



## Marion McGregor Lee Loy

*Interviewed by Joe Rossi (1991)*

*Narrative edited by Cynthia Oshiro*

**Marion Frances Kaleleonalani McGregor Lee Loy** was born in 1911 in Honolulu. She attended Central Grammar and Lincoln Grammar schools before entering Kamehameha School for Girls in the ninth grade. Lee Loy graduated from Kamehameha in 1929 and enrolled in the University of Hawai‘i, where she received her fifth-year teaching certificate in 1934.

Her first teaching job was at Huelo, Maui. Later, Lee Loy taught at Hawai‘i island schools in Kohala, Honoka‘a, and Hilo. In 1951 she returned to Honolulu, where she taught at Ali‘iōlani, Ka‘ahumanu, and Kapālama elementary schools. She spent the last fourteen years of her career at Farrington High School before retiring in 1974.

Lee Loy raised one son from her first marriage to William Flazer. She and her second husband, Samuel Kanu‘uhiwalani Lee Loy, raised two daughters and a son.

### Growing up

My father [Daniel Pamawaho McGregor, Sr.] originally came from Hau‘ula, O‘ahu. That’s on the Windward side. Since his father died when he was a year old, he was brought up by his grandfather, who was a *konohiki* for that area. *Konohiki* in the Hawaiian term means a lesser chief [i.e., headman of an *ahupua‘a* land division under the chief]. In this case, [grandfather] was a tax assessor of the area.

I recall my father telling me that once a year people would come up [to their home] to pay what they call ‘*auhau*, which were the taxes for that area. Maybe they’d bring so many pigs and so many this and that.

My mother [Louise Aoe Wong-Kong McGregor] was born in Maui. She was half Chinese and half Hawaiian.

My father met my mother because he was a substitute teacher, and she was the teacher at a one-room school in Hau‘ula. But when they got married, teaching didn’t pay too much. I think she said when they first started, it was thirty dollars a month or something like that. (Laughs) But, you know, bread was only five cents a loaf.

I remember him telling us that he sent away for this La Salle Extension University lessons in accounting. And then when this paymaster’s job opened and they gave him an accounting test and he passed it, he became a paymaster.

When I was about five years old, my Aunt Lani, my mother’s sister, died in childbirth. She was married to a doctor. Somehow they split, and he had gone back to the Mainland. The sisters said, “Well, let’s divide the kids up.”

My mother said, “No, that’s not right. The children, if possible, should be all brought up together so they’d know their brothers and sisters.”

Since they didn’t agree, they went to court, and my mother was awarded all six children. So you can imagine,

we had six of our own at the time. My youngest brother had not been born yet.

So Mom and Dad brought up the six Hutchinson children. And of course, after a few years, my brother Prince came along. He’s the baby of the family.

My mother and father were very close friends of Prince [Jonah] Kūhiō Kalaniana‘ole. He [Prince Kūhiō] said, “Aoe, if it’s a boy, will you give the boy my name?”

So she said, “Oh well, all right.” But she worried, because his name is Jonah, and she thought it was such a jinx name. But she did tell him yes, [and] it was a boy, so that’s why she gave the name Prince to him.

It was a large family, and yet we seemed to get along pretty good most of the time. Every Sunday night we would have church service at our home. My mother would get on the piano, and she would play, “There is beauty all around, when there’s love at home,” and we had to sing that song.

We had to go around the room, and everybody would say a [Bible] verse. Well, we had taught Prince to say, “God is love,” because it’s the shortest one. And then one of my cousins took “God is love,” and he [Prince] said, “That’s not fair, that’s my verse!”

There are a lot of things you learn in a large family. We were given just one serving of food, and that was it. When your dish was clean, you didn’t ask for seconds, because you knew there were too many. Or if somebody didn’t want to finish or somebody didn’t like carrots, they’d say, “Well, I’ll take your carrot,” or, “You can take my something.” We would exchange.

At that time, we lived on Kukui Street. Later on, most of the Chinese [there] moved out to Bingham Tract when they opened the tract. So we were wanting to go there, too, because we’d be near the University [of Hawai‘i] where

eventually we'd go to school. But my parents said no, that wasn't to be, because my father had some land over in Kalihi down here. There's a little lane, still there today [off of North King Street, near the present Farrington High School], it's called McGregor Lane.

I [first] went to Central Grammar [School]. At the time, it was the English-speaking school.<sup>1</sup> And then Lincoln was designated the English-speaking school,<sup>2</sup> so my mother had us take a test, and we all landed at Lincoln Grammar School, which [was later known as] Linekona School. I graduated from the first class there, 1925.

The test they gave us, oh, a lot of it was oral. Mostly they asked questions about your family, like how many children were in the family, what did your father do, and things like that. And so they said, "Oh, you speak English very well." So we knew when they said that we were going to get in.

Well, the ones that didn't get in, I think, were the ones that felt very bad, because they said that it was just like we were an elite group, and that education was for everyone and there shouldn't be that. But I could see why the [Department] of Public Instruction wanted to keep as many students who could speak well together so that the [English] language wouldn't be diluted.

My parents both spoke Hawaiian fluently. But they didn't speak Hawaiian to us, and they didn't want us to learn Hawaiian, because my mother said that if we learned Hawaiian, we would begin to speak a kind of pidgin. Especially being a teacher herself, she didn't want any of her children to speak pidgin.

In my class I don't remember any Japanese or Chinese [students]. It was just White and Hawaiians and Portuguese. Later on, there were some Chinese, but in my particular class I didn't have Chinese.

At Kamehameha, of course, we lived [i.e., boarded] at the school. There was a Preparatory Department for young boys,<sup>3</sup> and there was a school for girls that ran from seventh grade to twelfth, and then the [older] boys' was seven to twelve like ours, the girls' school.

We were under a strict schedule. We began at 8:00. Of course, we had devotions, which usually ran for about fifteen minutes, and they gave announcements for the day. This was [in] this large assembly hall that held everybody. And then we left to go to our various classes.

The ninth-grade class had the longest day, because we took all kinds of things. We took the regular math, English, science. [And] they taught us home nursing.

On Saturdays, if we had no demerits, we could go out for the day. They usually let us out about 9:30 [a.m.], and we had to be home before 5:00. If you didn't get back in time, well, then you lost your following Saturday to go out.

Our class, I think, was the naughtiest class, because I remember Miss [Maude] Schaeffer, who had [later] become

our principal at junior year, said that we were the most undignified seniors she ever saw. We know we didn't win ribbons with her.

Our junior year we had biology class, and we were divided into groups. We had an aquarium and took care of the aquarium. We'd say to our teacher, "Oh, Miss Catlin,"—she was our biology teacher—"can we go down and try to catch some minnows?"

There was a stream that ran along the edge of the school.<sup>4</sup> But we weren't going to catch minnows, we wanted to go and eat green mangos, because it was mango season (laughs).

I then went to the kitchen, because the Chinese cook was very nice to me. I went in and I asked him to give me a cup of *shōyu* [soy sauce]. We would eat the [green] mangos with *shōyu*. When I started walking down the steps out of the kitchen, who should be coming from the dispensary building, but Miss Schaeffer!

I grabbed a hibiscus leaf. And I put it over there [i.e., over the cup]. And then she says, "Oh, Marion, where are you going?" I said, "Oh, I am going to join my group. They went down to catch minnows for the aquarium."

And she said, "Oh, what do you have there?" I said, "I have a butterfly. If I show you, it might fly away." She said, "Oh, oh, I see."

So I went on down. Kehau was on the tree still picking mangos, and Alexa and Edith, all the rest of the gang, were out sitting there. They had brought a knife, and were cutting, eating.

Then we heard, "Kehau, what are you doing on that tree?" And she was so nervous that she dropped some of the mango, I think, on the head of Miss Schaeffer (laughs).

Cecilia Arnold was the president of the class. She said, "Oh, Miss Schaeffer, you should taste some of this green mango. They're delicious." Then my cousin Edith grabs that *shōyu* thing. She says, "You can dip it in *shōyu*, it tastes better."

Miss Schaeffer looked at me, she looked at the cup. She said, "Oh, that's your butterfly, is it?" (Laughs) I looked down. I felt so ashamed of myself, getting caught. My gracious. "Okay, girls, you come with me." She marched us to the dispensary, and we were each given a tablespoon of castor oil. So you can imagine, that afternoon we were running to the toilet all the time (laughs).

We were on the punishment list. We were to go to the dispensary and work for two hours each. If you're not going to mop and sweep, then they have you take boards, and they have these big, wide plasters, and you cut it in different sizes, and then you strip it on the board. So there we'd sit for hours, putting things on boards till our two hours were up.

