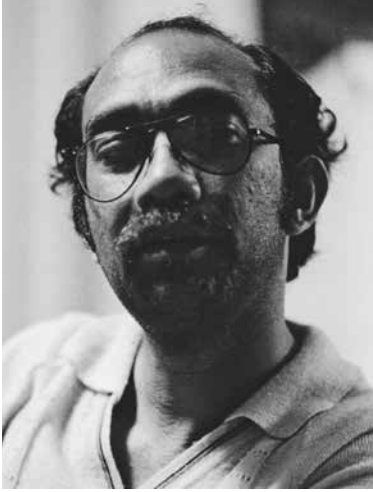


KOKUA HAWAII ORAL HISTORY PROJECT INTERVIEW WITH
Lawrence (Larry) “Harbottle” Kamakawiwoole



Lawrence Kamakawiwoole
Photo courtesy Ed Greevy

Lawrence (Larry) “Harbottle” Kamakawiwoole had a Master of Divinity degree from the Pacific School of Religion (PSR) in Berkeley, California, and, at 27 years old in 1970, was a teaching assistant in the Department of Religion at the University of Hawaii at Manoa when he was asked to look into the plight of Kalama Valley residents and farmers facing eviction at the hands of the Bishop Estate, the largest private landowner in Hawaii. This community land struggle has been considered as the precursor of the Hawaiian Renaissance. While a graduate student at PSR, Larry was a member of the Third World Liberation Front at PSR and had the opportunity to meet Afro-American leaders, such as Bobby Seale, a Black Panther Party leader, and Hazaiah Williams, who formed the Center for Urban-Black Studies at the Graduate Theological Union

in Berkeley. Working with various ethnic groups, such as Asians, African Americans and Hispanics, Kamakawiwoole gained organizational skills which helped him to bring together various groups to support the residents and farmers of Kalama Valley, including many Native Hawaiians. Kamakawiwoole often served as the spokesperson for the Kokua Kalama Committee, which later became known as Kokua Hawaii. He served as the first full-time director of the Ethnic Studies Program. He later received a Master of Education degree from the University of Hawaii and a law degree from Georgetown University Law Center in Washington, D.C. In 2015 and 2016, Gary T. Kubota interviewed Larry on several occasions at his home in Honolulu. The edited interview below is a product of those discussions and exchanges between Kubota and Kamakawiwoole.

GK: When and where were you born and who were your parents?

LK: I was born in 1943 in Honolulu. My parents were William and Wenonah Kamakawiwoole. My father graduated from the Kamehameha School for Boys in 1931, and my mother graduated from Punahou School in 1933. My father was a bus instructor and later dispatcher for the Honolulu Rapid Transit Co., and my mother was a substitute elementary public school teacher.

GK: I know you mentioned earlier that you’re connected to the John Harbottle family.

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Your father was hanai (Hawaiian tradition of sharing children among family, relatives and friends) at an early age?

LK: Yes, my father’s biological surname is Harbottle, not Kamakawiwoole. My father was hanai by his father’s sister, Sarah Hakuole, who married William Kamakawiwoole. They hanai my father because they needed him to carry the Kamakawiwoole name. They had two daughters and no son.

GK: Who was John Harbottle?

LK: He was British and is my great, great, great grandfather. He was a mate on the *Jackall*, a British trading ship which arrived at the Honolulu Harbor in the fall of 1794. He, along with several British and American military fighters, joined Kamehameha’s warriors to defeat his opponents in the crucial Battle of Nuuanu Pali in 1795. Harbottle was skilled in the use of western military weapons, including guns and cannons. John Harbottle later made his home at Kapalama near the harbor where he earned his living. He was the first pilot of Honolulu Harbor under Kamehameha’s rule. He held that position until the late 1820s. On or about 1806, Harbottle took as his “bride” Papapaunauapu, the hanai daughter of Kamehameha I. This was the beginning of the Harbottle family, one of the oldest hapa haole families in the Islands.

GK: I know names are sometimes assigned to characteristics of a family. What does “Kamakawiwoole” mean?

LK: Kamakawiwoole means, “The fearless eye.” Our name was originally “Kamakawiwoole O Kamehameha Ekahi,” also known as “The fearless eye of Kamehameha the First.” After the Christian missionaries arrived in Hawaii in 1820, the name was shortened to “Kamakawiwoole” because it was difficult for foreigners to pronounce the original family name.

GK: Please describe the community in which you were raised?

LK: I was born and raised in Palama, catty-corner to Palama Settlement. Palama was a low to middle income community. The famous singer Lena Machado lived next door to us. All ethnic/racial groups were represented. This was before the freeway was built. I, along with my parents, one sister, and two brothers—my youngest brother was not born yet—lived on my kupuna Sarah’s quarter-acre lot. We lived in a large two-story house. My father’s niece, her husband, and two children lived on the first floor. We lived on the second floor. We raised rabbits for food and pigeons as a hobby. My grandmother kupuna Sarah sold bags of poi to our neighbors. At one time, we had 15 dogs and a bunch of cats. And lots of fruit trees. My favorite place was a large sandbox in the yard where I spent much time everyday building sand castles. We never went to a doctor. Kupuna Sarah would use the plants and trees in our yard as medicine.

GK: Did you live there long?

LK: No. When I was in the third grade at Likelike Elementary School, the entire family had to move because of the government’s use of eminent domain to buy our land. The freeway was about to be built. Kupuna Sarah moved to Wilhelmina Rise with her daughter and family. We moved to lower Alewa Heights near Natsunoya Tea House, where my father purchased a small 5,000 square feet lot with a small house on it. My father’s niece and family moved to Hawaii Island.

GK: Could you describe your education?

LK: While living in Palama and then in lower Alewa Heights, I attended Likelike Elementary School and Lanakila Elementary School, respectively. Both areas were lower to middle class, multi-racial ethnic communities. I recall a lot of Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Filipino, Portuguese, Puerto Ricans and Native Hawaiians. Palama Settlement was an asset because it provided recreational facilities, such as swimming, basketball, and football. There were different clubs students could join. I was a member of the basketball club. We would practice and play after school. There were also language schools in the area. I remember waiting for my team members to finish Japanese language school and then practice basketball at Palama Settlement.

GK: When did you begin attending Kamehameha Schools?

LK: When I was in the sixth grade, I applied for entrance to the Kamehameha School for Boys (KSB). After an interview by the school’s staff, I got accepted to the seventh grade. I was the only student at Likelike Elementary School to be accepted. It was a big deal! My sixth-grade teacher announced the news to the class. It was like being accepted to Harvard! My classmates were so happy for me. I graduated from Kamehameha high school in 1961. At that time, there was a boys’ school and a girls’ school on two different campuses located at Kapalama Heights.

GK: Did Kamehameha School students speak Hawaiian?

LK: Although some of my classmates were fluent in Hawaiian, only English was spoken on campus. I recall my father telling me when he attended KSB, students were physically punished when they were caught by school personnel for speaking Hawaiian on campus. Kamehameha School focused on assimilation and acculturation. And they did a good job! The educational focus was on being Americans, not Native Hawaiians. I remember in my history class there was one page on Hawaiian history in the text book.

GK: What was the career expectation students had when they graduated from Kamehameha Schools?

LK: I’m not sure what career expectations my classmates had, but our class was divided into three sections—college prep, business, and vocational. I was in the college prep section. Most of us attended the University of Hawaii-Manoa, and some attended colleges on the mainland. Out of the approximately 125 students, there were about 25 students

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in this section. I attended and graduated from UH. The vocational section had the largest number of students. After graduation, my classmates in the vocational section entered the military, police academy, fire department, auto industry, carpentry, agriculture, welding, and other career fields. In all three sections, whatever carrier paths we chose, our class did quite well.

GK: How was your effort to gain a college education viewed by your parents?

LK: I was a good student at KSB. But my father did not want me to attend college. He wanted me to get a job and help with family expenses. He told me he would not financially help me if I attended the University of Hawaii. Fortunately, for my freshman year, I got a scholarship from the Honolulu Rotary Club. To supplement my income, I worked part-time at the university bookstore and later at Hawaiian Airlines as a baggage handler.

GK: Was your career path clear in the beginning and how did your future activism tie into it?

