

Filipino-American Historical Society of Hawai'i  
Oral History Project  
Interview #2

**Edward Felipe (EF)**

**Interview Conducted By:  
Nicolita Garces (NG)**

July 03, 2004  
Kalihi, Honolulu, O'ahu

NG: This is an interview with Mr. Edward Felipe at his home in Kalihi, O'ahu, Hawai'i. The date is July 3rd, 2004, and the interviewer is Nicolita Garces.

NG: Okay, um, going back, why did you come to Hawai'i?

EF: Well...I wasn't supposed come to Hawai'i. I was supposed to go up to the Mainland. To go to school.

NG: In...?

EF: But, ah, I stopped by because I had some relatives in Hawai'i. I was going to spend a few, ah...months with them before I went to the mainland. But, um, when I was here I started working and then I stayed here. I didn't...I didn't go to the mainland.

NG: What were you planning to study in the mainland?

EF: Well, I just finished high school. I was gonna, ah, continue with my studies, whatever, ah...

NG: You were planning to go to college?

EF: Well, that what I was planned to do.

NG: Yeah. In which state?

EF: California. That's where I had an uncle up there.

NG: Oh, another uncle. So, ah, when you left the Philippines, what kind of documents did you sign? Like, did you, I dunno if visas were there at that time.

EF: Well, what you needed was, ah, a visa.

NG: Yeah. Did you get a student visa to come to the United States?

EF: Yeah.

NG: Did, did you have to change your visa?

EF: No. Because, ah, Hawai'i was a, ah...

NG: Territory, right?

EF: It was a territory of the, ah...United States. So, ah, coming to Hawai'i was just like, ah, going to the United States. If you were in Hawai'i, you didn't need any visa to go to the mainland.

NG: Why did you decide not to continue with...why did you decide not to go to California after all?

EF: I had a cousins and uncles in Hawai'i. Before, I stopped by...and then I decided to go to work. So I went to work. Instead of going to the mainland, I stopped in Hawai'i and worked [chuckles].

NG: So at that time, you thought that it was better for you to work instead of continuing your education?

EF: Well, I figured that if I worked a little bit, ah...maybe later on, I would ah...go up to the Mainland.

NG: Umm, hmm, okay.

EF: But then I started working and kept on working and, ah, that's, that's it.

NG: Your first job was at New Malo Hotel.

EF: Yeah.

NG: Um, could you describe your job as a waiter?

EF: Ah...the New Malo Hotel was ah...was a hotel. People lived there. The hotel was ah...it wasn't like it is now. Right now, it is a big building with the...at the time it was just ah...consisted of ah...

NG: Cottages?

EF: Cottages. Many cottages. And, ah, people lived there. They go to the dining room for breakfast, lunch and dinner. And, ah, I was a waiter.

NG: Um, hmm.

EF: They had quarters for ah...employees so I lived there at the same time.

NG: I read in a article that in the hotels in the 1930s, most of the waiters were Filipino.

EF: That's right.

NG: Really?

EF: Yeah. Most were Filipino. Some were Chinese. But most were Filipino.

NG: To be a waiter, did you have to be fluent in English?

EF: Oh yeah, you have to speak English so you can speak to the guests.

NG: Uh huh. How much did you get paid as a waiter at the New Malo Hotel?

EF: At that time, in the '30s, ah...employees were paid dollar a day.

NG: Waiters, busboys?

EF: The same way, yeah. Waiters, busboys.

NG: Even maids?

EF: Yeah. And, ah, even the people in the plantations, they were paid dollar a day.

NG: Were you able to interact with the staff? Like the managers, busboys, waiters, head waiter?

EF: Yeah. Waiters, busboys, they lived in the...they had their own quarters. And, ah, they lived together.

NG: Did you have your own room or did you share your room with someone?

EF: Well, they had cottages where...they have rooms where two employees would live. And the cottages were, ah, were, were in the hotel premises also.

NG: Did Filipinos interact with the Chinese and Japanese and Hawaiians outside of work, or did the different ethnic groups keep to themselves?

