

Filipino-American Historical Society of Hawai'i
Oral History Project
Interview #1

Edward Felipe (EF)
with **Ermelita Garces (EG)**

Interviewed Conducted By:
Nicolita Garces (NG)

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Kalihi, Honolulu, O'ahu

NG: Interview with Edward Felipe at his home in Honolulu, Hawai'i on January 23rd, 2004. The interviewer is Nicolita Garces.

NG: Okay. I like to start off with your family background. Could you tell me about your family in the Philippines?

[long pause]

NG: Such as your...

EF: See, I don't have any family...already. Oh, I think I have a...one. Yeah, I think I have a sister...in Manila. But I don't I don't, ah, communicate with them anymore.

NG: How about your family...your childhood in the Philippines?

EF: Well, I have a...just like anybody. I started going to school and I, ah, I went to primary, intermediate. Then I went to high school. When I graduated...in high school, that's when I came to Hawai'i.

NG: What were your father's and mother's names?

EF: My father's name was Benigno Felipe.

NG: And your mother's name?

EF: My mother's name was Escolastica. [chuckles]

NG: Um, did you have any siblings?

EF: Yeah! There were eight of us. Eight children.

NG: Could you give their names and...who was the oldest and the youngest?

EF: The oldest was, ah, Frankalina, and then, ah, the next one was, ah, I can't remember their names. There was Frankalina, ah, there was a...girl below her, then I was the third...and below me was, ah, another girl. Her name was Rosa. [pause] Then, ah, there were four more. Under that, I don't even remember their names now.

EG: [In the background] *Tata!* Flo. The youngest.

EF: Oh yeah. Flo was the youngest.

NG: What did your father do? What was his occupation?

EF: He was a musician.

NG: A musician?! In Laoag?

EF: Yeah. He was a musician.

NG: How about your mother?

EF: Oh, she was just a housekeeper.

NG: Where? At home?

EF: In the house. At home. Yeah.

NG: Housewife.

EF: Yeah. Housewife.

NG: Oh, okay. What kind of instrument did your dad play?

EF: He played the bass. Bass. Bass horn. The bass horn.

NG: The bass horn? What is that?

EF: You know the thing with the, with the *biiig*, ah...[hand gestures to describe the bass horn]

NG: No. [laughs]

EF: You know that goes like that and, ah, goes around his neck like that and then goes up like this. And *biiiggg!*

NG: Is that the tuba?

EF: Tuba? I think...yeah, I think that's what they call it.
Tuba.

NG: Umm. Did he play in a band or an orchestra?

EF: He played both in the band and also in the orchestra. When I say band, that is the one that, ah, when they go marching. And the orchestra is where they play for... dancing.

NG: So tell me about umm... Do you have, ah, memories about living in the Philippines? Like what was your fondest childhood memory?

EF: I don't know... Just being with the band that's all. Playing music.

NG: Did you play music?

EF: Yeah. I was in the band. The orchestra.

NG: What did you play?

EF: I, I played the slide trombone.

NG: Only the slide trombone?

EF: And the... That's all that's all.

EG: [In the background] The one in your room.

NG: The organ? The organ or the piano?

EF: No, no. I never played the piano up there. I only, ah, started fooling around the piano when I ah was here in Hawai'i.

NG: Oh, okay. Did your brothers and sisters... your brothers and sisters play in the band and orchestra?

EF: No.

NG: Only you?

EF: Yes.

NG: Who taught you how to play the trombone?

EF: I, I, I, ah... [pause] Myself.

NG: You taught yourself...really?

EF: Yeah.

NG: Your father didn't teach you how to play?

EF: Yeah. I just started playing when I was ah, ah...old enough. I used to be in the band, the marching band. I played with the orchestra. I self-taught myself.

NG: Hmm. So after graduating from high school, what made you decide to come to Hawai'i?

EF: I had, ah, um... I had an uncle here. I had a cousin... here. There was no way of earning money up there. So... I had a cousin here and, ah, uncle here... and so... I come over here.

