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## EAST-WEST CENTER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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# Sarah Vann Interview Narrative

12-29-2005 and 1-10-2006 interviews in Honolulu, Hawaii

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The **East-West Center Oral History Project** strives to capture the Center's first 50 years as seen through the eyes of staff, alumni, and supporters who have contributed to its growth.

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## Sarah Vann

12/29/2005 and 1/10/2006 interviews in Honolulu, Hawaii

### **Personal Background**

I was born in Georgia, and my godmother was a great influence in my life. She taught at the Georgia State College for Women (now part of the State University System) in Milledgeville. And, of course, she made me become a good student. I followed her advice and I always felt I wanted to continue my education, in honor of her. So I went north.

Guess where I went? I went to the University of North Carolina, and I really thought I was going north. It was an exciting adventure, because at that time, the University of North Carolina was the radical school of the South. They said that my professor of Medieval Drama was a communist! I'm not sure! Then I went to the University of Michigan for my MLS during which time I worked in the university library, and then later on I went to the University of Chicago to get my doctorate.

I had an AB in English and French from Georgia. At the University of North Carolina I received my first library degree. At that time, you had to have an AB and then an ABLs, and then an MLS. So that's why I went from North Carolina on up to Michigan, because at that time, the University of North Carolina didn't give the master's degree, just the first, ABLs.

Michigan was one of the first to offer the master's, and I knew I had to go to Michigan. I truly went north then. And then after that, I was invited on my first teaching position at the Carnegie Library School in Pittsburgh, so that's where I began my teaching career.

And I loved it. It had been founded by Andrew Carnegie, and he had said that his money,

his funds for it, would be reduced at a certain time, and I felt that was a wise idea, because if you don't support an institution -- the Carnegie Institute of Technology was not too willing to assume the financial responsibility. Consequently, the University of Pittsburgh established its own library school which has become essentially a new and better school. Because I loved the Carnegie Library School and did not want to remain as an artifact, I accepted an invitation to teach at Columbia University during the year when one of the faculty members was on sabbatical.

## **Life Before EWC**

### ***Library School in the Philippines***

And then I was invited to go to the University of the Philippines to establish a library school program there. I loved living in the Philippines. In Manila.

I was just there for a year at that time. But I used to go back as often as possible.

Fortunately, the Institute of Library Science is still functioning, and it still graduates probably most of the librarians in the Philippines. Young people in the Philippines used to want, however, preferably to come to the U.S. for study. So, I am afraid, we didn't always get the best students, because those who were more vital and assertive would get scholarships for study abroad. But I think increasingly, it's becoming a better school.

Every once in a while I'll get a note from them about what they're doing. And a long time ago, the faculty used to come through and spend a few days with me. But now they've all retired, and unfortunately -- their salaries don't permit them to take trips frequently.

### ***Meeting Ranganathan in India***

After that I traveled around the world for about four months with PanAm on my way to the University of Texas.

And that was delightful. I really enjoyed being with the students, most of whom were from Texas. While there I was invited to make a world study of the use of the Dewey Decimal Classification because of my long association with the Lake Placid Club. That's when I visited incredible countries like Lebanon, Iran and Iraq. Even though I'd already been to some of these places on the earlier trip, it was fun going back.

I must tell you about the great Indian classifier Ranganathan. I was a little afraid to go to India, because Ranganathan's dream in life was having every library in India use his classification. But his was so very complex; I must admit I could never have used it. When we were studying classification systems I always tried to explain it to the class. But I would not have known how to use it, really. Meanwhile I wrote and told him that I was coming to India, but my only reason for coming would be to visit libraries using Dewey, not trying to convert anybody. Well, that pleased him. When I met him he was most gracious. He made my trip throughout India happy and successful. And indeed, I did have a tape-recording from him, in which he began by saying, "Melvil Dewey was my hero." And he said, "I learned from him how to create a classification."

After submitting my voluminous report of my study, I was much involved with Dewey, the classification, for several years. I always stayed at the Lake Placid Club off and on until I came here and retained my interest throughout my teaching years.

### ***Arrival in Hawai'i, 1969***

I came to Hawai'i in 1969. I was no longer involved in the classification, because I was too far away, and I was getting involved in so many other things. Among my activities were curriculum development and involvement in establishing the library school at the University of Indonesia. That was '70, '71. And that program is still active.

Probably the Institute in the Philippines is doing better, because it's had more support, I think, than this one has. And they're having so many tragic problems in Indonesia now. I hope it continues to survive.

After finishing the world tour of Dewey and writing that report, I was invited to help develop the library school at the State University of New York at Buffalo. They wanted to have one there, since there was nothing in that part of New York state. There were two or three of us creating the curriculum, and it incidentally has developed into really a wonderful program. It now offers a doctorate, and it's rather famous, I think, on the mainland.

While there, I continued going to meetings of the ALA [*American Library Association*] and I always knew lots of people at the Library of Congress. I don't know just how I'd gotten involved with them. But we always played Red Dog at night. Red Dog is a gambling game, and -- I think each player puts down 10 cents. I played Red Dog with them until they told the ladies not to come back. We weren't bidding enough! So anyway, one of the players was Robert (Bob) Stevens, whom I had met earlier in India. Anyway, after Shaw, Ralph R. Shaw, started the Graduate Library School in the '60s here in Hawai'i, Bob Stevens succeeded him. Later, when a new position was added, Bob wrote and asked me if I'd like to come teach here in Hawai'i. And I said, "Well, I'll think about it."

I'd been to Hawai'i once, and I loved it, but I didn't think I could afford to live here. So, Bob said, come on out and I'll show you how much eggs cost. It was the depth of winter, four feet [*of snow*] in Buffalo when I came out in February, and you can imagine how beautiful it was [*here*]. And I knew immediately I wanted to come. But I still wasn't

sure that I could afford it. So he took me to the grocery stores, and I tried to look wise, because you buy what you have to, whatever it costs. But anyway, we went to lunch at the revolving restaurant at Ala Moana, and I saw in the distance the Royal Vista just being completed. It looked gracious and welcoming -- there was nothing around it. It looked as if it was sitting in the wilderness. And I said if I come, Bob, that's where I want to live.

And within an hour, he had found a salesperson, and I'd paid \$1,000 down. She said she would hold it for two weeks. Can you imagine that today? And then she said, "Don't you want to see it?" I said, "Nope, I don't want to see it, I know that's where I want to live." Because I would have had to walk up a muddy path, and I didn't want to walk up. So I said no, I'll see it in August when I come. And I didn't see it until August.

## **Friends of EWC**

### ***Involvement, '80s***

I'm quite sure Sumi Makey, Dean of Students of the East-West Center, invited me *[to join the Friends of the East-West Center]*. See, I met Sumi through AUW *[Association of University Women]*. I met her there when we were on the Pacific Fellowship Committee, and I'm quite sure she's the one who got me involved. It must have been in the '80s. It was an interesting and effective -- a good Board.

I enjoyed being a member and was soon a member of the Board though I knew very little about the East-West Center, as a matter of fact. While our Library School had some wonderful students from the East-West Center, there had been no real connection between us and the Center. But we were always thrilled to have the students. I remember one of the wonderful ones from China, Qi Feng Li. That's how I got to know

a little bit more about the East-West Center. Through him, I began to know some of the activities of the East-West Center. But the Friends, I really hadn't heard much about, until Sumi told me about them.

Well, before I knew it, I was on the Program Committee. As in all volunteer groups the willing is always put on a committee. And then I think I was on the Nominating Committee. And then I was president. And I think it was 1990 that I was president. But I haven't given you my background history.

### ***History of the Organization***

I'm so happy to have this opportunity to be giving you this brief bit of history, because one of my goals, which I've never fulfilled, has been to write the history of the Friends. Part of it has been indolence; part of it has been that the records for the first 20 years are not available. As of now, nobody knows where they are. So that was quite a deterrent to my writing the early history. My own files began much later, and if I had been at school today, I would have checked to see when they began. But I did have the good fortune of learning that the whole idea of developing a Friends program to help the East-West Center was started by PAAC, Pacific and Asian Affairs Council.

And indeed, the '50s, I think, would have been a thrilling period to have been living in Hawai'i. It seemed that everybody was on a high. You go back and you read the newspaper... there was such hope, such enthusiasm here. I would have loved being here at that time, because statehood was imminent. Something was in the air about creating an international center. I think some people thought of having it associated as a unit of the University as just a college program. And there were other people who wanted it to be a free and independent agency.

I remember that one of the outstanding women of that period was a Mrs. Gobindram J. (Ellen Jansen) Watumull. She was absolutely wonderful. I picked up her record through PAAC's report. She apparently wrote to hundreds and hundreds of people in India trying to get money and publicity to help start a proposed center. It was a glorious period of history, I think, for Hawai'i. And if I were writing my history, I would call it the *annus mirabilis*, because it was a year when there was a belief in miracles and one of the miracles was the creation of the Center.

I believe there was some hesitancy about establishing such a program, far away from Washington, D.C., but it finally was established through an act of Congress. But meanwhile, during the '60s, in 1960, this new Pacific and Asian Affairs Council created a committee, not with a name necessarily, but its purpose was to help newly arrived students at the Center adjust to the American scene. And they really gave their hearts to it, apparently. They invited them to their homes, they tried to take them to the other islands, and somewhere along the way, somebody established units on other islands, little clubs for the students. I wish I knew more about that, but my record didn't go too much into what actually happened other than in Honolulu.

But very soon, PAAC realized that it could not afford to maintain the program, because they were adjusting/adapting to a new world with their own problems. In '61, very soon after the founding of the program, the committee announced that expenses were compelling them to seek an alternative owner, ownership for it. As of that date, they had a deficit of \$404.68, and they couldn't even meet that. Today, that seems simple, doesn't it? But even in the '60s, that was a large debt.

### *Incorporating the FEWC, 1962*

Quickly, the East-West Center stepped in and appointed Herbert H.K. Lee, a former Hawai'i senator to be chairman of a committee organized in 1961 to be called Friends of the East-West Center. In 1962, the Friends was incorporated on December the 12<sup>th</sup> of that year. Its purpose really was to continue as organized, to assist the East-West Center in attaining its objectives, with emphasis on students. It went through I think a rather strange, awkward period. Its status -- and this has been, I think, one of the unfortunate things in the whole history of the Friends -- it has never been an independent agency, but ever dependent on, the East-West Center.

Because what happened was, immediately, it was put into the Community Relations office of the East-West Center, which has changed its name off and on, but is now the External Affairs Office. It did nothing without the consent and approval of the East-West Center, which was appropriate, since it was established that way. But as I say, it has never -- as far as I know -- really truly acted totally independent. Because as I go through this chart briefly, you can see that we always relied on the East-West Center.

### *"Independence," '90s*

In the 1980s [1990s], the East-West Center decided, and again I don't have those papers, to give independence to the Friends to which they would give \$8,000 annual supplement -- to support the office. That's about the time that I came in. Jeanette Brown Lesko was the first independent secretary of the Friends. And we had an office up in Burns Hall, a very nice office, free, all supported by the East-West Center. Thus it was still unofficially associated.

And of course everything she did, she always -- either by choice or necessity -- made sure that everything that she did was acceptable to the Center. And indeed, she helped with everything in the East-West Center. She'd be called down to be there to take up tickets and help in many ways. The purpose, as stated, was "to support the East-West Center in fulfilling its mandate, and we accomplished this by enriching the lives of participants of the Center by promoting public interest in the Center and by serving as a bridge between the Center, the participants, and the community."

That, I found in the bylaws, dated 1994. I remember helping -- I was on that Bylaws Committee, and I remember vaguely we would meet at the Pacific Club to go over the bylaws. The head of it was an attorney who was on the Board. A very nice young man, I'm afraid I've forgotten his name. But the bylaws are really quite good as written. I don't think they're necessarily obeyed, but it's always more fun to write bylaws than to obey them. The purpose, as stated, simply extends the scope of service. The purpose that seems to have been more popular, at least more really fulfilled, was the involvement with the lives of the participants.

As I mentioned earlier, the Friends depended for space on the East-West Center. At the beginning, we were in Jefferson Hall and then moved to Hale Halawai, a cottage near Hale Manoa [*dorm*]. The cottage was special because the grantees dropped by to talk or to read something in the library, under the direction of Kathy Jay, among others. We were moved to Burns Hall when the dear cottage was torn down. Now we have two rooms and all the conveniences of an office.

The relationship has been cordial in every way and indeed insures the standing of the Friends. Nevertheless, our relationship differs from other Friends' groups; for example,

the Friends of the Library, which is totally independent and makes annual contributions to our local libraries.

The budget was based on the contribution from the Center and from membership fees. There is a range of fees. The East-West Center created a Foundation in 1982, the major purpose of which was to raise funds for the Center. Since its founding, the Foundation has been very powerful, and as of now, an agreement was made between the Friends and the Foundation which now gives to the Friends \$25 of every \$100 contributed annually to the Foundation. The original plan was that those contributing at least \$100 would be given membership in the Friends. We agreed to do this, however, with the understanding that the Friends would never have a fundraiser.

In 2005, this \$25 each amounted to \$3,000. Our major budgeted item that must be honored is the administrator's salary. Current it is \$500 but she deserves more for the hours spent. Most of the funds are budgeted for *leis* and meals for the grantees. I would love to offer awards for special activities such, as for travel if one is presenting a paper. Thus far, tradition holds!

### ***Activities and Programs***

Let me review briefly some of the activities of the Friends through the years and identify groups that have emerged since 1962. As you know, through the years and currently, we give *leis* to the incoming grantees and to the graduating grantees. A long time ago, you could get a *lei* for 50 cents or even 25 cents each! The custom adds a lovely touch. And I suppose it's the only *lei* received by incoming students but it is currently truly expensive! Another great program was the Host Family Program, which is changing in purpose and number, primarily because society has changed.

### ***Host Family Program***

The Host Family Program originally involved a very close relationship between a family and a grantee. The family would invite the grantee to its home for weekends, if it wished, but always for the big holidays. In fact, I know one host family was seemingly more fond of their EWC student than of their own daughter!

At one time, the Friends did have classes for the host families, to come and tell them what was expected of them, and what they might expect of the Friends. One really faithful host family member remains: Larry and Nancy Weisner. They come to everything, and they are still dedicated to the program. They take two or three grantees every year. They would be an excellent source for you to consult. In the last few years, however, the whole focus has been changed, so that if you want to do something you can sign up to take a child to a football game for example. The administrator keeps records of grantees and of host families and tries to match them. I do think that the original idea was really quite good but inevitably, times change.

### ***Reading Room***

Another service has been a Reading Room. They had a wonderful Reading Room originally in Jefferson Hall. And then, of course, when they built the Imin Auditorium, the Reading Room actually was downstairs in Jefferson Hall for some time. It has now degenerated into being part of a lounge in Hale Manoa, in the back room. One enters the room past the mailboxes and in a little corner, and there is the ever-faithful volunteer: Kathy Jay. She works faithfully but, alas, without a budget!

I am probably the only person who gives her things for the collection. She herself collects Chinese newspapers and collects everything from her friends. She's utterly

devoted to the Reading Room. She comes to Kahala Nui once a month or so to collect about 10 or 15 periodicals. Anyway, she came out two days ago and took about 100. She loves to urge the grantees to take them to their rooms. I am afraid that the time has come, maybe when she is no longer there, to drop it unless some financial support is available.

Long ago there was an active committee which collected gift publications such as the daily newspapers, etc., but that too has passed!

### ***T-Shirt Sales, Other Activities***

Another activity is selling T-shirts. We used to have a wonderful committee to sell T-shirts, but I think the administrator has assumed that responsibility. There are a couple of ladies who help: Arien Grabbe and Alfrieda Nagata. They're very devoted, very dedicated. Meanwhile, the East-West Center has begun to sell T-shirts and the Friends sell both of them. It would have been a good idea to have found something different. I think a scarf, a nice scarf, would be appropriate. And I like the idea of the keychains. In fact, I have thought I'd rather give a keychain to each graduate instead of a *lei*. But the *lei* is so meaningful.

We used to be involved in the East-West Fest. I think we used to offer soft drinks for sale, and you'd put your hand in the ice cold water and freeze to death! But anyway, we provided the drinks and they welcomed the profit. Of course, the whole affair – the traditional fest – has changed so much. At the last celebration the administrator was selling T-shirts only.

Another activity was the East-West Center tour. The last of those tour guides was Miyo Ichijo, truly dedicated, who, I believe, has died recently. Now I think, if somebody needs a tour, Suzan Harada [*the administrator*] will assume that responsibility.

There is an EWC mentoring program in which the Friends cooperate with [*Director of the Education Program*] Terence Bigalke and the alumni group.

### ***Luncheon Programs***

For many years, the Friends sponsored luncheons with distinguished speakers. Currently however, there is much co-sponsoring. I try to go to all of them, because I really enjoy the guest speakers.

Through the years the Friends, have had a luncheon for the Jefferson Fellows during which the Fellows could present their personal views on their experiences. And it's always informative to hear them report. I love listening to them. Though their visits are brief, they come back filled with memories of people they have met and what they think about the countries visited. It's wonderful. I love it.

### ***Ticket Refund Program***

One activity just for grantees was a ticket refund. This means that if a grantee went to a play or something specific to which he really couldn't afford to go, the Friends reimbursed him or her for the ticket. At one time, I think it was \$5, when tickets were reasonable as compared to today's costs. As time passed, however, grantees were asking for money for reimbursement to go to the movies. And I believe, slowly the activity has ceased. I have not heard of it recently.

### ***Loan Fund***

If a grantee was called home by death or illness or he/she was in debt after arriving in

Hawaii and needed money, the Loan Fund was available. We could always help pay transport. Or if a student found that he was in debt here and needed money. And it was a wonderful thing.

### ***Fund-Raising/Club Cottage***

Another activity, however, was fund-raising. That was a minor activity, actually. We had only one major fund-raiser, as far as I know, the purpose of which was to preserve the old cottage [*as a student activities center*]. Within a couple of years or so, it was torn down. But we did that fund-raising.

But as of now, the Friends cannot do any fund-raising, as you recall, because of the contractual relationship with the Foundation.

### ***Holiday Activities***

Formerly, we had celebrations like Easter egg hunts and Halloween parties for children of the grantees. One of the reasons that's becoming inactive is there aren't so many children now. In earlier days, the East-West Center offered additional funds for families, but they are no longer able to help with families. While a few grantees bring their families, they find life a hardship here. Back in India, for example, a grantee may think he will be able to live on his grant. Alas, when they arrive they realized how difficult it will be.

The Christmas event of 2005 was very similar to the good old days when grantees had children with a Santa Claus and a tree. Trudy Schandler Wong, one of our Board members, revived the singing of the "12 Days of Christmas" in the Hawaiian version! She did a marvelous job. She always had people singing "12 Days of Christmas" in the Hawaiian version, and that was always the ice-breaker. The atmosphere was like the spirit of old! Indeed, it was the best Christmas thing we've had in a number of years!

Insofar as the original purpose, however, the absence of children has lessened for me the fun of having it.

### ***Neighbor Island Activities***

And at one time -- this was long ago indeed -- we sponsored sending grantees to outer islands and having them talk to people and meet people on the other islands. I think that was started with PAAC which wanted to extend the experience of grantees to the other islands. As far as I know, there was one successful chapter established, and that was on the Big Island at the University of Hawai'i, Hilo. Hilo has some records and it has long been my desire to go down and read those records about the Friends. They established a chapter, or tried to establish one on the Big Island.

How successful it was, I don't know, but they've still got a few papers, because I corresponded with a librarian at that time. He's retired now. But I just never took the flight down.