LK: I did not seriously think about a career path until my junior year at the university. It began during my sophomore year when I enrolled in Professor Friedrich Seifert's courses offered in the Department of Religion. I was most influenced by a course listed as Religion 151, entitled, “The Meaning of Existence.” Being raised in a conservative, status quo family and likewise regularly attending Kaumakapili and Kawaiahaeo churches in Palama and Honolulu, respectively, “The Meaning of Existence” class turned my life upside down and inside out! For the first time in my life, I was confronted with questions of my existence, such as, “Why was I put on earth? Should I question people in positions of authority? Why were Native Hawaiians ranked high in crime, unemployment, lack of education, and poor health?” I had not encountered, nor thought of these questions before. Simply put, after taking Professor Seifert's classes and listening to his lectures, I was converted. I became a born-again human being!

GK: What books influenced your thinking?

LK: The reading list in Professor Seifert's Religion 151 class opened my mind to ideas I had never thought of, nor heard of previously. They included Frantz Fanon (1925-1961), Writer born in the French colony of Martinique, Fanon was a leader and supporter of decolonization struggles that occurred after WWII. He was involved in the independence struggle of the Algerian people against the French government. I treasure his book, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Albert Camus (1913-1960), French philosopher, author, and journalist, Camus' books, *The Fall*, *The Stranger*, *The Plague*, *The Rebel*, and *The Myth of Sisyphus*, changed and shaped my world view. Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980) French philosopher, novelist, and political activist, Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* and *No Exit* and his political activism inspired me. Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881) Russian novelist and philosopher, Dostoevsky's works, *The Grand Inquisitor*, *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov* were favorite readings of mine. Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) Danish philosopher, theologian, and poet, Kierkegaard was widely considered to be the

first existentialist philosopher. His works, *“Either/Or,” Fear and Trembling*, and *Attack on Christendom* were important readings.

Finally, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) German philosopher. His works, *The Anti-Christ*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and *Beyond Good and Evil* were important readings. Nietzsche was the leader of the “God is Dead” movement.

GK: So, your career path was?

LK: In view of Professor Seifert’s courses, I wanted to teach religion on the secondary level. I consulted with Professor Seifert. He recommended I consider doing graduate studies at the Pacific School of Religion (PSR) in Berkeley, Ca. He received his Doctorate in Theology at PSR. In my senior year at the university, I applied to PSR and got accepted. I attended PSR in the fall of 1966 and graduated in the spring of 1969 with a Master of Divinity degree. During my last year at PSR, I applied to high schools on the continent and Puerto Rico. I got accepted to three—a high school in New Mexico, one in New York, and a third in Puerto Rico. Simultaneously, Professor Seifert was looking for a teaching assistant for the “Meaning of Existence” class. He contacted me at PSR to ask if I were interested in the position. I accepted. The rest is history!

GK: What happened when you went to Berkeley?

LK: When I arrived in Berkeley in the late summer of 1966, sections of the cities of San Francisco and Berkeley were on fire! And yes, Bob Dylan was correct, “The times they are a changing.” In San Francisco’s Haight-Ashbury, the counter-culture movement led by the love generation “hippies” held a “Love-In” festival at San Francisco State Park. The park was packed with people. To the east in Oakland, the Black Panther Party was organizing African American communities to rise up against the establishment of oppression, with Huey Newton and Bobby Seale leading the Black Power movement. The Anti-Vietnam War resistance movement was growing with young men refusing to go to war and leaving for Canada or applying for conscientious objector status. The Third World Liberation Front at the University of California at Berkeley (UCB) was a massive movement of students, among others, who marched, held rallies, had sit-ins, and some got arrested. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and many others spoke on campus. The Hispanic, Chicano, Puerto Rican, and Asian movements demanded equal education, economic, and political opportunities. Music icons Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Pete Seeger, Jimi Hendrix, Peter, Paul, and Mary, Simon and Garfunkel, Jefferson Airplane, Bee Gees, The Kingston Trio, Everly Brothers, Harry Belafonte, and many others sang throughout the Bay area. The Peoples’ Park struggle held marches and demonstrations when the Berkeley city administration wanted to demolish a park and put up a parking lot.

All across the United States, including Hawaii, people were questioning and challenging the political, economic, and social system of capitalist America. I marched and supported the various movements. My time and commitment, however, were spent as a member of The Pacific School of Religion Third World Liberation Front (PSR TWLF).

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GK: How was your education at the Pacific School of Religion and your involvement with activist groups?

LK: My introduction to the PSR TWLF started during my first year at PSR. Field work was a required course for first-year students. I was assigned as a co-youth worker, along with Roberta Corson (married name), to Shattuck Avenue United Methodist Church in North Oakland, the first racially-integrated church in Oakland. The Rev. Robert Olmstead, the church's pastor and PSR graduate, had opened the church's recreational facilities to about 25 young African Americans in the predominantly African American neighborhood. Before our first meeting with the group, they had decided to invite Bobby Seale of the Black Panther Party to give a series of Sunday evening talks on the party and the African American experience in America. Seale's talks lasted for several months and focused on the political, economic, and social oppression of African American people by the white power government. The impact of Seale's talks hit home when I related them to the similar oppression of Native Hawaiians in Hawaii. I recalled my upbringing in the non-white lower-middle/middle-class neighborhood of Palama, a far cry from the upper-middle-class/upper-class neighborhoods of Manoa and Kahala, among others. I stayed with the group at the church for a year and got to know them. They taught me a lot about their life in Oakland. They tried real hard to teach me how to dance! (Laughter) They were either lousy teachers, or I just could not move like they did!

GK: How did all of this seem to you as you moved forward with your education?

LK: During my second and final year at Pacific School of Religion, I was a member of the school's Third World Liberation Front, comprised mainly of African American seminarians. We also had Chicano, Hispanic, and Asian members—and me! We confronted the administration and demanded the school admit more minority students, provide more financial aid to them, and expand its curriculum to include courses relevant to minority students. We were successful in achieving most of our demands.

GK: What did you think about Black Panther Party leader Bobby Seale?

LK: He was a smart, articulate, and charismatic speaker. He opened my eyes and ears to the African American experience in America. I liked him—his courage, bravery, and commitment in speaking out. I stopped by the Black Panther Party's office in North Oakland to say good-bye to him upon my return to Hawaii in the summer of 1969.

GK: How did his lectures go?

LK: His lectures were well received. The group of young African American people were excited to hear what he had to say. I'm not sure if any of them joined the Party. I might add here my readings continued while I was at PSR. I was most influenced by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), Hitler's German theologian, pastor, writer, and political activist, who spoke out against Hitler's Nazi regime and the persecution of the Jews. He was a leader in the resistance movement. He was imprisoned and subsequently hung in 1945.

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I treasure his books, *The Cost of Disciple*, *Life Together*, and *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976), German theologian and teacher who demythologized the New Testament for me. Harvey Cox, American theologian and professor at Harvard. His book, *The Secular City*, published in 1965, gave me a good view of what was to come in American cities, including Honolulu.

Finally, my dear friend of almost a half a century, Lawrence Mamiya, a Hawaii native who received his undergraduate degree from the university. Dr. Mamiya, professor of Religion and Africana Studies at Vassar College (ret.), is also a writer and political activist. His book (co-author), *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, helped me to understand the African American experience in America. His many years of working with African American inmates and taking his students to a prison are inspiring, I relate that to taking my students to low-income Native Hawaiian communities throughout Hawaii.

GK: What happened after earning your master’s degree in Berkeley?

LK: I returned to Honolulu in the summer of 1969 and looked forward to being a co-teaching assistant in Religion 151, along with David Panisnick. At the same time, I was a graduate student in the College of Education. My immediate priority was to do the best I could in both areas. I was not involved in community work. I was now a different person—challenging everything I took for granted before.

Growing up in Hawaii, I accepted the status quo. Everything was like it was because that’s the way it was. I questioned no one. I accepted life. I never thought of questioning or changing what was.

That all changed 360 degrees! People who knew me before did not quite know what to make of me. This quiet, no cause waves, mind your own business boy was now the biggest troublemaker in town! Yes, my experiences in Berkeley converted me! I was indeed a born-again human being!

GK: How did you get involved in the Kalama Valley eviction struggle?

LK: During the fall of 1969, John Witeck, founder and chairperson of the board of directors of Youth Action, invited me to be a member of the board. YA, predecessor to the Hawaii People’s Fund, was a non-profit agency that provided seed money to youth groups working for social change in Hawaii. The board’s membership included leaders of the progressive movement, including the Rev. Larry Jones, Randy Kalahiki, Rev. John Heidel, Professor Walter Johnson, Aiko Reinecke, Wally Fukunaga, and Mary Choy.

In the spring of 1970, at a regularly-scheduled monthly YA meeting held at the Church of the Crossroads, John asked me to go to Kalama Valley that week to ask the residents if they needed assistance from YA. He mentioned SDS had scheduled a meeting with the residents the evening of my visit. As a brief background, in 1968, the Bishop Estate, landowner of the valley and largest private landowner in Hawaii, had served eviction

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notices to approximately several hundred people to make way for a high-income residential resort development in Kalama Valley. Members of Students for Democratic Society (SDS) were already in the valley.

GK: What role did John Witeck play in the Kokua Hawaii struggle?

LK: If John did not ask me to go to Kalama Valley to offer YA's assistance, we would not have the KV struggle as we know it today. Witeck has been a pioneer of the progressive movements in Hawaii.

GK: What happened when you went to Kalama Valley?

LK: An SDS meeting was held outside between Moose Lui and George Santos' homes. After the meeting, I approached several residents and identified myself. I told them YA was willing to help and asked them what kind of assistance they needed. They told me they wanted to stay in their homes and community. They did not want to move! I replied, “No promises, I'll see what I can do and will get back to you shortly.” I took down their names and contact information. There were about a half-dozen residents present. In all, roughly about 35 families still living in the valley.

GK: What did you do?

LK: The following morning I contacted Witeck to relay what occurred the prior evening. I asked him if he could give me contact information on community organizers who might be interested in helping the residents remain in the valley. He gave me twelve names and their phone numbers. They were: Kalani Ohelo, Pete Thompson, Soli Niheu, Claire Shimabukuro, Ray Catania, Linton Park, Dana Park, Gene Parker, Kehaulani Lee, Joey Ibarra, Randy Suzuki, and Rene Kajikawa. I did not know any of them. I called each one and asked if he or she was interested in helping the residents. I asked them to attend a meeting with me that week at the Off Center Coffeehouse located adjacent to the university. Everyone showed up!

GK: What did you tell them?

LK: I told the group the residents wanted to remain in the valley and not move. I also told them we should occupy Kalama Valley 24/7, organize the families to fight for their homes and community, set up facilities and other necessities to live in the valley, get as many individuals and community organizations to support the struggle, use the media and public speaking engagements to keep the public informed and educated about why we are present in the valley, how the KV struggle impacted many communities on all islands, and plan for a long fight against the Bishop Estate.

GK: What was their reaction?

LK: Everyone was in agreement. We scheduled a date and time within a week of our meeting

to enter the valley from the entrance on Kalanianaʻole Highway. We called ourselves the Kokua Kalama Committee (KKC). We entered the valley, and the first thing I did was to introduce KKC members to the residents by knocking on their doors. That day, in the late spring of 1970, was the beginning of the Kalama Valley struggle. May I add here, early in the struggle, the “Kalama 3”—John Witeck, Linton Park (KKC) and Lori Hayashi—and the “Kalama 7”—Gregory Hasbouck, Wayne Hayashi, Richard King (Kalama resident), Kehaulani Lee (KKC), Stanford Masui, Linton Park (KKC) and James Wallrabenstein, were arrested July 2 and July 9, 1970, respectively. I considered these courageous and brave warriors to be a part of the Kalama Valley struggle. What distinguished the Kokua Kalama Committee, later renamed “Kokua Hawaii” from other groups is we entered the valley as an organization, and not as individuals, to occupy it, to keep the residents in their homes and community, and to stop the development of the valley for the wealthy at the expense of hard-working middle- and lower-middle class local families.

GK: In your mind, how far were you willing to take the protest?

LK: I knew we entered the valley eviction struggle late. Knowing that, I still believed there had to be a Kalama Valley struggle. We had to stop housing developments for the wealthy at the expense of lower-middle and middle-class local people. Before the Kalama Valley struggle, families got evicted and left. I believe we had to change the “no cause waves, just leave your homes” attitude. It’s what people served with eviction notices are supposed to do, like the sun rises every morning. It’s a part of living in Hawaii. This mindset had to change.

GK: When did Kokua Kalama Committee change its name to Kokua Hawaii?

LK: A couple of months into the struggle, my friend the Rev. Wally Fukunaga approached me at the Off Center Coffeehouse and suggested the name of the Kokua Kalama Committee be changed to Kokua Hawaii because other communities across the Hawaiian Islands were faced with the same issues as Kalama Valley. At the next Kokua Hawaii meeting, I made the recommendation. It was accepted unanimously.

GK: What was Fukunaga’s role in Kokua Hawaii?

LK: I met Wally while I was doing graduate work at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. We became good friends. At the outset of the Kalama Valley struggle, Wally offered the Off Center Coffeehouse’s facilities as a meeting place as well as the use of the telephone and copy machine. He never charged us a cent! The Off Center Coffeehouse became Kokua Hawaii’s main office. I always considered Wally as our advisor.

GK: What did Kokua Hawaii do once it was in the valley?

LK: Well, we tried to empower the families by standing in solidarity with them to remain in their homes and community in the face of threats of eviction. We invited the families to meetings and to participate in decision-making. Basically by staying there we got to know

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the families—their children, background, livelihood, housing problems, and personal history, and they got to know us. By our presence and talks with them, we tried to instill hope and faith in the families never to be afraid of confronting people in power.

On a very practical level, we also established ground rules for the occupation of the valley, including basic sanitation and communications. We had meetings at an abandoned house. Volunteers built latrines and constructed outdoor showers and a kitchen. Volunteers also set up a telephone system when the telephone lines were cut. We had a security guard shack located at the entrance to the valley. We also devised a plan for Kokua Hawaii and the residents in the event of an arrest.

GK: All of this seems like a big undertaking?

LK: Well, we recruited hundreds of volunteers to help. Randy Kalahiki of the Kualoa-Heeia Ecumenical Youth (KEY) Canteen, and Kahuna Lapaau Sam Lono were invaluable to the struggle. We also had help from the Church of the Crossroads with the Rev. Arlie Porter; the American Friends Service Committee (Quakers); Save Our Surf with John Kelly; The Hawaiians with Pae Galdeira and Paige Barber; Ian Lind; University of Hawaii Professor Walter Johnson and his wife Bette; the Rev. Wally Fukunaga, youth minister of the Off Center Coffeehouse; Life of the Land; Bishop Museum researcher Marion Kelly, Tom Gladwin, Anson Chong, University of Hawaii student organizations, and many others. Many individuals and organizations provided food and supplies throughout the struggle.

GK: How did you enlist their support?

LK: Communication was important. Through public speaking engagements, rallies, public meetings, and the media, we educated the public about why we were present in the valley, what the issues were, and development of land in Hawaii for the wealthy and its impact on the majority of the population. Certain residents, including pig farmer George Santos, talked about his pig farm, prior evictions, and living in the valley. We held, or were invited to, meetings and forums with groups, organizations, and schools on all islands, except Niihau. We were even invited to speak at Oahu Community Correctional Center.

GK: What else did you do?

LK: We held an open house for the public to come to the valley and many people came. Kokua Hawaii members organized supporters into work groups.

GK: What about news coverage?

LK: We maintained good relationships with the news media and various organizations. The media—radio, television, and daily newspapers—gave us continuous coverage throughout the struggle. Reporters who followed the struggle included Linda Coble, Bambi Weil, and Pierre Bowman. The KV struggle was in the local and national news.

There were articles in *Time*, *Newsweek*, and the *Rolling Stone* magazine. There were articles in journals, books, and doctoral dissertations. Local residents on the mainland heard about the struggle from California to New York.

GK: Who handled the news media?

LK: Linton Park, an Annapolis appointee who opposed the Vietnam War, was in charge of communications. Each member of Kokua Hawaii had responsibilities. Printer Merv Chang worked with newspaper press production, Vietnam veteran Ed Ching and others were responsible for security, other members helped the residents, such as working on George Santos’ pig farm. The organizational structure changed after Kokua Hawaii members Kalani Ohelo and Edwina Akaka returned from the mainland. They met with leaders of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California and the Young Lords in New York City. We formed ministries, such as ministers of education, defense, finance, security, and communication. At one point, Kokua Hawaii did wear brown berets, similar to the Black Panthers and Young Lords. The Kokua Kalama Committee started with 13 members and eventually grew to about 38.

GK: What made the gathering different?