NG: What did your cousin and uncle do?

EF: They work in the hotels. Waiters. [pause] At the old New Malo Hotel.

NG: Hmm...

EF: It was New Malo Hotel before. It's, ah... I dunno what is it called now. It was near Fort DeRussy.

NG: Yeah.

EF: What do you call that hotel now?

NG: Hilton Hawaiian Village.

EF: Yeah. Hawaiian Village. Yeah Hilton Hawaiian Village. That's what it is now. But when I came here, it wasn't a big, big ah building as it is now. It was cottages.

NG: Yeah. So, how how did... How did your uncle and cousin bring you here?

EF: How did they bring me here?

NG: Yeah.

EF: They sent me, ah, my, ah, my fare and I came here by the boat. The ship.

NG: How was the ride?

EF: The ride...from the Philippines to here? Twelve...twelve days. And I got seasick. I was in bed all the way until ah one day before arrival to Honolulu.

NG: Oooh.

EF: Ha ha!

NG: So at the New Malo Hotel, what were your responsibilities? What did you do as a waiter?

EF: As a waiter?

NG: Yeah.

EF: I served food.

NG: Just only serve food?

EF: Yeah... and, ah, they had, ah, guests up there. These guests come here, come to Hawai'i for vacation and some were living there permanently. They stay in the hotel. They live in the cottages.

NG: How many hours a week did you work in the hotel?

EF: Well, we served, ah, breakfast, lunch and dinner. So, ah... Breakfast is usually six o'clock in the...lets see till eight o'clock except when they wake up late and they come maybe nine o'clock. And then lunch is, ah...well lunch hour. And then dinner lasts, ah, six until closing.

NG: Did you interact a lot with the guests?

EF: No. Only when you're serving them. [laughs]

NG: So your bosses, didn't want employees [disrupted by EF coughing] to talk to them?

EF: Well no. You don't see them until, ah, come up to eat. You don't go up to their rooms and, ah, talk with them and... only when they come to eat, you serve them. That's the only time you can talk to them.

NG: Did they give waiters and waitresses tips back then?

EF: Tips? Yeah. They give tips.

NG: Do you have any, ah... Do you remember any of the guests at the New Malo Hotel? Especially those who lived there permanently?

EF: I don't remember their names now. No, I don't remember their names. I forgot.

NG: Hmm... That's okay. What did you do on your spare time, um, while you were working at the hotel?

EF: Spare time?

NG: Yeah.

EF: My spare time, ah, well I used to, ah, we went to town. To go to town.

NG: What did you do at town?

EF: We went to see a movie. Something like that. At Downtown, Honolulu. We go see a movie at, ah, Hawai'i Theater. Ha ha ha...

NG: Oh for real? On Bethel Street?

EF: That's Bethel, yeah?

NG: Yeah, yeah.

EF: Or go out. The hotel is right by the ocean, eh? Go out swimming, go pick up *limu*. [chuckles] Catch squid. Spear fish.

NG: And these would be with your cousin and uncle?

EF: No, mostly by myself. [both NG and EF laugh] Yeah.

NG: Really? How about friends?

EF: Friends when I was out there?

NG: Yeah.

EF: At the hotel? Yeah, I had friends outside, outside the hotel. I had, ah... I had a friend who worked at the hotel but he lived outside with his family. Yeah, he had a family. And, ah... And on days off when I'm not working, I usually go there and visit. Spend the day with them.

NG: What do you do with them?

EF: When I go up there?

NG: Yeah.

EF: And visit with them?... I go up there and have dinner with them. Something different from the hotel. Go up there visit with friends. Cook. Eat dinner. Eat something different. The Filipino foods. Which they don't have at the hotel. [chuckles]

NG: What did they serve at the hotel then?

EF: Usually what they serve guests...steak, ah, steak... They serve also fish, fried fish. Whatever they serve to the guests.

NG: You mean American food?

EF: Yeah.

