

Filipino-American Historical Society of Hawai'i  
Oral History Project

**Helen Duhaylongsod Barcelona (HB)**

**Interview Conducted By:  
Helen Nagtalon Miller (HM)**

July 14, 2004

HM: The Filipino-American Historical Society of Hawai'i biographical project. The interviewee is Helen Duhaylongsod Barcelona, and the interviewer is Helen Nagtalon Miller. And the date is July 14, 2004.

In our preliminary interview, you mentioned how important family was to you. So I'm going to ask you a series of questions about your family. The first one is... give us your full name and tell us about your origins and so forth.

HB: I'm Helen Duhaylongsod Barcelona, Camp 9, Waipahu, Hawai'i. Born February 27, 1927. American citizen and I'm a Filipina.

HM: What about your parents? Could you give us a little bit background of who your parents are and where they are from?

HB: Cayatano Duhaylongsod, Siquihor, Philippines; Filipino. My mom -- Alejandra Tankay Duhaylongsod Ramos; Filipino. Step-father -- Tomas Ramos, Sr.; Ilocos Norte, Philippines; Filipino.

HM: When and where in the Territory of Hawai'i did they settle?

HB: In November 1919 my mom and dad, Cayatano Duhaylongsod, left the Philippines and arrived in Hawai'i. They settled on a sugar plantation on Pāpa'i-kou located on the island of Hawai'i. In 1925 the Duhaylongsod moved to O'ahu, Hawai'i, and finally settled on the Waipahu, Hawai'i plantation.

HM: Why did they leave their native country?

HB: For employment and opportunities are greater in America, especially when raising a family.

HM: What languages did they speak?

HB: English.

HM: There was English in your home?

HB: Yes.

HM: How many children were there in the family? Could you tell us a little about your family ah....

HB: Nine children and I'm the third child.

HM: What was your father's job on the plantation?

HB: My dad was employed at the Waipahu Sugar Plantation sugarcane field. In 1933 Papa Cayatano passed away-- left with five children, Mercedes, Doris, Helen, Henry and Joseph and no means of financial support. Mama sought employment as a house maid for a camp nurse on the Waipahu plantation.

In 1935, Mama married for the second time to Tomas Ramos, Sr. I thank God, and I'm so grateful for Papa Ramos for marrying Mama with five children. Within their marriage, they produced four children -- the twins, Alex and Tom, Jr., Joshua and Roger. She was an active member at Waipahu Filipino Evangelical Church. In 1960 we merged with Waipahu Community Church and renamed Waipahu United Church of Christ.

HM: Um,...while you were in the plantations and, of course, your father, your fathers worked there, did they ever speak of Pablo Manlapit?

HB: No.

HM: Um, hmm.

HB: No, nothing about unions at all. Nothing.

HM: Um, hmm. What schools did you attend?

HB: August Arens School and Waipahu High School. I joined school chorus and lead the singing at all assemblies. My Waipahu High School music teacher, Mrs. Emma Meurlott Holt, sent me to piano lessons at St. Andrews Cathedral. She paid for my lessons for one year. The rest is self-taught.

HM: Did you attend any other educational institution after high school?

HB: Yes. The Mannes Music School 1947 through 1948 -- one year scholarship in voice in New York City.

HM: Who were your mentors, the people who influenced you?

HB: Consuelo Barcelona Casey is a Filipina. I've known her all my life. We belong to the same church. My oldest sister, Mercy, is married to Consuelo's older brother, Henry. I'm married to Consuelo's younger brother, Jose, also known as Sonny Barcelona. And the brother of drummer Danny Barcelona who played for 14 years with Louis Armstrong's band.

Consuelo encouraged and nurtured me with classical voice training. My repertoire includes Filipino, Hawaiian, English and Italian songs. Consuelo took voice lessons from Carlos Sebastian and later, I took lessons from Mr. Sebastian when I worked.

Romance is not always carefree. Consuelo and Dr. Ted Casey's courtship, it survived the attack on Pearl Harbor -- Dr. Casey's enlistment as medical officer in the Navy and the subsequent warnings from his officers to head the military's non-fraternization with native population directives. Consuelo and Ted were married two years and ten days after Pearl Harbor December 17, 1943, in Hawai'i.

In 1953 Ted and Consuelo moved their family to the mainland, to Officers' Row along East Evergreen Boulevard in Vancouver, Washington, where Dr. Casey would practice orthopedic surgery for the veterans Administration at Barns Hospital for more than 25 years. And Consuelo would raise their children and embrace her community with a singular style and generosity of spirit for the next 50 years. Consuelo went home to be with the Lord February 21, 2003.

HM: When did marriage entered your life? Could you give a little information about that? (HB chuckles)

HB: I'm married to Jose Sonny Barcelona on June 9th 1951. I have two daughters Marcela Inez Tamashiro. She is married to Dr. Alan Tamashiro. Grandchildren: Ryan Tadashi Tamashiro and Kristin Michie Tamashiro. My second daughter is Melissa Barcelona Frazier. Grandchildren: Justin Nathaniel Frazier and Tiffany Noe'a Frazier.

HM: Can you give us a brief, um, catch about the kind of things you did...your work, your work history.

HB: I was a receptionist at 'Aiea South Shore Hospital from 1945 to 1947. Receptionist to Dr. Isaac Glassman in New York from 1947 to 1948. Receptionist for Dr. Ted Casey,

Honolulu, Hawai'i from 1949 to 1953 and an accounting technician Naval Air Station, Barbers Point, Hawai'i from 1953 through 1983.

HM: Can you describe the role that music played in your life.

HB: When my daughters Marcela and Melissa were in elementary school, they were in my junior choir. I am in my 44th year as volunteer director of chancellor choir for Waipahu United Church of Christ.

You have to sing from the heart. You feel what you are singing all the time. I'd rather sing than speak to a group of people in public. I can express myself better singing than talking. Singing makes me feel good. When I'm doing it, I think of good things, my mom, my family. It makes me feel very close to God. All my talents come from God and by volunteering my services, it's my gift to God. It's...I find peace when I'm singing. It brings me great joy if I'm able to reach out to the congregation through the ministry of music.

HM: How did your interest in singing in church music begin? Because you said you were interested in singing classical, Alberta and so forth.

HB: My brother Tom Ramos, Jr., who was a member of Central Union Church Choir. My brothers and sisters-in-law are members Waipahu United Church of Christ chancellor choir. Marcela and Melissa sing duets in English, Hawaiian and popular music. For my mom's annual birthday, I would teach members of my family, brothers, sisters, grandchildren, in-laws, nieces and nephews -- about 25 of us -- an anthem and honor her, singing the special music in church. My sister, Doris, and I sang duets in church and social gathering. My mom passed away at the age of 95 years. October 7th 1992.

HM: You were still singing with your sister?

HB: Yes.

HM: In church?

HB: Right. Part of church.

HM: What languages did you use with your mother and father or anybody else you came in contact with?

HB: We spoke English to everyone.

HM: No other language?

HB: No.

HM: Umm...did you, umm...mind at all, if you had to use, if somebody had to use a language with you, and spoke to you in that language?

HB: Growing up, I was interested and eager to learn and speak Visayan. When I had my family, my mom would teach me and we would converse. And she would always pray in Visayan.

HM: So you understood-

HB: Yes, the Visayan language.

HM: So would you say you have understanding of the language.

HB: I do, Visayan only.

HM: How about speaking?

HB: Yes, umm, hmm.

HM: When you were growing up, what did you think and feel about being and referred to as a Filipina?

HB: I was very happy and proud to be a Filipina. The other ethnic groups might have felt and thought that Filipinos were inferior to the other ethnic groups.

HM: Umm, hmm. Could you give an example why you felt that way? Is it something you learned from the family?

HB: Umm..., no.

HM: You, you just felt that way?

HB: Umm, hmm.

HM: Ah, what activities or practices or...observances and some other things perhaps, help you develop some kind of a feeling or sense what a Filipino was like? And what they valued?

HB: Filipinos observed Filipino Flag Day, sports and musical talents of the Filipinos. For instance, the O'ahu Sugar Company Band was made up of Filipino workers of the plantation. They paid for their own instruments, and the plantations picked laborers from their homes and brought them to the Filipino club houses to practice and learned

new songs under the direction of Sgt. Gregorio. They performed during the holidays, concerts at Kapiolani Park and even marched during the Shriner's football games, which was held in the Honolulu Stadium annually. The band accompanied me when I sang "Amapola," and the singers were Consuelo Barcelona Casey, Violet Sismar, Mercie Duhaylongsod Barcelona and Nancy Gulermo.

HM: Ah! So they were, you were often invited to sing?

HB: Yes.

HM: Umm, what did your church or religion, or even in the public schools, any institution that you attended, what did they teach you about your identity or feelings about yourself, who you are?

HB: Church played an important role in the family life in the Waipahu plantation community. My family all went to church on Sunday, and our social life revolved around the Christian celebrations throughout the year. Although majority of the Filipino community were Catholic, we were brought up as Protestants by my family. Being Protestant didn't make any difference in strengthening or weakening our identity as Filipinos during the early plantation days.

HM: Um, describe how the children, or the various ethnic groups related to each other in school and out of school. Speak how the children related to each other and also to the adults -- how did they relate inside and outside of school?

HB: Because there were so many ethnic groups, children in school did not stick to their own groups. They mingled with others different groups and made no difference in their back grounds were. The different ethnic groups had their own holidays which they celebrated such as Rizal Day, bon dances and hula halau. When the plantation had celebrations such as Fourth of July, all the ethnic groups participated. Everybody enjoyed being together like a big happy family.

HM: How did Filipino after a hard day's work, get together with other people and...formally or could be informally, and um, what means were available -- offered to them to do these kinds of things?

HB: People get home and get ready for the next day. After sharpening their cane knives, care for their chickens, vegetable gardens and practice music on their instruments.

HN: Are there any particular places that they did it?

HB: No, at their homes. Of course, when they rehearse, they rehearse at the Filipino club house.

HN: Umm, hmm. I know you were asked to perform in your singing. So where did you perform as a singer and where, what kind of singing did you do?

HB: As a young child growing up in Waipahu's Spanish camp, I was often invited to the home of Hans L'Orange, legendary Oahu Sugar Company manager, to perform for guests with Consuela Barcelona Casey singing and accompanying. Besides singing at Waipahu United Church of Christ on Sundays for more than six decades, I sang for funerals, weddings and joyous and festive occasions within the Waipahu community and throughout the state.

HN: What affects did World War II have on your life and the lives of others, and other Filipinos on the plantations?

HB: When bombs fell on December 7th 1941, many left school to help Uncle Sam on defense projects. Despite all disturbances, school was resumed and plans were made under war time conditions. Girls prepared emergency applicators and folded bandages while boys assisted in the schools' victory garden.

HN: What differences did you see between the lives of your family in the early plantation days from the lives of the immigrants, the newer ones that come since 1965?

HB: With the new immigration law. Majority bachelors hired as first immigrant laborers working in sugar plantations and pineapple fields. With the new influx of Filipinos, some were professionals, and had a choice on employment, where they lived and they came as a family unit.

Early immigrants worked hard and saved their earnings to send back to their families in the Philippines. When they retired from the plantations, they return to the Philippines to their families. With the new immigration law, for the married men who came here alone, they returned to the Philippines to bring back their families. The bachelors would return to the Philippines to get married and returned with their wives.