

ON FACING EVICTION FROM PUBLIC HOUSING

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On June 1, 1946, the Manoa War Homes project was officially opened. This project, costing \$3,500,000 and covering an area of 83 acres, consisted of about 1,000 units and was an attack on the pressing housing problems faced by the Territory. It was set up originally by the Federal Government for the housing of war workers. However, occupancy was later restricted to the families of veterans and servicemen.

This project was established over the objection of many Manoa landowners and with the understanding that it would remain only as long as there was a local need. In April of 1954, as a result of the establishment of other housing projects and general improvement in the housing situation, the Hawaii Housing Authority unanimously voted to tear down the Manoa War Home units and not build any permanent units in that area. At that time demolition was expected to be completed by June of 1958.

In January of 1956, Lee Maice, Hawaii Housing Authority director, announced that all vacancies occurring at Manoa War Homes would be frozen. Relocation in other housing projects of the HHA was also planned at that time for families in the lower income brackets. However, families whose incomes or resources by then exceeded the maximum of those qualifying for public housing were expected to secure housing for themselves in the private market.

In June, 1958, an extension of the lease was obtained. At that time all occupants were notified that they were expected to vacate their homes by midnight March 31, 1959, so that the land could be cleared and returned to its owners by June 30, 1959. Because of the higher cost of acquiring an extension of the lease for another year, the rental fee, which included electricity and water expense, was increased from \$44 to \$56. At the time of our study, December, 1958, less than 100 of the original 1,000 units remained. They were confined to one small section of the original occupied area.

The object of our research was primarily to study the attitudes of residents of the higher income group in Manoa Housing at a time when they were confronted with a situation that threatened the stability of their housing, one of their fundamental needs of life. We chose to study particularly the resident of the higher income group because we felt that his problem would be more acute than that of members of the lower income families because he could not be placed in a similar housing project of the HHA.

Of the then remaining 100 families, there were 38 who composed this higher income group and were thus the sample for our study. Of these 38 families, 24 were interviewed. Those interviewed included Portuguese, Japanese, Hawaiians, Filipinos, and Mainland Haoles.

Economically, the families were generally in the lower-middle income group comparable to those families not living in public housing areas. Almost all families possessed a washing machine, television set, and a telephone. The average number of children in these families was three. It was evident in a number of homes that the welfare and happiness of their children were of utmost importance. In fact, throughout the study it was our impression that the attitudes and aspirations held by the majority of those interviewed were quite similar to those of comparable economic levels outside of public housing.

The interviews showed that the "higher income" residents were generally satisfied with Manoa Housing. They found the weather to be pleasant. They were able to save. The utilities were paid for. The area was safe for their children. It was near the stores and near to their place of work. For some, the area was good for their health. For others, the area afforded a certain amount of privacy. With such advantages, these residents were reluctant to move out of the Housing.

This place is the best compared to other housing areas. It's not so congested. We have a certain amount of privacy. It's much better here.

Maybe I'm prejudiced. Here, there is more respect for people's privacy. Mixed-Japanese or Japanese people would make fine neighbors. I know from experience. They typically respect your privacy more so than other nationalities. I could be prejudiced.

The weather is good and the stores are nearby. It is very cool and the air is very refreshing. Whenever I go to town or any place and come back home, I have to take a shower because the air in other places is so dirty. We don't have to pay the utilities. So nobody has to tell us how much water we should use and not to waste electricity. And the house is real nice compared to some houses people live in.

It's a pleasant place and comfortable to live in. And we don't have to pay for the utilities. The rent is very reasonable compared to the outside. The Housing is a safe place for the children while they are little. There are not too many cars and the Housing streets are not the main highway.

This is a convenient place, good location. It's a good place for those people who need it. My husband is the one who wanted to come here. I have asthma, and this cool climate is good for it. We lived in Kapahulu before, but it was too dry for me.

Well, the advantages would be mostly economical. Small rent, good neighbors, it was near to the U. of H. when I was going there, and now it's not too far from my working place, at least not too far like the countryside. Also one big factor is that the small rent helped us to save a little financially.

But with the imminence of eviction, the residents of the "higher income" group were compelled to consider one of three alternatives since they no longer qualified for assignment into other public housing. The residents had to face the prospect of purchasing a house, renting a house or apartment, or moving in with relatives.