NG: No Hawaiian food?

EF: No, no. They don't serve Hawaiian food. Because most of these are from the mainland, eh? Guests, guests.

NG: Yeah, yeah.

EF: They don't eat *poi*. [both chuckle]

NG: By any chance did you, ah, play music, um... while you were living at New Malo Hotel? Like, as an entertainer? Or just play music as recreation with your friends...

EF: Yeah, yeah. I had a piano. I had a piano in the hotel, which I played. I like to play. I self, I eh, ah, self um trained myself. I didn't go to any instructor. Yeah, I went a little bit. I went, ah, to have a little, ah, piano instruction from Harry. His name was Harry Owens. At, ah, let's see where was it at? There was a music store at the corner of King and, ah, King and Fort. Players...Players, um, Music Store. And he had his studio over there, Harry Owens. And ah, I took a little piano lessons from him.

NG: Like for one year, couple months?

EF: Oh, maybe, a year or more.

NG: So you played the piano, ah, just for fun?

EF: Yeah.

NG: Not for work?

EF: Just for, ah, past the time.

NG: Have any of the guests heard you play the piano?

EF: Yeah. And they used to come and knock on my door and say, "You're making so much noise!" [both laugh]

NG: So you had a piano in your room?

EF: Yeah. I had a piano.

NG: Oh, okay. Well, ah, like in 1941, you changed jobs from working in the hotel as waiter to a pipe fitter...

EF: 1941...let's see. Oy, I ah, ah...1941...that's when the war broke, eh?

NG: Right.

EF: That's when I went to um...Pearl Harbor. But before that, I worked for about six years...at Fisherman's Wharf.

NG: Oh, you didn't tell me that earlier.

EF: I told you that, eh?

NG: No. [laughs]

EF: Yeah, yeah. From, ah, New Malo, New Malo Hotel, I worked at Fisherman's Wharf for, ah...let's see, six years, I think.

NG: So how many years did you work at the New Malo Hotel?

EF: Ahhh...from the time I arrive...I, ah, ah, came...came to Hawai'i. When did I come to Hawai'i? Did you have that?

NG: 1933.

EF: Oh yeah, it was '33. And, ah, '33...I went to work at, ah, Fisherman's Wharf. I worked there about six years and I ah, I left when the war broke out. When the war broke out, I went to work at Pearl Harbor.

NG: What did you do at Fisherman's Wharf?

EF: I was a waiter.

NG: A waiter.

EF: Fisherman's Wharf is a, um, just like a restaurant.

NG: They still have Fisherman's Wharf right now, right?

EF: Yeah.

NG: I think. How was it different from work at the hotel?

EF: It's different...well, not much because, ah, you wait... it's the same thing. You wait at the hotel, you wait tables and, ah, hotel and Fisherman's Wharf. That's it... Waiting on tables. Serve food.

NG: How were the customers there? Were they nice to you?

EF: Well, yeah yeah. People are nice.

NG: Okay.

EF: They tip you and... [both laugh] You serve them nicely and they give you a good tip.

NG: The customers who went to Fisherman's Wharf, were they also tourists?

EF: Ah, yeah. Ah, most were tourists visiting from the mainland. But there were also local people. They wanted to eat outside, they come over there.

NG: So why did you decide to work in the, ah, at Pearl Harbor?

EF: When the war broke out...they needed workers. They had it, uh, on the radio. They said, ah, people were needed to work and, ah, because the war broke out, they needed people to work on the ships. Repair ships, eh.

NG: Did you have training? Umm, to work as a pipe fitter?

EF: Oh yeah, I was...I started as a, ah, trainee, as a helper. Helper and at the same time you're, you're training...you, you help.

NG: Who, who trained you?

EF: Well, the mechanic, who you work with. You helping.

NG: Like a civilian mechanic?

EF: Yeah.

NG: How was it working as a...how was it working on the ships?

