

Mei-Ying Remembers . . .

Before I come to Hawaii I suffer much. Only two kinds of people in China, the too poor and the too rich. I never can forget my days in China. In a small crowded village, a few miles from Hong Kong, 54 years ago I was born. There were four in our family—my mother, my father, my brother, and me. We lived in a two-room house. One was our sleeping room and the other served as parlor, kitchen, and dining room. We were not rich enough to keep pigs or fowls; otherwise, our small house would have been more than over-crowded.

How can we live on six baskets of rice which were paid twice a year for my father's duty as a night watchman? Sometimes the peasants have a poor crop, then we go hungry. During the day my father would do other small jobs for the peasants or carpenters. My mother worked hard, too, for she went every day to the forest to gather wood for our stove.

Sometimes we went hungry for days. My mother and me would go over the harvested rice fields of the peasants to pick the grains they dropped. Once in a while my mother would go near a big pile of grain and take a handful. She would sit on them until the workingmen went home. As soon as they go, we ran home. She cleaned and cooked the rice for us two. We had only salt and water to eat with the rice.

Father was suffering from dysentery so my mother went out to look for herbs. My father told me to take the baby out to play and not to come back until late. Being always afraid of him, I gladly took the baby out. We were three houses away watching a man kill a chicken. Pretty soon a man came to call me to go home, for my father is dead. I ran with my brother on my back and stopped at the door of our house. I took one look at my father dangling from the ceiling and started to run, to where I don't know. . . .

Poor people are buried in mats, but Mother bought a coffin for my father. She had asked the carpenter to give her a few weeks to pay for the coffin and the man agreed. My mother called me to her and put me on her lap.

"Do you want me to remarry or will you be a good girl and go to stay with a certain lady?" she said. I told her that I do not want her to remarry but I will go with the lady so that she will have the money to pay for my father's coffin. If she did marry again, I would have a hard time looking for her when I came big. I leaned my head against her breast and if I knew



that was the last time I would be so near to her, I would not have let my brother cry alone.

I heard my mother tell this go-between lady that she wants me put in the hands of a lady or man who would come to Hawaii because she has heard Hawaii is a land of good fortune. All the other people who went to Hawaii sent money home every time.

My mother took off my mourning robes, dressed me in a colored dress with a red string on my hair. We went with this go-between lady to the big house of Mr. Chin, two miles from our village. He was to look me over, and I seemed to be his choice for he took out 90 dollars to give to my mother. Every year of my age was worth ten dollars. I wished I were older than nine so that my mother could get more money.

Before the actual parting, I was happy and glad to go because I knew I was helping Mother. When my mother and me went out of the house I took one look behind and did not want to go. I cried and begged and asked to stay at home. For once I had the sympathy of the neighbors. They cried and told me that I must be a good girl and go so that my mother can get the money to pay for the coffin. I quickly wiped my eyes and went with my mother. It was eleven o'clock when we came to the gate of Mr. Chin's house. We stayed outside until it was twelve. It is said that it is bad luck

to enter a master's house when the time is odd, it must be even time. Again the parting was hard. I ran after my mother but my master held me. He gave me a silver spoon, a jade bowl, sweets, and cakes—all that I always longed for.

A lady in that house told me that Hawaii had big, fat, very sweet sugarcane—it was better than honey. I was crazy for cane that I just waited for the day to come to Hawaii. She also told me that there was hardly anything to do but after I came, I found out that this was not true.

In 1891 my master and me sailed on the *Billy Jack* to go to my new mistress in Hawaii. We slept on canvas cots and had cheap meat and cabbage for every meal. We could not land in Honolulu because there was smallpox on board ship. We went directly to San Francisco and stayed there for two months. I never saw the shape of the land for I was below the ship. When we came back to Hawaii, I was locked in the immigration office for three weeks. How happy I was when my boss came to me. The first thing I asked my master was a piece of sugarcane. He said that there is none around the place where we live. How sad I was for I expected cane to be all around.

