

Gladys, Jean & Lena discussion together over lunch.

Jean Kumamoto, Gladys Ching and Lena Young are charter members of the Honolulu chapter of Amazing Care Network. Jean (Health Education Director) and Gladys (Clinic Administrator) were colleagues at Kaiser Hawaii for 36 years. Lena is Corporate Director of Operations and Human Resources for Japan Travel Bureau, Hawaii.

How did you come to Amazing Care, and why is it important to you?

Gladys: It was amazing...that's why it's Amazing Care, right? (giggles) When Cora talked to us about it, we said, 'you know, that's kind of what we've started doing'. But we didn't have the financial part of it...that is different. We're already on this path, this journey.

Jean: Gladys was very interested in continuing her relationships with a group of women she had worked with and been close with while she was the Clinic Administrator for the Kaiser Hawaii Region. She had this bright idea of tapping into the people that she wanted to still be a part of her life after retirement and she met with us individually and asked us if we would be interested in joining this women's group that she was thinking of bringing together. She asked some of us to come together and be founding members because 'I really want to continue my relationships with you...I see it as a lifelong relationship and not just a professional relationship'. And so, she tapped about 10 of us who were Kaiser staff people, and then she invited some other friends whom she had met along her journey thru travels as well as thru school at the University of Hawaii School of Nursing. And she formed this group called the Tuesday Connection. We met on Tuesdays...now we meet on Thursdays, but kept the name.

So it started off...she helped coin the phrase that goes with the official name...Learning, Lunching, Loving, Laughing, Lending a helping hand to the community. It was really fun. I joined in the second year. So they already had a year's experience. When I came on board, they were all into going on field trips, things that they had put off while they were working and didn't have time for. So we went on a whole range of activities together that really provided us an introduction to some of the things that we have and can enjoy here on Oahu. And then there was the lunching aspect. We laughed a lot! It was really nice. It was something new, and I think everybody was excited and animated and really engaged with the whole process. And then we started getting a little bit more

serious in terms of figuring out how we could lend a helping hand in the community. Our thinking started gravitating more toward 'how can we be of service?' What are some of the kinds of services that are available in the community that we could become more knowledgeable about and receive more information so that we could use the information as well as be able to support other organizations.

One of the things, that was really quite timely...at that point in the community was a focus on developing what they called senior residences and communities and there was a big push on the part of private business as well as non-profits to start thinking about establishing these senior residences. So we started getting really interested in going out and exploring what Oahu has to offer in that regard and Gladys said ok, we need to develop a sub-group of the Tuesday Connection. Because not everyone was ready. You have to be ready.

And so we formed a group that was affectionately called SLOW. Senior Living Options Work group. We're getting Slow (everybody cracks up). We did...we had to slow down. We started making visits to the various residences and we even came up with spread sheets to examine and describe and compare the differences between the residences. It really became a learning tool. It naturally evolved into an opportunity for us to be of service. First of all to our own nuclear group, the women's group, where we actually came to see the benefits and the value of becoming more knowledgeable and receiving more information about these options. That's what Gladys means when she says, we were already doing it. We were already beginning the journey that was Cora's vision. And with her vision, came the financial mechanism to actually be able to have the savings part.

I get very passionate about it and I get very excited, because it's having a definite impact and meaning in my life where I am in my transition. It's really showing me and providing me with opportunities. I've become a "friendly visitor" for a couple on the windward side of the island. I visit them and I'm part of their friendship circle. They're pretty much house-bound. I'm beginning to experience the fruits of what we're trying to engender. I'm also doing, on a temporary basis, some grocery shopping once a week with another senior. I'm going with her to the stores. She pushes the cart, and I'm learning the tricks for how to help. We go first to Longs and then we go to Times to get her grocery shopping done. I grab the items on the higher shelves for her and put them in the cart. Where she can manage herself, she does. I get excited about this

because I'm beginning now to experience what a senior, who wants to live a much more active life, is going to face. You may need some help along the way. So, the friendly visitor program, the shopping program, those are some of the things that make me think, 'I know I want to age gracefully and I want to do it all as long as I can...so who are some of the partners, beside my family, that I want to partner with to help me do all of this?' I just assisted someone with an emergency medical appointment.

Gladys: Jean has now gotten all this knowledge and people see her as something of an expert and call her up and she can help them navigate their issues. It's been really helpful. Also, one of our other colleagues, told us that she's been able to help two or three people with analysis that she's gained from our group. So, we're gaining the knowledge ourselves, and we can also share with others...very similar to ACN, where there is a lot of networking and spreading of knowledge.

Lena: This is all post-retirement. I'm not retired yet.

G: One of the things I'd mentioned to some of the women when we were at one of the teas...I'm so grateful and thankful for all of the new relationships and friendships that have become a part of the Amazing Care Network experience. It's really opened up all these connections.

It's been really exciting for me. It's a give and take. There are so many opportunities out there...you just look, and there they are, right in front of our eyes. We just have to organize it...and that's one of the things that we're really good at! Because we have all of those skills. We're now doing those things in a more informal way, but we still feel like we're contributing to the community and to ourselves as well. So, when Cora talked about her idea, we thought, this is very much aligned with what we do. But Cora has such great vision. She wants to spread it out.

She has so many other components with ACN. When we talked to her...it started off with the teas. But they are only 4 times a year. For us, frequency of contact is really important. If you don't have frequency of contact, you lose some of the connection. So Jean and I stepped in and said 'we can help'. So we developed the monthly meetings for those people who are interested in more networking. Even for someone like Lena...she works and has such a busy schedule, but she feels this has priority.

Lena: when Cora first spoke with me about ACN, I thought, this sounds interesting and I should try it out. So I did. And I also introduced her to Howard Lee at UHA. I sit on their board, so I connected them a few

years ago because of the Sterling services. So now UHA has adapted Amazing Care for their employees. I'm wanting to see it grow from that perspective. From a selfish point of view, I see it strategically being a good UHA product. I think that once the mechanism is there...you want to make sure it can be sustained. Then at some point, I want to see it offered to other employers.

Jean: Its very timely. We keep hearing about the "Silver Tsunami". We're part of it. So I think Amazing Care will have a really attentive audience among businesses and business leaders in the community. The state is looking into trying to develop a long term care insurance program, but there's no schedule established yet. We're part of the group that is going to push the system on this...and what about the others coming up behind us? I think that the notion of aging gracefully creates a lot of opportunities that we, as the younger end of the spectrum, need to be much more proactive in planting the seeds with those who are going to follow us...

Lena: one of my observations...you notice that as the generations evolve...you notice that the families are smaller. I have only one child, and she lives in the San Francisco Bay Area. So many others have only one or two children. Or none. So you have to look at your circle of friends as your extended family. Because the days of 10 children, 5 children are gone. Even with Asians, it's always been important that you take care of your parents. But that's changing now.

Gladys: And also, if I look at myself as a parent...I really don't want my son to have to do that. It's such a burden on the young people. They have their own lives to lead. It's a gift to give them that you will be well taken care of. Yes, they will be there to support you, but they don't have to actually do the physical day to day work of that. I remember talking to my husband about 3 years ago...and he said 'no, they're supposed to take care of us'...if you grew up in the Asian culture, that's the way we've been brought up.

Lena: I come from a family of 3. My oldest brother has lived in Virginia for the past 40 years. He could have come back. But here I am, the youngest daughter...

Gladys: Yes, the family members that don't live here, so we have all these other issues...how is the care going to be organized?

Jean: I read an article this last week that pointed out that our children are going to be making less than we did. How can they take care of us?! It's such an interesting dilemma! We're going to have some issues with respect to taking care of our elders. Lots of things to think about!

Lena: I'm encouraging my daughter and my niece to participate in ACN. You'll meet my niece and her husband at the tea on Wednesday!

Gladys: I asked my daughter in law to think about it...it's not a priority for them at that age when the focus is on raising kids and a family. Unless you get it as a benefit thru the workplace. UHA is the first ACN commercial partner. And I think that's the way to grow...

Lena: I remember years ago when I was working for Kamehameha Schools, I was pushing for a long term care plan to be offered. It wasn't a benefit. It wasn't a big thing yet. I hired a consultant and they created a plan. And I'm so glad I did, because not only did I pick it up for myself and my husband, I picked it up for my parents and now, my mother is at a stage where she is using it, and it's wonderful. But, of course, there was a 4 month waiting period. So we had to go through that. But then the insurance kicked in. And now she's in her second year, and if we didn't have that...can you imagine...? I'm glad we were able to do it as a group insurance. When you do it as a group, it's always going to be a better deal.

Jean: How do we reach out to my peers and colleagues? I think the issues that we face in aging and our efforts to age gracefully, you really need to experience an event, an opportunity...it has to be experiential, to fully understand that this does have added value for me. This is why Gladys and I are excited about our monthly networking group where there is frequency of contact, learning from each other and sharing in the experience of aging gracefully.

Gladys: The vision is that we'd have many of these little groups, and it might be location based. It's the relationships that are really important.

Jean: It's truly a living community, that's what I call it. We get to experience each other, we get to experience the opportunities, the new ideas, the challenges...as a community. I think it was Cora who said, 'Aging gracefully is a group experience'. This is my community. That's what so exciting about it. Aging gracefully with those you love and you enjoy being with and learning and sharing. It's exciting in that sense. It's

a gift.

Lena: We are not alone!