

# **Remembering the Kids, the Bible, and the Dream**

**A rewriting of “Kids, a Bible, and a Dream” 2002**

**An updated and revised history of the Aiea SDA  
Church**

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## (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.

## (2) By the Pump House

It was no accident that Odell Mitchell, a navy sailor from the Carolinas, ended up beside an irrigation pump house in the hills of Halawa, Hawaii back in the 1940's. Mitchell, though drafted by Uncle Sam, was in the service of his Heavenly Father. He wanted to follow his Lord's voice, and in the presence of Majesty he would seek great expectations. World War II may have halted his personal plans. He may have been frightened by the prospect of soon being in harm's way; but there, sitting beside the pump house, Odell Mitchell read from his Bible and dreamt of a city whose builder and maker is God.

Upon this foundation of prayer and the word of God, the Spirit began to do His work. The Spirit of God reached out into the little plantation community of Aiea, and as often seems the case, He did not bring the popular, the strong and good-looking, or the most likely to succeed. He brought what to most would seem the unpopular, the downtrodden, and the infirm—in this case, poor plantation workers' children who could only dream of something better.

Minoru Azama, the son of Okinawan immigrants, was the first to run into Odell Mitchell. Minoru had been born with a congenital heart defect and was called a "blue baby." This condition made it difficult for him to do any sport; and as most physically challenged might attest to, he was probably the butt of many jokes no doubt causing him to shy away from the usual intermediate school activities. It is probably safe to say that he had dreams of someday running effortlessly and athletically in Nirvana's cane fields.

It may have been on a day when Minoru's head hung low as he trudged home despondent from again being left out. He may have been gasping for breath as he made his way up the slight incline of that dirt road. It may have been a day when the adventure of being a child gave way to the inner tears and angst that painted a horizon of physical and economic anonymity. But, on this day Minoru saw this strange sailor reading a book he had never seen before.

Wanting to know what book the sailor was reading, Minoru found the courage to go over to the man and ask him the question. No doubt filled with the Spirit of God Mitchell responded. His response included an invitation for Minoru and any others interested to come and study the Bible. The gospel call had been given, and the Spirit of God was waiting for hearts to respond.

We must always remember the strength of Mitchell's love for his Lord. When other sailors may have spent time and money on Hotel Street, Mitchell spent time with his God. It was in the solitude of his devotional life that Mitchell heard the voice of God and found his avenue of service. It was in his walk toward holiness that God spoke through him. God had opened his heart to see a kingdom that even included cast off Okinawan kids, a kingdom that turned the plantation caste system upside down, a kingdom where

the Road to Zion is linked to the hearts of men and not to their checkbooks, appearance or earthly position.

The following day Minoru asked his brother Shoichi and his good friend Kenneth Kakazu, among others, to go with him to hear the words of the Bible. Kenneth Kakazu has described himself back then as “shy, not athletic, and always picked last on the playground.” Kakazu later said: “I went and the first words of the Bible I ever heard were:”

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that  
whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.  
John 3:16

The rag tag bunch of intermediate school kids continued to attend Mitchell’s Bible class there beside the irrigation shack. They were taught some simple religious songs, some other Bible verses, and of course the gospel story. And though Mitchell soon had to leave, he arranged for a second sailor, Gerald Hemmet from Alabama, to conduct the informal class.

Hemmet stayed much longer than Mitchell and was very instrumental in putting to rest some of Ken Kakazu’s spiritualism fears and *obake* house memories. Besides the obake occurrences at the Kakazu residence, Ken had been scared to death after experiencing a séance at Mrs. Azama’s home. Minoru’s mother was known as the town medium, and at that particular séance Ken had run home after hearing what appeared to be the voices of the dead. When Gerald Hemmet went and visited the Azama household, Ken remembers feeling a great sense of peace, and not even being scared of her shrine in the living room. Later he said, “It was like he (Hemmet) had a greater power.”

Hemmet being a Baptist, as was Mitchell, arranged to take the boys to a Baptist church in Nuuanu on Sundays. Many of the boys attended, and several including Ken Kakazu were baptized there into the Baptist faith. Later Ken was also baptized at the Navy Chaplain’s headquarters in Kalihi called “Navigators.”

Soon Hemmet also had to leave. And though he and Mitchell have not been located (attempts have been made), we must always remember their part in the history of this church. At the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Aiea SDA Church, Elder George Kiyabu, Aiea’s first pastor, spoke in honor of the “two Baptist sailors who shared the pure gospel with the boys by the irrigation ditch.” When Ken Kakazu remembers studying the face of Odell Mitchell for the first time (mainly because he had never seen a white person close up), he recalls: “When I looked into the eyes of this man singing *Rock of Ages* there were tears. . . and I felt I was looking into the eyes of God Himself.”

Before Hemmet left he took Ken Kakazu aside. The mood was somber as Hemmet took Ken a ways up into the hills of Halawa. Perhaps Hemmet knew there was no other sailor to be sent to the Bible group. Maybe he was simply sad to leave his new friends. But soon they came to a viewpoint alongside a lone guava tree in some open grassy area. The sun

was setting and for a moment they took in an Oahu sunset with its orange and gold dying over the Waianae Mountains across the Ewa plain and the west loch of Pearl Harbor. They could probably smell the musty *pili* grass. They could probably hear the evening calls of the Shama Thrush and the *Elepaio*, or maybe even the calls of the ducks from the stinky pond of Chinese Camp. But there beside the lone guava tree Ken Kakazu heard the call to gospel ministry as Gerald Hemmet implored him to carry on the Bible study group. He gave Ken a complete Bible. Little did Hemmet know that God had impressed on him to plant a seed that would grow into a life long educator and the beginnings of the Aiea church. No doubt he had seen a vision of what the Bible in the hands of a child could do. As evening came that day so long ago to Aiea, it was really the dawn of something truly better. The ragamuffin kids now had the Bible, and with the Bible, they now had a dream.

### (3) Under the House

As one heads west toward central and west Oahu one is geographically forced to pass through the township of Aiea. The northeastern reaches of Pearl Harbor leave a slim corridor against the southern slopes of the Koolaus. This land beyond Red Hill then known as *ewa* was sugar and pineapple country, fertile and red dirt rich.

The town of Aiea itself evolved in the shadow of the Aiea Sugar Mill. The oceans of green wavy cane that stretched over all the uplands from Red Hill to Waiawa were brought to the Aiea Mill after harvesting. Harvesting by hand and mule transport gave way to train transport, then machine harvesting and truck transport. Kashin Kakazu did several jobs for the sugar plantation, but mostly he tended to the rows of young cane doing everything from weeding to irrigation.

Around the main street of Aiea, complete with stores, pool hall, and saloon, all under buildings with high front facades, lay the quarters of the plantation workers. The quarters tended to be ethnic “camps” scattered around the main street where today you will find some shopping areas, the Aiea Library and a Shell Station. Chinese camp was located somewhere in the east Halawa area. Filipino camp was closest to the town and included bachelor quarters. The Portuguese camp was primarily a few groups of homes woven amongst some of the other camps, but easily identified by the aqua and white house paint and outdoor ovens. The Japanese were in force in what the plantation workers knew as down camp, middle camp, and up camp (and later as Old Mill and New Mill Camps). Interestingly enough, down camp was known for outhouses, middle camp for a gravity sewer system, and up camp for flush toilets. The *lunas* (*foremen*) and some of the *haole* big shots lived in upper Aiea or on side streets exhibiting large southern colonial style homes.