[Senior year], there were twenty-one of us, so we were divided into [groups of] seven. There were seven that

lived in our cottage. And there were five bedrooms in that cottage. One [bedroom] was for the house mother, that was the teacher. The second one was for “Baby D” And then the other six girls were two in a room.

“Baby D” meant baby director. We took care of a live baby. His name was Edmond Austen, but we called him Denny. For one week we washed all his diapers—we stayed home from school—the work was given us to catch up—and we made his formula, fed him, and so on.

When you lived down in senior cottage, you took turns. You were a hostess one week, then you were with Baby D, then you were housekeeper. Then, of course, there was a cook. And then there was the dishwasher, and what else? I think we had assistant cook[sl, two people to help.

## University of Hawai‘i

At graduation they had given me the scholarship to go to the [Territorial] Normal [and Training] School. The truth of the matter was I actually did not want to be a teacher; I wanted to be a nurse. I got interested in nursing because we nursed at school, and I thought, gee, this is so nice because you can help people who are helpless. So I told my mother I wanted to be a nurse.

She told me, “See, they know you’re going to make a good teacher, that’s why they awarded you that scholarship.” But she said, “Too bad you can’t take the scholarship, because I want you to go to the University of Hawai‘i instead of going to this normal training school.”

When we were seniors at Kamehameha, everybody had to take Hawaiian [as a second language]. Our teacher was Professor John Wise, who was also the professor of languages at the university. So naturally, when we were there, we went on, took more from him. So I took all the Hawaiian that I could.

In my junior year [at the University of Hawai‘i], they closed the normal school,<sup>5</sup> and all those that graduated from normal school became juniors with us [at UH]. I finished the university in February 1933. And then I went back for my fifth year [teaching certificate].

When we did our fifth year, one semester you go out to Kalākaua Intermediate [School] or, I think, also Washington Intermediate [School]. Over at Kalākaua, I had [to teach] English. When we had our study period, they had us go and work in [either] the [school] library or dispensary. And I was assigned to the dispensary. So I would go with the nurse, Miss Westendorf, into the community. They had a list of those who didn’t come to school.

I remember there was one that they suspected—she told me, “Don’t touch anything.” They discovered she [the student] had leprosy [i.e., Hansen’s disease] when they made the test. It was from the father, he had leprosy, too.

## First teaching job— Huelo, Maui.

After doing fifth year at Kalākaua, I felt like I was ready for anything. But first they told me that Mr. [Oren E.] Long—he was then the superintendent of [the Department of] Public Instruction—assigned me to an eighth-grade class over there [Maui]. So I got on the boat.

I got there Monday morning, and the principal said, “Well, the eighth grade sits here and the seventh here and the sixth grade here.”

“Oh,” I said, “three grades. Well, I suppose I should juggle them around.” But I didn’t dare tell her I was shivering in my boots.

Shizuko, the girl who taught that [class] before me, wrote me a note because she knew me. She told me what she did. She [busied] the two classes that she was not going to [address] with work to do, make sure they got started, then she would work with the [other] ones. So that’s what I did.

I said to Mrs. Watson [the principal], “On Fridays, I’m going to send the boys out to play, and I’m going to teach the girls to sew.” She said, “Oh, that’s fine.”

You know, [S. H.] Kress [& Company] used to sell little blocks that you could eventually join and make a quilt. They cost only about fifteen cents, so one weekend I took off and went home [to Honolulu] and bought enough for all the girls to have at least one and enough of the embroidery thread and embroidering needles.

I would teach, “Now, this is how you make the French knot; this is called running stitch.” And they all had a different pattern, so no two had the same.

I imagine Huelo was maybe only one of a few schools where they don’t feed in too much [resources] there, because of the small enrollment. But for what little they had, the youngsters were very keen about learning there. It was so funny, they wanted to stay after school. We wanted to shoo them out of the classroom, because we wanted to go back to the [teachers’] cottage and do things for ourselves.

## Hawai‘i Island schools—1935–51

I taught from 1935 to 1951 at various schools on the Big Island. The first was Kohala High and Grammar School. I was [also] the school librarian part-time. I had one class in English, and in the afternoon I had the girls’ physical education classes from ninth grade to twelfth grade.

The [teachers’] cottages divided the elementary school, where they had this great big yard, and the school buildings for the high school and intermediate on the other side of this roadway.

I liked living in the cottage. We had a nice group. And then we also had the other cottage mates visit us. Sometimes we would have potluck dinners together. I would have stayed there, but when I had that visitation from that ghost army, that was the end.

I woke up [one night] with these dogs crying. It was a

wailing more than a barking, you know. And the Hawaiians used to say when you hear that kind of bark, that means there's going to be a death in the family. I could hear, at a distance, drums—boom, boom, boom, boom. And then it sounded like a lot of people walking. It was like people coming toward our cottage, and it was getting louder and louder.

Right next to my room was a bathroom, and then the second bedroom that Miss [Tsuruyo] Yamamoto occupied. And what should I see but this white figure, all sheeted—I was so frightened. Somehow I couldn't scream, but I looked and I said, "Who is that?" And she said she was Tsuruyo. And she said, "I'm going to come and sleep with you for a while." I could hear her heart beating, and I knew she was frightened. It sounded like the army was going down to the playground of the elementary school. So I finally said to Tsuruyo, "I'm going to get up and see who that is." We had these old-fashioned shades, you know, that you pull down by string. I opened the windows and looked out. Suddenly there was no sound at all. No laughter, no Hawaiian words, but it was absolutely calm, and the yard was clear of anybody. But there was this late misty moon shining into the yard.

Well, the next morning I thought I would ask Doris [Kotake], our roommate. And I said, "Doris, did you hear the dogs barking last night?" She said, "No."

About that time, Tsuruyo interrupted. So I went to the kitchen where she was, and she said, "Don't say anything more because Doris is going to think you and I are crazy because we're hearing armies and people marching and people talking."

We came out to eat breakfast and nothing was said. Then I went to open the library. And Mr. Harlan Roberts, the principal, said to me, "Good morning, Miss McGregor. How did you sleep?" I said, "Oh, just fine." He said, "Then you didn't hear the drums?"

When he said that, I was so astounded. I said to him, "Did you hear the drums?" He said, "Yes, I've heard them for the last thirteen years. The first year I was frightened. But now, I just take it for granted. They come right through."

I said, "Look, Mr. Roberts, as much as I love to be here at this school, please okay a transfer for me next year, because I'm Hawaiian, I'm scared of those kinds of things."

In the meantime, I wrote home to my father and mother, telling them about this experience. My father wrote back and said, "You heard the ghost army. It's called *huaka'i pō*." He said that where they're very strong, they come back all the time.

Anyway, I got my transfer out of there.

Later on, they moved the cottages to a different area of the school so that this wouldn't happen.

Hilo was the only intermediate school [on Hawai'i island] at the time. And they took in everybody from that area: Waiākea, Hilo proper, Kaūmana, wherever. Elementary schools fed right into it. That's why it was a very large school.

[During World War II], we had to every day go to school with our gas mask slung on the side. Every so often we would have parades, right around the school grounds. We had competition in the classrooms to buy [war] stamps. You'd get this big chart that's out there in the library where everybody can look to see what classes are 100 percent each week.

We had one boy in our class whose family belonged to a religion that did not believe in [war]. Because he didn't buy stamps, I told him, "Well, let me buy a stamp for you." He said, "Oh, no. If my parents find out that you bought a stamp, I would be in trouble." So I said, "Okay, Lloyd, that's all right."

They [the other children] were the ones that were grumbling, right where he could hear it. So I told them, "Look, I don't want to hear anything more about this. He cannot help it. You know, we have no right to change a person's religion. That's why we have the Bill of Rights."

I told the [vice] principal about my class being very unhappy never making 100 percent because we had one of these conscientious objectors in our room whose parents have not allowed him to put out one cent for it. I said, "I know the boy is very uneasy. He's such a nice boy. Can't we make it a rule that if you have students whose religion forbids them to buy stamps that we put them in a different category?" She said, "Oh, I think that could be arranged." So then we did that.

I had a very slow class. I knew that it would be almost impossible to teach more than writing a few sentences. But I just didn't want them to feel not successful. So I told them, "Once a week we're going to have Radio Station Day." Because in those days, they didn't have television, see.

And I said, "You can come up, and if you want to sing a song, you can sing a song. If you want you can tell us something that happened at your house or at the beach or whatever, so long as you come up and say a few sentences. Shizuo [a student in the class] is going to be the station manager. He is the one who's going to call you folks up." I felt that way I could also grade them on oral English.

