

Oral History of Mandy Blake Bowers

Today is December 1, 2021 and it is 10:15 in the morning. We are located at 3134 Huelani Place in the back of Manoa Valley on a rainy day. What could be more appropriate? My name is (HS) Harry Spiegelberg and I am on the Board of Directors of Malama Manoa and my kuleana is to prepare oral histories of prominent and interesting people who live in the valley. We are here today to record the oral history of (MB) Mandy Blake Bowers. So, with that we will get going on our journey.

(HS) The first question I always lead off with is when did your family first arrive in Hawaii, where did they come from and where did they first live in the islands?

(MB) Wow, that is quite a start! My parents came to Hawaii in 1928 My mother had been living in Paris, France and my father was born and raised in Aberdeen, Scotland. He flew a Sopwith Camel Plane in World War I. He was shot down in France, so that is when he met my mother. He came out to Hawaii because a friend was working in Honolulu and told him that it was a wonderful place. By that time my mother Dorothy had met him and she followed him out here. They were married here at Central Union Church on Beretania Street. They lived on Wylie Street in Nuuanu for a number of years and then bought a place near Jack Lane on Kaeloa Lane just a few blocks mauka of Wylie Street. This is where I was raised. I was born just before they moved. I grew up in Nuuanu and it was when my husband Miki was living in both Nuuanu and Kaneohe. He was a teacher in mathematics at Punahou. When this Manoa property became available for purchase it certainly made sense for us to buy it, so he could just drive down the hill to Punahou to teach. We have been here for over sixty years. I often feel that I am very fortunate to be where I am. We kept the Nuuanu property because we treasure it also.

(HS) What type of work did your father do and for whom?

(MB) He worked for C. Brewer & Company as an accountant and that took him to some of the outside islands to do their accounting. It was my good fortune and that of my mother, because he would rent a house for summer vacations. My mother and I would get on the old Humuula steam ship and sail to Kawaihae. I still remember driving up the hill from Kawaihae to Waimea. We also saw them driving the cattle down for shipping. We would stay on the Big Island for the summer and then come back to Honolulu on an interisland ship. This of course was before they had an airfield at Kamuela. My dad worked for C. Brewer for many years. My mother was very fortunate not to have to take a job so she was a homemaker. She did, however, teach French at the Nuuanu YMCA. My grandfather worked at the Library of Congress and was their representative in Paris, France. This is why my mother grew up there.

(HS) I think this is a superfluous question, and does not fit your family situation, but did your family have any domestic help?

(MB) Yes, we did. There was a Japanese woman who lived in the Liliha area who would do our laundry and we had a gentleman come and cut the grass on our large piece of property. Fred Higuchi who lived in Puunui was a big help to my family and it was a nice exchange because he got to use our yard for growing whatever he chose to do. He also drove my mother to and from Maluhia Hospital where she was an occupational therapist for many years and he also did some of the yard work at our Nuuanu property.

(HS) Getting more into your family, can you tell me first about your siblings?

(MB) I was an only child and I had a cousin who was an only child whose name was Nancy Corbett. Nancy's mother was my mother's younger sister. She was married to Judge Gerald R. Corbett. I don't remember when they moved to Hawaii from Washington, D.C.

(HS) Do you recall what kind of car your family first owned?

(MB) I don't remember if it was our first car, but I do remember a car that had a rumble seat and that was great fun to sit in the rumble seat particularly when we would go over the Pali because at that time there were no tunnels.

(HS) Can you present a picture of your early childhood, most likely in Nuuanu?

(MB) I was very fortunate as we had a large piece of property and it was terraced. It had an Awwai that ran along the top. Then in the middle area my dad and the neighbors set up a volleyball court which was great fun. On the lower level is where our vegetable garden was. On one side of the Awwai my dad had installed some piping that went underground and we had two concrete pools of water. Eventually it ran into Nuuanu Stream that ran along the bottom of our property. And of course, I can't forget to tell of the two wonderful Mango trees. One was a marvelous common Mango and the other was a really junk Mango tree. Most of those mangos had to be picked up and thrown away. The neighbors used to play volleyball with us. My mother used to be a prompter at the Honolulu Community Theater, now known as Diamond Head Theater. During the war, World War II, she would be a hostess when some of the troops would come up to our Nuuanu property to play volleyball. Also, members of the Helepolelai family would join us. Another family that lived near us were Ernest and Lois Gray and he was a "bigwig" and was one of those who set up Kaneohe Marine Air Base. His son Chuck has lived on Maui for many years and he was an only child as was I. We had great fun chasing around. Our neighbors on the mauka side or the Nuuanu Avenue side were some Hawaiian lei sellers and most of their property was Plumeria trees. I can remember seeing them sitting on their lanai and stringing lei. Later she would go down and sell them at dockside.

(HS) The lei sellers would call out two for a dollar, three for a dollar and so on.