EF: Yeah, they usually keep to themselves.

NG: Um...right now, and the Filipinos who worked in the plantations, they would send remittances back home to the Philippines. Um...did you send any? Was that a big responsibility? Did you send money back home to the Philippines?

EF: Oh yeah. I, I had a sister who was going to school so, ah, I sent money for her.

NG: How much would you send?

EF: Well, at that time...at the time, a dollar went a long way. I sent about \$15 to my sister and then she would, ah, help the other members of the family. Her parents.

NG: Ah...back then, did any of your plans included returning to the Philippines?

EF: Oh, yeah. I was thinking of going back to the Philippines, but, ah, as time went on, I stayed here and I never thought about going back. I figured, it was a better place to live in Hawai'i, so I stayed.

NG: So how was...out of curiosity, how was your first few months in Hawai'i? Like, were you ever homesick being away from your parents and siblings in the Philippines?

EF: Well, I was never homesick because I was with relatives here. I had an uncle and cousin. I felt like I was at home.

NG: Why did you change jobs from the New Malo Hotel to Fisherman's Wharf?

EF: Oh...I was a waiter and, ah, and Fisherman's Wharf. Fisherman's Wharf was a restaurant so outsiders came and have dinners, lunch. And, ah, waiters, they made more tips

than, ah, at the hotels. I figured I go up there, I'm gonna make more tips! [chuckles]

NG: How much tips did you get at New Malo on average?

EF: Well, ah, we used to be waiting on the same people for breakfast, lunch and dinner. The same people everyday. So, they don't give you tip every time you help. They usually give you by the end of the month! This is maybe, oh...maybe \$5 a month. Well, if you worked in the restaurant, you get tips every time the people come. People come in, you make more tips. So I figured, I go up there and work and make more tips. Make more money.

NG: Ah, hah! How was, um, what were the conditions like working at Fisherman's Wharf? Like your co-workers, how were the...

EF: Was good.

NG: Was it the same like back in the hotel? Was it much more difficult?

EF: No, it wasn't any more difficult. The, um, working at the restaurant, at the Fisherman's Wharf...I lived...you don't live in there because it was a restaurant. You live someplace else.

NG: Where were you living while you were working at Fisherman's Wharf?

EF: I was living at the, ah, housing...in, ah, Ala Moana. Not too far. The single apartments.

NG: So, bachelor's?

EF: It was for family, also. And, ah, I had a cousin and uncle living in one of the apartments. I lived with them...while working at Fisherman's Wharf.

NG: Were...were most of your co-workers Filipino again?

EF: Yeah, yeah.

NG: Was it more mixed?

EF: Mostly Filipinos.

NG: Ah, going back to the ethnicity part, the Chinese and the Japanese, were they originally from China and Japan, or were they local Chinese, Japanese workers?

EF: Well, they were usually local...ah...people. Because they spoke English, ah.

NG: On your spare time, you said you went to the beach alone for swimming or, umm,.getting *limu*, sometimes you went to a friend's house for Filipino food. Did you also go out in the evenings to town with your guy friends?

EF: Well, we used to.

NG: Where did you go?

EF: We used to go to, ah, to the theaters to see a movie.

NG: Do you recall any titles?

EF: No, I don't recall, but I used go to, ah, Hawai'i Theatre. And there was another theater. I forgot the name. But mostly Hawai'i Theatre.

NG: Did you also go to the dance halls, too?

EF: No.

NG: No? You weren't the dancing type?

EF: I didn't care for that. A lot of, ah, Filipinos, they used to do that for recreation. They spent their evenings. Go out, go out dance halls. They used to pay, ah, let's see...how much did they used to pay...for, ah, one dance? Berelia, for something like, ah, 20 cents.

NG: For a dance?

EF: Yeah.

NG: So, if they dance with five girls, then they spent one day's worth of salary?

EF: Oh, yeah. [both chuckle]

NG: So then, how did you meet girls?

