

GUSSIE ORNELLAS

## Bread and Jelly

### INTRODUCTION

Born in 1900, Gussie Lopez Ornellas, Portuguese, had been a lifelong resident of Kamañaki Street in Kalihi Valley, O'ahu. The youngest girl in a family of nine sons and three daughters, Gussie had spent most of her life as a homemaker, caring for her brothers and her own children. At age 23, she married Frank Ornellas. She later gave birth to three daughters and two sons. Two daughters lost their lives on December 7, 1941, when shrapnel hit their Kalihi Valley home. Gussie continued to participate in community activities and the activities of Our Lady of the Mount Church. Gussie Ornellas passed away in 1997.

Interviewer Michi Kodama-Nishimoto recorded Gussie's life history in December 1983 and January 1984 for Center for Oral History's *Kalihi: Place of Transition* project. Michi was impressed with Gussie's warmth and generosity, returning from visits to the Ornellas household with gifts of homemade mango bread and jelly. The following narrative was edited from Gussie's interviews. Brackets enclose editor's additions.

*Narrative edited by Cynthia A. Oshiro. Research and interview by Michi Kodama-Nishimoto.*

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*The Hawaiian Journal of History*, vol. 35 (2001)

## TRANSCRIBING AND EDITING PROCESS

The interview was transcribed almost verbatim by students employed and trained by the Center for Oral History. The transcript was reviewed against the audio recording and slightly edited by the interviewer for historical accuracy and clarity. The transcript was then reviewed by the interviewee who verified names and dates and clarified statements where necessary. The interviewee also made some grammatical and syntactic changes. All interviewee's changes were incorporated in the transcript.

In editing the transcript into a narrative, ambiguous statements, interviewer's questions, and responses extraneous to the narrative's storyline were not included. Topics were rearranged for coherence and readability. Added for fluidity were occasional conjunctive and transitional phrases; added for clarity were explanatory statements and definitions of non-English terms. These additions are indicated by brackets [ ].

Throughout the process, efforts were taken to avoid compromising the intent and genuineness of Gussie Ornellas' statements.

## INTERVIEW

My young days was good. People now, I don't know, they don't feel towards one another like before. Like when I was brought up, everybody was friendly. You know, you'd share things with one another.

My friends used to come to our house. The boys used to play out in the yard, the girls would play in the house. [The boys] used to make their own tops. From the guava branches they make peewee sticks, little sticks like that. They used to dig little bit in the dirt. They put the stick [in there] and then you hit with the big stick. If you'd miss, well, you was out. Then they used to get together and go down to the river. They used to bring *'ōpaes* [shrimp] and *'o'opus* [gobies], cook it outside.

Then on Christmas they used to build a little grass shack. They go up the pasture, get the grass. At the midnight mass they'd go spend the night over there in that little shack eating, and drinking their small soda. They used to have a lot of fun.

Well, [the girls] didn't have much time to play 'cause we had our

chores. Then, if we wanted extra money, my mother couldn't afford to give us, so we used to go wash clothes for people. We take the clothes, go down the river. They didn't want to go to the river like that, so we used to go. For ten cents, we'd wash one big tub of clothes. We used to take a rock, a nice rock, you know, where you can scrub. Not one that was very smooth, had to be a little rough. We wash the white clothes first because we used to bleach it on the grass. Then we wash the colored clothes, come home, hang up colored clothes, then go back and wash our white clothes and bring it up. That's how we would spend our time growing up, washing clothes for somebody that really wanted help. The clothes at that time, it wasn't clothes that you just wash and hang up and it's fine. Was khakis and dungarees and stuff like that. So we had to use two [charcoal] irons because if we only had one iron would take us long to iron. When this one was cold, we'd put it aside, we'd put the coal in, we'd pick the other one that was hot. That's how we used to iron fast.

Then at that time we didn't have powder for wash clothes. Was all the bars [of soap]. Well, when it would come to the end, you know, how it gets so thin, we used to put it in a bottle, save it for the coconut. My brothers used to crack it little bit right around with the hammer [and] saw the coconut in half. We'd wet a portion of the floor and then we would put the soap in the coconut and we'd scrub floors. Then take the rag, go over it again, then another bucket with the clean water. And the floor, it was nice after you washed it. Nice and clean 'cause it wasn't painted. And my mother used to come and check because if you don't wash one spot it shows, you know, when it's dry. There's a little spot, right, you go back and scrub it.