Mr. Chin was the owner of a large carpenter shop in Nuuanu Street. We lived behind the shop. I had to wash clothes, clean the house and the basin. I also waited on the table and, when the family was served, then I took my bowl to my master for food. I always ate separately from the family table.

Although my mistress called me a "slave girl," a good-for-nothing girl, and beat me unmercifully, I was happy to be in Hawaii. At least I had food in my stomach and ate with a silver spoon. (Wong 1936)

Toshio Remembers . . .

My name is Toshio Hirata. My father was a samurai [warrior] and my mother was a farmer's daughter. When father was young, the Emperor took land and power away from the samurai. They became like other people, having to work in order to survive.

Traveling up and down the countryside looking for land to buy, my father met an old farmer who owned some fine farmland. The old farmer said to my father, "Young sir, if you will marry my daughter, take my family name as your own, and work my land until the sweat soaks your clothes, I will give you all that I have when I die."



Father agreed. In a few years he inherited Ojiisan's [Grandfather's] farm. He worked hard to support his growing family: my mother, Kiku, my older brother, Kazuo, myself, and my younger sister, Osada. The village of Uto had been a prosperous *mura* [village] in Ojiisan's time. Most of Uto's 300 families were farmers who grew rice, barley and vegetables, raised chicken, and caught eels and fish. For as long as we could remember, no one ever went hungry in our *mura* because we all helped each other.

The tables of our *mura* did not stay full, however. For two years the harvests were very bad. Crops died in the fields, and to avoid starvation many poor families packed their belongings and wandered to the cities, hoping to find work until the gods smiled on the land again. I was only 16 when my father took us to Nagasaki to sell some land to a rich businessman. There I saw my first white foreigners and the big ships they traveled in. Just the sight of those ships made me want to sail away to see something of the world.

Sometimes these ships brought recruiting agents from Hawaii's sugar cane plantations. White American agents worked with Japanese agents, spreading the dream of wealth for people willing to work in Hawaii. "Young fellows," I heard one agent say, cornering some young men from our village, "you should think about your future. In Hawaii there is no winter. Summer all the year round. And you only have to sign up for three years. After that, you can do

as you please. Hawaii is not crowded like Japan, and you will make plenty of money. Why, in one month you will earn more yen than farmers see here in a year!"

What an opportunity! How many second sons, not needed to preserve family traditions, would take advantage of this offer? Ah . . . why can't I be one of those lucky Japanese? . . . But do I want to leave my home? . . . Well, it's only for three years. In three years, I'll be 19 . . . coming back to Uto with a bag of gold! I could take care of my parents, buy more land and build a fine house. . . . But Hawaii? What a strange wild place it must be. . . . It doesn't matter. People go there and come back all the time. . . . I'm going to sign up and come back to Uto as a rich man with many stories to tell.

"Father, I have decided to go to Hawaii," I blurted out, trying to be respectful and strongminded at the same time. Father's eyes narrowed slightly, but his voice was soft, not stern, as he asked me why I would choose to leave the land of my ancestors, to travel thousands of miles across an unknown ocean, only to work as a hired laborer in another man's fields. "You will disgrace our family name," he said.

"Is it a disgrace to do honest work, father? Kazuo and I are farmers. It is the only life we know. Our family farm has grown smaller since the bad harvests. From nine tan [three acres] of land, only three remain. Kazuo is the oldest son. He, by right and custom, will inherit this farm. Osada, at 14, is so pretty and womanly that many sons of rich farmers want to marry her. I am a second son—16 years old, able to read and write just a little, but with no trade except farming. What can I do in Japan? Shall I become a laborer in our mura? Lose face before sons of your friends? Is it not better to serve a strange master and come home to one's mura with honor and riches? Where can I find this in Japan?"

I felt foolish and rebellious as I finished my long speech. Father said nothing, staring at something beyond the wall. He remained silent for a long time. "Toshio," he broke into my thoughts, "you may go to these wild islands. Bring the sake [rice wine] I was saving for the new year. We shall drink to your health. Work hard, my son, save your money and do nothing to bring shame to your family, your mura or your country."