The interviews showed that buying a house was difficult or impossible for most of the residents in this income group.

With all the doctor bills we just couldn't make the \$700 down-payment. I would like to have my own home with a yard. It would be good for the kids.

There're a lot of things you have to take into consideration when you buy a house. You can't buy any old house and then regret it. I want a good environment and near a school. Prefer-

ably, I want a place in Kaimuki or Aina Haina. Kaimuki is convenient and the class of people is better than Palolo. Oh, it's convenient there too, but that place has a bad record. I want Aina Haina for the same reasons I want Kaimuki.

Like buy, but not now. Now no save too much money. Down-payment so big. Countryside can go. Over there down-payment not too big. But I no like. Country far from town. Not good for children because my girl come like country girl. School too far for children so I no like. I want to go sewing school and English school, but country too far.

My husband don't want to buy because maybe in between he can't work and then we can't make the payments then the place will be repossessed. He says we have to think of the future.

We were saving for a little while for a down-payment on a house. But my husband is the oldest son in his family, so when his father bought a house, he had to help out. He even went back to Kauai to help his father. So now we cannot buy a house for ourselves.

We wanted to buy but they told us we have to pay \$81 a month and add to that water, lights, gas, that's too much to pay. We can buy a house in Waipio but that's 17 miles away, then we have to sell our car. How is my husband going to work? Walk? What do they expect from us? My husband don't have a steady job,... So you see it's hard to keep up with the payments and if we miss one they take the house away from us.

Renting in private housing was more of a possibility, but each family had to consider the possible disadvantages. At the same rental, which in the Housing included utilities, only poorer living accommodations without utilities and in poorer surroundings could be obtained. Moreover, it is very hard to find rental accommodations for families with children.

It's very hard to find an apartment or a house, with my six children. I want to go where I'm wanted. My husband is an alien so he can't speak English very well. Well, you can say that I'm the sole supporter of my family. I've explained to the management that besides the eight in my family, I have an aged mother and an aged mother-in-law to support and that we Orientals have pride and we care for our elders, not like the Americans, but they didn't take my problem into consideration.

What landlord wants six kids? When I called for an ad in the paper and I tell the landlord we have six kids, they say you don't need a house you need a hotel. So I give up calling already.

The other day, the assistant manager came to me and said, "Mrs. _____, I found a place for you about \$80 rent." I said, "Oh, please, if I go into that high rent, all the collectors would be after me!" After all, after paying utilities we'd be paying over \$100 a month.

As soon as you mention children - you're out. The prices are always high. It's silly to pay such a high price. You might as well buy a place. If I can find a two-bedroom house for \$56 plus all the utilities, sure I'll be glad to move in.

We had a place in Kapahulu for \$50. We went down to look at it. The apartment was in the basement. It was so dingy. There were no shelves in the rooms. The windows were so small. That's why the place was so dark. There was only a concrete floor. It was really not healthy. We had to get our own heater and stove. For the heater we had to put in our own plumbing. We had to share the water bill. We had to combine it with the upstairs tenants. Now, how are you going to tell who used the most water? We'll probably have fights over that. We had to pay for the utilities and the garbage fee. The plumbing part I could get my kid brother to help me, but the rest is too much. It would really be expensive.

Impossible. You could never get anything with what you pay here. You couldn't find a place like this as long as you live, unless in a depression.

Rent good place cost \$100. I can not pay. I like house maybe \$50, \$60, \$70 because I like save the money. If house far from school I no like. My friends go out so make me scared you know. Pretty soon I be all alone.

The resident also found that for comparable living quarters more of the family income would have to go into such items as rent, utilities, and house repairs. Such increased expenses for housing would require curtailment of other family expenditures on luxuries and even on some necessities which the family can now afford.

We have to have about \$80 every month for food. My husband won't stand for it if I cut it down. I was thinking of cutting down my milk bill. You know, my girl drinks about \$15 worth of milk every month and that's quite a lot. But my husband won't stand for it if I cut it down. So I have to cut down on the utilities and gasoline. We just bought a car so I've been driving it around back and forth. I have to cut that out. I really have to budget my food and utilities.

Once you move out you have to readjust your living expenses. There's no escaping it. I'll have to cut out dining out twice a week. And buying expensive toys for my children. I guess we have to be sort of practical.

