

ANITA DAVIS BRIGHTMAN

An interview by J. Ward Russell

November 15, 1998

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I am Ward Russell, a member of the Outrigger Canoe Club's Historical Committee. For sometime our Subcommittee has been conducting oral interviews of prominent members of our Club. Today, it is my distinct pleasure and privilege to interview Anita Davis Brightman, whom I have known for many many years. She is also a member of the Historical Committee. We are on the lanai of her home at 3773 Sierra Dr. It is a beautiful Sunday afternoon.

JWR: Anita, how are you?

ADB: Well, I'm pretty good now. I had a bad time.

JWR: You really have had a bad time.

ADB: I fell in December and fractured my pelvis. When the pelvis is interfered with, one gets into all kinds of trouble, because it's just a large bone mass. So all the bones belonging to the pelvis had cracks in them.

JWR: Well, you know, when just looking at you today you have made a miraculous recovery.

ADB: That always made me feel so stupid, because here I have been so sick. Then somebody will come and say, "Oh my, you're looking good." (Laugh)

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JWR: A former minister at St. Andrew's Church used to say, "There are three stages in a man's life: Adolescence, middle age and gee, you're looking great". (Laugh)

ADB: Well, that's what I get. You even said it to me.

JWR: Tell me a little bit about yourself. Where were you born?

ADB: Right here in Honolulu.

JWR: Born in Honolulu. May I ask you the year?

ADB: 1906. I'm 92.

JWR: 92 years old. That's wonderful. Where did you go to school?

ADB: I was a charter member of Lili'uokalani Grammar School, as they called them in those days. One to eighth grade. My dad was a pioneer resident of Kaimuki and he was president of Territorial Savings and Loan. He wanted me to be one of the first students there and so he had to make me a year older. I was only five. I got to enter early. Then, I went to McKinley for a couple of years and finished my last year of high school at Punahou.

JWR: What year did you graduate from Punahou?

ADB: 1924.

JWR: 1924. Was Louise Erdman in 1924?

ADB: Yes, also Margery Atherton.

JWR: After Punahou, what did you do?

ADB: I went to Normal School. In those days Teacher's College was known as Normal School. The courses were for two years only. In my last year I

transferred to the University of Hawaii in the newly created Education Department.

JWR: Did you go into teaching?

ADB: Yes, I had two years on Maui.

JWR: On Maui? Whereabouts?

ADB: Hamakuapoko.

JWR: Hamakuapoko?

ADB: The high school was there.

JWR: What years were you there?

ADB: 1927 and 1928, I think.

JWR: You know something? I went to Hamakuapoko in 1927. My aunt lived in Kahului. I was born and raised in Hilo. My mother and I would occasionally spend summer vacation at Kahului with my aunt and uncle. One year my mother asked my aunt if I could stay over in Kahului and go to Hamakuapoko in my second or third grade while she was away on a trip to the mainland.

ADB: I taught second grade.

JWR: You may have had me because I was there for about six months. I remember going to Hamakuapoko and returning to Kahului each day on the train. How many years were at Hamakuapoko?

ADB: Two years. Then I got married to Frederick James "Rex" Brightman in 1927. He was a civil engineer with the U. S. Coast Guard, Fourteenth District. He was responsible for all the radio aids to navigation, lighthouses and buoys in the Territory of Hawaii.

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We lived for a year at the Diamond Head Lighthouse in the early 1930's.

In 1932 we purchased the 6,000 s.f. lot here at 3773 Sierra Dr. for \$1,500 and built the home for \$5,000. We have made improvements over the years and here is where our son Gilbert Clifton Brightman was born in Sept. 11, 1929.

Rex passed away in the mid 1950's.

JWR: What did you do then?

ADB: Well, I didn't do anything. Then I got pregnant.

JWR: Well, that's something. (Laughter)

ADB: I had my son Gilbert. Then I got a call from the Territorial Superintendent of Teaching and was employed as a teacher.

JWR: On Maui?

ADB: No. Here in Honolulu.

JWR: How many years did you teach?

ADB: Not too long. I taught at Iolani. I had substitute work. I might as well have signed up as a regular teacher. I taught second grade for the next two years.

JWR: When did you find time to get to the Outrigger Canoe Club?

ADB: Really, not until 1977.

JWR: You joined the Outrigger?

ADB: Yes.

JWR: How did that come about?

ADB: My mother, Abertina Johana Bechert Davis belonged and was a charter member of the Club. My brother, Clifton Davis, belonged also as a junior member. He kept urging me to join, but I resisted because I felt it was too expensive. This went on two or three times. Finally, he got "Toots" (A. E.) Minvielle, Jr., to submit an application for me and announced: "Well, you're in." He got me into the Club in 1977.

JWR: You've been a member almost twenty-two years.

When did you first become active on committees?

ADB: Well, My long time friend, Bob Fischer was very active on the Canoe Committee and he got me involved.

I will never forget the year I went along to help our crew in the Long Beach-Catalina race. I went the whole way on the escort boat - serving food and drink to the paddlers. Had a ball at the festivities following the race. It was a wonderful experience.

JWR: You certainly were a fixture on that committee. What other committees have you served on?

ADB: The Canoe Committee and then the Historical Committee.

JWR: How long have you been on the Historical Committee?

ADB: Fifteen years.

JWR: What have you been responsible for on the Historical Committee?

ADB: I was instrumental in its creation in the mid 1980's. My specific task has been the cataloging and preserving of the news clippings under "This & That." I started "This & That." That was my idea. News articles were placed in one of those big folders. A folder for each year. It was a major task as materials were scattered all over the place. We now have clippings dating back to the 1970's.

Also, I have developed scrap books on the Club's athletic activities. All of the materials have been bound, indexed and placed under lock and key.

I developed the Committee's early microfilm and microfiche programs.

JWR: Are there any other committee activities in which your were involved.

ADB: Can't remember. There was always something. Everyday on the Committee and at the Club has been enjoyable for me. I am so glad that my brother got "Toots" to put in my membership application.

JWR: You've been a wonderful member. You have always been involved in something.

ADB: It was fortunate for me that my friend Bob (Fischer) was so active. He appreciated having me help him. I think he lost his home because he spent so much time at the Outrigger.

JWR: Bob and I were close friends. We grew up together in Hilo. I miss him too.

JWR: What's your impression of our present Historical Committee?

ADB: I think it's very enlightening. Everyone is so friendly and cooperative.

JWR: Had you ever visited the Club before you joined in 1977?

ADB: I was just a guest of my mother as a youngster and during my early teens.

JWR: She was?

ADB: Albertina Johana Bechert Davis. Her parents were the first Germans to settle on Kauai. Her father worked for many years in the sugar industry.

JWR: I know the Becherts. They are a well known island family.

ADB: Yes, There was Paul, Carl and Richard Bechert and the Castles. Myrtle Castle is my mother's niece.

JWR: You said earlier that you were born in Honolulu. Whereabouts in Honolulu were you living at the time?

ADB: I have always lived in Kaimuki. Do you know the big house on Wilhelmina Rise and Sierra Dr.? I grew up there. My father bought the house for my mother shortly after they were married. My mother didn't want to move in. Said it was too big. She finally gave in.

JWR: What was your father's name?

ADB: Hugh George Davis. He was a pioneer of Kaimuki. He started the Kaimuki Savings and Loan, which is now the Territorial Savings and Loan. Absolutely. Some called him the "Father of Kaimuki".

My mother, Albertina Johana Bechert Davis was a sister to Frank Bechert. She was born in Hanamaulu.

JWR: Has anyone written up your family tree?

ADB: Yes, Edna Bechert, wife of Valdemar Bechert, has been writing the tree.

By the way, did you get a copy of my sketch? I wrote a story about myself.

JWR: Entitled "A Sketch"? Yes indeed! It was excellent. It will be attached to and become a part of this interview.

I think it is time I terminated this interview. I am most grateful for your patience and generosity. We can always add more. Just let me know when.

Much Aloha!

A SKETCH

BY

ANITA DAVIS BRIGHTMAN

What I have done in my lifetime to keep active and in good health, as follows:

- Spent a year on the Punahou Alumni Board serving on 2 committees - Historical and Awards;
- Presently on the Na Pa'ani O Wahine O Punahou Committee and Class Correspondent for Punahou Class of 1924;
- Sunday school Teacher for the Lutheran Church of Honolulu and the Epiphany Church in Kaimuki;
- Elementary school teacher on Maui and Oahu;
- Principal of two schools on Oahu. The Epiphany Day School and St. Paul's, a day school I founded;
- PTA President for Aliiolani School, Kaimuki;
- Girl Scout Captain for a troop at Hamakuapoko School on Maui;
- Secretary for the St. Paul's Lutheran Church Board in Kaimuki and as substitute organist;
- Corresponding Secretary for the Republican Women's Organization;
- Membership Chairwoman for Retired Teacher's Assn.;
- Pianist for the Rebecca Lodge of the Odd Fellow's Lodge;
- Manager of Hale Nani Court, Wilhelmina Rise;
- Personal representative of the Robert D. Fischer Estate;
- President and Secretary-Treasurer of Honolulu Review #1 (Women's Benefit Assn.) founded by Bina West in Port Huron, Michigan to provide young mothers life insurance and a \$1,000.00 college fund for their children;
- Outrigger Canoe Club - Canoe committee and present at most of the canoe races and once in Long Beach, California, to serve sandwiches and cold drinks to the Club's paddlers;
- Outrigger Canoe Club - Historical Committee - I have been responsible to make scrap books of all the Club athletic activities provided by a clipping service and dating back to the 70's. Recently, I started a "This and That" scrap book the purpose of which was to publish a special recognition given to the membership by the Club

or in other ways. It also contains items of interest about the history and growth of the Club. Anything to tickle your memory! I am on my 4th scrapbook. (Margaret Young thought it was such a good idea) I am also on the Sunshine Committee;

- Last but not least - I have been the neighborhood volunteer for fund raising drives for Heart, Cancer, Arthritis, etc.;
- I was also the actress on "The Bus" commercial aired, to alert the public to some of the serious problems The Bus driver is subjected. It ran for several months. Incidentally, accidents have been reduced since this special video addressed to the public was seen.