The Kakazu house was your typical example of a plantation home: small porch, three bedrooms, one bath, a rear wash house, all under corrugated metal roofing. Most of the homes in up camp and especially the Kakazus’ were elevated on “stilts” to account for the hilly terrain. The lowest end of the house was propped up so much that a door was cut into the lower lattice work and one could walk in the lower region and crawl around the rest. Here things were stored and Mrs. Kakazu would sometimes have *okolehao* brewing. Ken Kakazu chose this under the house area as the location of the Bible study Gerald Hemmet had commissioned him to carry on.

The group met on Sundays and sat on old wooden crates. At first Kashin Kakazu objected to the group meeting under his home. It wasn’t only that he was a Buddhist, but the size of the group would mess up and relocate some of his stored items. But after a bit of grumbling, he gave up and Bible study continued.

Ken Kakazu took Gerald Hemmet’s charge very seriously. He listened to radio preachers to get sermon ideas. But mostly the group would read from the Bible. They started with Genesis and worked into Exodus. Remarkably, they soon became convinced from their



reading that the Bible sabbath was the 7<sup>th</sup> day, so they changed their day of meeting from Sunday to Saturday. They also decided to call their group the “True Sabbath Keepers.” A wooden sign was made saying “True Sabbath Keepers” and placed on a post in this makeshift sanctuary. Ken would be the first to tell you that at this point he was the most unqualified to lead a Bible study. But he had his Bible, he had accepted the call, and God was in the midst of them, yes, even under the house.

Often it seems when God wants to encourage a leader or give impetus to a movement He shows His presence and love through a miracle. To a young Ken Kakazu, God’s reality could be seen in a miracle that seemed unthinkable and seemingly petty. How could the God of the universe be concerned about poor kids in the cane fields of Aiea? Could a supreme being who knew everything and could do anything be concerned about a child’s cry and children’s prayers? Would the Christian God perform a miracle for those who really didn’t know Him? Would God give grace to a teased Okinawan kid always picked last on the playground? Ken was blessed with answers.

The day was typical as Ken and some of his schoolmates played in and around a small stream after school. This day however, was infused with excitement as Conchita Arranda came around showing off her new white shoes she had received as a birthday gift. Since no one had shoes, Conchita felt rich and beautiful. For the entertainment of her peers she modeled her new shoes as a Filipina princess. But soon the novelty wore off and the group was splashing around and doing their usual craziness.

As the group was preparing to leave, it became apparent that Conchita’s shoes were nowhere to be found. She searched frantically. Others joined the search. But soon the young girl was driven to tears, and left mumbling something about how she would not know what to tell her father. Inspired by his new leadership position, Ken Kakazu stepped to the plate. He organized the group and together they scoured the banks, waded around the small bridge where the shoes most likely would be if they had fallen, and walked side by side moving downstream feeling every inch of the muddy bottom.

When all human effort turned up futile, Ken now thought about what Mitchell and Hemmet had taught him. He remembered the stories of prayer and miracles. Why would his God not be able to bring back a simple pair of shoes? Ken gathered the flock into a prayer circle, and there beside a small stream in the middle of the cane fields of Aiea, this motley group of misfits knelt and prayed to the God of the Universe asking Him to find Conchita’s lost shoes.

As Ken’s eyes opened he quickly focused upon the pair of white shoes resting nicely on the bank he knew they had scoured many times. Ken’s flair for the dramatic kicked in here and he told the group to keep their eyes closed and to keep on praying. Ken quietly and quickly maneuvered and retrieved the shoes and placed them in the center of the prayer circle. When he led in the “Amen,” the resulting moments were stunning. Stunning enough that Ken was later questioned by Conchita’s father in regards to his religious affiliation, and good sources have said that several members of the Arranda family were later baptized into the Baptist church of Mitchell and Hemmet. For Ken

Kakazu, he now knew that nothing was too small for God. His God was also the God of the teased Okinawan kids, a God who even cared about a crying girl, and one who honored a child preacher with His love and grace.

The Bible study group continued. Word got around that there was something organized, so attendance grew. Some simply came out of curiosity. And some, like Kenneth Fujimoto, attended faithfully. Knowing that the Salvation Army in the area had a baseball team, Ken Kakazu decided to start a team out of boys from his group to challenge them. He also made a rule that one had to attend the Bible study at least three times before he could play on the team. This incentive helped the Bible study to gain in popularity. It is said that at its height the group crowded 60 people into the Kakazu under house.

Ken continued listening to radio preachers to find information for his sermons. Kenneth Fujimoto remembers firstly Ken Kakazu's preaching, then secondly the singing, and thirdly the Bible reading. It was Ken Kakazu's radio interest that eventually led him to listen to the Voice of Prophecy broadcast. The offer of free Bible lessons was just what these poor kids needed. When Ken sent away for lessons, about twenty-something enrolled. The group numbers had dwindled it is felt because Buddhist parents did not agree with the Christian message and forbade their children from further attendance, or because some had come simply to be a part of some organization but wearied of the commitment.

The lessons were going well and the group was thrilled to have found a denomination that believed in the 7<sup>th</sup> day sabbath. But when a lesson came about clean and unclean meat the group, with Ken Kakazu's lead, decided to throw the lessons into the cane fields and have nothing to do with the SDA church. They, we must remember, lived in a subculture where Portuguese sausage, Spam, and Kalua pig were delicacies; and that Okinawans ate basically every part of the *buta* (pig).

When the local VOP representatives saw twenty or so lessons stop coming in, they sent a local Bible Worker, named John Alapa, to investigate. When the group realized Mr. Alapa was from the VOP, they hid in the mountains and cane fields. Mr. Alapa, however, did not give up easily. Sometimes he waited till some of the boys returned from hiding, or he came very early before the Sunday group could make their escape plans. Even though Mr. Kakazu was a staunch Buddhist, he implored his son and friends to at least be civil and to hear the man out.

Mr. Alapa tried to answer the boys questions and to work with them. He realized that something special had begun especially in their acceptance of the sabbath message. Because of the interest in Aiea, Elder George Kiyabu, a young pastoral intern was sent to the Aiea area to follow up on Mr. Alapa's findings. At first Brother Alapa told the boys to continue their Saturday meetings but to come, even just to observe, a "branch Sabbath School" he and Elder Kiyabu were holding in the Aiea Methodist church on Saturday afternoons. It was through this branch Sabbath School that Elder Kiyabu eventually was able to give Bible studies to the Kakazu siblings and others.

Since Kashin Kakazu spoke very little English, Elder Kiyabu arranged for Elder Miyake from the Japanese church, and also Mr. Ishikawa and Mr. Yahiku who were members of Japanese church, to come and study with Mr. Kakazu. God used these men as well as Elder Kiyabu to reach Kashin who at one time wanted Japan to win the war and for Buddhism to control the world.