In the early days, since records were so intermingled, the records of the early days of the Friends have not been found. Also, alas, many records have been discarded.

### ***International Visitors Program***

A recent activity for a brief period of time, as a result of the budget cut [*RIFF 1995*], was the International Visitors' Program for which I assumed responsibility, as president of the Friends, for three years when the program was ended abruptly at the time of the budget crises.

From 1995 to 1998, I think!

At the time I was the president of the Friends and I said I would be responsible for the program until the East-West Center could take it back. But after three years, it was really

demanding. At that time, the State Department gave me some money for our secretary and \$1,000, which I gave to the East-West Center as payment for the little office that we were using. I felt that was the best way to spend the money, because I'd said I would do it as a volunteer. Jeannette Brown-Lesko used to do some computer input once I had the program ready.

Incidentally, one of the people who helped me most with it was David McClain, then dean of the College of Business [*current acting president of the University of Hawai'i system*]. After three years, however, I told Kenji [*Sumida, then president of EWC*] that I could not continue. Later at a brief meeting with PAAC, Kenji offered the program to PAAC, stating that the Center simply couldn't afford to continue it.

I found that it was a valuable source of publicity for EWC. People would say, "Now, what is the East-West Center?" And then I would tell them, and about the Friends, and then they would say, "Of course I'll help you." Nobody ever refused in all my years of doing it -- to help with the program.

### ***Midnight Snacks for Students***

Oh, and then another thing we used to have, which I think was a good idea, was having a midnight snack for the students in the dormitories at exam time -- having hot pizza and coffee or chocolate or whatever. And I really don't know what happened to it. Perhaps it could've been Jeanette's idea. And I don't think I've thought of it until right now! I could mention it to Suzan because she does many, many things for the students. So those are some of the inactive or defunct activities.

### ***Mary Morgan Hewett Fund***

Perhaps the most important program administered by the Friends is the Mary Morgan

Hewett Fund [*for Women in Journalism*]. As you know, Mr. Hewett was long associated with the East-West Center. Upon the death of his [*first*] wife, he created a memorial fund, to be administered by the Friends. The award was to be made to an outstanding female in the media, primarily in Asian countries. The program has long been under the chairmanship of Fumiko Halloran, and I think it's been the best program ever, the most rewarding, because each year they've been able to find deserving candidates. A recent change, however, has been made. Just what prompted it Fumiko could tell you more about that. Indeed, I think you might want to consult her about the changes.

### ***Ohana Program (Formerly Host Family Program)***

The Friends now have an inspiring little group called the *Ohana* group [*the new name for the Host Family Program*]. It used to be known as the Host Family group. Currently, it has a charming, dedicated chair, Terrina Wong who holds an important position at Punahou. A successful and welcomed event has been having a big ice cream party for the new students soon after their arrival. Terrina was much involved in also making the Christmas party a success along with the president and Suzan. Patricia (Pat) Buckman, vice president, also contributes much, often quietly but effectively!

### ***Looking Forward***

Certainly the Friends have experienced many changes! We've gone through an exciting, promising birth at PAAC, a glorious period with EWC and then new groups have emerged, some duplications of effort are evident. Perhaps meetings of chairs/presidents of the many groups would stimulate new ideas and cooperation!

Incidentally, I had a marvelous Board when I was president. Admiral Hayes and Bud Smyser were the ones on whom I depended on the most. They were two of the best. Bud

Smyser, as Program Chairman, was largely responsible for our success because of his programs.

So, “To the future!” Are we declining? Opinions and views differ. One either looks for new solutions or one just maintains the status quo. I just honestly don't know, because I'm quite sure that nine out of 10 people will give you an optimistic view.

In retrospect, I wonder, could the Friends have survived if it had begun as an independent agency? Should it have been absolutely free of the East-West Center, ever-serving, but independent? Somewhat like the Friends of the Library which is totally independent but ever-serving libraries.

Let me conclude by saying that the Friends was the first organization created especially to assist East-West Center grantees and it has held steadfastly to that purpose. It is my hope that the thousands of graduates – of alumni – now all over the world hold the Friends dear in their hearts.