(MB) I am recalling looking out of our dining room window that looked mauka and on up to what is the Oahu Country Club we would see a field of Vanda Orchids because that is where Robert and Milton Warne grew Vanda Orchids. Across Jack Lane was Milton's property and he grew the ones known as Miltonia. These were specialized orchids and I remember a yardman nurturing these. Farther up Jack Lane was the Nahale family. Also on Jack Lane was the house in the garden and it was a large home, but also a home that people could rent to have parties. During the war they would often have parties for military people. And makai from that were small "truck gardens" and I would go down there at my mother's request to buy vegetables. You can't get much fresher than that! And I still remember the old Japanese couples that would carry the water from a nearby well to water the garden. And I would also go down through the gardens because my grandparents and cousin lived on the corner of Wyllie Street and Burbank Street. I would walk down through the gardens to visit family. My dad appreciated art and he became acquainted with a number of the prominent artists in Hawaii and Madge Tennent was one of them. We are fortunate to have several of her paintings. Isami Doi was another one that he knew and we have some of his work also. And then of course there is the Tennent Gallery that used to be on

Punchbowl and now is in Waimea on the Big Island. It had been donated to the Episcopal School known as Hawaii Preparatory Academy. So, I had a very wonderful childhood and was so very fortunate and still am.

(HS) When you were growing up what special holiday food dishes did you have and what were your favorites?

(MB) I guess I have always liked everything.

(HS) Did you grow up with local foods?

(MB) No, we primarily ate American food because my mother having grown up in Paris was not inclined to put the rice pot on. But I have always liked most kinds of foods. When the time came when I was working, my mother had a care giver during the day, but I don't remember any particular foods that were prepared for her that I would eat also. During the holidays we had tarts with grog as we called it. We would do Christmas readings and what was special for me was when my grandmother did it first. Then my mother would do some reading, but it was always on Wyllie Street at the home of the Corbett's on Puiwa Lane.

(HS) Earlier you mentioned that your family had a vegetable garden. During the war did they have what was called a "victory garden" or did you always just have the garden in your yard?

(MB) We always had the vegetable garden and fortunately we also had bananas and still to this day there are still bananas growing in that yard. I don't think we ever considered it a victory garden.

(HS) Can you go back in your memory and think of a story or two growing up there and think of what happened on December 7th, 1941 and during the war years?

(MB) For some reason I clearly remember, because I used to go everywhere on the bus, going down the front steps to head out to catch the bus and my mother called out to me that she had heard on the radio that Pearl Harbor had been bombed and attacked by the Japanese. So that ended my going to church. She made what we called black out curtains. The first night or so she took denim and draped it over lights in the house and then subsequently made some curtains to go over the windows in each of our bedrooms. I could read in bed. When I graduated from Hanahauoli School which was in May or June of 1941, my mom, dad and I took a ship and sailed to Yokohama and then did all of the tourist things in Japan and in China. I remember being in Beijing and when we came back to Japan, I remember seeing black out curtains in all of the hotel windows. But when we embarked onto the ship to come back to Honolulu, and by this time it was around August, my mother was sitting on her bunk bed knitting. The Japanese police were watching her doing her knitting and wanted to know what the code was. She had a book with her that had a "code" in it. The "code" was knit two, pearl three and they made her do this with her knitting needles.

(HS) You said that you started at Hanahauoli in the first grade?

(MB) I don't remember, but I do recall that I went to Lincoln School before that and it was located at the old Linekona Building that is across from Thomas Square on Beretania Street near the Academy of Arts. One of my classmates Dutchy Schuman thought it was great fun to go down the fire escape that was on the outside of the building. This was a fun activity. I think I went to Lincoln School first and second grade and then went on to Hanahauoli.

(HS) So Hanahauoli ended in sixth grade and then you went onto Punahou?

(MB) No, I then went to Stevenson that was on the slopes of Punchbowl. Right nearby there was a park and we used to go there as our playground. We would walk over to the park and play a game that I don't know if it is still played today. It was called Sham Battle. One team was lined up and the other team would throw a ball at them and try to hit them.

(HS) So you started Punahou in ninth grade?

(MB) No, I started in eighth grade.

(HS) So you are the Punahou class of 1947? What year was Miki?

(MB) He was the class of 1945. He had a steady girlfriend. We didn't get together until later and it was music that brought us together.

(HS) You have been your class correspondent for how many years?

(MB) A long time and I still have notes due.

(HS) Did you go onto any education after Punahou?

(MB) Yes, I did. I went on and graduated from Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts in 1951. That is where my mother had gone to college. I then came back to Honolulu and worked in the Punahou Intermediate Library for a while. I was encouraged to go on and get a Librarian degree and somewhere along the way I got a Master's Degree in Social Work from UH and worked at Palama Settlement for at least a year. Then I got my Library Tech degree from UH. I studied at the Library Branch out in Pearl City. I still remember driving out there to go to class.

(HS) Now we come to the big one. When did you and Miki meet and when did you get married?

(MB) We met regarding music. I had a Punahou classmate Byron Maurlott. He and Miki used to play music together when they were both at University of Hawaii. I don't remember at what point, but I did not drive at that time, but I was encouraged to join them. Miki had a girlfriend that he knew at Punahou. They went on to college on the mainland and subsequently broke up.