Well, before we would go to school, I had to see that the dishes was all washed 'cause we all used to eat about the same time. Then there was a group of boys and a group of girls that used to walk to school and back. And we had all dirt road, not paved roads. When it was all muddy, we used to take our shoes, wash our feet down by Kalihi Street, below School Street, in a ditch on the side of the road. Used to wash our feet, dry it, put our shoes on, then walk all the way to the [Sacred Hearts] Convent [School]. It was on Fort Street next to the cathedral. Then walk home again because [our parents] couldn't afford to give us fare for the bus or the streetcar. Even though it was five cents, still they couldn't afford it.

My brothers and I then come home from school. We had to make our homework, maybe we'd eat [a] sandwich before, then after our homework was done we would go up to the pasture and get wood. We had to use wood for the oven and wood for our stove because we had no oil stove. And then we used to come home, put our wood down, and go to the river to get the water.

And water, what my father did was, he had two big barrels and he had screen and mosquito net over them, that was for drinking. We'd go down to that river to get [water]. We used to put [empty] kerosene oil can on our head. We get an old rag and make a doughnut out of it, and put it on our head, and put the can on top of our head. We wash the leaves from the guava trees, the shoots, wash it nice and clean, then put on top in the can so that the water, when sometime you'd shake your head, wouldn't wet us up.

Well, that was for cooking and to water some of the plants 'cause my father was very fond of planting fruit trees. Had peaches and oranges, soursap, so he used to plant that. Once in a while they had to water it. With his fruit trees, [my father] wouldn't allow any of us to pick up the fruit unless he picked up himself because when he picked, he knew just the ones that was ready to eat. And he'd pick and everybody would have their share. Then if there was extras he'd give to the neighbors.

Six o'clock [in the evening] our church bell used to ring. Soon as we heard that bell, everybody had to be home. One day we were playing down on the riverside and we heard the bell, so we came home. When my brothers came up, they all came ahead of me. We had a big soursap tree, so they all went and feeled the soursap. I was the last one. When I went and feeled to see if it was dry, it fell down. We all came in the house, wash the hands. My father, he usually goes around see if there's any [fruit] to pick. So he held the soursap and you could see the fingerprints, you know, when you touch. So he came inside.

"Oh, who knocked this down?"

"I don't know, I don't know."

He said, "Nobody knows how it fell down?"

So he went in his bedroom, I heard him tiptoe, you know. When he tiptoes, he's a little angry. So I told my brothers, "I'm gonna tell him."

They said, "Yeah, but then he's gonna spank you!"

I said, "But I'm gonna tell him."

So he came out. He says, “Well, this is the last chance I’m giving you,”—in Portuguese, you know—“eh, I’d like to know how this fell down.”

So I told him, “Papa, we all touched it, but when I touched it, it fell down.”

“Well, it’s a good thing you came out with the truth,” he says, “or else all of you was gonna get it.” Wasn’t only one of us that was gonna get it, was all of us.

I was ten [years old] when my father died and I only had spanking from him one time. Well, I deserved it. See, those barrels with water, well, I wanted to see how much water was in there so I took the screen [off the top], peeped, and lost my balance. I went down. Good thing one of my brothers passed by. He started yelling for my father. So my father came and pulled me out. He pat me to get the water off. So then he tell me, “I’m gonna spank you. And you know why? I hate to do it, but that’s to give you a lesson that you’re not supposed to do that. You could have died.” So he spanked me. That’s the only time I had spanking from my father.

My father was very strict, but he was kind. My mother, too. She would always want us [to] be nice, friends with everybody. Don’t get yourself in trouble.

Let’s see, I was ten and I was born 1900, so 1910, [my father] died. [There’s] a cemetery up there, that’s where my father was buried. Everybody [went] to church.

The hearse wasn’t a car, it was [drawn by] horses. And they had this just like a shawl, a black shawl; each horse had one on top of them and had fringe about [two inches] long. They looked so pretty, the horses all decorated. And we walked in the back, walking to the cemetery.

[My mother] say she would never give her children a stepfather. So my mother was left with eight boys, my other sister and myself. My oldest sister had got married when my father passed. So we struggled, but we got there.

My mother was short, like me you know, [but] eh, she wasn’t afraid. My brothers were playing cards. Two of them got into a fight. She got hold of a strap. She called all the other ones to come and watch. She spanked the two of them. She didn’t care who had started it. “From now on,” she says, “I don’t want to see any of you brothers getting into a fight. You must remember you folks are brothers.” Boy, nevermore. Not one of my brothers got into a fight. Yeah, she was

strict. My mother, my parents were strict, but it was for our own good, because after all, they had so many children to raise, and it was hard.

