

E

Names and Faces	E2
TV Tonight	E6
Entertainment	E6-8

FOCUS/people

The Honolulu Advertiser
Thursday, September 1, 1983



**molokai says
goodbye
to pine**

Protected from the angry pine spikes by a green cap, goggles, gloves, boots and heavy denim, Remy Patacsil spends her last day in the fields. Her smile at pau hana time masks the uncertainty felt by Remy and her fellow workers as operations gear down at Del Monte's Molokai Plantation.

Advertiser photos
by David Yamada



Last day to pick
pine — 'It's sad.'

By Beverly Creamer
Advertiser Staff Writer

KUALAPUU VILLAGE, Molokai — At 5:30 this morning 4-foot-11 Remedios "Remy" Patacsil greased her lips with Vaseline and rubbed her arms with Ben-Gay for the last time. She's officially "laid off" this morning with 10 other seasonal workers at Del Monte's Molokai Plantation.

The Vaseline's for the sun; the Ben-Gay's for the persistent pains in her arms from bending and picking pineapple all day long.

Today is the company's last "official" day of operation at the Molokai plantation, even though pickers got the word yesterday morning as they boarded buses to take them into the fields that regulars and non-regulars should report Tuesday. They'll be picking ripe fruit all next week, but will work a week at a time, depending on the nation's demand for fresh pineapple. But Remy and the other seasonals — the workers with the least seniority — are pau after today.

A couple of weeks down the road, although no one knows exactly when, only 60 Del Monte employees will remain at the Molokai operation, a skeleton crew to pick fresh fruit as it's needed to supplement Oahu production. Picking could last through next year, but no one knows that for sure, either.

As 42-year-old Remy Patacsil stands outside her neat plantation cottage in her work clothes, the family roosters crow in the distance and the early morning sun spreads pink across the sky. An hour earlier her father was up to collect the eggs and feed the chickens and ducks before he, too, joined her in the fields.

"It's sad," she said yesterday, echoing a sentiment held by almost everyone whose life has been wedded to this plantation.

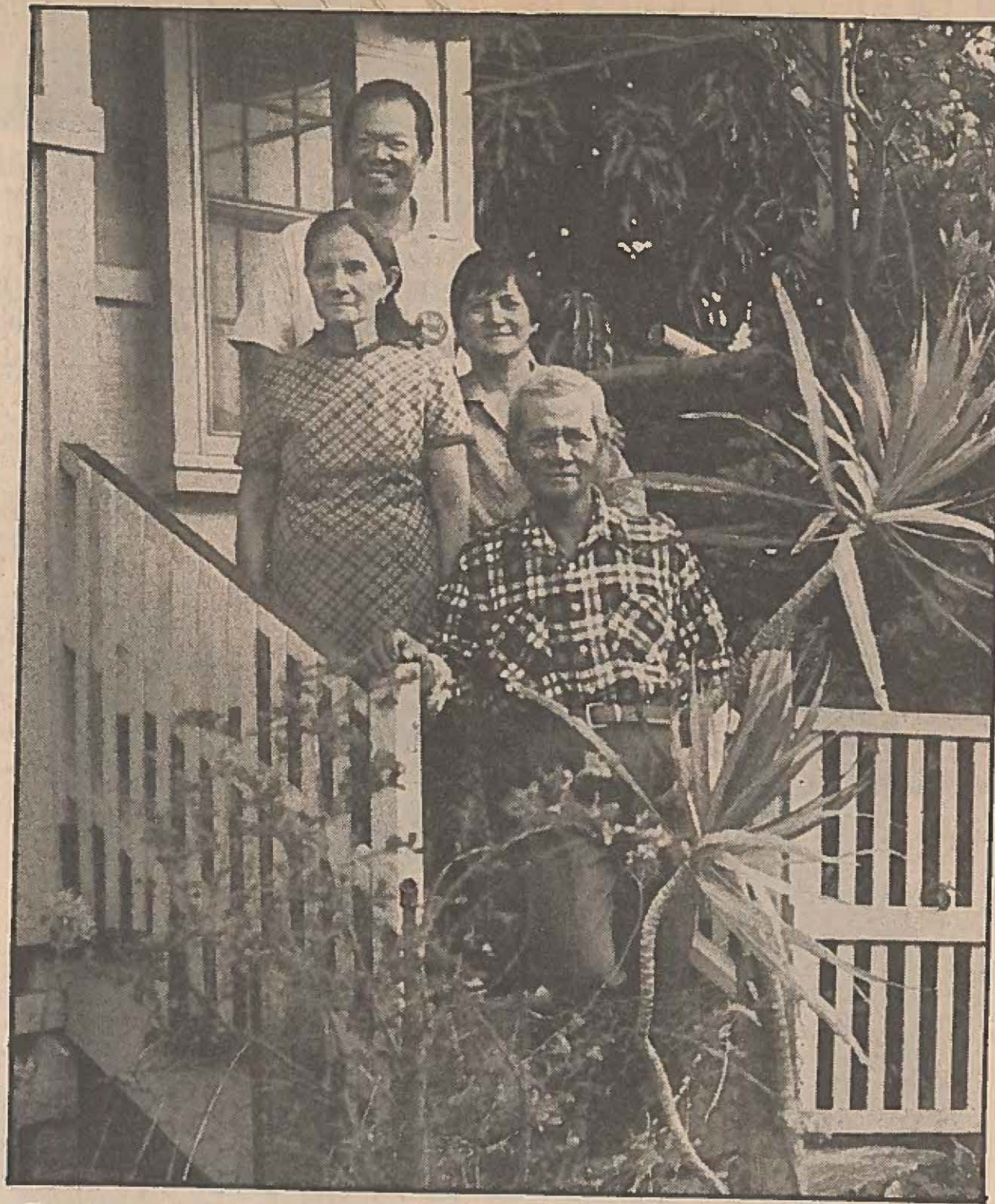
"Everybody said they don't know what they'll do. They told me 'Good for you Remy, after pineapple you go substitute (teach). But what about us? We sit at home.' They say they are worried because they are old already and they won't be hired by another company. How can they be hired? They don't have driver's license. In cornfields, if you apply there, you have to have driver's license. Sometimes they car pool in here but you have to pay \$2 a day."