EF: No, I didn't. I didn't care too much about meeting girls. I liked to go to the movies by myself and that's about it.

NG: Do you remember when World War II broke out? When, umm, the Arizona was bombed by Japanese forces?

EF: Yeah, I ah, ah...I remembered that. Where I lived in Kalihi. I could see the dive bombers coming down. The planes go up and they go down like that. Where I lived. Where I lived in Kalihi. That was, ah, that was before I was...

NG: Was that Kopke Street?

EF: No, that was not Kopke Street. That was, ah, Gulick Avenue.

NG: Gulick.

EF: Yeah. Close to um...I lived there for a while.

NG: How did people around you react when, um, the war broke out?

EF: The people?

NG: Yeah, um, your family, um, people at the restaurant. Like what were they saying? How were they feeling?

EF: Well, that's something that they didn't expect. It was something like, ah, they didn't expect it. It was, ah, they didn't expect Japan to strike. It was like a stab in the back.

NG: What did you mean by "stabbed in the back?"

EF: Well, ah, he's your friend and then, um, he attacks you, ah?

NG: Oh.

EF: So that's what mean. Japan supposed to be a friend of the United States. You used to do, ah, do business with.

NG: After Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, how was your reaction to the local Japanese, for example, if you had Japanese co-workers?

EF: I didn't have any Japanese co-workers. When I was working at the restaurant as a waiter, they were mostly Filipinos.

I didn't know any Japanese. I hardly mingled with the Japanese.

NG: So how did you end up working at Pearl Harbor, again?

EF: Well, when the war broke out, um, it came out in the news. 'Cause they were, um, looking for people working...people to work at Pearl Harbor. That's how I went there.

NG: Were you interested in working for a new job? Um...were you tired of working at the restaurant?

EF: Well, I figured that, ah...ah, going to work...working for the Navy, for the government, it would be a lot better off than working for a private industry, so...

NG: In what way?

EF: 'Cause you get more benefits. You get a pension...you get a lot of benefits working for the Government.

NG: Um...were you interested in working for the military? Did that ever cross your mind?

EF: Not when I after was working at Pearl Harbor. They had the draft but, um, as soon as I was working for a different job, they didn't have to take this, um, do the services. And that what I was working. I was working in a defense job. That's why I was exempted from working military service.

NG: Were you relieved or...

EF: I figured I was doing the same thing. Because going to the service, you, you were working for your country. Working for a defense job was the same thing. You were there, working on, um...on, um...battle ships. It's a defense job, that's what it was working at Pearl Harbor.

NG: Did you chose to work in the pipe shop or did someone else put your there? Did someone put you in the pipe shop?

EF: No. When you go up there, they, ah...I didn't intend to be a pipe fitter. I wasn't offered this job before I went up there. I was just a waiter, so. But, ah, when the war broke out, you go up there, and they sent you to the shops where ever a shop needs, ah...ah, men, that's where they



send you. And they send you to the pipe shop. I wasn't a pipe fitter, I didn't think about piping, but, ah, they made me an apprentice. And they had me a mechanic to work with. That's how I, um, became to be, ah, pipe fitter. Pipe fitter and then, ah, change to coppersmith.

NG: To...to...excuse me?

EF: Copper...coppersmith.

NG: How was the working conditions at Pearl Harbor? Like how many hours did you work a day?

EF: Eight hours.

NG: Eight hours.

EF: Well, that was a requirement. We worked 8 hours.

NG: Who did you work along with?

EF: I worked with, ah, a mechanic, as a helper. Then, ah, after a while, I learned the trade, and, ah, worked on my own and had my own helper.

NG: How many people were working in the shop?

EF: Plenty. I dunno. Plenty I don't recall how many.

NG: The pipe shop is a big shop. Was it a dangerous job?

EF: No, it wasn't. Because, I worked inside the shop, I didn't go out to the ships.

NG: How did you bend the pipes? I remember you told me that, ah, you have to, one of your duties were to bend the pipes. Did you have to use a blow torch or hammer?