LK: The gathering consisted of persons of all racial, ethnic, economic and social backgrounds. What we had in common was to fight the profit motive capitalistic system which favored the wealthy at the expense of the overwhelming majority of Hawaii’s population. The Kalama Valley struggle gave many Kalama Valley families hope, faith, and courage to fight for their homes and community against the largest private landowner in Hawaii. Perhaps for the first time in their lives, the families saw people who did not live in the valley stand in solidarity with them. This is important because many of the families had been evicted from their homes from Waianae to Kalama Valley.

GK: Who were the members of Kokua Hawaii?

LK: Kokua Hawaii was comprised of primarily local people born and raised in Hawaii. We were not outsiders. In 1970, this was not the norm. In 1976, Skippy Kamakawiwoole, leader of the Makaha Sons of Niihau, told me during the Kalama Valley struggle he was watching the evening news on TV when he saw me being interviewed. When he saw my name on the TV screen, he called his mother and said, “Look ma, he got the same name as us.” Yes, the Kalama Valley struggle was local people standing in solidarity with local people! Skippy was 13-years-young at the time! A number of members were graduates of Kamehameha School—Joy Ahn, Soli Niheu, Pete Thompson, John Fuhrman, and myself. We confronted and fought the Bishop Estate for the first time in the over one-hundred year history over its land development.

GK: There were certainly a lot of Native Hawaiians involved in the struggle, including Native Hawaiians serving as leaders. I know I’d never seen anything like that before, and out of it sprung a lot of native Hawaiian-related issues?

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LK: I know people talk of Kokua Hawaii and Kalama Valley as the start of the Hawaiian Renaissance. In so many ways, it really did broaden the field for Native Hawaiian leadership. It is important to me and Kokua Hawaii members that the Kalama Valley struggle be remembered as a local peoples' community struggle to reverse the pattern of developing land for the wealthy, many of whom are outsiders, at the expense of local people. We were a coalition of local people who became community organizers fighting against evictions of poor and working people in Hawaii.

GK: How did you manage to do what you did while working at the university?

LK: I didn't sleep much. The responsibilities of graduate school, teaching, and Kalama Valley were overwhelming. It was like having three full-time jobs. I discovered when one is committed to a cause, the energy level heightens. Less sleep is not a problem.

GK: What made the residents step forward?

LK: People involved in other eviction struggles began calling us because Kokua Hawaii gave the residents hope and courage in light of evictions from their homes and community. Kokua Hawaii empowered the families in the valley and families across the Hawaiian Islands, to stand together in unity and solidarity! George Santos spoke for many families who had been evicted in the past.

GK: What about Black Richards?

LK: Black, like George Santos, was another resident who stepped forward. He became a member of Kokua Hawaii. Black was soft-spoken and effective. He was an inspiration to local people throughout Hawaii.

GK: During the eviction struggle, what was your role?

LK: I think my role developed out of the needs of the Kalama Valley struggle. Early in the struggle, I maintained a close relationship with George Santos and other residents by informing them of daily events and how they could help. I had George's trust. When Kokua Hawaii members approached George with an idea, George's response was usually “check with Larry.” I gave residents support to let them know they were not alone in their decision to remain in their homes and community. I really didn't have a title, although I was the chair of most of the meetings. I tried to make my actions define my role. Regretfully, later in the struggle, my responsibilities removed me from maintaining that relationship. I spent more time at Kokua Hawaii's office at the Off Center Coffeehouse and traveling to the neighbor islands and across Oahu for speaking engagements with Kalani Ohelo. That might be the reason why some residents eventually moved out of the valley. They probably felt disconnected with the struggle and left out of what was happening in the valley.

GK: What kind of demand was there for public appearances back then?

LK: Kalani and I traveled to all the islands, except Niihau. We spoke at public intermediate and high schools, at the University of Hawaii-Manoa and community colleges, at the East-West Center and various communities.

GK: How were you received?

LK: I recall the welcome we got from Milolii on Hawaii Island. The fishing village held a luau for us. And Dixon Enos and Joe Tassill welcomed us to Hoonaaunau on Hawaii Island and showed us the work they were doing with young people. We also had a big crowd when we spoke at Oahu Community Correctional Center in Kalihi. Kalani and I were away from the valley weeks at a time.

GK: What was the point of these appearances?

LK: Our objective in our public engagements was to raise the consciousness of people about the capitalist profit motive economic, political and social systems and their impact on Hawaii. We did this by telling them about the Kalama Valley struggle.