If we rent we have to cut down even more than now, our kids would feel it too. They couldn't go show and town as much as they do now.

I guess we have to cut down everything. I think the food bill would be cut most. When I shop, I don't buy the very best like I've been doing or buying extra goodies we can do without, buy maybe the second best. Maybe my husband can quit smoking. He tried to quit before, but he couldn't.

I guess we could cut down on food. Not be too extravagant. Recreation, bowling like that we can cut down. Kids things we can cut down too. Unnecessary things we don't have to buy.

The alternative of moving in with relatives was strongly resisted even though most of the interviewees came from groups in which, traditionally, relatives did live together with three or four generations in one household.

Definitely not, I wouldn't even think of living with relatives. I rather live in a shack than live with any relatives.

No, we don't want to move in with our families. My brother wanted us to move in with him, but we didn't want to. You just can't do what you want living in with relatives.

My husband doesn't want to live with them. In fact, at one time, my father found a place. He thought it would be cheaper if we all lived together. But my husband didn't want to live with my side because, I guess, he would feel out of place. I would feel the same way with his family.

I don't want to live with my relatives. I had enough with my in-laws. They lived in the country... They were typical Japanese. Real Japan style. I really slaved for them. I prepared meals and I had to eat last. I used to work too. So if I eat last I just lose my appetite. So I really lost weight. My mother always used to tell me how come I'm so skinny. My father-in-law had to go furo (to take a bath) first. Everything, he was first. You see, I married the eldest son.

The residents anticipated a lack of privacy if they lived with their relatives.

We never thought of moving in with relatives. My mother's house is too small. But if worst comes to worst, we'd probably move in with my mother-in-law as a last resort.

For one thing moving in with relatives would be too crowded. We wouldn't know where to store our things. Any way it's better to keep-away from relatives. We'd be a lot happier living alone.

There would be less privacy for both families and the children. There may not be enough living space. People will be getting into each other's way.

My father won't bother I think. But I think my friends wouldn't want to come over because of my father. They wouldn't feel comfortable with him around.

Yeh, we wouldn't have any privacy because like if we moved in with my sister, they have a studio apartment and just one kitchen and bathroom. It would be like a community bath. My husband, he wants to take a bath when he feels like it and do what he pleased, so it wouldn't work.

Interviewees also anticipated complications which would arise in living with their relatives. Also, the residents felt that there would be greater likelihood of conflicts concerning the children and their control.

That's the worst thing to do, move in with relatives. You know old folks, they complain about little things. It's better to struggle yourself than to move in with relatives.

Conflicts would arise. We lived with my husband's folks for about one and a half years, and somehow their ways and my ways never agreed.

There wasn't any real trouble, just the usual things that happen in every family. And too, maybe because my father-in-law was important in the family. He was first in everything, that's why.

There would be differences of opinion especially with the older people concerning the children. You don't want to raise them in the old fashion way but in the modern way.

For a couple of months things would run smoothly, but then there might be trouble. My brother-in-law is married now so you can see already what would happen. If my daughter makes noise, she wouldn't like it. My sister-in-law is pregnant so more she wouldn't like it. And if I don't work, she might go and tell my mother-in-law.

The attitudes of the residents towards living with relatives seem to confirm the existing trend in American culture toward keeping the "small family" (parents and children) an autonomous unit, without extraneous relatives.

Thus at the time of the interviews--approximately three months before the March 31st deadline--the residents regarded the necessity of moving with some misgivings. Many of the residents were searching for a place to rent and were hopeful of finding one. Two, in fact, had already located homes for themselves.

We haven't given up, we're still hunting. In February, I have about two weeks vacation coming, so I can devote my time looking for a house.

We found a house already. We're going to move in a few weeks. So we're not worrying anymore. Before that I couldn't sleep at nights.

Now that we found a house I feel very much relieved. Before that I used to worry so much that I couldn't sleep at nights.

Several of the residents felt that they could do nothing but wait for the day of eviction to come. Some of the residents still hoped that somehow the Hawaii Housing Authority would take care of them.

We're curious about where we're going and we're sort of worried--if the HHA would find a place. At least the children have a school; that's all I care about. We're waiting for the HHA to call us if they have a house. We're not worried about anything else. They'll find us something. But if I could I would get my own house. But we just don't have the money. It would

be nice to have our own home. I think everybody wants their own home someday.