[Then] my mother, she got real sick. She had rheumatism in her hands and her back, her feet. [Although] I enjoyed school very much, I had to quit when I was young. [My mother] went and she asked the nuns. They didn't want [me] to leave because I was only in the sixth grade, but my mother says that my two sisters were [already] married. So anyway, I had to quit school to stay home, do all the washing, the cooking, the ironing. That was my life.

[My husband] was twenty-six and I was twenty-three when we got married. I used to go visit my [future] sister-in-law and we met. So we started seeing more of one another.

He was a concrete mix man. That was his trade. When he was a younger boy, well, he used to work labor. But then, as he grew up, I don't know, I guess the man that used to run it must have taught him. That was his job for years and years. Royal Hawaiian Hotel, he was the one that made all the concrete for that building.

[A] little German man, Mr. Murphy, had [this] small, little house, and all around was mango trees. He wanted to sell because he was getting old. He wanted to go back to Germany. So, we asked him who he would have [to be] the agent to sell it. He says Bishop Trust, because part of this land up here belong to Bishop Trust. So, we went to Bishop Trust and we told them that Mr. Murphy had said he wanted to sell his place. They says yes, that he had gone down to tell them. They came and they measured and surveyed and everything. They told us that we could get it for \$500. Well, at that time, was big money for us. (Chuckles.) [But] we bought it.

My husband's grandma, she lived across. I never forget that when she heard we had bought the place, she was so happy she gave us five dollars gold. For good luck, she says. (Chuckles.)

My little girl, her name was Barbara. But from the hospital, she was so tiny, the nurses gave her the name of "Tiny." And that's how everybody knows her by the name of "Tiny." My husband's grandma used to love that little girl because she acted like a little old lady. I know when she used to clean house, she used to like to go down with the dust mop, and oh, every little corner. Like my mother always used to tell us in Portuguese when we never used to do things right, "Ha! You just did the part where, if you had a mother-in-law, she would come

and she would see that was clean.” (Laughs.) But that little one, oh, she was really clean.

And the children used to go to—well, they call it the Bible reading. We call it “catechism.” And we used to have the fairs. They sell ice cream. And there was games for the children to play. [My young days] the Lady of the Mount [Church] used to have a big doing over there. That’s the patron saint of the Portuguese and they used to have a novena, they call it, for nine days. You used to go pray the rosary in church, and then they used to shoot powder, you know. They used to make this sticks of dynamite or something, and then they used to light and throw them one after another for those nine days before the regular date, the fifteenth of August. Then we would have bazaar and games. At that time they would allow even those dart games. You’d get prizes.

We used to make sweet bread, and sometime we’d put three or four sweet breads for a prize. To bake the bread, we had to make yeast with boiled potatoes. Well, the white bread, we used to grate the potatoes and put the potatoes, some sugar, salt, little bit water, and let it rise. When it was up, we used to get our flour, sugar, and bake our bread, [with] little salt. That’s the white bread. And then the sweet bread, well, it was about the same, only we had to add butter and eggs to the sweet bread. That one sometime used to take a little longer to rise.

The ovens were made of bricks and were nice and rounded. Well, [when] it was time to start the oven, we used to put the wood in, let ’em get good and hot. We used to throw some flour in. Well, if it would burn the flour, means it was too hot. We used to have a big stick with rags, and we used to damp the rags, and we used [it] to go and clean all the oven up, and bring all that coal all to the sides. [And] had a piece of tin like a door, you know. Well, if it was ready, we’d put our bread in. Cook for one hour. Maybe twenty minutes or so, we’d look at it. If it was little too brown we’d keep on shoving the coal toward the door a little bit more. And if it wasn’t, then we’d let it be until the hour, then we take it out. We used to make those great big loaves. [But] we couldn’t afford to make sweet bread often. Sweet bread was only on Easter, Christmas, [and church bazaars].

We would [also] carry all the statues, all decorated—Sacred Heart, the Blessed Mother. And the Lady of the Mount used to be [carried by] the ladies, two in the front, two in the back, and walk all the way

from the church, go around KC [Market], up to the school and come back to the church. During the war [World War II], that's when they break, because you couldn't have the processions here.

December 7, 1941. That's when they were making lot of buildings for the Army and Navy. Mr. Vierra, he was the foreman there. So, they needed some ladies, after the buildings were made, to clean up before the service people would come in. So anyway, I went. I was the oldest, so he put me in charge of the other girls. I used to work every day. Then, Sundays was my day to go shopping because the stores, markets, and all was all open. On the way coming up [that Sunday morning], I looked up and I saw so much smoke. We had my husband's auntie with us. I told my husband and her, "Oh, my goodness. Look at all that smoke up in the sky."