That was 1898. I always tried hard to remember my father's words, for I never saw him nor my mother after that time. (Hung 1976)

Yong-su Remembers . . .

Times were hard. The country had been passing through a period of famine years. The Emperor needed more money; but my occupation as a tax collector barely kept me from starvation's door as I traveled from village to village. More often than not, I would be greeted thus: "You are too late. The one before you has already collected the money." Even now, I've often wondered how your mother got along, but somehow she managed and took good care of your harabuji [grandfather]. But the little babies . . . they never lived to be even a year old. We had already lost four, and only one remained. He was about five years old when I heard about Hawaii.

I remember as if it were only yesterday. It was in Seoul. I had gone there to find out more about this land of opportunity, this land of perpetual sunshine where it is never cold, this paradise across the Tai-Pyong-Yang [Pacific Ocean]. I had been directed to go to a certain minister's house, and as I entered the yard I saw a little girl. She was about five, too. I asked her if her father was in. She stopped her swinging and ran into the house. Soon the minister came out.

We shook hands. "Is it true about this land beyond Tai-Pyong-Yang, where one can make a fortune in just a year?" He replied, "Why, most assuredly, yes! Thousands have already gone, and you must not await another day but make preparations



immediately. A boat will be sailing in a week from Inchon harbor."

So I returned home and spoke to your mother. It was my intention to go to Hawaii alone. I would be gone for three years, at the longest, and I would return to the family. You know, your mother never said a word for a long time. Then she said, "We'll sell the house to Saam-choon [Uncle]. He'll take care of Kun-ah-boo-nim [Father-in-law]." And she started packing.

Your grandfather had just celebrated his haangup [sixty-first birthday]. I was sure he should remain at home in Korea. But he could hear nothing of it. "I am still good for another ten years. Surely, we will return long before that. We'll call this a little vacation trip for me. Let's go." You remember him, don't you—tall, spry six-footer to his dying day at 86?

It was the S.S. Mongolia that brought us across the great Tai-Pyong-Yang, and we landed in Honolulu in April 1904. We were a family of four then—your grandfather was 61, I was 36, your mother was 39, and your brother was five years old. (General Assistance Center for the Pacific 1975)

Anna Remembers . . .

I was born in 1880 on the Portuguese island of Madeira, far away from Hawaii. Most of the Portuguese people in Hawaii, which was then called the Sandwich Islands, came from Madeira or from the Azores, a group of islands near Madeira.

There were mountains and valleys in Madeira just like in Hawaii. We had a pig and a cow, and we grew beans, sugarcane, bananas, vegetables, flowers and grapes to make wine. After church on Sundays, everybody would relax and visit his family and neighbors.

On holidays or on religious feast days, we would dress up in festa [festival] clothes for dancing and singing, and everybody would enjoy the special festa foods and sweets.

But during the week, my husband Francisco and I had to work long hours to raise our three little children, Manuel, Mary and Caroline. I took care of the house and did the cooking, baking and sewing. Sometimes I helped Francisco with his work in the fields. There were many things we needed that we could not make or grow ourselves, like shoes or cloth.



So Francisco used to pack a bag of beans on his back and leave before daylight to walk over the mountains. The market at Funchal was on the other side of the island. The next morning he would sell the beans and then walk back with the money he had earned and sometimes with goods he had bought, arriving home after dark. From our friends who worked on sailing ships, we heard stories about a group of islands far away that was just like Madeira. We read letters from Portuguese families who had settled there. They all said there were good jobs and lots of land you could buy, that it was green, rich and good. They said that people wanted Portuguese families to settle there to work and make Hawaii grow. Francisco and I listened to these stories, but we never thought we would leave Madeira. One day, everything changed.

It was late afternoon and I didn't expect Francisco back from Funchal until after dark. I remember that I was up in the fig tree in front of our house, picking figs for the children, when Francisco returned, upset and angry.

He said that when he arrived at the market to sell his beans, a man told him that they already had all the beans they needed and would not buy any more. All his work for nothing!