Elder Kiyabu's Spirit-led work had begun to convict some of the Aiea kids. The decision was then made at the Mission level to hold an evangelistic effort in Aiea using another young pastor, Elder George Munson of Wahiawa, as the principal speaker.

A large tent with saw dust floor was set up somewhere above where the Aiea Union 76 Station sits today. When some in the community realized the prospects of an Adventist church coming into Aiea, hostile attacks were launched to discourage the effort. Human feces were smeared over the pulpit area after the first few meetings. Ken Kakazu and some of the boys decided to sleep in the tent as a result. The next night Ken, a light sleeper, was awakened to see the form of a person outside the tent trying to start a fire. The boys were able to scare off the potential arsonist and to extinguish the pilot flames. When Elder Kiyabu and Munson heard of this, they took over the night watch.

Even if the tent would have been destroyed, nothing could destroy the fire of God's Holy Spirit. It was this evangelistic effort, with Elder Albert Munson doing chalk drawings, and the preaching of Elder George Munson, called "interesting" and "good" by some of the Kakazu siblings, that led to the conversion and subsequent baptism of the first wave of Aiea's charter members. The Adventist message of a second coming of Christ warmed the hearts of many of these "kids." Those who once had known only ridicule, poverty, and a future of hard work in the cane fields, now had a dream. . . a dream of a kingdom of power and majesty, a kingdom where everyone stood on equal ground clothed in righteousness and grace.

Following the meetings, the group in a sense now an Adventist company, met on Saturdays with Elder Kiyabu in the Aiea Methodist church. In 1947 the company purchased for \$50 an old army building, probably about 12' by 50', and they installed it somewhere above where the tent had been pitched. It is at this point that one can say that the Aiea SDA church had been established. In just a short time a simple sailor-led Bible study had evolved into a small church. Ken's little group that once met under the house, now worshipped under a house of God.

#### (4) Reaching Out

Like the polar ocean currents that move toward the equator and return, and the ebb and flow of the tides, any idea stagnates without circulation, growth, or progressive movement. The Adventist message that Elder Kiyabu's fledgling congregation now embraced found root in repentant souls and outward movement in the pulse of the Holy Spirit and on the wings of childlike faith. Soon Kiyabu and his group took on the task of launching their own evangelistic effort in the small plantation camp of Koalipea (somewhere in the greater Mililani area today).

A small clubhouse centered amongst the living quarters of the camp was used as the meeting place. The young people of Aiea aided Elder Kiyabu, the principal speaker, with music, legwork, and in hosting the guests. In this age prior to TV, cell phones, and cars in every garage, meetings were a real come on. The evangelistic series was attended by quite a few, and the end result was that several strong members were added to the Aiea congregation.

The Koalipea effort added such names as Gerald Ishihara, Helen Iha Yoshida, Dr. James Miyashiro, Dr. Shigenobu Arakaki, and Betty Arakaki Emoto. In time, several of the parents of these young people joined Aiea's *issei* group. An example of this was the mother of James Miyashiro. She later gave her heart to the Lord after seeing a marked change in her son. James himself admits that he started attending church in that little army building because of the "friendship, volleyball, and girls." He even admits that he really didn't care for the personal Bible studies that Elder Kiyabu was giving him. But one day before they started, Dr. Miyashiro recalled, "He (Kiyabu) asked me to pray. . . I refused, but he kept insisting, and so I prayed something. . . but after that the Bible became meaningful. And that's how I became a changed person."

The power of God's Spirit didn't just add numbers to Aiea. Eventually the Koalipea converts would take God's message to the world. Helen Iha Yoshida would later become an Adventist educator and work on the mainland. Dr. Miyashiro and his wife Heidi would serve as medical missionaries in Trinidad-Tobago, Africa, Kosovo-Macedonia, and Okinawa. Dr. Shigenobu Arakaki and his wife Lily would serve God in Japan, the mainland, and here locally. Dr. Arakaki is credited for being God's hand in turning around Sacramento Adventist Academy, bringing Japan Missionary College to what it has become today, developing Kahili Mt. Park into what it is today, and for taking the Hawaii Conference to new heights as the first local conference president. Aunty Betty Emoto can be found greeting people even today at Aiea on sabbath mornings; and we must never forget that it was her diligence in bringing her nieces and nephews to church that led to the conversion of Pastor Lyle Arakaki. Isn't it just amazing what God did with just a handful of children from the cane fields.

As the little Aiea church was beginning to surge with the wave of God's spirit, the dream of a larger sanctuary was born. A larger used navy parish hall was found and trucked onto the current site. The property and hall could be secured for \$1500. The young members

of Aiea began the task of raising the necessary funds. They gave all they could. And then they went door to door ingathering, knowing they could use any money earned beyond their stated goal for their project. When all the money was turned in and counted, and the ingathering overflow dollars were returned by the mission, the group had raised \$1400. Though in reality this was remarkable considering the wealth of the members, it was a dreary sabbath when the group learned of its shortfall. They had knocked on every door in their ingathering district, and they had given all they could possibly give.

It wasn't a high sabbath afternoon as their dream appeared to be fading into thoughts of despair. While the group was contemplating their dilemma almost in silence, Elder Kiyabu jumped up and said, "Minoru, come with me." The young man followed as fast as he could. The group remained puzzled. Later Minoru would tell them that Elder Kiyabu took him into Aiea town to visit the contractor who had placed the parish hall on the current site. "He promised to help us with our purchase," Kiyabu had said.

In a matter of minutes Elder Kiyabu was almost running back to the group. He was waving a piece of paper in his hand. As he came closer, the group realized he had a check in his hand. He told them to look at the check. As each member glanced at the check amount, they realized it was for exactly \$100.

When the group realized what had just happened, without any cue, "we stood together and sang the doxology," recalled Ken Kakazu.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow  
Praise Him all creatures here below  
Praise Him above ye heavenly host  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost  
Amen

As the last note resonated across the termite infested hall, as if heaven had heard, the sky opened up and showered the traditional Hawaiian blessing as a huge downpour of rain came cascading down upon the makeshift choir in this impromptu praise service. "But we didn't care," Kakazu recalled, "we were so happy."

As the little Aiea congregation had grasped the pulse of God's Spirit, they began to realize dreams and to reach out to the world. The passing of time has shown us a little bit of God's working, but only in eternity will we be able to see what the living gospel has accomplished from the seeds planted in the cane fields of Aiea. Great dreams will continue to be realized as we tie in to the current and cycle of God's Holy Spirit and allow Him to lead beyond the island horizons.

## (5) God's Bunch of Kids

The Koalipea effort had strengthened the ranks of the Aiea congregation, the parish hall was an improvement over the little army building, but almost without saying everyone knew that at the end of the rainbow was a new sanctuary. The little congregation had known sacred moments, and certain places in their brief history had become signposts of good memories, but a monument to God's grace that would stand till the Lord's return was the goal of the worshippers. It was the biggest dream to date, a brand new church built from scratch.

