools were closed. Farrington, Punahou, St. Louis, Sacred Arts Academy. I mean Sacred Hearts Convent up in Nu'uuanu--they were all closed. Punahou became a base yard, I think. But Farrington, St. Louis and Sacred Hearts became hospitals. So that's places that you cannot even go there, all right? So there's no place for us to go. We can't go to the beach because they had barbed wired the beach as well as the reef. You can't--I mean, there's no such thing as surfing.

PR: They locked down the reefs?

AW: The reefs all had barbed wires.

PR: Oh, wow.

AW: Then the big areas like Kapi'olani Park, they put big boulders or things in the park because they were thinking that in case it was attacked, there was no way of a plane landing. So you close up Kapi'olani Park, no activity there. So for most of the younger people like us, there is no place to go. There's no facility for us to do except Palama Settlement. We were fortunate that we were able to come here. So we spent a lot of time here at Palama, a lot of time. For me it was about four or five hours a day and at least five days a week. After a while, we were fortunate to have this fellow in our medical corps from Tripler Hospital. He was a corporal. His name was Philip Panos. P-A-N-O-S. He could drive the truck that Palama Settlement had. Palama had a truck that was converted to a bus--they built in little seats on the truck. That became like a regular bus that's open. Now, in Hawai'i there was only one thing that was rationed and that was gas. You know, on the mainland you had sugar and all those other things that was rationed. But here, only gas. Everybody was entitled to only five gallons a month. Palama Settlement had all the gas they want. So fortunately for us, Mr. Panos drove the truck and took us hiking and camping. So we went to Helemano, Hālawa Valley and many other places. So it's almost every week that we went out camping. Hawai'i, or at least Honolulu, we had a blackout. Meaning there should be no light shining on off your building. We went there and we built campfires, but we didn't worry because we knew all there was vegetation--nobody could see our flame. So we had campfires out there just as though there was no restrictions.

PR: What did you do during the days? What kinds of activities?

AW: Well, if we're camping, or if we--as a Boy Scout, we go out and we hike during the day. That was interesting because many times we had to hike on the highway. All of us were barefooted. So you had a choice. Your feet will burn or you go on the side and those little cocoons that we call it would go into your feet. So you alternate. I can understand why we did that. But of course, we all didn't know what a slipper was. Nobody had slippers, and so we tolerated that. So with the Boy Scout, we spent a lot of time, at least on the weekends and in the afternoon. So Mr. Panos, he probably got out of work about 2:00 or 3:00. So he would come here and eventually he had the key to the gym. There was a second floor of the building where they had the adults game room. In fact, I remember they had two pool tables there, but we could never go up there and play pool. Eventually we stayed there overnight. We don't go home. So after dinner or so, or maybe--we would all come here and we stayed there. We went to play in the gym or play outside in the court or swim, and then we stayed overnight.

PR: Did you have sleeping bags or cots or something?

AW: Oh, no, we didn't have anything. No pillow, no cots, just on the ground. This is just good enough for us. You know, we used to it (laughs).

PR: Your parents didn't mind?

AW: I think the issue at that time was not safety. Parents--our parents knew that we were kind of safe. They never worried about where we went, they didn't have to inquire. We just said "Oh, going to Palama." That's it. On Saturdays, they see us, they'll see me packing up my blanket and a knapsack and I'm leaving home. She doesn't--my mother or nobody asks, "Where are you going?" They know it's Boy Scouts. We had a very good, what I would call today, Committee Chairman or something. Every Boy Scout troop has one of those. His name was Harry Lee, and he lived on the second house just below Vineyard Street on Palama on the 'Ewa side. Periodically he would invite us to his house. Those days, they served us some punch and a couple of cookies and boy, that was a big party for us. One of the things that is outstanding as a Boy Scout was that Palama Settlement had a dorm up here. I think it's a women's dorm. At that time, they decided to close the dorm. So the scoutmaster, I think he either bought it or it was donated to him, all the food. So we got all that food and we went on a 17- day camp in Waipahu and we didn't pay a cent. Because we were here to get the food and prior to that we had a little carnival in the parking lot where your apartments are. That was, you know, with games like the original Punahou carnival, all kinds of games. I think the scoutmaster had the funds there so that none of us need to pay anything. So that was the longest thing that we ever did in our life for most of us. So you can imagine that most of us stayed together in a pup tent and get acquainted with red ants for the first time and became very good friends.

PR: And this was in Waipahu?

AW: Somewhere in Waipahu, I remember. I cannot find the place today, but I know it's all filled with cane fields and pineapple fields. So for Palama, it created a sense of belonging for us. It also created a sense of, you know, helping each other besides the family. On

December 7th, about 6:00, one of the senior scout masters came to my house and he asked my mother to let me go with him because they were volunteering to be messengers. You know, there was no instant telephone calls and they thought that if they needed, they're going to have to send messages by bicycle. So my mother said he can't go because he doesn't have a bike (laughs). So some of them, I don't know, went and volunteer somewhere to help with communication. But what they did, I don't really know. So the war--World War II created really this sense of unity for all of us, and that, I think, carried through throughout our life. That is for me. I'll be 93 tomorrow. I mean, next week.

PR: Where where was your father when Pearl Harbor was bombed?

AW: Oh, he was at City Mill, and he was helping C.K. Ai pack clothing and shoes to be shipped to China. Mr. Ai was very kind and charitable, and so my father volunteers to help him pack those things. He told me that while they're doing that--I think he was the only one doing it with another person who was the watchman--kids were throwing rocks on the corrugated roofing. So they went out and take a look and--no kids around. It was a puzzle, how did all this, you know, things falling on the roof? But when he came home, then we told him that, oh, there's a war going on. Then we assumed that those were shrapnels or something from the plane that fell on his roof--or for City Mill's roof. Mr. Ai has been very, very kind to my father. My father eventually was, and I think what I would call or what I'm told today, is the stomach cancer. In those days, we didn't know what cancer was. So when he felt a little good or felt a little better, he will go to work and he could work maybe a half a day. Then he's sick. He doesn't go for four days. But whenever he could, he went to work. I mean, he had a tremendous loyalty to Mr. Ai, and eventually, in fact, oftentimes he would volunteer to stay at City Mill with the night watchman.

PR: Do you remember any of the doctors at the Strong Carter Clinic? Did you go get your teeth fixed or any other care?

AW: I know three doctors that work for the Strong Carter Clinic. Dr. William K. Holt, TKTK Dr. Fan Luke and Dr. Adrian Brash.

PR: What was the name of the first one, please?

AW: William K. Holt.

PR: Holt.

AW: Yeah.

PR: H-O-L-T?

AW: Right.

PR: Okay. The second one again?

AW: Fun Look, I don't know how to spell--F-U-N I would think. And L-O-O-K.

PR: Okay.

AW: And then Adrian Brasch.

PR: B-R-A-S-H?

AW: A-D-R-I-A-N.

PR: B--?

AW: B-R-A-S-H.

PR: Okay. Thank you. See what we can find in the archives about them.

AW: Let's see. Yeah. So they would bring the children from Ka'iulani School up to the Strong Carter Clinic, I think, every week.

PR: You mentioned a dormitory at Palama Settlement, and I'm not familiar with that. Do you recall where it was on the campus or--?

AW: I really don't know. I cannot think of where it was. The only thing I know--that it was a dorm and I know that we got their food (laughs).

PR: Okay. How many children do you have?

AW: I have three girls.

PR: Let's talk about the next generation. Okay. Three girls. What are their names and ages now?

AW: Gailene is the oldest and she's a graduate of the Priory. She was Grant Director at the Weinberg Foundation for about almost--pretty near 20-something years. Now she works in housing for the City and County of Honolulu. Lydia is a medical doctor. She is a general practitioner, and she's with Kaiser [Permanente]. She went to St. Louis University--St. Louis University Medical School. That's the only place she's worked all her life, at Kaiser at Pensacola Street.

PR: Are they both still Wong?

AW: Oh, no. Gailene is Wong. That's Lydia Takazawa.

PR: Okay.

AW: Now, Chrystal is the youngest. She decided to become a real estate broker. As of today, she must have had 25- years experience. She again--she's not so much interested in investment as she's interested in people's how to sell--I mean, about selling and buying people homes. But then after, she has very little bit interest in analyzing a real estate property and talking to people. However, she has a master's in business administration, I think, at Chaminade [University]. So armed with that information, that tends to move her into investments. In fact, Gailene also has a Master's in Business Administration from Chaminade and Chrystal is from UH.

PR: What is Chrystal's last name now?

- AW: Chrystal Nakasato. [N-A-K-A-S-A-T-O].
- PR: Okay. And Gailene went to Chaminade you said, for her MBA?
- AW: No, Gailene went to Chaminade for MBA.
- PR: Okay.
- AW: So as you can see—oh. . . .
- PR: And their ages?
- AW: [inhales]
- PR: (Laughs) That's okay.
- AW: I'm not sure of their ages (laughs).
- PR: All right, that's fine.
- AW: But incidentally, Maureen graduated as a nurse at UH.
- PR: Oh.
- AW: Her interests was in public health.
- PR: Oh, really?
- AW: Yeah, so she hardly worked at--I don't think she had a job at a hospital at all. One year she had a grant. Kennedy had this program where they were interested in pushing up science because the Russians had that Sputnik. Remember that period of time?
- PR: Mm hmm.
- AW: So they were subsidizing education. So she had a grant and she got a Master's in--what is that--in public health from UH. I've never seen a more liberal bunch of professors because they all came from UC Berkeley. We had a--I had a discussion one night with one of the professors and the discussion was welfare. He said welfare was a right. I said, welfare is not a right. I said "For us, we were brought up with the idea that if you are on welfare, it's a very shameful thing." You got to be self-sufficient. I think that was the general feeling of the people of all nationalities in our area. I mean, in our era. But today, you get money from all over government. You don't ask for it and they want to give it to you. So that was a real big change in terms of the socialization of people--oh I wouldn't call--not socialization--yeah, socialization of our government.
- PR: Okay. We will veer away from politics, I think. Something that's very important to Palama Settlement always has been and after 126 years, I think I can safely say always will be, is that we are a safe place. You have said that you found Palama to be your safe haven during small kids time.
- AW: Oh, definitely.

PR: What what does that mean to you? Clearly, it meant something to your parents. If you could pack up a bag and say, "Bye, see you tomorrow," and they said, "Okay," and you were gone all night--what did it mean to you? And I think what I'm also saying is--how can we be that for people now? [Phone rings] Do we all have our phones turned off? Do you have your phone turned off? Sorry, I should have asked that earlier. Do you need a break?

AW: Let me think about this question a little bit.

PR: Okay.

AW: Today, you will see almost every elementary kid walked or driven to the school and they also are picked up after the school. For us, the world was wide--we can go all over town, we never felt that we would be in danger. I mean, there was no thinking about being in danger. We never worried about being attacked. It's like when I read about the shootings on the mainland, I cannot imagine that ever happening in Hawai'i for us. We don't ever think about those things. So we don't know what was danger. There's no idea of danger in our lives. That's why we can travel all over. We know that the person's going to leave and come back not being injured by somebody. We don't expect somebody to be shot at or stabbed at or whatever. So I really can't think that there's such a thing in our mind of being--of not being safe. It was just understood.

PR: How about today? How do you feel Palama can be a safe haven for kids today?

AW: I think the thing that Palama should be able to do is to first keep them here. Bring them to Palama. Think of ways of how they can spend five hours here like I did. You can therefore change their character by teaching them integrity, by teaching them financial security. Maybe the arts, music, dancing. In fact, Palama had a thing called Teen Canteens, I think, every Friday and the people would come here and dance. So a lot of the youth today have no place to go. Then I would say that Palama should be outreaching. They should be at Mayor Wright Housing. They should be at the churches and tell the churches what you're doing and that you want them to come here. Would it be a nice thing if Likelike School across the street or Palama or Farrington High School has a failing student--and it's mandatory for the student to come here once or twice a week after school and be tutored free. In the subject that they're shortcoming. So you will say "Well how are we going to get the tutors?" Well, there's enough people from Palama who has done well. I'm sure you can find somebody, especially schoolteachers who are retired, to come here and volunteer to tutor.

PR: I'm really looking forward to having our after-school tutoring come back. The woman who ran it is still afraid of COVID because she takes care of her older mother. But we really need to just jumpstart it one way or another and get it back. We had wonderful volunteers, and the majority of them were retired schoolteachers. We need to have that program back. It was downstairs.

AW: So the other thing I think about is this: is Palama Settlement open on Saturdays? Is it open on Sunday? You know, it's like having a big temple and you can go in there.

PR: Thank you for bringing that up. I bring it up at the board frequently.

AW: Can you give people the opportunity in a community throughout the islands to come here every Saturday and Sunday and they can swim whenever they want? So your board will tell me it's going to be expensive to hire a lifeguard. So Palama can start a lifesaving class. You got the pool. Teach people lifesaving and then get them to volunteer. Secondly, during the summer, Punahou, 'Iolani, The YMCA--they slowly needs lifeguards in their swimming program. So if they took a life saving course here, they have a great opportunity to have a job during the summer.

PR: We used to have an arrangement with Punahou that way. We really need to get that back. You're right, we really have to be open on weekends. That's when they need us most. That's when they're gonna get in trouble.

AW: So what I see--what I dream about is this: can Palama be open 24 hours a day, seven days a week? Including holidays. Can you use the facility to accommodate churches today? Churches have the most difficult time finding a site because of the zoning rules.

