

Ed Kaneko, Engineer, Coffee Farmer, Master Weaver, Beloved Kumu

To visit Ed Kaneko, where he lives with his beautiful wife Kay, on their 100 year old coffee farm in Holualoa, one might think that he had lived there forever. Not so, it's more like he's come full circle.

Ed was born on May 29, 1930, He was the sixth of eleven children born to Jimpachi and Yuri, maiden name Matsushita. Jimpachi arrived from Japan in 1913. He was sponsored by the Hind family of Pu'uana'hulu, owners of Pu'u Wa'a Wa'a Ranch, as a cook. At that time many of the ranch hands were Hawaiian, so Jimpachi learned the language. Ed's mother arrived a few years later from a neighboring village, about 1918. It was an arranged marriage, which was common at the time. This marriage turned out to be long and successful.

Education was very important to Jimpachi and Yuri. While Ed's older sisters were tutored along with her own children by Mrs. Hind, by the time Ed came along, they moved to the Honalo area of Kona where schools were closer.

In Honalo the family farmed coffee, first on five acres, and then an additional eight. The kids were all expected to help with farm chores. At that time, and up until the early seventies in Kona, the school year was scheduled around coffee picking season. Most kids had to work before play. The smallest children had the job of picking up the beans that had fallen on the ground, since they were the closest to it!

In addition to farming Yuri supplemented the family income by weaving lauhala baskets for picking coffee, purses, and covers for cigarette packs, among other things. (Hat weaving was the exclusive domain of the Hawaiian weavers who mostly lived at the beach.) The kids also engaged in this endeavor, and by the time Ed was five he was weaving baskets. It was also the boy's job to "go into the bushes" and harvest the lau. While many weavers sold their products to Kimura Lauhala Shop Yuri sold her work through Mrs. Toda, who sent it to Honolulu shops. Especially during the war years there was a high demand for souvenir products as the G.I.s wanted gifts to send home to their moms and sweethearts.

During the summer months Jimpachi earned additional income by occasionally cooking for the Hind family and guests at Kiholo, where the Hinds still own a beach house. The Hinds would send a chauffeur for Jimpachi. This must have been exciting for the kids. There were beautiful hala trees at Kiholo that Jimpachi would gather from in his spare time for Yuri.

Ed went to the old Keauhou school from grades 1 through 8. The school still exists today as a preschool located on the Mamalahoa highway, near the Keauhou junction. And then on to Konawaena High School.

Ed's favorite memory of school days is from the war years. During the war,

remote coast lines were evacuated for security reasons. The more accessible beaches had a curfew imposed on them. That didn't stop Ed and Peter Hirata, the principal of Keauhou school. They liked to go night fishing. So, they would hide their fishing poles under Peters car, then drive south to the Graces' place, probably Ka Ohe, where the family still owns land. There they would borrow a donkey, load him up with their gear and grass for him to eat, and hike down to the beach. There they would fish and spend the night. Ed fished for menpachi, Peter ulua. Ed always chuckles when he tells this story.

Ed also realized the importance of education. Thinking he could go to school under the G.I Bill, like so many had after the army, he enlisted in November 1948. There he spent the next 3 years, 7 months, 12 days, 12 hours. He was held over due to the Korean conflict.

Ed spent 14 weeks in basic training at Fort Ord, California. It was during that time he met his future bride to be, Kay Uno. Then on to ordinance school in Georgia.

Ed's first deployment was to Japan under the occupation. By this time the U.S. Government finally recognized the value of having Japanese American troops in the military, especially those who spoke Japanese. The crossing took 14 days. Ed utilized his time teaching Japanese to his fellow troops.

While in Japan the Korean conflict broke out and Ed was sent to Korea because he spoke Japanese (under the occupation of Korea by Japan the Koreans were made to speak Japanese). In Korea Ed did reconnaissance and intelligence gathering. He also became motor pool Sergeant (N.C.O.) He spent one winter in Korea. While he was there he contracted jaundice. As a result he was shipped back to the mainland.

After recuperating from jaundice Ed's stint in the army still wasn't over. In 1952 he was sent to Desert Rock testing grounds a member of support troops. While not in the immediate area of the tests, years later he received questionnaires inquiring as to his health. Well, he's 86 now and still in good health.

Ed's final job in the military was the hardest of all. He was assigned to escort the dead from the Korean conflict home. He was discharged in August of 1953.

After leaving the army Ed lived with his older sister, Kikue, in Honolulu while he finished some high school requirements at U.H. This was made possible under the G.I. Bill, as were all of his undergraduate studies. The G.I. Bill was probably one of the smartest programs the government ever enacted. It provided funds to send thousands veterans to school, who in turn built the nation we have today.

After finishing up in Honolulu, Ed was off to Michigan State where he studied civil engineering. It was while he was still in school he returned to California and married Kay Uno, in September of 1955. Kay had completed

nursing school by then. During their marriage she worked as a public health nurse. Ed had met Kay through her father.

Kay's father was very supportive of the military and the young recruits, many of them away from home for the first time. Kay's brothers were against the marriage because two of their older sisters had married guys from Hawai'i and the marriages ended in divorce. Ed and Kay have been married for 60 years.

Kay's childhood was very different from Ed's. Although also born to immigrant parents, she was born in California. And due to a perceived threat by Japanese infiltrators the U. S. government interned many American born Japanese in "relocation" camps. This included Kay, her other young siblings, and mother. Kay's father was held in "detention", separated from his family, under some suspicion. Many years later Ed, under the freedom of information act, found nothing incriminating him.

After marrying Kay and Ed returned to Michigan, where Ed completed his undergraduate and graduate studies. And got a job with the Michigan State Dept. of Highways. This was great, as it enabled him to work in the day time and complete his thesis at night. It was during this period that the first of Kay and Ed's children was born. Kris Kaneko was born March 31, 1958, in Lansing, Michigan.

After completing his education at Michigan State Ed, Kay and their young son moved to Honolulu, Hawai'i where Ed worked for the Dept. of Transportation for two years. Then for the Civil Aeronautic Authority and the Federal Aviation Authority for 6 years. While working for the FAA, Ed was involved in the planning and engineering for a new facilities on Canton Island, a joint U.S. British owned desalination plant on Wake, airport maintenance and certification of navigational equipment on Guam. It was during this time Kay and Ed's daughters were born.

Julie on August 7, 1961, and Patricia, on April 10, 1965.

After working for the FAA for 6 years Ed was sent to U.C. Berkeley for one to get his masters degree in aviation. This was a special program, Ed was one of only 5 students. He was rewarded with a desk job in Washington D.C. for five years!

After working in Washington Ed was sent back to O'ahu for two years. Then on to Guam where he was the Resident Director. Guam was like a vacation for Kay. Julie and Tricia enjoyed the traveling and experiencing new environments. Kris was off on his own by this time.

After two years on Guam Ed's job brought him back to Honolulu. There he became the Division Chief with 400 employees working under him. He held this position for 4 years, overseeing the entire Pacific basin. This was an interesting job as Ed traveled to many remote islands to set up navigational systems.

Ed's final job with the FAA took Ed to Tokyo, where he was the senior FAA Representative and contact person for 13 countries, based in the U. S. Embassy.

During this time Ed traveled To Brunei and China to establish U.S. International relationships . Ed even took a group of Chinese dignitaries to Disneyland

Kay really enjoyed living in Japan. There she explored her heritage, becoming very interested in Japanese culture and the arts. She frequently visited a nearby paper making village, where she even tried her hand at paper making.

After three years in Japan, Ed retired in 1989, at 59. Ed and Kay returned to Hawai'i Island, where they had purchased a coffee farm in Holualoa two years earlier. Ed spent a couple of years getting the farm in shape before embarking on his new career, as a coffee farmer and volunteer.

Ed never lost his interest in weaving. Throughout his travels he collected baskets. In his collection are beautiful baskets of oak splint from the East Coast, and wonderful bamboo works from Japan.

Ed is among the founders of the Holualoa Foundation For Culture And The Arts. Originally utilizing the Imin Center to offer workshops for adults and art fun days for children, the art Center is now located at the old Donkey Mill coffee processing plant a short distance south of Holualoa. Ed still presents weaving demonstrations there.

Active with the Kona Coffee Cultural Festival Ed's a 4 time float winner. He is also a 3 time grand prize winner, one time runner up in the lei contest. Ed was the first to introduce coffee aroma into his winning lei, by finely grinding coffee and applying it to his lei.

Ed worked on the traveling Kona Coffee History Exhibit, Shown first in Kona in 1995, then traveling as far away as Brazil in 1996.

Among the many volunteers who built the play ground at Higashihara Park, Ed and several others spent 7 months just grouting the rock work there. He gets to enjoy the park every Wednesday while weaving with his friends.

In 1996 a year after it's inception, Ed began teaching at the Ka Ulu Lauhala O Kona annual weaving conference. He is best known for his sturdy baskets, woven from the top down, similar to the coffee baskets his mother wove when he was young, the Akana hat, and his iconic cowboy hat. An image of that hat graces the back of the 2016 commemorative Ka Ulu tee shirt.

While Ed learned most of his weaving through observation, he was taught the Akana hat by Nancy Uemura about twenty five years ago, after Mrs. Akana passed away. It would b nice to know more about Mrs. Akana.

The Akana hat is a coarsely woven farm hat, the weavers being a third of an inch wide or more. It resembles a coconut hat in that there is a swirl of weavers on the crown. Mrs. Akana was very proprietary. Fortunately, she passed this information to Nancy, and she in turn taught Ed. Now, thanks to Ed Kaneko this information is available to a whole new generation. Currently Ed and one of his students are weaving a collection of these hats to be worn by the docents at the Kona Historical Societies Living History Farm in Captain Cook.

Ed has been a long time member of the Society. He served on the board for 10 years and generously donates to their fund raisers.

Shortly after joining Ka Ulu Lauhala O Kona, Ed started what is now known as the Wednesday weavers. It is thanks to Ed the weavers have had a booth at the Merry Monarch Invitational Crafts Fair for about the last 15 years. Some weavers weave all year just to sell their work at the Fair. You've got to get there early if you want a fancy hat!

In 2006 Ed traveled to the Smithsonian Institute, along with a group of other artists for the Carriers of Culture exhibit. Among them were Harriet Soong and Gladys Grace. There they displayed 50 lauhala hats. It was quite an impressive sight.

Most recently Ed, with the help of some of his fellow weavers, wove a collection of traditional baskets and mats for the Polynesian Voyaging Society. These items were on display at the Smithsonian Institutes Indian Museum over the Memorial Day weekend where they were viewed by over 15 thousand people. Currently, the collection is with the Hokule'a traveling up the East Coast, This was an exciting project.

Lately Ed, a devoted husband, can be found mostly at home with his beloved Kay, at the Donkey Mill, or at weaving, still sharing his considerable knowledge and donating his time.

Nanette Bell

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