Knowing that the Hawaiian Mission had a policy to match money raised for church capital improvement projects by 50 percent, Elder Kiyabu scheduled an appointment for himself and some of his members with the Mission president. (In an attempt to be a bit politically correct, he will not be named here). Ken Kakazu remembers the meeting vividly. After outlining their plan, Kiyabu asked if the Mission was willing to match what the church would raise. The president went into a discourse about a church not being needed in Aiea, and then turning to Pastor Kiyabu, with body language showing condescension and in a tone projecting almost a sneer (in their remembrance), he let out, ". . . plus Aiea is just a bunch of kids."

Needless to say, Elder Kiyabu and Ken Kakazu, and later the whole congregation, were disappointed. However, this was no time for self-pity or running with tail between *okole*. The president's brush off seemed to energize the "kids" even further. Perhaps it was the adrenalin rush of an "I'll show you" reaction, or perhaps it was a childlike faith that saw beyond cautious institutional maintenance, but for whatever reason, the little Aiea church began to work toward the building of a new sanctuary.

Plans were needed, so Ken Kakazu went and visited his former pastor at the Nuuanu Baptist Church. Since their sanctuary was relatively new he still had the architectural drawings. When Ken explained his hopes, this pastor in pure Christian brotherhood was more than willing to share the plans. Pastor Kiyabu secured a contractor in J. Mukaigawa who gave him a bid to build the sanctuary for \$20,000. What remained now was to raise all the money.

After much thought and discussion, the church came up with a two-fold plan. Mr. Tetsuo Toyama, a businessman who had recently joined Aiea church's issei group, would take Elder Kiyabu and they together would solicit donations from all of Mr. Toyama's business contacts. This was phase one. The second phase would involve the "kids" ingathering the Aiea district in hopes of gaining a large ingathering overflow amount to keep, and then going door to door selling "crisis books." In the book sales they could venture out island wide.

The hand of God was seen throughout the process. It wasn't long before Mr. Toyama's contacts had donated a whopping \$16,000. The "kids" ingathered and soon blanketed the whole island, leeward to windward, selling the crisis books. It was observed that on some

streets, when a priest or religious leader of some other denomination realized what the Aiea members were selling, they would run ahead to the next street to tell the people not to buy the books. Sales nonetheless continued, and soon the remaining \$4000 was raised through the sweat and toil of the “kids.”

Here we must take a side trip that shows how God used even this endeavor to bring glory to the kingdom. One of the homes that Ken Kakazu and Elder Kiyabu knocked on in Halawa Housing in the ingathering phase was that of Chief John Ufuti, a recent immigrant from American Samoa. Ufuti had read a *Signs of the Times* article in Samoan that had convinced him of the 7<sup>th</sup> day sabbath. The magazine had been delivered by a colporteur on a bicycle named Tini Lam Yuen. So Chief Ufuti, like the kids of the under house Bible study, had begun keeping Saturday on his own. This had alienated him from the council of chiefs and hence his move to Hawaii. Chief Ufuti was overjoyed to have finally found a 7<sup>th</sup> day keeping church. And after the visit from Elder Kiyabu and Ken, he was soon attending the Aiea church with his wife and daughter.

Chief Ufuti and Dr. James Miyashiro were baptized into the SDA faith in the Aiea swimming pool in 1949. In the last chapter we spoke of what Dr. James went on to do. Chief Ufuti would later start a Bible study in Nanakuli where he had moved to after some from his village in Samoa had immigrated there; and when he moved to back to Samoa, that Bible study group would join with interested others in the Waianae area to become the nucleus for the Waianae SDA Church. Later he would return to American Samoa to find that his stateside “education” had gained him favor amongst the other chiefs again. Chief Ufuti would then use his regained status to declare a piece of land for the building of an SDA church. This church stands even today. Even later when living on the mainland, Chief Ufuti would help start the Vista, California SDA church.

On a visit to American Samoa to conduct an education seminar in 2005, Roy Kakazu (Ken’s younger brother) would incredibly be blessed to visit Chief Ufuti’s grave and to see the church in Samoa he had been instrumental in starting. The events of Chief Ufuti’s life show candidly what can happen as anyone does the work of the Lord and of His church. Many other such stories await us on that other shore.

With the \$20,000 raised to complete the project, construction on the current site was completed toward the end of the year 1949. A sabbath dedication service was planned with the Mission president as the keynote speaker. Ken Kakazu can never forget what Elder Kiyabu said and did as he introduced the president. After giving a proper introduction, Elder Kiyabu stretched his arms out across the inner expanse of the completed sanctuary, and with great pleasure and in the tone of a rascal remarked, “And look at what a bunch of kids can do.”

That the current sanctuary building stands today is no accident, and in retrospect not the work of just any “bunch of kids.” The charter members of Aiea, most of whom were still in their teens when the new sanctuary was dedicated, were not just a group of plantation workers’ children. These “kids” had given their lives to Christ. They had been transformed not only out of a world of economic poverty, but one of spiritual

emptiness. They had seen the miracles and had drunk from the well that never runs dry. They had heard the powerful call of God, and they had come by way of His cleansing blood. The current sanctuary stands today as a gift of grace to the childlike faith of **God's Bunch of Kids**.



## (6) The 1950's: Growing Together

Sugar production with some modern improvements was probably at its height on the Aiea plantation in the 1950's. With statehood looming, not only Oahu, but every Hawaiian island was a jewel waiting for good ole American capitalism to develop. Even though the Aloha Tower was the tallest building in Honolulu, the onset of the infrastructure formation for tourism was taking shape all across Oahu. Aiea began to feel the pinch of postwar expansion as slowly sugar land went into subdivisions, and military quarters into civilian housing. New retail establishments and the growth of industrial and commercial enterprises began to infiltrate the greater Aiea region.

The home front of the 50's was rather simple, and something generations since find unbelievable. Not many homes had phones, and if they did they were probably hooked to party lines. TV was just coming into being, though Hawaii lagged a bit behind the mainland. Cars were just becoming affordable. Streetcars were just starting to be replaced by buses. Ocean liners were just giving way to airplanes. Homes were still visited by the ice truck, the milkman, the paper boy on his bike, the ice cream truck, and the *buta kau kau* man collecting his "treasure" from square cans hanging on the clothes line post.

Those who attended Aiea church in the 50's remember the sabbath as being an all day affair. Families would come for sabbath school and church service, lunch at someone's house, and then afternoon and evening programs. The afternoons would be taken up by activities such as singing bands, literature distribution bands, MV programs, and sometimes hiking. Saturday evening after sundown was Pathfinder meeting time followed by games on the church grounds. Choir practice was also added for some after the Kiilehuas joined Aiea.

The Pathfinder program in Hawaii in the 1950's and 60's was nothing close to what it has become today. Most churches had large clubs, and each was very active. Even though Aiea's membership then was less than half of what it is today, the Pathfinder club usually had upwards of 20 young persons. Each club worked diligently to prepare for the yearly Pathfinder Fair that included an on street parade with police escort. Each club would march into Thomas Square for a dignitary greeting by such as Police Chief, Dan Liu (an HMA alumnus), and competitions in "pathfinding skills" from fire starting, knot tying, flagpole pitching, and off course inspection and drilling.