PR: We have a church that's here and they've done a lot for us in return. They're the ones who help us feed the kids. The Training Table--well we used to call it Training Table, but they help feed the kids dinner Wednesdays and Thursdays.

AW: So the churches have the infrastructure already.

PR: They do.

AW: So now if you have three churches coming here--can you imagine what they can do, too?

PR: And that is the way to reach the Micronesians.

AW: Yeah.

PR: Is through the churches.

AW: But then, as a real estate person, I'd like to see you reexamine the productivity of your apartments across the street. As you know, the rail is coming up. One of the great advantages of the rail is that you have more liberal building requirements. That's why you see all those high rises creeping up in Kaka'ako and next to the Ala Moana Center. Could you investigate a long- term possibility of removing all those apartments and going high rise? Because you see, the average family has not--have a difficult time finding housing. If they had the money, they have to---leave that area or the outside areas. So there's a tremendous amount of transportation that they have to assume. So with the rail, if they're taking the real rail and they live--and Palama has some--I don't know how many facilities, but if they can do that, that would be a an ongoing income stream perpetually for Palama. One of the cheap way of getting people to be involved in Palama's Settlement is to use your logo. I haven't seen that logo since I was a young kid.

PR: Or a winged 'P'?

AW: Yeah. Is that a winged 'P'? Okay.

PR: Mm hmm.

AW: Could you get some T-shirts and give it to every person signing up for class here?

PR: I think our seniors get them, don't they?

AW: I don't know. I don't know. I don't know anything about your program--

PR: Your wife doesn't have a Palama t-shirt--?

AW: They don't have the flying 'P,'--

PR: Okay.

AW: Yeah. So what we're saying is that as you walk around, there's so many t-shirts that people use today. You want them to ask, "Gee, what's this flying 'P' about?"

PR: I can't wear my Palama polo shirts to the market without having somebody say, "Oh, my auntie went there," or, "Oh, I learned to swim there." I mean, the cashier at Foodland, I mean, just everywhere I go. I wear them a lot for that reason, because it starts conversations.

AW: So the next time you go there and you say, "You know, we're having a fundraiser, do you think you can give us \$10?" Right? You see, there is so much--let's put it this way. There was so many residents in Palama and so many people who have advantage of Palama in the past. But Palama has failed--and I say it failed very loudly--to go out and ask for help. I can tell you that this is the criticism that I've given to the brothers at St. Louis. I said, you know, I went to St. Louis, my tuition was \$100 a year. The following year I go to UH, it's \$100 a year. Never in all my years at St. Louis did anybody talk about giving money to the school. They never talked to about raising money because the brothers were not expensive right? They didn't have to have all this Social Security in order to pay--their job was just teach. And when they teach, the organization pays for every clothing, everything that they need. So, you know, we can plagiarize from other organizations.

So your next question, I think, will be: what do you do now, Albert? Well, I tell you what I do. A lot of people call me and is do want real estate counseling or ideas, and I freely give it to them. That allows me to maintain my real estate skills. So I volunteer to do those things for organizations. I've done it for the Catholic church. I've done it for the Episcopal church. Right now I'm trying to help the Mānoa Chinese Cemetery. That's just one area. At Chaminade, at St. Louis, and Sacred Hearts. I try to help them with their fundraisers. At Chaminade. I'm trying to help them promote financial literacy. They are training teachers to teach that at all grade levels. They've done plenty last summer and they're going to 20 again this year and hopefully with enough teachers trained, the DOE will do that as required course. So then there's a lot of opportunities in off to do things for the community. I think the problem is we don't ask. And Palama hasn't asked. I remember--I forgot about this place, actually. My wife has been here for 20 years doing Tai Chi. I drop her off, I'm sitting on the car and I'm reading the newspaper and I'm working on my iPad. Oh, she's finished, she jumps on a car and we do the next thing. So if you take a message back to your board, I think the message ought to be we got to let people know that we are alive. Our doors are open.

PR: Yeah. That message goes first to our marketing committee, which is a committee of the board, and then we take it to the whole board.

AW: Could you imagine that I spend so much time of my youth here? I've never been into Palama Settlement at all since I left, say, six or seventh grade until we had that reception--that field day or whatever it was on you on your 125th? I sat out there from eight in the morning till about 1:30 or 2:00, and that's the longest I've ever been in Palama Settlement.

AW: As an adult?

PR: Yeah.

AW: And how come? I asked myself. Right? So people love this place. But if you don't ask, you don't get. So your board must embark on a fundraising project like yesterday. Like yesterday. Not soon, not one year from now. You talk about these buildings that ought to be torn down. They should be done now very quickly.

PR: Well, thank you.

AW: Well, I hope I helped.

PR: You did good, yes. Pau.