

Oral History of Harrison Spiegelberg

My family came to Hawaii just before the turn of the century when my maternal great-grandfather General Edward Davis retired here after being the commanding officer of Camp McKinley, which was where the Waikiki Fire Station is located today. He was part of the first U.S. military presence in Hawaii and retired to a large home on Hastings Street today known as Nehoa Street near Punahou. After my great-grandmother passed away, "The General" moved in with his daughter and son-in-law at their home "Red Hale", so named because of its red paint and the red dirt kicked up by the horses in Kapiolani Park across the street. This was on the beach at the end of Kalakaua Avenue where The Tahitienne co-op is located today. My mother was born here 10 days after they moved into their new home. The land was leased to a corporation in 1957 and was the first co-op and high rise at that end of Waikiki. My grandparents met at a Royal Ball held at Washington Place when Queen Liliuokalani was in residence in 1902 and were married at St. Clements Episcopal Church in Makiki in 1903. My father arrived in the islands in 1930 as a research scientist with the Pineapple Research Institute and met and married my mother in 1937. She graduated from Punahou in 1929.

I was born Harrison Spiegelberg on May 1, 1942, May Day in Kapiolani Hospital. This was five months after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. I was born three months premature. The doctors found that there were two fetuses and I had a twin sister. The delivery team looked at me and said that I was not going to make it, and they gave my twin sister Carole Marie a 50/50 chance of survival. Two days later on May 3rd Carole Marie died and her ashes are interned at the family plot in Oahu Cemetery in Nuuanu. I often wonder why I was spared and allowed to live a full and long life. To help me survive my mother pumped her breast milk and my father drove down the hill from the back of Manoa Valley to Kapiolani Hospital. Because it was war time our family had to be allotted extra gasoline coupons to allow for the daily trip down to the hospital. After three months in an oxygen tent I was allowed to go home and have lived in the back of Manoa Valley ever since.

I grew up on Keahi Street in the back of Manoa Valley on the Ewa side. This is known as the Alii side of the valley. Queen Kaahumanu had a summer home four or five blocks mauka of where our home is. Ours was the last house on the street and everything mauka was Hono Hono grass, mango trees and wild orchids.

On the floor of the valley were Japanese vegetable and flower gardens. It was like living in the country. Today I live next to the house I grew up in 76 years ago; therefore I am a lifelong resident of the valley.

I grew up with an older brother and a younger sister. Some of our adventures included walking to Manoa Stream and going swimming, usually in our birthday suits. We often would bring home sword fish that thrived in the stream, along with polliwogs, that grew into frogs, much to the chagrin of my mother. Approximately two hundred yards mauka of our house was what we called "The Hawaiian Wall". We would climb over the wall to reach an area that we were sure had remnants of living areas of Hawaiians many years ago. We would also venture up to Manoa Falls where we would swim and cavort. One of the most unusual aspects of our growing up environment was a cave perhaps 100 feet deep. This was reached by hiking up the Ewa side of the valley as if we were going to reach Tantalus. In this cave we would consume our lunch often made up of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, cookies, an apple and a peanut butter jar of milk. Our neighbors were many with lots of kids as our playmates. Unlike today we were able to stay outside without worrying our parents of any danger. When I was 13 years old a neighbor friend and I hiked to the top of Tantalus. We were so pooped that we called my mother from a nearby house to come and take us home.

My first stop in my education journey I attended Teachers College (TC), now known as The Lab School at the University of Hawaii-Manoa, and Manoa Elementary School. My third grade year was where the Manoa Fire Stations is today. I was a proud JPO (Junior Police Officer) in my khaki pants, white shirt, black tie and bare feet. The plastic white helmet made me look like Beagle Bailey. We controlled the traffic and kept our classmates safe on their way to and from home. At that time I didn't give it any thought, but today I treasure growing up with kids of many ethnic back grounds the way Hawaii was then and still is today. I have memories of a small store on Manoa Road near the school that specialized in cracked seed items and all kinds of other local treats. My favorite was the preserved lemons in a tall glass container on the top of the store counter. During my elementary years I had a Honolulu Star-Bulletin newspaper route. My customers were located in the neighborhood Ewa of where Manoa Marketplace is today.

Robert Louis Stevenson Middle School was my next stop on my matriculating journey. I spent one adventuresome year there and after a year of getting my lunch money high jacked by the Papakolea bla las, I repeated the 7th grade entering my Punahou experience. After six years I graduated from that fine school of learning and am proud to call myself one of the Buff 'n Blue graduating with the Class of 1961.

Next I attended Washington State University in Pullman, Washington, located 12 miles from the Idaho border. This Manoa boy endured four cold winters at WSU. The coldest I can remember is 27 degree below zero without the wind chill factor. Brrrrr!! After four years I received my bachelor's degree in Hotel and Restaurant Administration. Later I received a MA degree in Business Supervision from Central Michigan University.

Not wanting to end up in Vietnam with a rifle over my shoulder, I next entered the U.S. Navy spending four months at Naval Officer Candidate School in Newport, Rhode Island. I graduated as an "Officer and a Gentleman" with the rank of Ensign. I then went to the Clubs and Messes Management School to learn the nuances of operating Navy clubs. I spent three years on Active Duty. The first 18 months were spent managing the BOQ, Package Store and Officers Club at Naval Air Station Point Mugu, CA on the coast north of Los Angeles. I then volunteered to go to Vietnam spending 12 months overseas, part of the time with a rifle over my shoulder. I was attached to the Clubs & Messes Division in Da Nang helping to manage 17 clubs throughout I Corp. My first assignment was as Accounting Officer. The middle six months of my tour were as the Entertainment Officer and Detachment Officer. I would audition the various entertainment groups that we placed in our club facilities. Someone had to do the tough jobs. At the same time I traveled through the northern part of South Vietnam called I (eye) Corp. supervising the five clubs located away from Da Nang. One of these facilities was located at Dong Ha, a short distance from the DMZ and North Vietnam. While there we often experienced rocket attacks from the North. I traveled via helicopter, airplane, boat and truck to reach my destinations. During my last three months in country I was made the officer-in-charge of the division since the more senior officers had cycled out of country. When I returned "to the world" I helped manage the Officers Club at Pearl Harbor. After three years of Active Duty I was a week end warrior at Pearl Harbor for 19 years, eventually retiring as a 22-year Commander.

Knowing what a hard life it is managing hotels and restaurants, I instead spent my working career as a business consultant with an International Certified Public Accounting (CPA) company Pannell Kerr & Forster. I spent 20 years traveling the Hawaiian Islands, the South Pacific, Asia, Europe and California conducting market, financial and economic feasibility studies for newly constructed, refurbished hotels, restaurants, and resorts. I was involved with much of the concrete poured in Waikiki and on the Neighbor islands. I also conducted management efficiency studies for hotels, restaurants and golf operations. My work also involved being a member of multi-disciplinary study teams examining country-wide tourism developments throughout the Pacific and Asia.

After a 15 year marriage my first wife passed away and I found myself as Mr. Mom taking care of my 11 year-old daughter and elderly father who lived next door in the house I grew up in. As a result I left the CPA firm and established my own consulting firm Harry Spiegelberg & Associates working out of my home. Truth be told my associate was our family cat Snuggles. During this period I met and married the new love of my life. Patti and I have been together for 22 years. After working out of my home office for another ten years, I became a Case Manager at a non-profit Comfort, Security & Independence (CSI). This organization looked after the financial affairs of elderly and disabled clients. For six years I was in and out of nursing homes, care homes and overcrowded houses and apartments, holding the hand of dying widows and alcoholics. In my entire career I loved this job the most.

During my working years I also was involved in various volunteer experiences. For 17 years I was a mediator with the Mediation Center of the Pacific assisting couples, neighbors and businesses with their disputes. I also have been a docent with the Manoa Heritage Center conducting hour-long tours for adults and children. This involved telling of the history of Manoa Valley, the Cooke residence Kualii, Kua O' O Heiaua, the native Hawaiian garden with endangered plants and the Voyaging Canoe Garden with plants brought to Hawaii from the South Pacific. I conducted these tours for eight years until the peripheral neuropathy on the bottom of my feet made it too difficult stomping up and down the rock trails. I got this from being exposed to Agent Orange in Vietnam. In addition, Patti and I are very involved with our church, Saint Andrews Cathedral.

Years ago, with many others, I was involved with the Waahila Ridge effort where Hawaiian Electric Company (HEI) wanted to erect tall, ugly towers on the Diamond Head ridge in Manoa Valley. My assisting involved getting shoppers outside Manoa Safeway to sign our petition against the HEI effort. I did this with my daughter Susan. At the end of this campaign HEI was required to send a letter setting out the status of the situation to all who had signed the petition. To amuse myself, I had signed up our family cat Snuggles Spiegelberg as opposing the ugly towers. Sure enough here came a letter in the mailbox to me, Susan and Snuggles. This proved that the system worked. Thanks to the hard work of many we still enjoy the beauty of Waahila Ridge today

Finding a bit of time on my hands my most recent volunteer effort is becoming a member of the Board of Directors of Malama Manoa. It has been a joy to be a part of a group dedicated to looking after the welfare of the valley. My specific contribution has been resurrecting the oral history project, whereby, finding old-

time Manoa Valley residents and conducting interviews to capture each of their special memories of the valley.

I consider myself most fortunate growing up and living in Manoa Valley virtually my entire life. It can't get any better than this!