Aiea's club of the 50's was first rate. The skills and organization of the Aiea club made them and their leader, Bill Villegas, receive many honors; and even the Honolulu Advertiser had an article picturing Bill receiving the top honor. The 50's club which some have said were made up largely of Kakazu relatives and Kaeka siblings took part in mission wide camporees, and their own camps and trips. A trip to Kauai in the 50's is well remembered. The Pathfinder club met the needs of that age and put the little Aiea church on the map.

In the 1950's Aiea's pastors were Walter Barber, Gordon McLafferty, Lester Bennett, Don Lee, and Harold Rich. Some of the prominent names of the 50's were Shige Arakaki, Hideo Oshita, Bill Villegas, Minoru Azama, Gerald Ishihara, James Miyashiro, and Shige and Masao Kobashigawa. Family names included the Tabalis, Sorianos, Ihas, Yamanuhas, Ishikawas, and the Kiilehuas. Other unique names were Leslie Tyau, his Model A brought 9 passengers to church on sabbaths, and the "Three Musketeers" made up of Kazu Kojima, Thomas Carter, and Alec Kiilehua who became famous for giving Bible studies.

What appeared to be happening the 1950's was the influx of other races and professions to the largely Okinawan/Japanese base of plantation workers' children. The charter members began to raise their own children in the church, and with the coming of other families, a more typical church dynamic was beginning to be seen beyond the "bunch of kids." In short, the little Aiea church was beginning to look like your typical Hawaiian melting pot church. Aunty Kay Kaeka has summed it up this way:

"Though I was Hawaiian and many of the young members were Japanese, we were family. . . We were a working church. . . There were no high *makamaka* people in this church."

Though the landscape of Aiea was changing, and sugar may have been on its last leg, the dream of Ken Kakazu, Pastor George Kiyabu and friends was just beginning to flourish. It could be said that now there was a "real" church. The Spirit of God had gifted Aiea with award winning Pathfinders, lay Bible workers, and most of all a strong family base. Alec Kiilehua, Aiea's first head elder, and his wife Grace have called the Aiea church of the 50's the "high point of our Adventist experience." The founding fathers of Aiea knew that positive comments and successful programs were the working of God, but above all, they knew that a true church was more than just a building and successful programs. A true church is people, families and individuals working together. . . together because they share the same Spirit.

## **(7) The 1960's: Growth and Faithfulness**

The sixties saw the downgrading of the Aiea Sugar Plantation. Sugar production was becoming more limited as the growth of suburbia took place. Subdivisions crept in and with them town centers with the small shopping centers, service stations, fast food joints, and some other mom and pop establishments. Cane haul roads became streets and municipal thoroughfares. School expansion realigned the area around Aiea into Pearl City, Waimalu, and Halawa. The day of the plantation camp had all but been forgotten.

The growth of Aiea also coincided with the growth of the island into the foundation for what it is today. The age of cheap cars and cheap gas had arrived. TV had taken a simple lifestyle into one that ebbed with America's fads. No longer was the island isolated from the flower children, JFK's assassination, the Beatles, the Berkeley and Kent State unrest, and the Vietnam conflict. The local SDA institution saw Castle Medical Center come into being, and the golden age of the Voice of Prophecy and the Vandeman Crusades even embrace Hawaii.

The Aiea church also saw growth in the 60's. In the decade the church was led by pastors Gordon Collier, Darryl Mayberry, Jerry Dill, George Kiyabu (who returned for a second term as pastor), and James Finn, Jr. The most obvious growth was in the physical plant itself. For almost two years Sundays were taken up with the building of the church's baptismal area, restrooms, and classrooms. The multi-purpose hall was also completed and named Baker Hall. The name was given in honor of a couple who in reality were just visitors to the Aiea church. Mr. and Mrs. Reginald E. Baker from California visited the church one sabbath and endeared themselves to the members. They were so loved by the Aiea members that on a subsequent visit the church held a golden anniversary celebration for them. The gifts to them at their anniversary, and a generous portion of their wealth, were given to Aiea's building program; hence the naming of Baker Hall.

The strong Pathfinder program continued with incentive trips to the Big Island and Molokai and Maui. The club showcased names that were evidence of a second generation of Aiea members. For example the Pathfinder clubs of the 60's included names such as Okihiro, Oshiro, Nitta, Otsuka, Quizon, Arakaki, Emoto, Villegas and Kiyabu. The Pathfinder program indeed was part of the "ministry to children" that Pastor Lyle Arakakai referred to as he reminisced about attending Aiea in the 60's.

The strong ministry to children that Pastor Arakakai has spoken of could also be seen in the smiles of the isseis such as Mr. and Mrs. Tetsuo Toyama, Mr. and Mrs. Tom Hirata, Mrs. Iha, Mr. and Mrs. Kashin Kakazu, Mr. and Mrs. Arakaki, and Mrs. Miyashiro. It was the faithful Aiea members bringing their nieces and nephews, and their own children, to church and sabbath school every week that was integral to the ministry. And we must not forget the faithful members who manned the sabbath school positions every sabbath regardless of the numbers or glamour. When Pastor Lloyd Munson took over in 2003, he was even pleasantly surprised to see a solid sabbath school still in place in Aiea.

Pastor Lyle Arakaki also mentioned a “long tradition of outstanding music” as a strength of Aiea in the 60’s. As one looks back at Aiea’s history, music has always stood out. From the pump organ of Howard Lee and the broken-stringed violin of Mrs. Alapa to the contributions of the Severins, Cusons/Mirafuentes, and Ramos’ of today, Aiea has always been blessed with fine musical talent. In the 60’s one could remember the music of Kenneth Fujimoto, Aunty Kaeka and Lei Juarros, and the harmonica of Shige Kobashigawa. The original Aiea quartet of Kiyoshi Nakashima, Kenneth Fujimoto, Kenneth Kakazu and Eddie Kakazu gave way to the quartet of Joe Waipa, Ken Fujimoto, Bill Villegas and Shige Kobashigawa. Pastor Lyle also remembers the sweet voices of Naomi Kiyabu Smith and Juliana Juarros Moniz, and the soulful violin of Mary Castor.

Even though the Aiea area was no longer the sea of waving cane, and from Aiea heights one could see subdivisions, buildings and Aiea High, the Aiea SDA church remained in tact and continued to flourish. Yet greater than the new additions and Baker Hall, and still greater than the Pathfinder club, the sabbath school or the musical talent, was the spirit-led faithfulness of all the Aiea members. God had not called Aiea to success but to faithfulness. It was the faithfulness that brought the continued spiritual renewal and the seeming outward successes.

The spirit-fed fruit of faithfulness caused Mr. Toyama to give hugs to children every sabbath. The fruit of faithfulness led Aunty Betty Emoto to go and pick up Lyle Arakaki and his siblings in Ewa every sabbath. Faithfulness led Bill Villegas to hold Pathfinder meetings every Saturday night for 19 years. Faithfulness led Ken Fujimoto to hold his position in the children’s divisions and lead out in music all those years. Faithfulness caused Aunty Kay and Lei to add their voices and ukuleles to the church’s music.