EF: The ships...as a pipe fitter...as a pipe fitter, you, ah, work on pipes, um, when they make alterations on the ships. They reroute pipes and all that. And I work mostly with, ah, copper pipes. We work on the ships and we have to, ah, You know pipes, you have to make bends and stuff like that. So, we go to the shop and, um, bend the pipes to fit, to suit, you know, to suit, um, the ship.

NG: How many hours a week did you work at Pearl Harbor?

EF: Well, ah, we worked ah five days. And when we, the work is busy, and you you have to work more than five days, you get paid overtime. [chuckles] Yeah, you work overtime.

NG: Could you tell me more about, I guess the work environment?

EF: I worked mostly in the shops. We fabricate pipes. You know, the workers who work on the ship they come to the shop, they bring out templates you know, templates. Template is, ah, the wire, you know. They make out on the ship, they make a wire they bend it to maybe...with it they bend like that so they come to the shop with a wire template. So that you know how much bend you have to make on the pipe. And if you have to make an offset like that, you bend like this and you go back like that. So that's what I do at the shop, bend, bend pipes. [uses hand gestures to demonstrate]

NG: How many people were working in the shop?

EF: Oh, plenny. Plenny workers at the shop.

NG: About...20?

EF: Oh, more than that. It's a big shop. The pipe shop is a big shop.

NG: Yeah? Like, 50 people?

EF: Yeah, probably about like that.

NG: So from 1971 to 1989, you worked at Marisco Shipyard.

EF: Marisco, yeah. Marisco.

NG: So, why did you decide to move from Pearl Harbor to the shipyard?

EF: I retired from Pearl Harbor because I already put in, ah, 30 years. But after I retired from Pearl Harbor, I get tired doing nothing at home. So, I went to work at the shipyard over here. Marisco. Was it Marisco?

NG: Uh, hmm...

EF: I think it was also called Honolulu Shipyard.

NG: So were you doing the same...

EF: The same work I was doing at Pearl Harbor.

NG: Okay, now to family life again. How did you meet your wife, Nana Lourdes?

EF: Ah...let's see. Her cousin was a friend of mine. And I used to go and, ah, I spend a lot of time at her cousin's house 'cuz we were friends. We used to work together at, ah, at the hotel. We were both waiters. So, ah, he was a friend of mine, and I spent a lot of time at her place. At his place. And when she came, to Hawai'i, she went and stayed at his place. 'Cuz he's, ah, her cousin, eh?

NG: Uh, hmm...

EF: That's, ah, that's, ah, where I meet her. I met her.

NG: So when did, when did, you, ah, you and nana get married?

EF: Let's see, 1955, I think. I'm not sure now. I think it was, um, 1955.

NG: And how many children do you have?

EF: Two.

NG: Two children.

EF: Yeah.

NG: And you were how old? About 42 when you got married?

EF: Yeah, that's very close. Yeah.

NG: So, what are the names of your two children?

EF: The girl was, ah, took her mother's name and the boy took my name. [chuckles]

NG: So, Lourdes and Edward.

EF: Yeah, right.

NG: Do you remember when, um, Lourdes was born?

EF: Ah, let's see... When I was I married?

NG: '55. [chuckles]

EF: Well she was born in '56. [chuckles]

NG: And how about, ah, Edward, Jr.?

EF: Ah...two years later. Two years after, ah, the girl.

NG: So, where did the family live again? On Kopke Street?

EF: Kopke Street? Yeah.

NG: How was...could you tell me more about, umm, your life with your family, like raising your children, supporting, umm, having your wife with you? Starting a family practically.

EF: Um, we live a normal life.

NG: What did your wife... What did Nana Lourdes do?

EF: At first, she had a travel agency. Travel agency.

NG: For flights from?...

EF: For, ah, people going to the Philippines, like that.

NG: Only Philippines?

EF: Yeah, mostly... here to the Philippines. She had, um, Filipino customers, eh? At first, yeah, ah, she quit that. She stayed home, and she, ah, she had a care home.

NG: Care home?