And one day, I didn't know the principal [Lorna Desha] was going to walk in. Shizuo was here on this broom, singing away. The broom was supposed to be the mike. And I thought, oh, god, she would have to walk in. I said, "Oh, good afternoon, Mrs. Desha. We're having a simulated radio program. Would you like to sit down?"

So immediately, the kids clammed up. Well, you know, the boy [Shizuo] is smart enough, he picked the kids he knew who loved to talk. So he called Richard Farias up first. Richard said, "Oh, I'm going to tell you about going on a fishing trip with my father." And he spoke so well.

What I didn't know was that Mrs. Desha, before becoming principal of Hilo Intermediate, was principal at Waiākea Kai [School], where the boy was going to school. And this



little boy used to speak [only in] pidgin English, so she was amazed.

## Return to O'ahu—1951

I started out at Waipahu High School, and then I had difficulty getting my children to the day care and getting to school on time. So they arranged to have me transferred to Ali 'iōlani [Elementary School].

The following year, I transferred to Ka'ahumanu [Elementary School] because it was very near to where I lived on Mott-Smith Drive.

And when we bought [a home] here [Kamehameha Heights] in '53, I moved to Kapālama [Elementary School], and I was there till '60. And in the fall of '60, I went to Farrington [High School].

I started off teaching English for about, I imagine, six years. And then I was changed to world history and Hawaiian language.

The last four or five years before I left, the big thing, big hue and cry, was to go back to Hawaiiana. They had been teaching Hawaiian history, I think, in the fourth-grade year. But they felt that it wasn't enough. So I was asked to head and write a curriculum for it.

So I called on my dear friend, Dr. Donald [Kilolani] Mitchell at Kamehameha Schools, and he gave me a course of study that they had there. And from there, of course, I adjusted. It covered a whole array of subjects, [such as] Hawaiian religion, the gods, and [cultural] practices.

Since we were [located] so near to Bishop Museum, [we were] making trips. I'd give them something to do before they go. Like if we're going to study feathers and cloak-making or something, I'd have them go to the library and identify certain cloaks and so on. When we studied feather work, we [observed] *kahili* [feather standards].

At Farrington, it seemed with my slower classes, there was a different attitude from my top classes that I had. You had these slower-learning youngsters, they're in school because they have to be there till [age] eighteen. Maybe ten won't turn in their homework papers. And I'd say, "Why didn't you do your homework?" "Oh, I had to go drive my mother to Ala Moana [Center]." They'd give an excuse like that.

I said, "You weren't in class last Thursday, but I heard you were in school." So they said, "Oh, we were so hungry, we decided to go have early lunch. Excuse us."

What are you going to do when they tell you that? (Laughs) I said, "If you don't make up your work, I'll give you a nice dandy grade." They knew dandy, I meant *F, D*.

[But] I have only given one or two *F*'s in all. Because I felt that if you gave an *F*, you were a failure, too. You're a failure because [the student] didn't get anything out of you

## Retirement—1974

My sister Louise, who was teaching there at Farrington, had just retired at sixty-five the year before. So I said to myself, "I'm just making sixty-two, then I'm eligible for social security if I want." I still had enough fight in me to teach to sixty-five if I wanted to. But I decided, no, that with the shortage of jobs, that if we hang on to the jobs, then the younger ones can't get a chance. I once had this student, [Barbara] Kim. She was the valedictorian [at Farrington]. She came back to tell me that all she could get [as a novice teacher] was substitute work.

So with that I retired.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> In 1917, the Department of Public Instruction (today known as the Department of Education) in Hawai'i designated Central Grammar School as an experimental school, requiring students to pass an oral English examination for entrance.

<sup>2</sup> In 1924, the Department of Public Instruction designated Lincoln Grammar School as the first of a set of schools as "English Standard." By 1937, there were ten English Standard schools, most located in Honolulu. In 1960, Roosevelt High School graduated its last class of English Standard school students, thereby ending the controversial practice.

<sup>3</sup> The Preparatory Department at Kamehameha Schools was an educational and boarding program for boys under the age of twelve.

<sup>4</sup> The Kamehameha Schools for Girls, dedicated in 1894, was located on the *makai-Koko Head* corner of King and Kalihi streets. In 1941, the girls' school moved to its present location at Kapālama Heights.

<sup>5</sup> In 1931, the Territorial Normal and Training School was moved to the University of Hawai'i and became known as Teachers College. Today, it is known as the University of Hawai'i College of Education.