"All the Filipinos say, 'If they'll give us a job, even minimum wage, we'll accept. But if there's no job, what shall we do?'"

Patacsil's red kerchief, faded to pink from so many washings, is tied carefully around her head with her short, pretty hair tucked under it. Safety pins hold a pair of detached denim jacket sleeves to the shoulders of her cotton work shirt. Thick socks protect her feet and ankles. By the time she gets into the fields she'll add a green cap, goggles, gloves and boots to this outfit.

She slings her denim lunch bag over her shoulder and heads up the lane and across the street to Kualapuu Village's staging yard, the Del Monte "headquarters." It's here that workers have gathered each morning in their chaotically colored field garb for morning truck pickup. Some of the women smoke blunt Filipino cigars called *tocanis*. All wear kerchiefs, store-bought or maybe torn from old sheets.

At the end of the day the trucks roll back in and the acrid burn of red field dust mixes with the sweet smell of pineapple as workers scatter back to their homes.



Erasmus Patacsil with his wife Remy and her parents, Alejandra and Jose Naoe: "I had a good job with Del Monte," he says. "But now we gotta exist the way we gotta exist."

The emotional jolt to this community was felt eight months ago when Del Monte announced the closing of its Iwilei cannery in Honolulu and hence its operations on Molokai. Today the workers seem resigned to it, although many have adopted a wait-and-see attitude, hoping other companies will move into the breach.

The Patacsils say since the shut-down announcement they've sensed depression among the workers and seen a slight increase in petty crime. (They lost four pigeons and a tankful of gasoline, for instance.)

"I'm a little bit depressed," admits Remy's

husband, Erasmus, 43, even though he has experience in a wide number of plantation jobs and hopes for a job in the state civil service system.

"Because usually I've got a stable income and the possibility of an increase again and with that maybe we can improve our way of life. But now we gotta exist the way we gotta exist."

The Patacsils both were college educated in the Philippines and have become leaders in this community in the 12 years they've been here. They've also become typical residents. He is active with the United Filipino Council, the Cub Scouts, and holds a position in his ILWU local.

She has been working off and on in the fields ever since the family came to Molokai from the Philippines in 1971. Erasmus had convinced them to come to America because he wanted to follow his father's footsteps. The elder Patacsil was a Harvard scholar before he returned to his homeland in 1938 to teach college Spanish.

Erasmus, too, started in the fields at Del Monte, but ambitiously worked his way up to storeroom clerk, machine operator and finally assistant research worker. He's now one of those responsible for adding pesticides to the drip irrigation system. Since the discontinuance of heptachlor, EDB and DBCP in Hawaii pine fields (Erasmus administered all three) he's been testing a new pesticide — nemecur bydate lannete.

Even with the Molokai plantation closing, Erasmus has continued his tests. The results will be applied to other plantations, he says.

Neither Erasmus nor Remy's father knows when his last day of work will come. They may be two of the 60 kept on. They may not. The company is in the process of deciding who stays and who goes. After interviewing all the employees, it may still depend, in some cases, on who is willing to do field work.

For the time being many of the workers are waiting — waiting to see if they'll be kept on, or if new jobs will suddenly materialize.

Some, like the Patacsils, started planning for the inevitable months ago. Erasmus has taken and passed a civil service exam and hopes to get a state position as an agricultural research technician. And Remy expects to get a contract to substitute teach in schools all over the island, something she's been doing sporadically.

Like most of the other families in the village, the Patacsils are economizing wherever possible.

"We group ourselves into 10 families, buy one cow worth maybe \$500, and divide it up," says Erasmus.

"We do that with pork, too," says his wife. Because of a space squeeze, fruit and vegetables in various stages of ripeness turn up in the oddest places in their house.

Under the bathroom sink a box of bananas is ripening fast. On the dirty clothes hamper there's a bamboo tray of ripening tomatoes and a basket of sweet potatoes. Patacsil says their sweetness develops best if they're picked and left for a week.

This abundance of produce comes from their front-yard garden and the quarter-acre plot the company provided most workers as a supplement in these lean times. They've also got a freezer full of fish Erasmus has netted and a couple dozen backyard ducks and chickens that produce half a dozen eggs a day.

They've cut their electricity bill almost in half by turning off their water heater at night and cooking on a small, two-burner gas stove they installed on top of the electric stove. Remy says it's humbug to use because of its size, but Erasmus — the family cook — juggles his pots and pans expertly.

"Plenty guys cook outside nowadays," says Remy. "Not like before when everybody worked Del Monte every day." They cut old water heaters in half and turn them into barbecues. "When not enough jobs you have to cut down."

There are four Patacsil children, with the

See Last day on Page E-3

Her last day to pick pine: 'It's sad'

from page E-1

youngest two still at home. Numer is 12, his younger brother Erasmus Jr., 9, and the Del Monte closing has even entered their consciousness.

Obediently they flick off light switches when they leave a room. Only when there's company is the overhead light left burning in the "parlor" — the tiny living room that's crammed with everything from family pictures and various trophies won by the children to assorted knick-knacks.

When the closure was announced late last year the children asked their father if it meant they were going to move.

Erasmus shakes his head. Like the others in this Del Monte village, the Patacsils don't want to leave, and the county and Molokai Ranch, the landowner, are now trying to work out a way to make that possible.

Even so, some families have already moved out, heading to Maui, Lanai, the Big



**beverly
creamer**

staff writer

piners looking for work.

"The people said 'What should we do?' They went to Maui and the rent is too expensive," says Remy. "Even my husband go. On Maui \$400 a month, only two bedrooms. So I told him never mind."

That's one of the reasons workers have been loath to leave this little plantation town. Erasmus once turned down an offer of hotel management training at the Sheraton Molokai Hotel. They told him if they trained him he'd have to work there for sure.

"But I had a good job with Del Monte," he says. "You've got your free water, your

low rent, someone to mow your yard, pick up your rubbish." He grins and shrugs. His face says he would have been a fool to leave Kualapuu.

Both daughters are on the Mainland, one in college, one in high school staying with a relative in Tennessee. The eldest, Jocelyn, begins pre-med at Loyola University in Chicago this fall on \$5,000 worth of scholarships.

But there are further costs and she's taken a nighttime job to help pay them.

"She told me she pitied me working pineapple field," says Remy. "The first time she worked pineapple field she cried when she came home. 'Mom, it's too hard to make money. It's hot. You cannot even eat your lunch.' She said she will finish her education and then help me send the boys to college."

"She told me 'Mommy, I know your hardship.' She told me, 'Mommy, I study hard.'"