EF: Yeah. She took care of these, um, you know these certain, um, retarded people.

NG: Oh.

EF: And she was working for, um, that's government, I think, that one. She was working for the government. Care home. These people that she cared for, were, ah, er, from the government, eh?

NG: Uh, hmm... Your daughter Lourdes was a, um, was in beauty pageants. Whose idea was it for her to compete in beauty pageants?

EF: Well, er, actually she started young. She was a Miss Sampaguita. We called it Miss Sampaguita. That's, ah, Miss Sampaguita was sponsored by, ah, ah... What's the name of that church?

EG: St. John.

EF: Saint, St. John? What's this?

EG: St. Anthony.

EF: Oh yeah. I think it was St. John up there, eh?

NG: St. John... where?

EF: By, ah?

EG: School Street.

EF: Oh, oh, oh yeah. School Street. Yeah, yeah, okay. School Street.

NG: How old was Lourdes in the picture? [pointing at framed photo in living room]

EF: Ah?

NG: How old was Lourdes when she became Miss Sampaguita?

EF: Well...well maybe um, seven years old. About seven years old, I think.

NG: Did, ah, was Nana Lourdes, ah, the main person to encourage her to be...

EF: Yeah, yeah.

NG: How did you feel about that?

EF: Well, I did...I didn't have anything to do with it. I, eh, they did what ever they wanted to do it. I had nothing to do with it. [chuckles]

NG: So how did you feel when she won?

EF: Well, I was glad.

NG: Did you watch...obviously, you saw the pageant. How, could you tell me more about the pageant? What Lourdes did, um, was there any talent portion, ah, interviews, and so forth?

EF: You mean when she was, ah, well, let's see... She had Miss O'ahu [Filipina] and already then she was Miss Hawai'i [Filipina], eh? That's when they had, ah, talent, ah, talent contest, ah, that's all part of the both becoming Miss Hawai'i, Miss O'ahu, ah?

NG: How about for Miss Sampaguita?

EG: No more.

EF: Well, I don't think there's anything.

EG: It depends on the money you can make.

NG: What? (laughs)

EF: Oh yeah. I think it was something like that.

NG: The money?

EF: The, um, the money collected. The money was collected, ah...

NG: The money was collected from...

EF: How did they collect that money, now?

EG: Nana will solicit people to buy tickets.

EF: Tickets for what?

EG: For, so they can...tickets for Miss Sampaguita.

EF: Oh, the one who gets the most tickets for the church, yeah? That's the, ah, the church yeah? Yeah.

NG: Were you active in, with St. John?

EF: Me?

NG: Yeah.

EF: No. [NG laughs] I'm a Catholic, but I'm not active.

NG: But did you go to church like on Sundays?

EF: Hardly. Maybe once a year.

NG: Really? So what did you do on Sundays, when ah...

EF: Nothing. Just stay home.

NG: Oh...so how about your son, um, Junior? Did you teach him... Well, he plays drums..

EF: Ah?

NG: Your son plays drums. Did you teach him how to play drums? Were you an influence in his musical...

EF: No, he was musical. He, he drummed...when he was small he used to drum the pots. [chuckles] Yeah, as a small kid.

NG: Did he teach himself, too?

EF: Yeah. Yeah, he teach himself. He still play. He still play with a group. I think they play at least three times a week, something like that.

NG: So, you were 74 when you retired. And, um, ah, usually when you're 65 years old, that's retirement age. Why did you work so long?

EF: Because I can't stay home...doing nothing.

NG: Did you try to join any social organizations? I guess, maybe...or social groups, like in music, or in something else?

EF: No.

NG: Why not?

EF: Because there was no social groups I had to go to. Nobody asked me to go and join them. [laughs]

NG: Okay. That's the end of my questions. So do you have anything else to say?

EF: Well, today I have a sore back! [both laugh] I can hardly turn my head! [both laugh]

NG: Go see the doctor. Okay, it's going to end. I'm turning it off.