



What School You Went? Local Culture, Local Identity, and Local Language: Stories of Schooling in Hawai‘i

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This work explores local culture and local cultural practices in an attempt to understand the forces and influences that have affected the development of a local identity as well as the persistence of Pidgin¹ (Hawai‘i Creole) as its language. The discussion ends with two short stories, “What School You Went?” and “No Pass Back,” told in Pidgin by a young narrator describing his school experiences during the 50s and 60s. Together they paint a picture of local Hawai‘i culture and of the narrator’s growing understanding of his place in the world. Although they can be taken as tales of a simpler and more idyllic time, underlying the informal, “talk story” narratives is a troubled and conflicted voice representing the challenges and struggles of a search for identity from within a minority culture. The contradictions and inequities that the child faces within the school community mirror the struggles that all Islanders face: racism, stereotypes, and economic and social stratification. These conflicts are not simply that of the oppressor versus the oppressed, but an intricate web that includes the exercise of power by members within the community.

Local narratives and literature reflect a strong sense of place grounded in themes of local culture, identity, and family relationships within the context of linguistic and cultural domination by forces of Westernization and assimilation. Taken from an ecological/communitarian perspective, contemporary local culture can be understood as a dynamic culture that is constantly negotiating and mediating between other forces. Yet, at its core, it acknowledges particular values and principles, which may explain not only its persistence but the embracing of local as a truly multicultural identity.

Local Culture: Weaving Histories Together

[I]n the native Hawaiian way, personal introductions include these questions: What are you called (i.e., your given name)? Who is your family (i.e., your surname and genealogy)? Where are you from (i.e., your neighborhood or district)? And who is your teacher (i.e., your school or the way of thought to which you are loyal)? It occurs to me that, without their knowing its Hawaiian origins, locals expect this genealogical exchange, this fine ritual of personal introductions, not for judging the superiority of one person over another, but for learning facts that relate somehow to inner values of the individual, on the one hand, and to already existing social and cultural connections on the other. This local ritual is expressively a way for two people to begin discovering their relationships with each other, however distant, in order to talk stories that sprout on common ground. It is a way to begin weaving their histories together—and this defines friendship, or an aspect of it, local style. (Sumida, 1991, p. xvii)

The typical local party in Hawai‘i consists of a buffet table set out in the carport with family and friends sitting on folding chairs or atop coolers of beer and soda talking story. If you are a visitor, sometime soon after the introductions you’ll likely be asked, “What school you went?” Locals know that the question refers to what high school you attended. And invariably, after a few more questions, a connection is made through a relative who attended that school or a mutual acquaintance who lives in the neighborhood or, sometimes, the discovery of a distant family relationship (“Eh, my sister-in-law’s niece stay married to your cousin!”).

At the party, both kids and adults are likely to address an older female as “Auntie,” whether they are related or not. Local kids have innumerable “aunties,” not all by blood, but all who act as family. In fact, a high school teacher once confessed that the most effective warning for misbehaving study hall students was, “I know your father.”² Presumably this relationship allowed her to act *as* a family member and not simply as someone who would report *to* a parent. The “What school you went?” question is derived from the native Hawaiian way of identifying oneself by geography and genealogy: “I am Keone from Nu‘uanu Valley. My parents are Nalani from the Kamelamela ohana on Maui and Joseph from the Heu clan in Nu‘uanu. My grandparents are . . .” (Sing, 1993).

In Polynesian cultures, the universe is considered “a giant kin; a genealogy” (Whitney, 1987, p. 8). The question when meeting someone is not “What do you do?” but “How are we related?” And Hawaiians, Whitney notes, use a much broader, more inclusive definition of family that goes beyond blood or genealogy to one that is based on role and relationship: “If someone fulfills the behavioral expectations of a relative, a relationship may be assumed” (p. 9).

This impulse to establish how we are related is critical to understanding local culture and local literature. Thus the question “What school you went?” is fundamentally an effort to understand the context of one another: your name, your family, your district, and your teacher. And common phrases such as, “Howzit Auntie!” or “Wassup, Cuz?” express a desire to act and be treated as a member of your family.

Similar perspectives are held by other native and minority cultures. The Lakota, during a purification ritual, call upon “all my relatives” when they need help: “their ancestors, their tribe, the rocks, trees, birds, animals, the world, the universe” (TuSmith, 1994, p. vii). While Bellah (1985) concluded that most white, middle-class Americans have a “first language” of individualism, ethnic Americans have retained the language of community in their literature (Tu-Smith 1994).

This language of community also seems to characterize local culture, which at various times has been described as troubled, contentious, racist, or fissured. It is easy to forget how communities, like families, are based on a sense of belonging together and not on an affiliation based on geography, politics, or economics. Like all families, such communities can be marked by conflict, disagreement, and discord, and yet retain a fundamental bond to each other.

Local Identity: I Is

“So what if I wake up tomorrow and no mo haoles (Caucasians), I don’t have an identity?”

—graduate student in Political Science.³

“I IS.”