She says, "Oh, it must be the planes practicing."

Then, I saw my cousin going down. He was [usually] a slow driver. [But] he was going kinda fast. I told my husband, "Look, Fred is going down, and he's going down fast." I said, "I wonder if something happened."

So, got to the school. I saw everybody outside. So, I asked them. I says, "What happened?"

They says, "We don't know, but whatever happened was up your street."

We got [up] about a block. Here was a American Legion man telling that we couldn't come up because there was a big hole in the middle of the road coming into my garage. Then, one boy came. I says, "What happened?"

He says, "Whatever happened was at your place."

Oh, we left everything. My husband and I ran up. When we came, they had brought my oldest girl. One of the [American] shrapnels hit her on the main artery and she was bleeding. They had laid her down. There was a nurse that used to live below, she was here. Then, I asked for my boy and my other girl.

Oh, they say, "I think Frank is downstairs with the uncle in the basement."

I said, "Where's Tiny?" Nobody knew where Tiny was. That was their bedroom.

When I went in there, I saw her flat on the floor. One of the shrapnels went right through her temple. [And] she had a gash, this—her wrist.



Then, my nephew downstairs, one shrapnel went down there. He was just coming out of the bathroom. Hit him. My brother was cleaning his car and the shrapnels ripped his side all up. So, Fred took him with another friend of ours, and they put him in the car and they rushed him because the ambulance take long to come. You know, roads were blocked and everything.

Then, the ambulance came. They were taking my oldest girl and my nephew. I says, "Tell the ambulance to stop because there's Tiny. They have to pick Tiny up." So then, they took the three of them. They stopped us from going down. We were going to the hospital, but they said, "No, you cannot go." After I don't know how many hours, my husband went to the hospital. So then, when he came home, he said . . . Well, Tiny, I knew she was dead because right through her temples. I know she couldn't pull through. That, I'm sure she was dead, but the sister was still alive when they left. My nephew was dead, too. So [counting my brother], there was four [who died] in the family.

My husband's cousin used to live across, too. She got hurt. But it just passed by, you know, just a scratch. But her daughter, see, the wires fell down. They were going to her sister's house up here that had a basement. The little girl stepped on the wire. So, it affected her leg. Her leg is short. Then, my auntie's house, the shrapnels went through, but nobody got hurt. It was only us here and across.

One bomb fell on that side, the river. But you see, over there, it's all soft dirt, so it went right down [and] didn't explode. But this one [fell on] the road, and, of course, hit something hard, yeah?

Oh, it was awfully hard to take. I wouldn't open their bedroom. I just couldn't [for] one year. My mother used to go in there and kinda air it out, but I just couldn't go in there. Our pastor used to come all the time and ask me, "Open it."

"I can't." I says, "I can't."

So then, my mother with my cousin, they cleaned it up. They took everything out. After one year, I went in there. Oh, but the first days, the holidays, oh, it was terrible. You know, the holidays would hit you real hard. Think of them every time. At night, I used to cry. My husband tell me, "It's happened. We can't do nothing about it." Oh, but still.

I had a [neighbor]. She always sends me a Christmas card. This year, she wrote, "You know, I love you very much, my husband and I. You're our good, good neighbor." You know why? She had a little boy,

seven years old. He had cancer in the lungs. I used to go there and keep him company. She almost went insane, too, when she lost that boy. I used to go there, talk to her and tell her that she had to take what God gave her. I says, "Look with me. I lost my two girls. I lost my brother, my nephew. All on the same day." I says, "But, I got to make the best of it."

After the war, then different people start coming. You see, some of the Portuguese moved. Like right now, this one [neighbor] is Filipino, then there's a Japanese [and] all the rest going down, it's all Filipinos and Japanese. But to me, everybody's my friend. That's the way I feel, regardless what nationality and all of that. If they want to live up here, it's okay.

Once you so used to with a place, you don't want to move. I like it so much. This was the first home that I bought. You know, my own. Some salesmen, they come here. They says, "It's easy to sell it." [But] I wouldn't part with it, unless God wants to take me, then I have to part (chuckles), but otherwise, I'll go for a trip and all of that, but I'll always come back home. And my family up through here, we all united. As they say, [we] stick like bread and jelly.

\*The Center for Oral History, Social Science Research Institute, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa