

March, 2019 Newsletter

President's Message



Dolores Ethyl Serrao Ramos

February 4, 1931 ~ February 9, 2019



Dolores Ramos in her late teens/early twenties.

I knew Dolores for many decades. She and her husband Eugene were long active in PMKCA, Dolores most recently as President of PMKCA for the ten years to 2014 (and President Emeritus thereafter). When I attended the memorial service for her recently, I was intrigued by the photo of her as a young woman and realized that I knew virtually nothing of her early years.

Dolores was born at the beginning of the Great Depression and was only fourteen at the end of World War II, leading me to wonder what her life was like during those tumultuous years. Her daughter, Pamela Ramos, kindly took some time to sit with me and tell me about her mother's early life. The following conversation has been edited for clarity.

Joe: What was life like for your mother as a young girl? Did she tell you stories about her life then?

Pam: When Mom was young, she lived with her brother and two sisters and her parents on Haili Street,

just below the St. Joseph Catholic church. She was the second of three daughters and the youngest child was her brother. One story she told me was about the period during WW II when that church had been converted into a USO for soldiers returned from action in the Pacific. Mom was always a hard worker and often took charge of her siblings at home since both her parents had demanding jobs, but she was eager to help out at the USO. She made bandages and served food to the recovering troops and listened to their stories, which was her first real exposure to the wider world beyond the quiet town of Hilo. She said that working there really opened her eyes.

Joe: You mentioned that both parents worked outside the home. Please tell me a little about her parents.

Pam: Her father, Moses Serrao, was a construction supervisor, who worked on projects around the island, including the breakwater for Hilo harbor. He was Portuguese and his family was from Hilo. Her mother, Rebecca, was Hawaiian and was a Keli`iwaiwai`ole from North Kohala. She worked as the supervisor of the Hilo telephone operators at one of those old-style switchboards. She had relatives who worked at Kahua ranch, so Mom used to love visiting there and experiencing a bit of ranch life. Although Hilo was a small town, Mom was pretty much a city girl who knew little about what life was like in the country. Except for visits to Kahua ranch and train trips to Hāmākua for family picnics, her childhood free time was spent riding her bike or taking walks around Hilo with her friends.

Joe: What kind of things did she do around Hilo town?

Pam: Mom was very active, even as a little girl. She was fearless about climbing trees, even though she sometimes fell. She broke her collarbone five times from falls and her doctor got so frustrated with constantly fixing her breaks that he threatened severe action if she ever came back with a broken bone. Luckily, she never had to go back. She also loved swimming in the ocean. Before the breakwater was built, Hilo Bayfront was one of the prettiest beaches ever and she loved to swim there. Hilo was a very safe town, even during the war. Parents would let their kids go anywhere as long as they were back home by sunset. Because of the wartime blackout, Hilo was very dark at night, with very few lights showing.

Joe: Where there any important events in her life during her high school years?

Pam: Mom was half Hawaiian and proud of it. Remember that during much of the territorial days, Hawaiian culture was not celebrated as it later was. It was even suppressed. Mom danced hula and co-founded a club at Hilo High for those of Hawaiian ancestry and those interested in Hawaiian culture. The other co-founder was George Na`ope, who later went on to co-found the Merrie Monarch Festival. Because my Mom was dedicated to Hawaiian culture, I also started hula very young and was able to participate in the very first Merrie Monarch and others thereafter.

Joe: Dolores grew up in Hilo, so how did she end up in Pa`auilo Mauka?

Pam: Her older and younger sisters both went on to college after high school, but Mom decided to get a job. From her mother, she learned about a job opening in Honoka`a for a switchboard operator, and she got the job. She lived with other single young women in a little cottage, but often traveled back to Hilo to visit family. Trips to Hilo happened less and less often as she got to know more people in Honoka`a and especially after she met my Daddy (Eugene Ramos). My father's family was wary at first with him for wanting to marry a half-Hawaiian girl, but she quickly became a cherished member of the family because of her good nature and hard work ethic. When I was born, my parents lived in the family ranch

house (near the corner of Pohakea Road and Pohakea Lani Road) and we moved into the house on Pa`auilo Mauka Road when I was five. This is where my mom loved living for the rest of her life.

Joe: Was it hard for her to adjust to up-country ranch life?

Pam: Oh yeah! She was a city girl from Hilo that had not grown up in ranching country. She had to learn how to operate a wringer washer by hauling buckets of water to the washroom building, which was separate from the house. She had to learn how to really ride a horse. My dad practically grew up on a horse. He had to ride down to Honoka`a every day to go to high school. He could not do sports because he had to ride right back up after school to do ranch work. One time, mom was out riding on the ranch with my dad and they ran into a big boar. My dad climbed a tree right away, but my mom did not know what to do. Nothing bad happened, but it was a shock for her. When there was a roundup, for branding or other cattle work, mom became the cook for the huge number of people who came to help. Of course, after the work was done, it was a big celebration. My grandparents and their siblings owned one of the last of the working ranches in my family, where that was all they did. I had over thirty uncles and aunties, so when their parents died, many, many acres got distributed to a multitude of heirs. My parents still had cattle, but they had other jobs too. And that is when my mom started her 47-year career with the post office. She worked 15 years in Pa`auilo post office, at what is now the propane place, 10 years commuting to the post office in Hilo where she became a supervisor and 22 years as the postmaster in Honoka`a.

Joe: One last question. I know that your mother was very active in her church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Since most Portuguese are from Catholic families, I am curious how she became a Mormon.

Pam: Her mother was baptized Mormon early in her life and mom was baptized as a child. Mormon missionaries came to Hawai`i after the Protestant missionaries, but they were very active here. Mom's father was Portuguese, but he was from a Protestant family. All the kids, including my mother, were raised Mormon. My father's family was Catholic, but I was raised in the Mormon faith. Mom was very interested in genealogy. She eventually became director of the Family History Center for the Honokaa Ward of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and worked weekly at the Kona Hawaii Temple, assisting people with researching their genealogy. Finally, my mother loved her church and her community, but first and foremost, she loved her family.

Joe: Thank you, Pam, for telling me about your mother.

Pam: You're welcome. Mahalo nui loa for asking about her.