EF: There is a big machine in the shop. It's a pipe bender. It's a machine. You get the pipes. You set the machine and you clamp it, you start it and it bends the pipe.

NG: How many people does it take to work the machines?

EF: Well, ah, ah...two people. You, usually a mechanic and then you have your helper that runs the machine while the mechanic...the mechanic sees the pipe bends, how much the bend is and when to stop, and you have your helper with it.

NG: Was the pipe shop mixed?

EF: What it what?

NG: Mixed? Like, ah...besides Filipinos, there were Hawaiians...Chinese.

EF: Oh, yes. Where there Japanese? No, there were no Japanese.

NG: Oh, yeah, 'cause they were internees, yeah?

EF: Yes. Japan was at war. Most Japanese were in concentration camps. There were no Japanese. There were Chinese though...and Portuguese.

NG: So that was the first time you interacted with the people from different backgrounds?

EF: Yeah.

NG: How was it?

EF: It was alright. It was alright...we understood each other. I speak English. They spoke English.

NG: Were you able to make friends with them?

EF: Oh yes.

NG: How much did you get paid?

EF: Pearl Harbor?

NG: Pearl Harbor, yeah...[long pause]...about one dollar a day?

EF: Yeah, it was a dollar at that time. That was, ah, average payment.

NG: Dollar a day? At Pearl Harbor?

EF: Yeah, I think...dollar a day was outside um...

NG: Okay.

EF: Yeah, I don't remember how much I was making at that time.

NG: More than one dollar?

EF: Yeah, it was more than...

NG: During the wartime, what did you do for recreation? What did you do when you were not working?

EF: To go to the movie. That's about what you could do...go to the movies.

NG: How was Hawai'i different from the 1930's compared to the war years?

EF: The '30s... the '30s was more like...everything was slow. Just like you didn't have to rush for anything.

NG: Then '40s?

EF: That's when, ah...people were working. Working. Mostly working.

NG: For the war effort?

EF: Yeah, for the war effort.

NG: Could you explain how people in Hawai'i or how you reacted after you umm...you found out that the war ended? That Japan surrendered.

EF: Everybody was happy. [both chuckle]

NG: Was there a lot of work to do after the war ended still? Or was the work a little bit the same?

EF: For me? Well, the work still the same. Because, umm, we were still working, working on the ships. Even the war ended we were still working on the ships.

NG: Did a lot of your co-workers continued working at Pearl Harbor? Like you worked there for 30 years. Did many of your co-workers do the same?

EF: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

NG: You mentioned before that you were trained by a mechanic. Did you also become a mechanic?

EF: Yeah.

NG: Really?

EF: Uh, hmm.

NG: Was that the highest position you can get in your field?

EF: I became a piping systems inspector, also.

NG: Uh, hmm. So you climbed up the ladder while you were working at Pearl Harbor?

EF: Yeah.

NG: From apprentice to coppersmith to...wait...apprentice to pipe fitter to coppersmith, mechanic and then inspector?

EF: Yeah.

NG: Um...what did you do at Marisco Shipyard?

EF: Pipe fitting. Like that. Work on ships.

NG: What kind of ships.

EF: Navy ships.

NG: At Marisco?

EF: Yeah. There were, um, some of the work that wasn't done at Pearl Harbor, they gave... the Navy gave to some outside place like Marisco.

NG: Did you work on other kinds of ships besides Navy ships? How about cruise liners?

EF: Like what?

NG: Cruise liners, the cruise ships.

EF: Maybe I did at Marisco because Marisco...yeah...I worked on cruise ships. I might have when I was working at Marisco.

NG: How about...when did you get your American citizenship? When Hawai'i became the 50th state in 1959?

EF: I, ah, let's see. I took my citizenship the same time I could have been, ah, I don't remember now. I took something and I took my citizenship at the same time.

NG: Was it before 1959?

EF: What was the number? Did I say it?

NG: No, no, no...I think that's it. Let's end the interview here.

EF: Oh okay. It's getting late anyway.

NG: Thank you, tata. *Na palsin.*