(HS) That was your lucky day.

(MB) Yes, indeed it was my lucky day.

(HS) So you and Miki got married. In what year did you marry?

(MB) I think it was June of 1952 when we were married at Central Union Church on Beretania Street.

(HS) Other than raising six wonderful children, what would you say is one of your greatest accomplishments?

(MB) I would say raising a family that by and large are happy and positively contribute to the world around them in their own way, in their own capacity. I would say that Miki would agree with me. Our six children in birth order are Laurel Bowers Husain, Honolulu, Francis A. I. Bowers III (Andy), Williamsburg, Virginia, John I. Bowers, Honolulu, Julia Bowers (deceased), Charles Jib Bowers, a twin to Julia, Honolulu, Douglas I. Bowers, Honolulu.

(HS) The next area we are going to talk about is living in Manoa Valley. What year did you and your family first move to the valley?

(MB) Well I know that it was at least sixty years ago. I don't remember the exact year. We were living in a cottage on Miki's family property in Nuuanu, Nuuanu and Judd Streets. Living there meant he had to deal with traffic driving to Punahou where he was teaching. It was wonderful that this house at 3134 Huelani Place came on the market and we were able to purchase it over sixty years ago.

(HS) What is your earliest memory of living in Manoa Valley?

(MB) At the time I was very busy with kids. Laughter! We had neighbors. With the recent rains we have had reminds me about how my kids and the neighbor kids used to go out and play in the water rushing down the street. We do live on a dead-end street and even today I don't worry about having the front door open so I can see who is coming up and down the hill.

(HS) What things or experiences do you miss the most that no longer exist in the valley?

(MB) Maybe Toyo's Superette down in the village shopping area. This was a Japanese owned store. I took Japanese language lessons when I lived in Nuuanu at a Japanese language school just mauka of Vineyard Boulevard. There also has been a Japanese language school on East Manoa Road just next to where Toyo's store was located.

(HS) What do you feel makes Manoa special?

(MB) Well I feel that we are very fortunate not having the tunnels going over to the Windward side like Nuuanu Valley and others, so we don't have people zooming to get to the other side in our valley. We are fortunate to have Lyon Arboretum in the back of the valley. We are lucky that we have shopping areas, but not over run with too many stores. I don't know whether the farmers markets are still going on

(HS) Yes, they are open Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday back next to the Post Office.

(MB) We used to go to them regularly, but since I no longer drive, we don't do that any longer. Since I live on a dead-end street, we don't have cars zooming by us. I think that the large park located near Manoa Elementary School is wonderful. It is a huge well used park. I am always happy to see kids playing down there. They don't play as much anymore because they are busy with other activities. From my vantage point I watched the fire race up the mountain over near the UH Manoa Faculty Housing area. With the amount of rain, we have had recently that area has again turned green with vegetation. We also watch the yellow helicopters and small planes go up the valley to rescue hikers who have not been wise in their decisions.

(HS) What would you like to see preserved or improved in the valley?

(MB) I am happy to see that there are a good number of the old houses that are being kept up. This is always a challenge because of termites. I do hope that people are able to preserve them. I wish there weren't so many more high rises going up, primarily in the Waikiki area. That view is our vista toward the ocean. We see the large number of high rises. We hope people are able to not have their property overloaded like the Monster Homes that have been seen here and there. But when you have to pay property taxes it is hard.

(HS) Mandy I see that you are wearing a nice Malama O Manoa t-shirt. Were you ever personally involved with Malama Manoa?

(MB) I don't recall if I was ever directly involved, but I have always supported the organization.

(HS) So that is what you did to help Malama through the years. As you are most likely aware, Mary Cooke and Helen Nakano started it and we are going to celebrate thirty years very shortly.

(MB) I know that Helen Nakano was the first person to contact me. I don't remember why, but she did. Helen lives on the Woodlawn side of the valley. I have had friends who have lived over there, but they are no longer with us.

HS) Mandy that completes all of the questions I have on my paper. Can you think of any things that we should also cover? Things that people would be interested in knowing about the valley?

(MB) The reapportionment committee contacted me about splitting Manoa into two areas. Right away I answered saying that no way should Manoa be split into two separate areas for voting. Manoa is an entity in itself and we don't need to be separated. Since the beginning we have supported each other as one valley entity. I wish I were more able to do more of that.

(HS) Thank you so much for allowing me into your home and allowing me to conduct this oral history interview with you. I will now type our words into my computer and get it back to you as a printed document. Then please read and make any necessary changes you feel are appropriate. If you are interested in seeing other people's oral histories, you can go on the internet at Malama Manoa. Org and read many interesting stories of people who have had much to do with Manoa Valley over the years.

(MB) I have the book about Manoa titled "Manoa Valley, The Story of a Valley". I thank you for doing these interviews. They capture so much history that would otherwise be lost. I have been thankful that we as kids did not have to write in a diary to tell of our day's activities. Now I am so sorry that I did not do that.

(HS) Well, we have captured a good bit of your life. Thank you so much again!