Francisco threw down his bag of beans and went straight to the immigration agent and signed up for the next boat to Hawaii!

I didn't want to leave Madeira and our friends and family, but he said, "If you want to stay, then stay. But I'm going!"

He was my husband, the father of my children and the head of our family and he had made his decision. So we packed and left.

I remember it was the summer of 1906 when we left on the little ship called the Suveric with other families from Madeira and the Azores. The ship was crowded with 616 children and 710 adults. We worried most about the children, because in a small ship there was no place to play and they became restless and got sick easily. We took turns eating and sleeping.

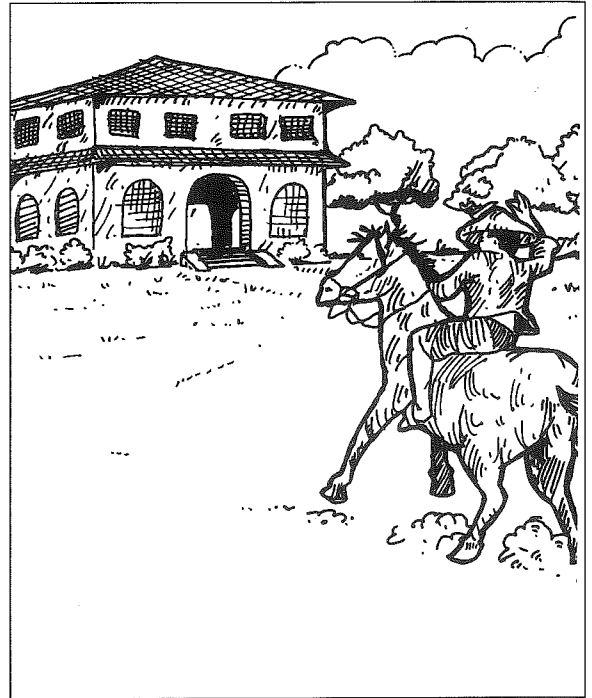
The food wasn't too bad; we had beans, soup, hard bread, and some meat and fish. But I remember that there were some rascals on board who were unhappy with the food so they used to throw it overboard. Not only their share, but ours, too! A shame they were from Madeira! Finally, we had to chain them like prisoners for the rest of the trip. When we arrived in Hawaii, these rascals were sent back to Madeira on the next boat. I often think about what happened to them when they got back to their homes.

Our voyage was more than 60 days, but it took families who came on earlier sailing ships over three months to reach Hawaii. The trip was difficult and dangerous, especially when we came through the Straits of Magellan at the stormy tip of South America.

We prayed that God and His saints would help and guide us through the voyage. Like many others during that difficult trip, I prayed that we had made the right decision to leave Madeira, our dear families, all our friends, and go halfway around the world to another group of islands we had never seen. (Gouveia 1975)

Bonipasyo Remembers . . .

You see, what was happening in our part of Ilokos was that families were getting bigger. There were more and more people—that was natural. But some of our neighbors were losing their titles to their lands—to those who were educated and some of the rich that lived in town. The people were afraid and as their families got bigger, they plowed their bodies more to sweat and feed their children. The future for



them was a lifetime of toil, a lifetime of crouching. That's why stealing was rising again. People were hungry, their stomachs were growling. Yes, robbery was on the rise. Too many poor and a handful of rich people. . . .

When I was 19, my kayong [brother-in-law], Miguel, came home from Hawaii. He brought back so many things: a personal mirror for his wife, Damiana; hammers, chisel, drill and tape measures for Tata and ready-made clothing for all. The most important ones he brought home were the sewing machine and the phonograph. We were so amazed by those machines.

When I got home from Pampanga, I gave 200 pesos of my savings to Nana [Mother] and I told her, "Nana, I am going to Hawaii." We were alone and it was early evening. She was cooking dinner in our kitchen and she said nothing. She just threw in slowly more firewood into the stove and stared at the fire. I can't forget this since that was the most warm and sad time I ever had with my Nana. Finally, I said quietly, "Nana, don't tell Tata [Father] or anyone. I'm not going yet. When I go, I'll just go." Still she said nothing. Only this time she looked at me in the eyes. Her eyes were so strong, they always were, but this time the red lines of hard honest toil glistened.

