

(1) Introduction: a Brief Kakazu Family History

Before we can begin to read the history of the Aiea SDA church, there are a few pieces of information that might be helpful to know.

- 1) There was a man named Kashin Kakazu who came to Oahu in the year 1903 as one of many contract workers from Okinawa to work on the Waipahu Sugar Plantation. We are not sure why he chose to come, but being a second son in a society catering to the firstborn, and coming under his older brother's birth certificate since he was not yet 18 at the time, makes one speculate that his decision may have been to forge his own "birthright" under a new identity in a foreign land.

After being a bachelor for ten years, at Kashin's request, his family back in Okinawa arranged a marriage for him to a girl from his home prefecture named Kame Chinen. It appears that Kame was a reluctant bride who came with the hope of seeing her sister who had come earlier as a picture bride to a man on the island of Kauai. She also wished to return to Okinawa with money to bring to her ill mother after three years. Her hopes and wishes were never realized as her sister returned to Okinawa before she was ever able to visit Kauai. And Kame herself could not return as she soon had many children to care for.

It appears that Kashin had dreams of a fortune crafted by his own hard work. He left the Waipahu plantation and purchased ten acres in Kipapa Gulch. There he took up vegetable and pig farming. But even with hired help and Kame working in the fields while watching her babies, nothing seemed to do well there. In Kipapa, Alice, Shigemi (who passed away at age 3), Ellen, Jane, Joyce, Richard and Kenneth were born. The impoverished family remembers attempts at tofu making and selling pineapples to the soldiers on trucks headed for Schofield.

With no fortune, Kashin moved his family to Puuloa (near Honolulu International Airport today). There Kashin bought a truck and tried to make a living selling baked goods. This endeavor was also unsuccessful and Kashin was forced then to ask for a job at the Aiea sugar plantation. At Puuloa Eddie and Irene were born. The family remembers keeping pigs and picking keawe beans to supplement their dad's meager income. Kashin also pulled his oldest daughter Alice out of school and sent her to barber training in town. Most of the children were old enough then to remember Kashin leading them weekly in prayer services to Buddah.

Kashin was still working for the sugar plantation when he moved his family to Aiea. It appears the move was precipitated not only by Kashin's job but by the prospect of more business to the new family barbershop manned by Alice. In Aiea the barbershop in front of the Kakazu home became so busy that the second daughter Ellen had to leave her job as a maid for the Waterhouse family and come and help Alice in the shop. Though the family had more income, it did not go very far as two more children were born, Roy and Harriet. Even though the older

sisters were bringing in more income, the younger boys remember the embarrassment of going to school with meager lunches and old clothes.

It was this Kakazu home in Aiea that the family calls the “*obake* house.” Strange things would happen. They would hear loud noises coming from under the house, but no one was there. Doors would open with no one there and no wind. The youngest son Roy would sometimes be thrown into violent seizures that had no medical explanation. It got to the point that Kashin visited a spirit medium in Ewa. He was told that their home sat over an old Hawaiian cemetery and that the spirits were restless. He was told that a murdered man’s body lay near a lemon tree in their back yard and to appease the spirit they had to put food there on the day of the month he was killed. When food was put there the happenings ceased, but if they forgot, it seemed Roy would have his seizures. Kenneth even recalls running out and throwing food at the tree to stop one of Roy’s seizures.

Though no one will admit, Kashin moved the family a few blocks away to the home that has stayed within the Kakazu family circle since, probably to get away from the *obake* house. Kashin now had ten children, a back-breaking job, but still not the fortune he dreamed of. Keep this brief history in mind as you read the story of the Aiea SDA church.

- 2) Sometime just before the start of World War II, an Adventist colporteur named Hideo Oshita knocked on the door of a family on Kauai. This was their introduction to Adventism. To make a long story short this contact resulted in a young man named George Kiyabu coming to Honolulu to study at Hawaiian Mission Academy and later on the mainland. As a result of his study he would return to Hawaii as a pastoral intern for the SDA church and be assigned to the ewa district.
- 3) Ellen Kakazu Nitta was the first person from Aiea to be introduced to the Adventist faith as she worked for the Waterhouse family. Mrs. Waterhouse was an SDA, and Ellen remembers dressing her boys for church on Saturdays.
- 4) To say that the Kakazu family with their ten children were financially challenged is an understatement. Here are a few of their remembrances.

Alice Okihiro: “. . .But, sad to say, I had to quit school because the family was having a hard time. I was twelve years old at the time my dad sent me to Honolulu to learn to become a barber.”

Ellen Nitta: “. . .when the depression came and they couldn’t sell their pineapples to the cannery, it was a tragedy. Because that was their only source of income, Jichan had to think fast how to take care of his family. Well, he decided to put me beside the main road to sell the pineapples to the folks who were driving along.”

Joyce Villegas: “I worked for the Pocketbook Man as a secretary until I got married in ’51. I gave all my paychecks to mom, and she gave me only bus fare.”

Kenneth Kakazu: “We couldn’t afford sandwiches, so mom would pack rice and leftovers in wax paper wrapped with newspaper. The hot *okazu* would melt the wax paper and leak through the newspaper. I was kind of embarrassed, but that’s the way it was so I hung around with the poor Okinawan kids.

Harriet Miyashiro: “We did not have shoes to wear to school, but fortunately most of the kids we went with were in the same boat. We walked through the cane field roads to get to school because it saved us about a half mile, but our feet got all dirty so we just ran water over them before we entered the classroom.

- 5) In the days when the Kakazu siblings attended grade school in Aiea, Okinawan children were often teased by the Naichi (Japan born) children. Most Okinawan kids remember the following jingle:

“Okinawa ken ken
buta kau kau”

By giving you this brief introduction involving the Kakazu family, it is the hope you will have a better understanding of the kind of “kids” (and their background) that you will encounter in this history.