

Tita Spielman - Waimea Gazette 2007

“I saw Waimea when it was beautiful...when cowboys rode the street on horses, not in cars.” This is the recollection of Tita Spielman, an attractive woman who was born in Hilo, in 1924. Now living in her 83rd year, Tita resides in Waimea, in a home she and her husband built which overlooks the three mountains; Mauna Kea, Mauna Loa and Hualalai. “Families took such beautiful care of their lawns and homes, and it was a pleasure to drive through Waimea,” Tita said.

Tita was born the youngest of four children and she was the only girl. Her three older brothers “watched over me like a hawk,” and it was they who started calling her Tita, a name she has answered to all of her life. All of her brothers have since passed on and Tita said, “I’m the last of the Mohicans.”

Growing up in Hilo, Tita’s mother was from the Big Island and her father was from England. The lessons her parents taught her have stayed with Tita all her life. “We were raised with rules and our parents set examples for us,” she said. “We had to bathe and dress for dinner, where we ate meals around the round koa table every evening together. Those days, we had to ask for permission to leave the table,” Tita said.

Tita graduated from Punahou High School and remembers taking a boat to and from Oahu. “We would leave Hilo at 4 p.m., make a stop in Maui and land in Honolulu at 7 a.m. the next day. The Punahou cars would be waiting to pick up all the students.” After graduation she went east to Boston for more schooling, but the war broke out and she came home. “I felt so far away and very homesick, I was glad to come home,” said Tita.

She attended UC Berkeley for a stint, but came home on the Lurline to Oahu. She met her future husband Joseph Spielman in Honolulu who had graduated from UCLA and had played football in the first three Hula Bowls. “Before marriage, I made sure he knew that I would never leave the Hawaiian Islands except for visits. He agreed,” Tita said. She married at the age of 28, “which was considered an old maid in those days,” Tita added. The couple was married for a total of 54 years, and had three children.

“Joe was a treasurer for Lewis Cook, and then he started his own contracting business,” said Tita. “The third thing he did was become the project manager for the renovation of Iolani Palace.” This was a job that Joseph took seriously, putting so much time and effort into the project that they waited until he completed it before moving to the Big Island. “It was worth it, even though it was a tedious job,” Tita explained. She said that Joseph was meticulous, like sending away for the same color and type of carpets that were originally placed on the floors of the palace.

Tita had always wanted to move back to the Big Island, and in 1981, she and Joe bought a home in Waimea. He built the first condominiums at the Mauna Lani and also worked in Waikoloa. They found their present home site (above Anekona Estates) on Waiaka stream and built the

cedar home she lives in today. Joseph passed away in 2006, but Tita fondly recalls many good memories with him.

“My husband worked very hard and I used to tell the kids that he was hard on them because of his own growing up years,” Tita said. “He only wanted the best for them.” She said the secret to a long and happy marriage is communication and understanding. “You have to put everything up front, and not hold anything back.” She laughed and recalled a time when the two of them were arguing. “Joe got two yellow pads and gave me one, and we had to write down everything we didn’t like about each other. Then we exchanged pads and started laughing. It’s about working it out and working on the things we can change about ourselves.”

When Tita was a young woman and living in Hilo, one of her wishes was to learn how to fly planes. Her father forbade her, but she found a way to fly anyway. “I had a friend who was a pilot and he hated logging in time, so I said I’d do the logging in exchange for free lessons in flying,” Tita said. After eleven hours of flying lessons, Tita said on a beautiful windless day in Hilo, the instructor hopped out of the plane and shouted, “Go!”

“I was scared, but I took my first solo flight and I was thrilled!” Tita said. She smiles as she recalls how her father found out. “My cousin came to dinner that night and said we had to toast, and when my father asked why, we had to tell him,” said Tita. “After that, he knew he couldn’t keep me from flying.” She said she would fly with her cousin Bobby Hind and see the sights of the islands.

Tita said that in those days, kids did fun things like fish, play ukulele, travel in the car across the island and sing songs. “We counted the gulches as we drove from Hilo to Waimea, Paauilo, then Hamakua, saying ‘almost there!’ We didn’t have to have all the gadgets like ipods that the kids have now.”

She remembers learning to fish with Uncle Francis Brown, who knew and taught she and her siblings the history of the coastline, stories he’d learned from Jack Paulo of Kawaihae. “We were just so happy to learn the stories of each area and I’m thankful to have had that experience,” said Tita. She is also grateful to have experienced the simplicity of the times and to have explored the land and ranches, especially Pu’u Wa’a Wa’a. “We made our own entertainment,” she said.

One summer, Tita went on a cattle drive with Waimea ranch owner Anna Perry Fiske, where they drove the cattle on the roads and cars had to pull over to make way. “On the way back, we galloped on our horses through fields where the KTA shopping center now stands,” Tita remembers. “I’ll never forget stopping in the middle of a mint field, oh, the smell.”

She loves living on the Waiaka stream, which she said, always ran and was never dry when she was a child. Her three adult all live on the Big Island, and her youngest son lives next door to her. “I’ve been so lucky and have known wonderful people in my life,” Tita said. “I miss my friends who have passed on, but I have lived a charmed life, and I appreciate all that I have.”