—from “Name Me Is,” *Saturday Night at the Pahala Theater* (Yamanaka, 1993)

Local culture has been characterized as a culture of resistance against a dominant white culture and is rooted in the struggles of the working class of Hawai‘i’s sugar plantations. Immigrant laborers entered a native Hawaiian culture that valued relationships—*aloha kanaka* (love for the people)—and environmental concern—*aloha aina* (love for the land) (Okamura, 1980). The values of family loyalty, obligation, and reciprocity that arrived with the Asian immigrant workers coincided with the native Hawaiian orientation that valued harmony between people, minimized personal gain or achievement, and shared natural resources (Okamura, 1980). According to Okamura, this process of cultural accommodation on the part of native Hawaiians and immigrant labor occurred primarily because they shared subservient positions on the plantations and differs from the more romantic notions of blended cultures, melting pot, or a democratic sharing of cultures.

Locals have always been well aware of class and ethnic differences and their hierarchical relationship to the plantation bosses. From this perspective, local culture developed out of necessity: immigrant laborers and native Hawaiians found themselves on the lowest rung of the ladder and subject to deliberate efforts by the plantations to pit ethnic groups against one another through pay differences and housing in ethnically segregated camps.

In the words of Kiyo in *All I Asking for Is My Body*

Shit too was organized according to the plantation pyramid. Mr. Nelson was top shit on the highest slope, then there were the Portuguese, Spanish and nisei lunas with their indoor toilets which flushed into the same ditches, then Japanese camp, and Filipino camp. (Murayama, 1988, p. 96)

More recently, this resistance has turned to issues of over-development (particularly with regard to tourism), loss of local control (opposition to foreign investors, often Japanese), and resistance to “outsiders” (including more recent

immigrants, the military, and tourists). Thus local culture has been defined largely by what it was *against* and by who *didn't* belong rather than by those who did (Okamura, 1994).

If one's identity is based solely on being "anti-haole," as the first quotation of this section suggests, does one's identity vanish if the object of the resistance disappears? Such a definition obscures the equally important communitarian aspects of local culture. "A communitarian perspective views culture as a verb, not a noun. The community is constantly engaged in the processes of actively negotiating those visible and invisible bonds of meaning that tie it together" (Tehrani, 1990, p. 10).

Although Okamura warns that there is a danger of locals "polarizing the Hawai'i community" which may "exacerbate ethnic tensions and hostility and expand the social distance between groups," he notes that "local also represents a coalescence of ethnic groups, that it can transcend ethnic differences, and that it has the potential to change its meaning over time" (Okamura, 1980, p. 136). Thus, one can interpret the "What school you went?" question as one that attempts to differentiate by social class or ethnicity, e.g., public versus private school, or neighborhoods (Kalihi versus Kāhala). Similarly, the notion that locals are preoccupied with ethnicity appears at the outset to be racist ("What are you? Filipino? Japanese? Okinawan?"). If we consider that the question might have risen originally from the plantation practice of segregating workers into ethnic "camps," it can be viewed as the vestige of a question about locale, "What camp are you from?" i.e., "Where do you live?" as well as an interest in one's ethnicity.

While ethnicity and class play important roles in defining local culture's resistance to the dominant Western society, the "bonds of meaning that tie it together" are the common values, common history, and common language (a Hawaiian-based Pidgin) as well as the recognition and adoption of many native Hawaiian cultural practices and beliefs. While this makes Hawaiians (or at least Hawaiians living in Hawai'i) the "quintessential locals" (Sumida, 1991, p. xv), this perspective is not always realized by locals. Linda Colburn, Office of Hawaiian Affairs administrator, reminded local audiences that the issues facing native Hawaiians are not solely a "Hawaiian thing" but are concerns of an "island people" who must face the health, environmental, and economic problems that currently face Hawaiians, problems that an "island people" cannot run away from (Colburn, 1995).

And in light of the native Hawaiian renaissance, the local and native Hawaiian communities are not necessarily in conflict or mutually exclusive. TuSmith notes, "The pluralistic idea of the 'local' suggests that ethnic cultures are affirming communal values without giving up their identities" (TuSmith, 1994, p. 190). Thus one can both have an affinity to local culture *and* retain one's ethnic identity.

This mediated understanding differs from the commonly held perception that ethnic Americans have dual personalities (which asserts that ethnic Americans switch back and forth between their ethnic part and their American part).⁴ Rather, a new, distinct identity located along a continuum exists between the polar opposites. If we consider that we have argued that local identity includes factors such as ethnicity, class, language, family, geography, and one's school or teacher, then we might consider locating local within a multidimensional space which allows for considerable variation between members of the culture yet succeeds in creating communities based on bonds of mutuality and emotion.

Local Language: Like Home

But I can't talk the way he wants me to. I cannot make it sound his way, unless I'm playing pretend-talk-haole. I can make my words straight, that's pretty easy if I concentrate real hard. But the sound, the sound from my mouth, if I let it rip right out the lips, my words will always come out like home. (Yamanaka, 1996, p. 13)

—*Lovey, Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers*

Is Pidgin really a language exclusive to the stupid of Hawai'i? . . . Is it a matter of prejudice, skill or inadequacy of vision that the Hawaiian writers championing the virtues of Hawaiian Pidgin cannot make the language work complexities, communicate intelligence, perform magic?

—*Frank Chin*⁵

This story has no literary merit.

—*High school speech tournament judge regarding the performance of a Pidgin story*⁶

Pidgin is not capable of conveying the width and breadth of human emotion.

—*Graduate student in drama*⁷

The emotional underpinning of local culture and the affirmation of community might well be the sense of

“home” of which Lovey so eloquently speaks. And while an immigrant people can never know the deep connection to the land that only native Hawaiians can fully appreciate (Trask, 1993), all local people can surely know and speak of a local cultural home.

The use of language and story (and the practice of “talk story”) to convey the sense of home is reflected in Hawai'i's local culture and literature. The persistence of Pidgin in the islands despite widespread assimilation of American culture suggests that Pidgin speakers are resisting the process of decreolization and are seeking to retain Pidgin as a marker of local identity (Sato, 1989a). Ironically, the separation of standard English (SE) speakers from Pidgin speakers through the English Standard schools, starting in the 1920s and lasting until the 1950s, may have contributed to bonding the Pidgin speaking community, slowing decreolization, and providing yet another target of local resistance (Sato, 1985).⁸

The shift in the public's perception of Pidgin from something to be eradicated to something to be valued became apparent at the Board of Education (BOE) hearings in 1987 on a proposal to ban Pidgin in the schools. For the first time, according to Sato, locals and others spoke up to support Pidgin as a symbol of Hawai'i's unique cultural and linguistic milieu (Sato, 1989a). This was by no means a majority view. The impetus for the proposal in the first place was the board's view that Pidgin speakers were “severely limited” in their competitiveness and unable to “move up the ladder of success” (Hawai'i State BOE, 1987), a view from the 1880s which linked “ignorance, deficiency of character, and low sensuous life” to Pidgin (Stueber, 1964, p. 149). The Board of Education hearings marked over a century of denial of the legitimacy of Pidgin as the language of a significant number of people in the islands.

Not only does the use of Pidgin promote a sense of community, it challenges our assumptions about language and culture particularly with regard to the privileging of standard English and mainstream American culture. Pidgin serves to unify local culture and to critique the dominant one. When Lovey speaks of letting Pidgin “rip right out the lips,” she speaks to the attitude of language imperialism which elevates standard English and internalizes the view that her language is “a hideous mongrel jargon,” a “barbarous perversion of English,” a “bastardized language,” and a “savage dialect” (Stueber, 1964, p. 149).

Thus, the common notion that ethnic literatures “break silence” or “give voice to people who do not ordinarily speak” is problematic: if Pidgin is a creole, a native language, then its speakers could never have been silent and have always had a voice and a literature. The perspective of Pidgin as a literary language only recently “discovered” or of local literature as an “emerging” literature suggests a developmental narrative (i.e., Pidgin literature will eventually develop into “real” literature)⁹ and allows teachers and scholars to avoid admitting that Pidgin is a legitimate language with a legitimate literature.¹⁰ The “silencing” of these voices is more accurately a suppression of an entire language, literature, and culture by a dominant Western culture that refuses to acknowledge that a local culture ever exists and culminates in the terrible silencing of Lovey of her own accord.

Cultural Suicide: Ma-ke, Die, Dead¹¹

In the islands, a common Pidgin phrase is “Bumbye pau.” When a child falls and runs crying to you for comfort, you say, “Bumbye pau. Bumbye pau sore.” The question facing Hawai'i's local culture is whether its existence is “ma-ke, die, dead,” because of the challenges of native Hawaiian sovereignty, the inability to include new immigrant groups, the retreat to ethnic enclaves, or heightened class distinctions due to a foundering economy. Or whether it will be “bumbye pau,” soothing words of comfort, inclusive and accommodating, conveying the sense that trouble and pain will soon pass.

The measure of who we are as locals is, in fact, conflicted, fragmented, and sometimes confused. It is an identity that is constantly being negotiated and mediated by forces within the community and outside of it. As a local Chinese-American how could I possibly be Chinese when as child, I had resisted all things Chinese? My clear preference was to be all-American, to have lunch at Kress' soda fountain rather than Tai Sam Yuen Chop Suey. I wanted to be like Homer Price, certainly not like The Five Chinese Brothers or Tikki Tikki Tembo.

What I got as a child was a local experience, neither Chinese nor American, not a blending, not an egalitarian “multi-cultural” experience where all ethnic groups contributed equally, but a complex experience of actively negotiated “bonds of meaning” amidst a multiplicity of conflicting forces.

Are our stories tales of nostalgia, of a culture stuck in a time long dead, or are they stories that will continue to comfort us and sustain us? I believe that we are richer because of our stories, that we have an understanding of each other through them, and that they provide bonds of kinship that make us a community. I believe that we will continue to ask one another “What school you went?” and find the points where we can begin to weave our histories together.



The two stories that follow are fictional narratives based on school experiences of a Pidgin narrator growing up in the 50s. The vignettes in the first story demonstrate the clear distinctions between the mainstream adult culture and that of the students. The second story “No Pass Back” is an exploration of power and resistance and of how change can occur from within a community.

What School You Went?

1. Kinnigarden

Mrs. Wagnah was our kinnigarden teacha. She was one old haole lady wit gray hair and her glasses was tied to one string so dat she no lose um. I donno how she could lose um cause she had big chi-chis and her glasses always stay dere j’like on top one shelf. And she had one nudda stuff, like one necklace dat clamp to her sweater, so da ting no fall off. She wear her sweater j’like one Supahman cape, she no put her arms inside da sleeves. And when she put on her art apron wit her glasses stuff and her sweater stuff, she get all tangled up and den somebody gotta help her figgah out how fo take um all off!

Mrs. Wagnah one pretty nice teacha. Only ting, she made you sleep during nap time. She was strick about dat. You had to put on your eyeshades and lie down on your sleeping mat and no talk and no move around. Even if you wasn’t tired, you couldn’t move around and you had to shut your eyes cause she said she going check. But how she going check unless she get x-ray vision? Most times she jes sit at her desk and close her eyes too, das when you can lift up your eyeshade and make funny faces at Fat Frances until she cry. Or you can play try-make-me-laugh wit John or Andrew. Mostly everybody was peeking and wearing their eyeshade on their forehead by da time napttime was pau.

Alfred was da only one who really went sleep. Even when was pau nap time, he no get up. Yeah. Everybody put away their mats and he stay snoring in da middle of da floor and Mrs. Wagnah gotta drag him still yet on his mat, to da corner so dat had room fo storytime.

One time, almost to summer vacation, when was real hot, Mrs. Wagnah said we had to quiet down and take a nap even though nobody could, was so hot.

Alfred, he sweat da most of anybody and he use his gullah-gullah hankachief fo wipe his face cause every time he foget bring one clean one. Every morning Mrs. Wagnah tell us line up and she check if we went wash our hands and no mo dirt undahneat our fingahnails and you gotta show her dat you get one hankahchief and da juice money monitah and da lunch money monitah collect your money. Good when you one of da money monitahs cause den you can count da money and put um inside da Band-aid can and take um to da office.

Alfred, he always get da same old hankachief. I no tink he wash um. He use um for anykine: fo tie around his mout like one bandit, fo tie around his head like Zatoichi, fo tie around one eye like Zorro. Fo catch bugs in da dirt. Fo make parachute. And when he pau, he jes shove um back in his pocket. So every time, Mrs. Wagnah gotta tell him, “Time to bring a clean handkerchief, Alfred. We don’t want to spread our germs around, do we?” And he use his hankachief fo his coin purse too. Mrs. Wagnah, she use only two fingahs fo pick out Alfred’s nickel and quartah from da middle of his hankachief so she no catch his gullahs or his hanabuttahs.

Sometimes Mrs. Wagnah get two pencils and make uku check. Everybody gotta line up and she poke around your hair wit da eraser end of da pencils looking fo ukus. If you one girl and get long hair, she look long time. If you live Mayor Wright housing, she look long time. If you Alfred, she look extra long time. I always get nervous cause you donno when you going get ukus and if you get um, you gotta go to da health room and everybody call you “uku-boy.” Alfred was “uku-boy” plenny times, but I wasn’t, yet. Even if Bungy said I was. I wasn’t, he lie.

So we was suppose to be taking our nap and I was watching Alfred wipe his face with his gullah-gullah hankachief and den go sleep and I heard Mrs. Wagnah tell Shirley to be da room monitah cause she had to go to da office. I donno howcome she always pick Shirley.

She so sassy when she da monitah cause she no report da girls. But if any of da boys move around or talk, she report *every little ting*. Mrs. Wagnah nevah come back fo long time and everybody stay moving around and lifting up their eyeshades, peeking. Bungy went get up and look around da room and jes when Shirley was going say, “Ahunna-ko-ko-le-le, I going tell Mrs. Wagnah,” Bungy went look out da door and tell, “Mrs. Wagnah went fall down! She stay lying on da ground!” We all went jump up and run to da door and Shirley was yelling at us, “You supposed to stay on your sleeping mat,” and Fat Frances stay crying awready, “Mrs. Wagnah going ma-ke die dead!”

Bungy went open da uddah door cause couldn't see too good and Shirley still was trying to be da boss, “Not suppose to go outside,” and he went tell her, “Aw shaddup, stupidhead” and she started fo cry real soft, “I going tell Mrs. Wagnah you went call me stupid. Not suppose to say ‘stupid.’” I couldn't see anything cause everybody was by da doors so I jes went stand on top da table awready fo see what was happening. Mrs. Ching from next door and Miss Greenwood, da principio, and da janitah, Mr. Rodrigues, all stay crowded around Mrs. Wagnah lying down. Mrs. Ching was holding one umbrella fo shade Mrs. Wagnah, and Mr. Rodrigues was fanning her wit one folder, and Miss Greenwood was holding and rubbing her hand. Shirley was going back and fort from one door to da uddah saying, “You guys bettah get back on your sleeping mat . . . Daniel, you bettah get off da table . . . I going count to tree. One. Two. Tree.” Nobody went move, even her best goody-goody friends nevah move. So she went climb up on top da tables fo look outside, too. Miss Greenwood went look at us hanging out da doors and Mrs. Ching's class too and she went send Mrs. Ching back to take care of us. By da time she went shoo her class back inside her room, we went back to our sleeping mats but we nevah even pretend we was sleeping cause we wanted to know what was happening. Mrs. Ching came into da room and told us Mrs. Wagnah had one accident, she went faint. She tink was heat exhaustion cause was so hot. Bungy went tell, “Das cause she always get da sweater on.” And Shirley went raise her hand and tell her dat Bungy went get up from his sleeping bag and went outside da room. And Mrs. Ching went tell, “Okay, thank you, young lady.” Bungy went smile big at her. Mrs. Ching wasn't going do nutting, ha-ha!

Shirley went try again, “But Mrs. Wagnah said not suppose to do dat!” Mrs. Ching said she would discuss it

later with Mrs. Wagner. Shirley went look back at Bungy and stick tongue. Mrs. Ching said we could play quietly and she was going back and fort between da two rooms so we bettah behave or else she going get Miss Greenwood come watch us. Everybody said, “Whoa,” and came quiet. Shirley went raise her hand again and say, “I can be da room monitah?”

And Bungy said, “No make her monitah!” and Fat Frances said, “Da ambulance went come!” and she started crying again. Everybody went rush to da doors again fo watch dem put Mrs. Wagnah on da stretcher and slide her inside da ambulance. Da lights was flashing but nevah have siren. Bennett said, “How come dey no put on da siren?”

Fat Frances said, “Maybe she ma-ke awready!” and started fo cry mo loud, “I no like Mrs. Wagnah ma-ke!” Some more girls started crying soft-kine and Mrs. Ching said, “No, no, Mrs. Wagner not ma-ke but she has to go to the doctor to see what's wrong so she might be absent for a little while.”

We went watch until da ambulance went drive off da playground and jes when we heard da siren go, “Awwrrrrr,” Alfred went wake up.

2. Firs Grade

Firs grade, we had Mrs. Perry. I was kinda scared of her cause she make you eat everyting on your lunch tray. When you in firs grade, you gotta go to da cafeteria fo get your lunch tray but you no can stay dere eat. You gotta carry um back to da classroom fo eat so Mrs. Perry can watch us, make sure we eat all our vegetables and we no can see da six graders wasting food. Me and Bennett always try walk waay behind Mrs. Perry so dat we can ditch da vegetables in da bushes before we reach da room. Couple times we went hide um in da milk carton but Mrs. Perry went check and she made us pour out all da peas and eat um. I almost went chrow up when I had to eat peas mix up wit milk. Once, we seen her make Shirley eat every lima bean even if she was crying “I no like, I no like” and she was crying so hard and eating lima beans dat she went chrow up all ovah da table. Yeah, you know. Ho, aftah dat, she nevah have to eat anything she no like!

One time when had beets, Bennett went put um in his pants pocket and take um home. Only ting his mahdah went call up Mrs. Perry and ask her how come Bennett went come home wit beets in his pocket. He fogot to ditch um, da stupidhead. One time Mrs. Perry went call my house fo talk

to my fahdah. Da only time da teacha call up your house is if you went do someting bad, so I was scared, man.

My fahdah said dat Mrs. Perry said dat I had to practice skipping so I no jam up da May Pole Dance.

“Hard you know,” I told him. “She try teach us da dance only one way and I no can skip da way she teach us.”

“But you gotta try.”

I no like do da stupid dance. She tink I stupid like Alfred cause we both write left hand. She like me write like everybody else. Everytime she say raise your right hand, me and Alfred we raise our hand and she laugh and tell us, “Your uddah right.” So quick we gotta change cause one time, she went tell everybody dat your right hand was your writing hand. Wasn’t. She lie.

Daddy, he could write good wit his right hand. I wanted to write scrip like him. When he sign his name on papers la dat, he gotta get all ready: unscrew da fountain pen, wipe da tip wit Kleenex, and get out da blotter. Den he make his hand go in little circles. Circle, circle, circle. Den he sign real quick and blow and blot and come out perfeck. Sharp, his writing. I wish I could write scrip like him. He told me his teacha used to whack his hand wit da ruler if you use your left hand, das how he learned how fo write right hand but he still dribble da basketball and shoot left hand. He told me, “Lucky Mrs. Perry no whack your hand.” I nevah feel lucky. Hard, you know. You try skip right hand way if you left hand.

But bumbye Mrs. Perry wanted to be my friend cause one time had one painting contest. Dey went bring one lamb, you know, one real one, like Mary-had-a-little-lamb-little-lamb-little-lamb, and da whole firs grade had to go in da yard wit their easels and paint da lamb. And one nice lady from da Art Academy went pick mine as da best of da whole firs grade. Yeah. Den Mrs. Perry wanted to be my friend cause j’like was because of her dat my painting was da best. But wasn’t. Most times she no like da way I paint. She said everyting had to be correck: yellow sun, green tree wit red apples, white clouds, blue sky, green grass and flying birds dat look like one V.

I jes went paint da stupid lamb. Must be cause I went make da clouds and da lamb and da grass all look da same, all curly and fuzzy and funnykine colors, cause Bungy went take da good colors and all I had left was purple, black, brown, and orange. Mines was mostly circles, cause I was tinkin about da fluffy wool and clouds and Daddy

writing scrip. So I went write scrip wit my brush. Circle, circle, circle. Even Alfred told me at recess time, “Nice, your painting.”

Alfred no like do art. Everyting he paint or he draw look da same, like one stick man. And aftah he pau, he no like um so he paint anykine colors all ovah his pickcha so end up all brown and ugly and when he do schoolwork he use so much eraser he always make puka in da paper. No good lend him your eraser cause going come back all used up. Anyway, aftah da lady went pick my painting and put um up by da office fo little while, plenny guys was my friend. Even Throw Up Shirley nevah call me “Uku Boy” or “Alfred’s Bruddah” too much.

Naptime, Shirley and Alfred and Kyle could sleep on top da desks cause dey had asthma and everybody else had to sleep on da floor. No fair. Was cold, da floor. And everytime, aftah naptime pau, Alfred still stay snoring on top da desks except Mrs. Perry, she wake um up. Alfred he even sleep when we jes gotta put our heads down on da desks cause we too noisy or we gotta settle down aftah recess. I hate when Alfred do dat cause sometimes he come ovah to my side of da desk and he drool on top my work. Even if you draw one line on da desk wit your eraser and tell, “No can cross da line,” he always stay on my side. Uji. And jes because I sit next to him, Throw Up Shirley say I going catch Alfred’s uji germs. Not. Not going, yeah?

3. Fort Grade

Fat Frances Obata such a crybaby. When we get P.E. and gotta choose up fo kickball, her and Alfred always da last to get picked, so she cry. When Bungy tease her, she cry. When Throw Up Shirley fold one origami fortune teller out of one piece of paper and tell her fortune, “You going get married to Alfred,” she cry. Even if she only get one wrong in math, she cry. Sometimes I little bit sorry fo her cause she always stay by herself recess time cause if you like go on da jungle gym, da bull of da jungle gym, usually Bungy, make up one password like, “Fat Frances eat buta kaukau.” And if you no say dat Frances eat pig slop, she still yet cry cause she feel sorry dat dey nevah let you on da jungle gym.

I hate it though when she bring one orchid fo Miss Von, our fort grade teacha. One cattedeya wit foil wrapped around da stem, big and purple purple, almost black. No spots, no bugs. Perfeck. One real big one dat da teacha put in her hair or pin um on her dress or put um in her vase on her desk.

And Fat Frances everytime massage Miss Von's back cause she da biggest girl in da class and probably mo strong den even Bungy, so Miss Von go ask her fo lomi-lomi her back. Wasn't fair man, cause Miss Von only like you if you bring her flowahs. We no mo nutting in our yard dat I could bring fo da teacha. Not unless you count da Christmas berries dat hang ovah da fence from da Witch Lady's tree next door. Dat I can get easy. But da teacha only like dat at Christmas time and den you gotta pick real plenny and dry um up and spray paint um gold or silvah. Supposed to look like holly but I donno what holly supposed to look like. Look fake when you spray paint um though. Anyways das not like bringing one giant orchid everytime.

Even Bungy always bring someting from his aquarium fo show and tell. One time, he went bring fighting fish in one long skinny aquarium divided up into sections wit pieces of plastic in between so dat da fish stay in their own part until he lift up one section and da two fish fight. Dey chase each uddah and bite each uddah's tail until you get da net and scoop one out or until one die. Bungy went put one mirror up to da glass, and da fish tink das one nuddah fish so he fight wit himself, da stupidhead. Da fish jes charge um. Fat Frances started fo cry fo da fish and Miss Von told Bungy he couldn't bring fighting fish anymore. So he started bringing crayfish. One time I went wit him to da river fo catch crayfishes so dat I could bring someting fo show at show and tell but he only made me do stuff like move da rocks and splash da water and chase um to him. Suckah. He nevah gimme any. I had to bring home my mayonnaise bottle empty. The only ting I could catch was grasshoppers, but anybody can catch grasshoppers, so das nutting dat. Sheesh, I couldn't even bring grasshoppers if I wanted to cause grasshoppers no last too long and dey only shet in da bottle. Even Bennett could tell about how his fahdah went talk on da ham radio to somebody in Australia and da teacha went show us where dat was on da map.

What I going tell? Dat my fahdah went sell six refrigerators in one day? Dat my mahdah and me went pinch da tail off one whole bag of bean sprouts?

One time Alfred went bring one small peanut butter bottle to school and leave um in his desk and everytime he open um up and smell um and close um back real quick, secret kine. I went look at um but only had couple dead leaves inside. Nevah have insects or one cocoon so everybody tawt stupid Alfred went bring one bottle wit dead leaves inside.

When was his turn he told us he went wit his uncle up St. Louis Heights and went smell da eucalyptus trees and he brought some leaves fo us fo smell. And he went write "eucalyptus" on da board and told us dat koala bears, he went write "marsupials," eat eucalyptus leaves in Australia. We knew where dat was. Everybody went tell, "Whoa, Alfred," when he was pau.

Andrew went tell, "Eh Alfred, I nevah know you was smart."

Den Bungy went tell real loud, "Whoa, Alfred, we tawt you went save yo futs inside dere," and everybody went laugh and started calling Alfred "Fut-boy" until Miss Von had to shush da class wit da yardstick, wha-pak! She went bus um on her desk.

Aftah dat, I nevah see Alfred open up his bottle anymore.

4. Fit Grade

Da worse was Miss Greenwood, da principio. Nobody like get reported to da office cause fo sure Miss Greenwood going whack your okole wit da rubbah hose. She had um hanging up behind her desk. One time I had to deliver one note fo da teacha, Mrs. Tenn, Andrew call her Mrs. Ten, Eleven, Twelve. Funny guy. I had to wait inside Miss Greenwood's office and all I could look at was da black rubbah hose, looking mean and stiff, j'like Miss Greenwood. She was tall and skinny and always wear one white blouse and black skirt tight around her okole. I wondah if her okole evah got da rubbah hose. Doubt it. Sometimes right aftah recess when we all stay lined up by da classroom door, ready fo go back into da room, we can hear somebody crying in her office. Big six grade kids stay crying and screaming, "Huh, huh, huh, ow-wee!" Some start crying even befo dey get to da office, dey know dey going get it. Dey got nabbed fo fighting or talking sassy or fo trying to scoop somebody's balls recess time. I nevah had da rubbah hose but Bungy went get um plenny times and Andrew almost as much as Bungy. Dey said you gotta sit on da chair while Miss Greenwood scold you and den she write someting down and when she stand up and close da door, dat means you gonna get it. You gotta bend ovah and hold da stool, and she make sure you no nutting in your back pockets and she swing da hose down first, den she whack you. Whoosh, pack! Whoosh, pack! Whoosh, pack! When Bungy go, he no cry anymore, he so used-to to it, I tink. He told me dat nowadays he fake

cry cause if you no cry, Miss Greenwood whack you mo hard. So even if sound like he crying, he told me he only faking.

One time he went tell Alfred dat Louise like him and wanted to show him what color her panties was. Louise, if she like you, she count off her crinolines fo you and den she show you her panties last. But no ways she was going count her crinolines fo Alfred. Da girls all hated Louise cause she had bra awready in da fit grade so dey went dare Alfred fo lift up her dress and count her crinolines and see what color her panties was cause Louise like him. And all da boys went tell him, “Yeah, Alfred. She like you.”

Dat time he got sent to da office right before recess and got real plenty whacks and we could hear him all da way down by da basketball court crying, “No tell my mah-huh-daaah! Huh, huh, huh. No tell my mah-huh-daaah!”

When Alfred came back to da class, nobody wanted to look at him cause j’like he took da lickings fo us, cause we went dare him. He jes went put his head down and nevah look at nobody, especially Louise.

From Lum, D. (1997). Local Genealogy: “What School You Went?” Stories from a Pidgin Culture. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Hawai’i at Mānoa.

No Pass Back

I hate Alfred. He so stupid. Everytime he catch it from everybody and jes because him and me get da same last name, da guys all tell dat he my bruddah. But he not. He get da same last name as me but he stupid and he kinda fat and when he breathe he make noise wit his nose and his mout. J’like one horse. J’like he always stay huffing and puffing. J’like he no mo nuff air.

Nobody like be Alfred’s friend. Nobody like be his partnah. Nobody like even talk to him, except me. I gotta, cause I sit next to him. I gotta sit next to him because da teacha make us sit alphabetacal.

I everytime gotta give Alfred one false crack because somebody go play Pass On, No Pass Back. Dey punch you in da arm and den tell, “Pass on, no pass back.” So you cannot crack um back, you gotta pass um on. I tink Benjamen Funasaki da one dat always start um. Den it go down da line: to da G’s, and den da H’s, and da I’s, no mo J’s, and den to da K’s. Get plenny K’s: Kim, Kimura, Kodama, Kodani, and den come da L’s. Get plenny of dem too: Lau, Lee, Loo, Look, and den Lum. I can tell get one false crack coming when I

hear somebody tell, “Ow!” and den you hear, “Pass on, no pass back.” And when get to me, everybody stay waiting. So I gotta punch Alfred and tell, “Pass on, no pass back.”

Da ting is dat Alfred no pass um on. He jes look at me and den he put his head down and den he cry. He no punch back or nutting. He no pass um on.

One time I went try tell him dat he gotta pass um on. Ass how you play da game. But he no like. He say he no like punch nobody.

Alfred like hang around by me even though I no like hang around him. But sometimes I gotta. When Benjamen and John play basketball and dey choose up sides, always get me and Alfred left over. We da substatutes. We gotta jes watch from da side wit da small kinnigahden kids. Or when Benjamen and John choose up, one side gotta take us two guys fo one good guy. Us two fo one. Den me and Alfred, we gotta watch da behind part . . . waay behind.

One time at recess, Benjamen and John went make like dey had ugi germs and dey went wipe um on Alfred and den push him inside da girls bathroom.

“Ugi germs,” dey went yell. “Pass on, no pass back!” And all da girls went tink dat Alfred was going try get dem so dey went run outside screaming, “Ugi Alfred going touch you!” But he only wanted to get back outside. Da Campus Patrol went nab him and den report him fo going inside da girls bathroom. Alfred nevah say was Benjamen and John dat wen push him inside. He had to pull weeds recess time for one whole week fo breaking da rules. But was j’like he no care. He jes went by where da janatah told him fo go and he went pull weeds and catch beetle bugs in da dirt.

Pretty soon, all da kinnigahden kids went come by him fo watch his beetle bugs. He went make one house fo da bugs in da dirt. Had one yard wit one rock fence and one old milk carton wit water fo da swimming pool.

When da janatah wasn’t looking, Alfred went give da kids horsey back rides, too. Da small kids grab anykine fo hold on: his hair, his ear, his nose, his eyeglasses. But Alfred no mind. He jes laugh and go until da tetherball pole and come back.

Pretty soon da kids was lining up fo ride Alfred every recess dat week. Dey nevah like watch basketball no mo. Dey jes went wait their turn in line and watch da beetle bugs. Benjamen went come by Alfred’s bug place fo look what was happening. One beetle bug was coming by him and he went try step on um but da small kids all went push

him away, even though dey was scared of da beetle bug too. Benjamen went tell one small kid, “Try come, try come.” And da kid went come and Benjamen went punch um and tell, “Pass on, no pass back,” and den run away.

All da kids started fo do dat, Pass On, No Pass Back, and everytime got stuck at Throw-up Shirley. Throw-up Shirley, she always throwing up. And she wasn't too good at playing Pass On, No Pass Back so dat everybody knew already dat when she came by you, she had to pass one punch. So pretty soon everybody jes run away from her she little mo cry until Alfred went tell, “No do dat,” and he gave her one ride two times around da tetherball pole.

Next time, Alfred was absent so one kinnigahden kid started fo boddah me fo give him one horsey back ride. “Nah, nah,” I went tell um, “I stay substitute fo basketball.” Den Benjamen went come by me and ask me if I like play basketball fo his side. Da small kids was scared of him. Dey thought he was going give dem one mo punch.

“Nah, I no like play,” I told Benjamen, “I gotta give this kid one ride.” Funny, I nevah feel like playing basketball dat time. I dunno why. Den I went hapai da kid, carry um, you know, and we went around da tetherball pole and den came back. J'like how Alfred do um. By da time I came back, had one line.

Da next day, was all bus up, Alfred's bug place. Da kinnigahden kids went cry but Alfred went make one grave and had j'like one funeral and all da small kids went put flowers and leaves on top and Alfred went make one cross out of sticks. Maybe I should have told him I seen Benjamen by his bug place las time. Maybe Alfred already went know. I dunno.

Alfred no need pull weeds anymore but he still go by his bug place every recess time. Da small kids tell, “Yea!” when he come. I wish he wouldn't do dat. Now I da junkest guy. I da only substature and cause dey no can choose up with him and me for one good guy – two fo one – Benjamen and John no like me play wit dem. Well den, I no like play Pass On, No Pass Back either. Nowadays I no hit Alfred when da ting come around da G's, da H's, da I's, da K's and L's. And Susan, she sit right before me, most times she no pass da punch on to me either. Even when Bennett punch her hard. Bennett punch everybody da same, boy or girl, he blass um. But once, I seen him and he nevah punch Susan when was Pass On, No Pass Back.

Hey, j'like we passing um back, yeah?

From Lum, D. (1990). Pass On, No Pass Back. Honolulu: Bamboo Ridge Press, 11–15.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ I am using the common term “Pidgin” to mean Hawai'i Creole in this paper. It is capitalized to emphasize its distinction as a language (M. Forman, personal communication, 1996). I have also chosen to italicize only foreign words in this paper. Pidgin and Hawaiian words, being the native languages of the islands, are not italicized.
- ² L. Farias, (personal communication, February 8, 1997).
- ³ L. Kubo in reference to Okamura's (1994) definition of local which suggests that local identity is primarily defined by what it opposes, e.g., outsiders (personal communication, January 1997).
- ⁴ The dual personality “implies that the individual is split between two polar opposites: he or she is conflicted between East and West and has no center” (TuSmith,1994, p.41).

- ⁵ Critique by Frank Chin of my work according to note 2 in Morales (1998). Morales attributes the quote to Fujikane (1994) but I could find no reference in Fujikane to the Chin quote. Nonetheless, Sumida's account of Chin's remarks is essentially the same (1991, p. 101-102).
- ⁶ M. Forman (personal communication, February 7, 1997).
- ⁷ Remarks by drama graduate student who served as a teaching assistant in a University of Hawai'i Pidgin playwriting course during the Fall 1976 semester.
- ⁸ The dichotomies between Pidgin speakers and standard English speakers, however, cannot be simply characterized as non-haole versus haole or non-English Standard versus English Standard schools. A haole graduate of the class of 1951 at Roosevelt High School, an English Standard school, reportedly felt more at home with the local kids from Papakolea (a Hawaiian home-stead community) than with his standard English speaking classmates. Perhaps because of this relationship, he reportedly never got into any fights with locals, and more often got into fights with other haoles (primarily military dependents and recent arrivals). Neither did he experience or know of the legendary “kill haole” days where apparently local toughs would seek out haoles at English Standard schools and beat them for no apparent reason. He did report getting reprimanded by his father when he asked at the dinner table, “Try pass da rice” (Rogers, 1996). Clearly in this case, within the English Standard school community, Pidgin and local culture had made inroads. One cannot easily generalize that haole English Standard school students felt superior to local students or did not have an affiliation to local culture. Nor did all local students necessarily have racist attitudes toward English Standard school students.
- ⁹ See Romaine (1993) who sees written Pidgin as a literary dialect rather than a literary language but one that is “coming of age.” While she attributes this primarily to the lack of a standard orthography for the language, her views reflect an elevation of the novel form and third person narrative voice as a measure of literary development.
- ¹⁰ See Sumida (1991) on A. Grove Day's Books about Hawai'i: fifty basic authors (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1977) and A Hawai'i Reader (Honolulu: Mutual Publishing Co., 1984), also Lum (1990) regarding what appeared to be a deliberate denial of a large body of local literature by compilers of anthologies.
- ¹¹ Pidgin term combining Hawaiian “ma-ke” and English “die, dead” suggesting that something is really dead.