

War Era Story Project 2012

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Current home town: Parma, Ohio

Age: 85

On December 7, 1941, I was attending Holy Mass and singing in the choir upstairs in the choir loft at Blessed Sacrament Church in Pauoa, Oahu, Hawaii. This was the children's 7:30 to 8:30 a.m. Mass. We heard all the firing, sirens and explosions going on. When we looked over the railings, we saw parents walking down the aisle and take their children out. As soon as Mass ended, we came downstairs and were told to hurry home because Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor. We ran together until we had to go our separate ways. The military trucks and jeeps were patrolling the streets and the men were yelling orders to get in our homes. I was terribly frightened; I thought I was going to die and never grow up. I was fourteen years old, in the ninth grade.

Curfew and blackout started that evening. Schools were closed for several weeks. Since we had a military governor, we lived under military rule and they even governed our schools. Students were divided into morning or afternoon sessions. We all had to be inoculated again. Later, we were issued gas masks and had to carry them with us everywhere we went. This was not popular with the young people like me. We shared our schools with the military and had bomb shelters on the grounds. Instead of fire drills, we had air raid drills. The shelters were not a pleasant place to be.

Curfew began when the sun went down. Of course it took a while to get the proper coverings for our windows. We couldn't go to the beaches because they were covered with barbed wire. Some evenings we gathered in our neighbor's yards to play ukuleles and guitars and sing and tell jokes. The block warden would patrol the neighborhood by foot and always asked if we all lived there. We'd say yes and he'd warn us that he'd better not catch us going back to our own yards. He knew us; he lived in our neighborhood too. We'd climb walls or fences to get home.

On Saturdays I went to the YWCA to help roll bandages for a few hours. A few months after I turned fifteen, my girlfriend's mom chaperoned at USO afternoon dances and we danced with the service men.

In the 10th grade, we were sent by trucks to the pineapple fields to work one day a week. This was with our parents' permission. That was hard work, but the men were getting drafted so we were needed to help. We had to get to school very early to be picked up. The students who didn't go attended school. Of course, whoever worked got paid. I went as often as I could.

In my junior year, the Pearl Harbor Marine Base sent a bus to the YWCA at 4 p.m. every other Thursday to transport young women to dinner and dancing at their base. It was rush home after school to get all dressed up and return to the YWCA to get on that bus ... my friends and I lost no time when the last school bell rang to keep this date. The persons in charge arranged us by home addresses and we were

delivered to our homes after the dance by station wagons to the areas we lived in and to our doors. We were treated with respect and we had such happy times.

Every time there was a dance advertised at a certain military installation, word was spread from the YWCA, and if we could attend, we did. Transportation was always provided. The military bands were the big bands and they were excellent. The music of the 40's was so romantic; "I'll Be Seeing You" brings back memories. We were always saying good-bye to guys getting shipped out.

Sometimes we had dances after school on the school patio. The teachers chaperoned. There were always chaperones.

After the ninth grade, I joined the adult choir at Our Lady of Peace Cathedral. We sang for the Bishop at the 10 o'clock Mass every Sunday. Many military men joined our choir. We lunched in the area then attended afternoon dances at the Knights of Columbus building on the church property. It was a USO project. We gals became a special part of this. We helped whenever they asked us. We put on musical programs or fashion shows. At Halloween, we worked on fun things to do, such as fortune telling at a costume dance. There was always punch and cookies.

When the war moved further away to the South Pacific, the barbed wire was removed from the beaches and we could gather at our favorite spots with our military friends. They came along with us usually on a Saturday. The bus travel was very good on Oahu and we really enjoyed going to the beach together as a group. Our favorite spot was right in back of the Royal Hawaiian Hotel.

August 1945, Japan surrendered. The Cathedral USO announced they would be closing. Everyone was invited to the Army and Navy YMCA. There was a Girl's Service Organization there, so we joined their group. At that time we began saying good-bye to our military friends who were excited to be going home. It was bittersweet and so many promised to write and keep in touch. That lasted a few months then the letters stopped.

A few times, I filled in on the bus as a "Round the Island" tour guide. It was a whole day affair and when we got back, I was so tired, I'd say hi and bye then go home to rest.

In October of 1946, a group of sailors came into the club. They were all from the same submarine. Little did I know I would marry one of them.

So I guess you can say, "I danced my way through World War II".

(More)



GERRI SANTOS



First row: Mildred Leong, Betty Chang, Maybelle Ching, Elaine Won, Marguerite Ho, Marian Jim, Sg. Lionel Baker, dog Piilani.
 Sec. Row: Melvia Lee, Lorraine Irvine, Lovette Thomas, Dorothy Furuya, Aileen Foreman McCabe.
 Third row: _____, Lucille Garcia, Patricia Knapp, Eloise Bondegard, Geraldine Santos.
 Fourth row: Katsumi Matsuoaka, _____, ?Benjamin Kittle, _____, Tex Hays, Carson Moore, Jack Myers, Kwai Lam Young, _____.

Baker + Piilani (Dog)