I left right away and spent the night in our barn. All night, I couldn't sleep. I was not angry at anyone or myself. I was only sad for Nana. My mind kept wavering side to side about what I should do. To Hawaii, to make money fast and come home like Miguel . . . or to stay and rot my hands and feet farming?

Later, Tata somehow found out, I guess from Nana, about my plan. So he didn't talk too much to me. He would say, "There is enough to eat here, son." But I was one of the last of my peers left in the barrio. They had all come to Hawaii. My kayong Miguel tried to stop me. "Why go to Hawaii, Kayong? Hardship is Hawaii. Only a dollar a day. You'll regret it!" he told me. But I answered, "I just want to see another land." Yes, I wanted to see another place. I just had this feeling that I had to get away someplace. Especially to Hawaii because when people talked in those days, they said, "Hawaii is like a land of glory."

I galloped the horse across an open field west of the marketplace, then let it trot straight towards the municipio [municipal building]. The recruiter's office for Hawaii was directly behind. For the check-up with the doctor, there were so many people, people who were so young at the peak of their strength. The agent stood at the door with a big cigar, and he would shout, "Give me five," and people went in by fives. I thought I wasn't going to be taken because in my group, I was the skinniest although I was the tallest. They told us skinnies to step back and they let the huskies through the back of the room. Then the agent came in smiling, "You are taken!" and we almost shouted. He gave us our tickets.

When I got home, I was really happy. Elias, my younger brother, was there. I threw him my tabungaw [gourd hat]. "It's all yours," I said. And we raced up the stairs. I was laughing so much I jumped the stairs in two steps. But when we got up there, they were all crying. They were so sad to see me go. All week, people from the barrio, neighbors and relatives came to give their well wishes and good luck. We had a party that Sunday and it was so nice I knew I'd come back as soon as I got my three years freedom.

The only thing I had was a rattan suitcase with a few belongings—two pairs of pants, one gabardine and one denim; and two long-sleeved kinuli [homespun cloth] shirts. I wore dark green gabardines with the kinuli and a red scarf around my neck.

That was a big, big boat, the biggest I have ever rode in my life. President Taft was the name of the

boat and the year was 1925. Ay, those who were sick were pitiful. Between Yokohama and Honolulu, two dead bodies in white sacks were dumped overboard. And my straw hat was blown off to the sea by a gust. On deck, there was a higher platform with a chicken-wire fence around it where all the whites stayed. We were not permitted to go there. A few days before we reached Honolulu, the sea got so rough that so many people got sick. I stayed in bed mostly after that—chewing biscuits. Then very early one morning, our interpreter came down the hatch shouting, "We're interapproaching Honolulu!" and everyone forgot their sickness.

We landed at the pier of Hilo early in the morning. And as the official of immigration, a haole man, called out our names by plantation of destiny, we held on the railing to keep from weaving with shaking knees. We filed down the gangplank and at the end we were led by a plantation official with bango—workers' dog tags.

There was no time wasted, and immediately with our bedding bundles and luggage we climbed up the back of big cattle trucks and off we went towards Naalehu. My stomach was still queasy high up in my chest, and the truck's vibration and gasoline smell nauseated me. The ride seemed forever. It took half a day and there was nothing but guavas that lined the road at first, then endlessly nothing but sugar cane until you were bored of it. Along the way we dropped off people at their plantations of destiny to work out their three years of labor contract to earn their freedom to go back home. (Felipe 1972)

Activity: Mapping It Out

Your teacher will give you a map like the one that follows. You will also need the table entitled "Immigration to Hawai'i by Major Ethnic Groups 1855–1930." As you do this activity, keep in mind that the period 1880–1921 was one of large-scale migration throughout the world. Not only were people moving to Hawai'i, but millions emigrated from southeastern Europe to the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil.