

KOKUA HAWAII ORAL HISTORY PROJECT INTERVIEW WITH
Dancette Yockman



Dancette Leiluaana Kan Ling Yockman was a teenager when her parents were evicted from their family farm in Kalama Valley to make way for Bishop Estate's residential housing subdivisions. As a teenager, Yockman herself joined in a protest at the state capitol, and she shared her recollections of the impact of the eviction on her family. For a time before her family members found a permanent home on Hawaiian Homestead land in Waimanalo, they were homeless. As an adult, Yockman was homeless herself for years before she participated in a self-help housing project and built her house in Kalihi. She was interviewed by Gary T. Kubota at a park in Kalihi on September 4, 2017.

Dancette Yockman
Photo courtesy of Gary Kubota

GK: Aloha, Dancette. When and where were you born?

DY: I was born in 1953 in Honolulu. It was then the Territory of Hawaii.

GK: Who were your parents?

DY: My father's name was William Keanuenu Yockman, Sr., the oldest son of grandfather William Chang who was half Hawaiian and Chinese, and of paternal grandmother Lanae Kapiko who was a full Hawaiian. My mother's name was Grace Momi Lee, whose step-father was Yau Lee who was Chinese, and maternal grandmother Lila Haupū Lee who was Hawaiian.

GK: Who were your brothers and sisters?

DY: My siblings were William K. Yockman, Jr., Grace Iwalani, Robert Kamakaokalani, Donna Mae Eanae Puana Kam Oe; and Ford Lee Pononui. Our ohana also included Uncle Wilbur and Uncle Albert Apuakehau, Uncle Ronald Lee, and Grandpa William Chang Yockman.

GK: Were they living with you?

DY: We all lived in Kalama Valley. We had a two-bedroom home. Dad built and attached a third bedroom to the back of our home. It was big enough to fit 15 persons with room to spare. Mom and dad had one bedroom, my three sisters had the second bedroom, and the new third bedroom was for the guys.

GK: How did they get the land?

DY: My parents leased the property we lived on for \$75 a month. The property was huge, from the road in front of our home and up to the mountain ridge, sometimes over to the next valley or so. We lived on a farm.

GK: What kind of a farm?

DY: We had various animals we raised for food. There were pigs, cows, goats, laying hens, ducks, geese, geese, turkeys, and rabbits. For pets we had several dogs, cats, and countless pigeons.

GK: And this was in Kalama Valley?

DY: We didn't know the area was "Kalama Valley" until we received the eviction notice. Kalama Valley was always known to all in the valley as Ehukai Street Valley, maybe because the valley next door was named after its road, Lunalilo Home Road Valley before it was called Hawaii Kai. Kalama Valley is part of Waimanalo ahupuaa (Hawaiian land division that extends from the mountain to the sea).

GK: Can you describe the valley?

DY: The entrance of Kalama Valley was located near the middle of Sandy Beach, a little closer to the second bathroom. Ehukai Street was the valley's main road in and out of Kalama Valley. At the beginning of our valley from Kalaniana'ole Highway, the Kaiwi ohana lived on the Blow Hole side of the road and across Ehukai Street was the Buddy Silva ohana. They lived on Makapuu side of the road.

GK: How was the wildlife in the area?

DY: We did have a path about the midway on our road right after the Koko Head Crater entrance. It gave us a shortcut to the next valley, Lunalilo Home Road. This path was known as the Path of the Owls—"Ke ala Pueo." There used to be hundreds of various kinds of owls, all kinds of colors: white, black and different shades of browns.

GK: What kind of physical features were in the valley?

Dancette Yockman Interview

DY: As you look into the valley, on the right side, there was a crater smaller than Koko Head Crater. It was alive with the smell of sulphur. We called it “the Cinder Pit.” It was almost as tall as the valley’s walls. The cinder pit would burn all day and night. The valley got very hot during the summer, and the sulphur smell was stronger. That’s where we and many others threw our trash. Even big businesses would use it for the same reason, to take care of their trash. After the cinder pit were three cinder cones. Each were taller than the cinder pit and of different colors—brown, red, and black.

GK: Sounds interesting?

DY: The cinder pit was one of our favorite places to play. We played on top the rim of the crater, inside of the crater and around. We had so much space for adventure.

GK: Tell me about the farms and residences.

DY: Most of the families in Kalama Valley lived a simple life. Our water came from a water catchment system. We had an outhouse toilet outside. No indoor plumbing. Our shower was outside near to the washroom and the outhouse toilet. Everyone had cesspools. Later, most homes in the valley got indoor plumbing.

GK: Tell me about the location of the houses.

DY: Right before and after the cinder pit road there were two bridges that were too weak for any heavy truck. The trash truck and the fire truck would not cross the bridge. One bridge was near the Kaneshiro ohana and the Sampaio ohana (Patrica/Patty). The second bridge was near the Rezentes ohana.

The back of the valley had a gradual slope, where the Kay ohana lived at the end of our street, also the Tabayoyan ohana. Mr. & Mrs. Frances, Alan and Wendy Tabayoyan, the Roque ohana.

The Kaiwi ohana and Buddy Silva ohana lived at the beginning of our street.

GK: What did your parents do for a living?

DY: Mom worked as a waitress and could speak English, Hawaiian, Chinese, and Latin. She went to Sacred Hearts Academy (a private high school). Dad quit school when he was a teenager and got a job to help his family. Dad was a heavy equipment operator. But before that, he worked as a mechanic, carpenter, electrician and plumber.

My dad enjoyed farming but most of all, he enjoyed fishing. My grandpa, brothers and uncles help take care of the farm.

GK: So you had an extended family on your farm? How was life as a child?

DY: Actually, everyone took care of everybody's kids, like a big ohana.

We had relatives living next to each other. The first home after the weak bridge there was the Jeremiah ohana, then the Richards, and then our home.

Next to us lived my Uncle Henry and Auntie Phoebe Kaholi. Phoebe was dad's sister. They had three sons: Henry, Seriaco, and Abraham. Next to uncle Henry was my grandma's house. She was my dad's mother. Living in her home was her second husband, Seriaco Pasco and her sons: Daniel Kapika, Thomas "Boney" Handler, and Edward K. Pasco. Her daughters were Julia, Betsy, and Henrietta "Lani."

Across the street was the home of Uncle Ben, and Auntie Jennie Kaholi. They had seven children, including William, Richard, Ben, Francis, Dolinda, Pohai, and Olinda.

GK: How old were you when you received the eviction?

DY: I was 16 years old, a Kalani High School student, when the letter of eviction notices arrived. It spoke clearly to my mom and dad, that we had to move from "Kalama Valley."

GK: What did you think about the protest being organized against the evictions?

DY: I totally supported it. But my parents didn't want "any trouble." When a few cousins, friends and I found out that there was going to be a gathering at the state capitol building in protest of the Kalama Valley evictions, we cut school and caught the bus to join it. (Laugh) We held signs, waved at those passing by and beeping their horns and we chanted, "Stop it, stop it. . . enough is enough!"

That day mom was watching the news and saw me protesting the evictions. She asked me if I went to school. I told her, "Yes, I went on an excursion with other classmates to the State Capitol." She told me that she did not want any trouble. So I did nothing more. The subject was closed. (Laugh)

GK: What happened after receiving the eviction notice?

DY: Grandpa died and also uncles Wilbur and Albert died before we were evicted. Dad had to sell everything, because we were unable to find a place to move our farm—animals, boat, trailer, all kinds of tools for the imu, auto repair, welding torch and tank, and so much more. What he could not take, he gave away or just left it behind.

GK: How did that affect your lifestyle?

DY: We lost everything—the valley, the farm with food and our houses. We lost our simple, carefree lifestyle. We lost the lease of the land—mom and dad paid \$75 per month for around 16 years. There were no more ohana parties. Gatherings were just a few and limited to a few major holidays. My whole family suffered while struggling to change.

Dancette Yockman Interview

GK: Where did you move?

DY: Mom found a home for us on the Heeia Kea side of Kahaluu—just before the old pineapple hut and St. John's By the Sea Church. We lived across the street on the mountain side of Kamehameha Highway.

Mom and dad thought they could handle the enormous rent for a three-bedroom, one-bath home. The rent was \$1,500. I didn't think the home was worth the rent.

Although we lived in Kahaluu, I still was attending Kalani High School. I graduated in the summer of 1972. I was 18 years old. At that time, my two older brothers—William and Robert—had enlisted in the Navy. There was mom and dad, my sisters Grace, Donna Mae, and myself, one son Ford Lee, and uncle Ronald. We only lived in Kahaluu for a few months.

GK: Where did you move next?

DY: Mom found a cheaper home and we moved to 22nd Avenue in Kaimuki. It was a larger home: three bedrooms, two baths and patio. The rent was \$800 a month.

We stayed about two years, then mom and dad were notified of a home in Waimanalo on Hawaiian Homestead. The following month, we packed and were ready to move to Waimanalo. We had to wait for a few more months for our home to be built, so we camped at Baby Makapuu for about four months. We were homeless, and there was no problem about camping or fishing like there is now. And we did that because we needed to save some money and prepare ourselves for new things and new bills. So when we moved in, we were ready. Mom and dad got furniture and appliances for the home and it was a struggle, but oh, they were happy to have their home.

GK: You mentioned that as an adult, you were homeless for a time?

DY: I was homeless again after my mom passed away, and my dad wanted me to remove myself from the home. That meant my whole family, and it happened at night, and I had no place to go. I prayed, and we sought shelter underneath the bridge at Waimanalo pier.

GK: How many children did you have?

DY: There was five children and two adults, including myself and my boyfriend. He's still my boyfriend 38 years later. I was homeless at that time, so after a couple of nights, some police officers came and told us we needed to vacate the spot. Otherwise tomorrow, if we are still there, they will arrest us, confiscate everything, and take the children to child authorities. That night I prayed and asked God and the next morning, I walked toward Waimanalo and I found this blessed place and it was just God-made. There were two balconies, all pushed up. The land was rock solid and as you walked up the trail, there were two big trees. It was all designed—there was a flat area, where I could put

up the main tent. And past that toward the highway, there was a barricade—a barricade so the cars don't come through and hurt anyone of us. Anyway, we ended up having a playground next to the camp area and across from it there was a garden.

GK: How was it to live on the beach?

DY: I had battles with cockroaches. I mean swarms of them. Bees. Centipedes, scorpions—oh my God. They came in packs, and I had to deal with them. Each one. One day, I got stung by a centipede, stung by a bee and later that afternoon, I had a Portuguese man of war right around my body from swimming—and I didn't even feel it. I guess I had so much venom in me. (Laughter) So, it didn't faze me.

GK: How long did you stay there?

DY: I stayed there for about five to seven years.

GK: How did you get your current house?

DY: I was very close to a pastor. He would come and visit us, bring us blankets when it's raining, bring us food and other items that we were so happy to receive. This gentleman—he was Japanese—before he died, he asked one of his people who come to his church—he asked her to come check on us. So she did, and through her, I got an application from Habitat for Humanity in 1989. I signed it in March, and I was told in April I was going to be the next homeowner and they were busy building the first (self-help) home, which is the Kaneakua's home; they had 10 in their family. I helped build their home, and our home was built two houses away. Through the Habitat program, I was able to help to build four houses and was happy to do so.

GK: How did it make you feel?

DY: It really felt very good to help others. It was a gift to see their hearts smile.

GK: People have told me that those who are evicted from their homes with seemingly no place to go have talked about the trauma sometimes, the stigma and shame. How did that eviction affect the way you looked at yourself?

DY: To me it was devastating. We were lost. My whole family was devastated because we enjoyed living on a farm. Getting rid of everything we owned because we had no place to take everything was stressful. We barely could find a home that we could afford. Our first house was \$1,500, and it was only a three-bedroom, one-bath home in Kahaluu. It was really hard to put food on the table, because there was electric and water bills and normal bills for the home. We cut back on all our wants and desires, in terms of clothing and spending and joy. We just cut back on it. We had emotional stress. We were lost. The occasions we would celebrate normally, we were not celebrating. It took a toll a lot, financially, physically. We were lost. We were losing our lifestyle and culture. We were

Dancette Yockman Interview

losing our home.

GK: When you were going to school, did you talk about it?

DY: I chose to hide it from other people because I wanted them to know the joy in me, not the sadness.

GK: Was it hard to cope with it? You were going to Kalani High School. That was a fairly upper-middle class neighborhood.

DY: A lot of them were very friendly, and they were so very helpful and kind. There weren't any mean people in that school. At an elementary school, there were a lot of mean people, telling us we Hawaiians were lazy and dumb.

GK: What do you think society should be doing to reduce the homeless problem in general?

DY: Give us back our Hawaiian Homestead lands. It is ours. It was never the state of Hawaii's. The ceded land is ours. Don't they know they are stealing? Somebody should put the law against them. . . I've waited for 40 years for Hawaiian Homestead farmland, and they tell me no more land. There's plenty of land. They've given outsiders the farmland. That's not right. They're treating us Hawaiians like second-class citizens when they should be taking care of us. They should make life affordable. Period.

9