The strength of Aiea spoken of in this chapter could be seen on a typical sabbath morning in Aiea heights. There amongst the trees at the start of the original Aiea Loop Trail (where local hikers refer to as trail one ridge), one could hear memory verses being recited and a song sung in Spanish. As the morning sun filtered through the eucalyptus and *ohia*, and as the creepers and *amakihis* darted through the *waiwi*, one could hear the words of this song sung by Manuel Juarros and his daughters Juliana and Linda blending in with the sounds of leaves rustling in the trade winds. (Here are the words of the refrain in English)

Far beyond the sun  
Far beyond the sun  
Up there is my home  
My home, blessed home  
Far beyond the sun

May the Aiea church of today continue to minister to its children through the fruit of faithfulness and its gift of music.

## (8) The 1970's: New Era, Same God

The 1970's saw what one might call the end of the old Aiea and the start of modern Aiea. Sugar production was down to simple refinement in the Aiea Mill. Any harvested cane was probably taken into Waipahu. Sugar land had become more dominated with homes. The day of the large development had begun. With the Honolulu skyline developing, into the Aiea region came high-rise condos and apartments, Aloha Stadium, Pearl Ridge Center (phase one), and the super markets. Sugar irrigation reservoirs were defunct and filled in, or part of water hazards on golf courses. With the American folk music era dying, Aiea was a classic example of the song line "they paved paradise and put up a parking lot."

Improvements in audio technology brought new trends not only nationally, but to the music of the SDA church in general and the Aiea church specifically. With music recordings readily available in LP's, cassettes, or 8-tracks, the musical tradition of Aiea took a turn with the times in Adventism, as local groups resembled such ground-breaking groups as The Wedgwood (a group that brought the guitar into the SDA church against early opposition) and the Heritage Singers (who developed the use of PA into Adventist music). The music of Jeff Wood and Take Three became youth favorites even in Aiea.

Yet as the world was finding a growing market with "acid rock" and the disco age, Dr. Bennett Lau was leading Aiea into what might be called the Age of the Aiea Choir. Though Aiea always had a choir of sorts, what Dr. Lau started in the later 70's would take on a whole new horizon. What the Pathfinder program was to Aiea in the 50's and 60's, the Aiea Choir became the equivalent in the 80's and 90's. More will be explained in the next chapter; but as "pathfinding" began to live out its golden age as the 70's came to a close (though Aiea still had strong clubs under Mr. Leong Ko), the choir took over as the showcase of excellence for the Spirit's gifting of lives in Aiea.

Even though the church's ministry of music came to the forefront, the church's ministry to children continued. With a flair seemingly out of the hippie era, the Aiea youth department influenced a new breed of young urban professionals. Pastors Lyle Arakaki and Bob Michaelson, Drs. Gary Kerstetter, Annette Nitta, and Gary Young, Doctor of Music Cheryl Villegas, and nurses Dexter Emoto and Juliana Moniz all went through Aiea's youth division in the 70's. The Aiea youth division of the 70's was led by Craig Klatt, one who seemed so comfortable talking with converted hippies and who later became a pastor, Marshall Anders, one who seemed to have come out of the hippie era himself but who spoke with the wisdom of a *kupuna*, and Leslie del Prado, a math instructor for HMA and the Kamehameha Schools whose genius challenged everyone to rethink their faith. The continuing ministry to young people caused Leslie del Prado himself to see Aiea as a place of "young people" and people whose thinking was "young at heart."

The 70's included pastors James Finn, Jr. (who started in the late 60's), Richard Among, Frank Michaelson, Lloyd Herr, and Jim Pimentel. At times church attendance was so

great that talk of holding two services was entertained. And even though the media age had begun and the mini-skirt and leisure suit came and went, Aiea hung on to its ministry to children and its long tradition of outstanding music. In fact, the dawn of a new musical age had begun in the Aiea Choir.

The cane fields were now shopping malls and subdivisions. Where the feet of the plantation workers had trodden lay the offices, drive-ins and businesses. The irrigation ditches where the kids used to play were either gone, dredged into canals, or aesthetic touches to developments. A second generation was heading off to college or to the work world. Yet the Aiea church found new members, the Puuiki campout, and a new use for the improvements in audio technology with its choir.

That the church continued to flourish was not a stroke of luck or genius. The Spirit of God would find leaders who lived in the times and in the moment. Christian education would affect some, and the song of the cane fields and the under house church would take on the genre of 70's Adventism. Perhaps on a given sabbath in the 70's one could find guitar accompaniment and the recorder obligato of Leslie del Prado backing singers such as Juliana Moniz or Joanne Michaelson in a song with these words:

When I'm all alone  
And I can't find my shadow  
Jesus comes to comfort me  
And love me  
Always love me

All my life  
I will be  
By Your side eternally  
And so we walk together  
Side by side we three  
That is how you'll find us now  
Jesus, the Spirit, and me  
Jesus, the Spirit, and me

## (9) The 1980's: The God of the Song and Videotape

By the 1980's the Aiea church would have its choir loft, and its pastor's office. By the end of the decade, Moanalua Road would be widened and the church would lose its front parking area. In the area around Aiea, the 80's would find cane fields a thing of the past, and the urban sprawl of Honolulu would reach through and past Aiea into Pearl City and almost central Oahu. Industrial areas would expand in Halawa, Pearl City, and Waimalu. Pearl Ridge would expand, and even the old Leeward Hospital would develop into Pali Momi. By the end of the 80's probably the only thing that remained of old Aiea was the Sugar Mill and the Sumida watercress farm.

The 80's would be the start of the computer age. The average consumer began to experiment with the personal computer when such relics as the Commodore 128 became affordable. The video age began, and everyone wanted to buy a betamax and eventually a VHS system. At the end of the decade CD audio was taking over and the newer generation began to laugh at the memory of the 8-track. When the camcorder came into being, one began to realize that the microchip, integrated circuit, and fiber optic cable were about to revolutionize not only Aiea, but the world.

It was in the ministry of the Aiea choir that the explosion of technology was used to the glory of God. Dr. Lau used "canned music" to accompany his choirs. And with the improvements to amplification and mixing, the Aiea choir had a sound worthy of the day and age. Many of Aiea's cantatas were captured on VHS or 8mm videotape.

Aiea's choir was more than just a musical group to be proud of. In the choir one could see a spirit-touched fusion of young and old in age, new and old in church membership, and skilled and unskilled in musical ability. It is amusing, yet sobering, how God could take a tenor that sings soprano (just kidding the late Uncle Terry), or a Filipino lady with an accent, and fuse the sound into praise and glory to the name of Jesus. The Aiea choir of the 80's and 90's would provide the avenue of service for many, and the performers it appears would be spiritually helped themselves as they sung for the Lord. After hearing a very good choir from another congregation sing at Aiea, Mr. Eric Tamura once remarked, "But no can beat the Aiea Choir."

Another very important strength of Aiea that came into focus in the 80's was a strong military presence that benefited the church. Of course, we know that two navy sailors made the first Christian contact, but military members would always contribute to Aiea. It wasn't that Aiea was located close to Pearl Harbor, Hickam, and Aliamanu that drew the military personnel, but the spirit-fed fruit of kindness, goodness and hospitality. It wasn't uncommon to see such members as Uncle Joe Hirata or Uncle Shige Kobashigawa talking to and befriending the men and women of the armed forces.

The church of the 80's recalls the contribution of Captain Fred Spruel and Chaplain Dick Stenbakken. Later Aiea would be blessed to have such men as Chaplains Torgerson, Smedley, Castanon, and Forrester. It must also be noted that several military families

have chosen to retire in Hawaii and contribute to the Aiea church. We think today of the Severins and the Lanes.

As the 80's was the age of the Aiea Choir, the one pastor who served for most of the decade, John Sharp (80-87), would be remembered as Aiea's most known "singing pastor." Pastor Sharp and his wife Muriel, were both gifted with incredible singing voices, and this really gave strength to the Aiea choir. Pastor Phil Muthersbaugh (87-90), also a musician, contributed to Aiea's musical tradition. Those who remember the choir programs of the 80's and 90's realize that the God of the cane fields inhabited the music.

The church of the 80's has been remembered by many as a friendly church. Lima and Teri Laupola remembered the "friendliness of the people" above all else on their first visit to Aiea. And Lima himself would become part of Dr. Lau's choirs and contribute to the musical ministry and youth division of Aiea. The fruit of kindness and hospitality was noted in the 80's especially as touching military personnel. Potluck as we know it reached its pinnacle in the 80's. And it has been said that seeing a visiting military family sampling chopsticks at an Aiea potluck, would sum up this spirit-fed gift of the Aiea congregation.

Though the Aiea of the past was no longer recognizable in the 80's, and the dawn of the techno age had begun, the Aiea church was still standing upon the Rock of Ages. One of the cantatas that the Aiea choir sang featured a song with the line "He remains the Cornerstone." No doubt, it was on the foundation of Christ that the Aiea church found its resolve to continue and to find a relevant identity in a modern age. The Christmas and Easter Cantatas that would be performed in Aiea and on every neighbor island, were not just showcases of talent. The gospel story and the God of the songs were lifted up. This same God of the cane fields and under house would touch singer and listener, and the Spirit would inspire and work.



## (10) The 1990's: Still Going Strong

If the 1980's was the dawn of the computer age, the 1990's brought the computer age to a new pinnacle. In the 90's the personal computer became more affordable and standardized, and with the development of the internet, computing reached new heights. As the year Y2K approached, one of the greatest fears was computer system "meltdown" proving how dependant the world had become on the computer. How the world would do business, education, and communication had changed forever.

With America as the world's only superpower, its enemies turned to terrorism to wage warfare on the US. The first gulf war showcased to the world a new age of American weaponry, and also a world economy that was now so linked to global events. Yet as the world became so controlled by science and technology, there grew a yearning for spirituality. Many turned to pantheistic leanings reminiscent of the new age movement that sought to touch base with various spiritual forces out there. Others returned to the church, and the development of the "superchurch" took flight in the 90's.

Within the postmodern world of the 90's, the township of Aiea began to be blurred into the sprawl of urban Honolulu and the endless homes of emerging communities like Pearl Ridge, Royal Summit, Newtown Estates, Stadium, and Salt Lake. The Aiea Sugar Mill was razed and the site became the home of the offices of the Sugar Association. The cane fields and their workers were only found in historical discussion and in pictures at the Waipahu Cultural Center.

Though the islands and the US may have been seeking a spiritual renewal in a postmodern world, Aiea church clung to its strengths seemingly oblivious to the surrounding upheaval. Sabbath school and children's ministry continued. Though "Pathfinding" was on the downswing, Aiea would find a large young adult group in the 90's led by Dennis and Lydia Kaeka. With the blessing of the "diving deacons," the Puuiki campout was almost a rite of passage into the Aiea ohana. It was noted that some families even returned after moving from the islands just to attend the Puuiki campout. One could see a military chaplain leading an outdoor service under the trees on Memorial Day or Labor Day weekend, croquet being played into the night, and Uncle Max bringing back a *manini* he speared, where later stories would morph it into a 100 pound ulua. =)

The Aiea choir continued its golden era, and Pastor Daryl Rott would lend his powerful tenor voice to some of the cantatas. But with the move of Dr. and Mrs. Lau to the mainland in the later 90's, one could say that the golden age of the Aiea choir was laid to rest. Yet even with Dr. Lau gone, the front of the Aiea sanctuary was renovated in the later 90's and made more attractive and performance friendly—this a dream of Aiea's longest serving choir master.

The advancing technology of the computer age would be seen and felt in Aiea as well. The coming of the video projector would bring in the monthly usage of "Mission

Spotlight and such programs as Net 95. This would give rise to the high lumen projection of the new millennium.

Besides Pastor Rott, the 90's featured Pastor Tom Becraft (98-01). Though Aiea no longer had true isseis, Pastor Becraft who was fluent in Japanese became a welcome minister amongst Aiea's Japanese group. By the end of the 90's Aiea's membership was over three hundred and its tithe-base made it the third largest church in the Hawaii conference. Yet one would not point to conference indicators as the strength of Aiea. The nicknames of groups within church pointed to a humorous side and down-to-earth openness of the members gifted by the Spirit to encourage and love. The "beach gang" led the camping and vespers. The choir ministered and created community. The "sanhedrin" solved the world's problems. The "diving deacons" did the dirty work. The young adults started the River of Life ministry. The "issei group" now became the elderly Japanese-speaking club who kept Aiea's potlucks alive. Yet in diversity Aiea continued to work together, praise together, and to befriend the visitors.

The 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the church in 1997 reminded the members of how God had led in the past. And in this historical background the future looked bright.

## (11) Into the New Millennium

The new millennium brought marked changes to Hawaii and to the Aiea area. Truly the American century was upon Aiea. In came the mega stores, the Wall Marts, K Marts, Home Depots, Best Buys and Targets. Out went the smaller retailers; and any resemblance to the mom and pop days was gone forever. Even the familiar corner eateries were replaced with the chains like Subway, Jamba Juice, and Starbucks. Aiea looked like any American populated stretch where an old town center (in this case a plantation camp) had been overrun by deep retail-consumer establishments.

Even the local church scene took on the look and feel of the times. The little country churches on the edge of town were replaced with TV churches, fellowship and worship centers, and the multi-service church meeting in large auditoriums. The mega church with its polished praise teams grew in leaps and bounds. It appeared that the church of this age needed air time to market itself. It seemed a message that brought the power of God into daily situations and relationships met the inner need of this stress-laden millennium.

For the first time in its history it might be said that the Aiea SDA church sought to find a niche within the competing forces of the religious scene. Aiea at times tried what the Hawaii Conference was promoting—namely “retro-60’s evangelism” gaining inspiration from holding crusades in third world countries, and “small group ministries,” a page out of the mega church models. At other times Aiea would hold support ministries for disadvantaged groups, trying it appeared to do what some of the mega churches did with their paid professionals. Aiea’s choir and Pathfinders though still very good, no longer dominated the life and pulse of the church.

Yet Aiea still did what it had always done, ministry to children and music ministry with a unique excellence. The Vacation Bible School in a modern format was resurrected under the leadership of the Sewells (Geoff and Esther). Summer youth pastors were hired for the first time. The praise time just before the church service became a children friendly ukulele-based session. The keyboard work and vocals of Pastor and Mrs. Munson added class and richness to the praise time.

As the new millennium rolled along, it would appear that God would use Aiea’s financial solidity (the largest tithe base in Hawaii) to carve out two new “edifices” that involved dollars. Under Pastor Lee Grady (2002-03), a pastor who came out of retirement to pastor Aiea for a one-year term, the church would set in place a scholarship fund to help students attend church school in percentages based on financial need. Some were helped from 10 percent up to nearly 100 percent. Miracles in generosity were seen here. Under Pastor Lloyd Munson (2003-present), the son of evangelist George Munson who helped to start the Aiea church, the church would buy an adjacent property and create a much needed parking facility out of it. Because the project was costly and logistically challenged, there wasn’t an overwhelming consensus, and tension arose. But as the two properties miraculously became linked by the purchase of a “bridge property” making the church grounds and its new parking lot one, most rejoiced at the public blessing in March

of 2006. The scholarship fund will stand as long as the generosity of Aiea's members continues. The parking lot loan was paid of rapidly and with pride.

As we head toward the remainder of the first decade of the new millennium, a relatively small church like Aiea is challenged to find relevancy and an evangelism identity. We are challenged to maintain our financial obligations, and we are challenged not to forget how God has led us in the past. But if our history has taught us anything, it is that God cannot fail, and that the spirit in which something is done is crucial. We may not be the stars of the TV church, or the sought after mega church, but that's OK. The Spirit of God is not a respecter of persons. God is not finished with us yet. We have nothing to fear for the future. The *obakes* have all been drowned in the Sea of Glass. The God of the cane fields and under house, is also the God of cyber space, social media and the concrete jungle. The history of Aiea is not yet complete. If you have committed your life to Christ, you are part of God's Bunch of Kids. And if you read your Bible, you have a dream. Let us always remember what God did, and can still do, with just a bunch of kids, a Bible, and a dream.

## (12) Conclusion: Remembering the Dream

As we celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Aiea Church, it would do us well to remember the part of our founders' dream that is yet to be realized. To do that, travel in your mind's eye with me back into the hills of old Aiea. Let's go up a dirt road past a pump house and a sweet artesian well. Let's pass through some cane fields and find a rise with an open area and a lonely guava tree. Let's listen to the words of the Master Sailor.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

Yes, I am coming soon.

(NIV)

Let's look now beyond the Waianae Mountains into the expanse beyond. The cane fields are now bordered with flowers and fruit trees. A large irrigation ditch winds through this garden. Brother Harris Okuda is tending the garden. The diving deacons are swimming with the fish in a glassy ocean. Gabriel is leading a large choir including Chris Hong, Sala Mamea, Hilda Wong and Molly Horikawa. Minoru Azama is running. Aunty Lei Juarros is doing hula. Uncle Manuel is hiking along the river. Mr. and Mrs. Tom Hirata are joined by their family including son Leslie. Mr. and Mrs. Kashin Kakazu are joined by their family including sons Shigemi and Richard, and daughter-in-law Yvonne. Aunty Kay Kaeka is joined by her children including Hoolu. Isabella Quizon hugs Yolanda. Kenneth Fujimoto and Uncle Bill Villegas are leading the Aiea pathfinder salute. We see

the Aiea pastors, the members, our friends, our relatives, our children. We see the big smile of Pastor George Kiyabu with his arms around Odell Mitchell and Gerald Hemmet.

But then there's a moment of silence.

Everyone bows.

The only sound is that of crowns being laid on the ground.

We remember this presence.

We remember this voice.

We cry tears of joy.

We are left speechless, but our souls sing Alleluia.

This is not just a memory.

We sing louder.

This is real.

This is eternal.

This is forever.

The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ

And he shall reign forever and ever.

And this is our dream.

## **Aiea's Charter Members**

Alliason, Peter  
Arakaki, Shigenobu  
Azama, Minoru  
Azama, Shoichi  
Chinen, Clarence  
Emoto, Betty Arakaki  
Figeuroa, Juanita  
Figeuroa, Shirley  
Fujimoto, Kenneth  
Ishihara, Gerald  
Kakazu, Edward  
Kakazu, Kashin  
Kakazu, Kenneth  
Kiyabu, Elder George  
Kiyabu, Mrs. George  
Lee, Howard  
Low, Francis  
Low, Mrs. Francis  
Nakashima, Kiyoshi  
Nitta, Ellen  
Okihiro, Alice Kakazu  
Oshiro, Jane Kakazu  
Otsuka, Ruth  
Sakai, Marian  
Sakai, Nancy Chiyomi  
Tabali, Theresa  
Takano, Mitsuo  
Uchida, Alvina  
Uehara, Alice Watabu  
Villegas, Joyce Kakazu  
Villegas, William  
Yamanuha, George  
Yoshida, Helen Iha

## Aiea's Pastors

1. George Kiyabu	1947 - 1949
2. Walter Barber	1950 - 1951
Hideo Oshita (interim)	1951
3. Gordon McLafferty	1951 - 1954
4. Lester Bennett	1954 - 1958
George Kiyabu (interim)	1958
5. Don Lee	1958 - 1959
6. Harold Rich	1959 - 1960
7. Gordon Collier	1960 - 1961
8. Darryl Mayberry	1961 - 1964
9. Jerry Dill	1964 - 1965
10. George Kiyabu	1965 - 1968
Robert Chism (interim)	1968
11. James Finn, Jr.	1968 - 1970
12. Frank Michaelson	1970 - 1973
13. Richard Among	1973 - 1975
14. Lloyd Herr	1975 - 1978
15. Jim Pimentel	1978 - 1980
Charles Goodwin (assistant)	
16. John Sharp	1980 - 1987
17. Phil Muthersbaugh	1987 - 1990
18. Daryl Rott	1990 - 1996
Phil Dunham (interim)	1997
Elder Heitzmann (interim)	1997
19. Tom Becraft	1998 - 2001
20. Lee Grady	2002 - 2003
21. Lloyd Munson	2003 - 2010
22. Gerry Christman	2010 - 2016
23. James Mangum	2016 - present



## Sources

*“An Oral History of the Kakazu Family”* compiled by Annette Nitta, 2000. This includes many interviews, audio-taped conversations, and letters written by each Kakazu sibling and Mrs. Kame Kakazu.

*“From Canefield to God’s Field,”* 1987 and *“Kids, a Bible, and a Dream,”* 2002. These are brief church histories compiled by Melvin Villegas.

Aiea SDA Church’s *40<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary programs* recorded on videotape. These included many speakers and some of Kenneth Kakazu’s stories.

*The Aiea Tidings.* A church newsletter of the 1950’s. This was the main source to “From Cane Field to God’s Field” mentioned earlier.

*150 Years of Hawaii’s History.* From the Honolulu Advertiser. A series of articles spanning 150 years of Hawaii’s history.

*History of the Waianae SDA Church.* An unpublished article written by Lemuel Leialoha for the dedication of the current church building in Waianae in 1972.

Some information was gained by speaking with church members directly and by informal interviews.