

## **The Rice Tree Chronicles**

### **The Great Escape**

Kindergarten at Wailuku Elementary School was the beginning of my taste for adventure. Although much wasn't said at home, I always knew that school was important. I guess it was an unwritten rule in our family as it was for many families at the time.

You'd wash up on a Monday morning, put on a freshly starched Aloha shirt so stiff that you had to gingerly break your arms through the sleeves. If you had gone to the beach the day before, then it would have been sheer torture and your shirt felt like sandpaper over your sun burnt back. It was a mild form of self mutilation most commonly reminiscent of Monday mornings.

Before leaving our small two-bedroom flat roofed house on Wells Street, a quick inspection by my mother meant that all was right and ready to go.

My sister and I walked the three blocks up Wells Street barefoot and were happy to be on our way to school. No one really wore shoes or slippers. In fact, I never wore shoes to school until the eight grade and only because I became socially aware of what others were wearing. Peer pressure sometimes worked wonders.

Wailuku Elementary School still stands today where I have always remembered it. The prominent granite administration building was built from stones gathered from Iao Valley and neighboring plantation fields. Mrs. B. was the principal, and rumor had it that you would never want to be called into her office. There in the lower left-hand drawer of her large roll top oak desk, was where she kept her 12-foot bull whip. Woe be the kid who got called into her office for some kind of mischief.

But the year was 1948, and I was in kindergarten where the biggest task for the day was to build something with the giant two by four blocks of wood. No silly Legos, we had the real stuff with blocks ranging anywhere from several inches to a foot and a half in length.

We built structures like post offices and giant boats that resembled Noah's Ark and when completed, the reward was being allowed to sleep in them during nap time. There was finger painting with some warm gooey stuff that felt good oozing between your fingers and playing instruments like tambourines and triangles during music time.

All these activities took a bit out of us and so nap time was a welcomed relief. As we crawled into our home sewn denim sleeping bags along with matching eye bands and visions of recess and snacks danced through our heads.

One day, for reasons I do not remember, several of us were allowed to take our nap in the small back room facing the cane field. It was a rare privilege. In the privacy of the back room, some kid named Kamao thought it would be great if we all sneaked out through the back window, run up the embankment and hide in the cane field. A great idea!

Slowly and quietly like cane mice, we climbed out the window and hid. After nap time, out came Miss. S. with the rest of the class in tow. There would be a show down, someone had to give in, but it was not going to be me.

One by one, my gang of five dwindled to four then three and finally one. Our fearless leader Kamao gave us up. He was the first one down...that rat! But I resisted. I held out and remained alone. "Ok, Mr. Earle, I guess you will just have to miss cookies and milk for snack today," at which she and the class did an immediate about face and headed back to the classroom.

"Wait, cookies and milk? Snack time? I forgot the most important part of the day...after nap snacks...wait...WAIT....I'm coming! I'm sorry Miss. S. I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

Those were the hard lessons in my life and for a five-year-old what better motivation than cookies and milk. My great escape soon faded into oblivion as my bare feet carried me back to the classroom after my teacher.

Wailuku, Maui, Territory of Hawaii

Circa 1948

Reprint from Neighbors of West Maui Magazine

December, 2022

[Ricetreechronicles.com](http://Ricetreechronicles.com)