I'm still trying. Everytime in the newspapers. Some people don't care, but I do. I think we're still going to be here when the time comes. But I don't think they can just throw us out like that! Isn't there something that says because we're citizens that we have our rights and that they can't just throw us out on the road?

I think I will still be here in March. We tried hard to find a place, but we just can't. I don't think the government will ever kick us out. I know them pretty well and they wouldn't do anything like that. Well, if some of us are still here--I think we will be temporarily placed in another housing. What can we do if we can't find a place to live?

There was a feeling among the interviewees that the maximum income for those qualifying for public housing should be raised. In families where both the husband and wife worked, there was some discussion as to whether the wife should quit her job in order that the family income might fall down into the range of those qualifying for public housing.

If there was no other way, I guess I would give up my job at ... and tell them, "Okay, I won't work so our income would be low enough so we can go into some other housing." Or maybe the HHA would let us go into another housing temporarily until we can find another place.

Then, there was also a feeling of injustice among a few interviewees because neighbors in public housing failed to report all their income and thus continued to qualify for public housing.

I used to go to the manager and argue. Some families have higher income than us and they have less children. But they still get into another housing. But he said he couldn't do anything. Some people can lie about their income and they don't put everything down in their tax questionnaire--the extra money they make. Sooner or later they're going to get caught. Me, I can never lie.

Another group of interviewees felt that the Hawaii Housing Authority should do something for the "higher income" residents like themselves.

As for myself I don't have any grudge for having to leave here. But my husband is different. He says they will have to carry him out. He thinks the HHA should find a place for us. He says this place should never be given up.

They don't do anything for the middle income people. That darn HHA. They're not doing anything to help us. Somebody should look into the government. I don't see why they have to provide housing for only the low income people. What about us middle income people? Some of those low income people are far better off than us. We pay more taxes and they get all the benefits. Might as well not make much money, too! You can see that the government is building housing for the low income people. If I know who to see, I would really squawk. This whole thing is unfair.

I don't see why the Territory is making so many roads. Why don't they make more housings? Only people get killed on the roads.

The majority, however, agreed that the land should be returned to the owners, and a majority also held no ill-feelings towards the Hawaii Housing Authority. These interviewees felt fortunate that they had been able to stay in Manoa War Homes as long as they had, for after all they had been enjoying low rentals, during a period of unspecified length, after the family income had risen above the maximum figures allowed for persons qualifying to enter the housing.

As far as the landowners are concerned, it's up to them--it's their land. But the HHA are very arrogant, I'm telling you! They think that everyone who is in here are shiftless and don't have a reason or purpose. Anyway a housing project in the Manoa area is ill-advised. It's too beautiful a spot.

In summary, the opinions expressed by the residents of Manoa War Homes were generally those of satisfaction with the advantages they gained by living in public housing, such as the relative convenience of the area, free utilities, and the opportunity to save.

Because of the high cost of a down-payment on a house, the residents were reluctant and in most cases unable to purchase a house. The residents seemed more disposed to rent a house even though they anticipated several major financial readjustments in their present standard of living. In conformity with the American value of having one's own home exclusive of relatives, the residents were most hesitant about sharing a home with their relatives even in a time of desperate need.

Despite the difficult situation the residents have had to face because of the eviction notices from the Housing authorities, most of the residents hold no ill feelings toward the HHA or the landowners, although several felt that the HHA could provide some housing projects for the low-middle income families like themselves.

At the time of this study, about four months after the interviews were made, there are about 37 families still left in the Housing. Thirteen of these were among the 38 families in our sample who were not eligible for placement in other public housing.

Of the 25 families in the sample who have left the Manoa War Homes nineteen families are living in rented homes in such areas as Kalihi, Kapahulu, Manoa, Kaimuki, Liliha, and Moiliili. Six families have bought houses in the following areas: Aiea, Pearl City, and Kapahulu. None of the families from our sample of 38 residents have moved in with their relatives. However, since the lease has been extended until May 31, 1959, it remains to be seen whether any of the remaining 13 families will move in with their relatives.

Note: In June, two of these thirteen families moved in with their relatives for the following reasons: the incompleting of one family at the time of the deadline, and the inability of the other family to meet the downpayment on a house.