

Chapter 4

Growing Up On Kauai

I can still see the old plantation house in Rice Camp where our family of 15 lived. It was a typical wooden, single-walled construction house that was made available to all plantation field workers with four bedrooms and one living room. The kitchen was separate, adjoined by a walkway. We all fit in the house somehow. We doubled up, slept on the floor. As a child I didn't think about it much because I didn't know any better.

Our neighbors on one side were Filipino bachelors who worked long hours and tended to their roosters tethered in the yard. Our neighbors on the other side were the Kagawas. I remember clearly Jimmy, one of the Kagawa sons, and his irritating whistle to signal the kids in our household to keep quiet.

The area around the plantation camp was full of peacocks, roosters and hens. No one was allowed to catch them, and Kauai was free of mongoose, a natural predator, so the birds were everywhere. They slept in trees and woke up early to announce their delight at the new day.

The crowing and cawing were incessantly present in the early morning hours. Did you ever hear the loud scream from a peacock or guinea hen in the darkness of early morning? It did not bother me, but I am sure it would not be the same for someone who has never experienced this.



I painted this picture of a typical Kauai sugar plantation camp house from images that permanently reside in my mind and heart.

My father was a trackman tending the plantation's railroad tracks. He also served as a middleman for the employees to talk about their problems and grievances to the management. He earned about \$35 a month and that was more than many other men.

Our life revolved around the small sphere of the plan-

tation, Rice Camp, local fishing spots, Hamano Store, Seki Camp and Stable Camp, which were other plantation camps nearby. We walked everywhere or we rode one of the two bicycles our family repaired and rebuilt, claimed after someone had thrown them away. When I visited Rice Camp several years after moving away, I jogged the three miles from Hamano Store to the main highway. I was surprised that this distance was such a short run, and yet at that time no one searched out this greater world.

When I was growing up, you walked to get anywhere or rode a bicycle if you had one. No one had a car except two families who spent most of their time polishing their cars instead of driving them around. No one else could afford such luxuries. If we were walking when a car came by, they almost always stopped to give you a ride. Back then, it was a pleasure to ride in a car.

We shopped for necessities at Hamano Store, owned by a Chinese couple and managed by the husband. He usually gave you a piece of candy or ice cream if you made the trip to his store. Back then it was a very welcome item and everyone was thrilled to get it. When he didn't want to go to the freezer to get an ice cream, he would give you a soda, and it was a joy to receive.

There was only one policeman in the area. His presence got everyone's attention. Actually there was no need for police work because most of the problems were handled internally and most were non-violent. None of the homes had keys to the door. Break-ins were non-existent. Besides, what was there to steal?