First Person Account of Growing Up in Waihe’e, Maui

I spent the initial five years of my life in Waihee when my father was the manager of the Waihee Dairy. Living a few yards from the dairy office, milking barn and associated pastures, I enjoyed the area as if it were my own farm. There were no other houses immediately around our family home which was also just a few yards from the beach. At the beach a few beach homes stood where the plantation supervisors spent weekends with their families. The ocean was famous as homes for tako (octopus) that found many places to hide among the underwater coral formations.

Most of the dairy workers, cowboys, farm hands, and milkers lived in the camp above the Waihee Dairy in neat little homes with small yards. At the end of the camp road was a stable where a few horses were kept to tend to the herds of cattle that lived in the pastures surrounding the dairy. There was also a slaughterhouse where they slaughtered and prepared meat for sale. Above the worker’s homes rose a sand dune accessible by a hikable trail. I fondly remember clmbing up to the top of the dune and looking at the rolling pastures, beach and ocean below it.

The small community was busy with the routine of herding the cows to the barn, milking, processing the milk that was freshly squeezed from the udders of the cows, either by hand or newly invented milking machines that been purchased by the dairy. School classes were frequent visitors to the dairy and were treated to small glass bottles of fresh chilled milk at the end of their visit.

Otherwise, life was quiet in the little dairy community and self-contained. It was as if the Waihee villagte that was a few miles away near the Waihee Ball Park was a million miles away and the two communities seldom met except for ball games at the park or attending Waihee School nearby.

My family left Waihee when I was 5 and moved to Wailuku. I had very little occasion to return to the dairy except to go to the beach nearby. Except for the closing of the dairy and the demolition of some of the beach homes over the years the property remained as I remember it growing up, windswept beaches guarded by stately Ironwood trees

Then in the late 1990’s a Japanese based development firm bought the property to develop a beach front golf resort. A native Hawaiian group protested the development citing numerous burials in the dunes on the property. I was saddened to think that my childhood home would become the site of a modern golf resort with residences and resort amenities.

Then in 2003, when the Japanese economic bubble burst and the development firm could no longer afford to develop it the 2.7 acre property was purchased by the Maui Coastal Land Trust The property was saved! The Coast Land Trust stated that it was an incredible opportunity to purchase such a vast tract of land holding a wide variety of conservation, cultural preservation and recreation opportunities for the people of Mau. Because of the preservation effort, the land is being restored to its original habitat, preserving wetlands and native flora. What a difference it would have been if the golf resort was built and a resort community was created.

You can still visit the Waihee Dairy site just like the school children did when I was a child over 70 years ago. You can walk along the one and a half mile beach and climb the sand dunes some of which are 200 feet tall. You sit on the shore and listen to the wind whistling through the Ironwoods. How lucky we are to have this area preserved.

Carol Ball 3/8/2016