GK: How did you handle the news media?

LK: At the Off Center Coffee house, I received lots of calls from the public inquiring about Kalama Valley. I also spoke on radio stations to recruit people to the valley to help the residents. That's how I met Edwina Akaka in 1970. She responded by attending a Kokua Hawaii meeting. At the time, she was a student at the University of Hawaii and a waitress in Waikiki. She was not involved in community work. I encouraged her to join Kokua Hawaii and help the residents in the valley. She did and it was the start of her political involvement in land struggles, which lasted until she passed away in April 2017.

I also spent time meeting with organizations and individuals to inform them of the struggle, such as The Hawaiians led by Pae Galdeira, Revs., Darrow Aiona and Tuck Wah Lee, Paige Barber of the Congress of Hawaiian People, Kahuna Lapaau Sammy Lono, Randy Kalahiki of the KEY Canteen Project, Marie Stires of Kuhio Park Terrace, Rosemond Victorino of Mayor Wright Housing, Nelson Ho of Kahaluu, Rev. Bob Nakata, Rev. Arlie Porter of Church of the Crossroads, Rev. Frank Chong and his sister Ellie Chong, the American Friends Service Committee, Life of the Land, Larry Jones, John Witeck, and Carl Young, among others.

GK: How were decisions generally made?

LK: During the Kalama Valley struggle, I often helped to set the agenda for the meetings. But the decisions were made by consensus.

GK: What were some of the major decisions?

Lawrence (Larry) "Harbottle" Kamakawiwoole Interview

LK: One was that the Kalama Valley struggle be non-violent. I recommended to Kokua Hawaii that the struggle be non-violent. Beyond religious or spiritual beliefs, on a very practical level, very few members were familiar with firearms, and we would be killed by the police powers on the side of the Bishop Estate. Additionally, it would have alienated us from the communities we wanted to reach. Ironically, the ones most against the use of firearms were Vietnam veterans in our group. Similarly, although we received offers, we turned down getting help from the syndicate.

To enforce this policy, Kokua Hawaii built a guard house to be used as a check point for individuals and vehicles entering the valley. A major Kokua Hawaii policy was no alcohol, drugs, and weapons allowed in the valley.

GK: What else were you involved in during the struggle?

LK: I was also the chief negotiator for Kokua Hawaii and the residents. I met with the Bishop Estate trustees at their Halekauwila Street office about three times during the struggle. I always took one or two Kokua Hawaii members with me. I recall asking Kalani and Soli Niheu to join me at the meetings.

GK: What did you discuss?

LK: During one of the meetings with the trustees, I proposed the valley be developed to accommodate high-income, middle-income and low-income residents. The trustees replied they had to develop a high-income development to support the Kamehameha Schools. A half-century later, the government and developers are catching on to the idea. (Laughter) The government, of course, has given the developers incentives, such as additional floors for their projects.

GK: What were some of your other tasks?

LK: Sometimes, I acted as an intermediary or peace maker. Midway in the struggle a Kokua Hawaii member approached me to tell me there were several local guys in front of Moose Lui's home who wanted to pick a fight with Kokua Hawaii members. I went to the scene and I recall Kokua Hawaii members Kalani Ohelo, John Saxton and Ed Ching standing in front of Moose Lui's home along with three local dudes about to fight. I intervened. I asked the three men to sit down at a table and I educated them as to why Kokua Hawaii was in the valley, the history of evictions impacting local families in Hawaii, and the western divide-and-conquer rule. I concluded by telling them they could remain in the valley if they wanted to help the families. Otherwise, they had to leave. They left peacefully.

GK: That's an interesting approach, taking the high road in activism.

LK: I believe when you educate people about evictions in Hawaii, they will understand because almost everyone brought up in Hawaii has been impacted by evictions—either personally, or by a family member, a relative, or a friend.

GK: Kalani, Saxton and Ching were pretty big guys. I don't think I'd want to cross them.

LK: To avoid what might have been physical confrontations, I personally had conversations with Homer Hayes of Hayes Guard Service. I think Homer understood there was a difference when dealing with local people who were activists. Family ties can make a difference. At one point, the guards tried to block the road, but after a talk with Homer, the road remained open by the guards. Hayes also gave up a guard shack that they had built in the valley and the guards moved their security closer to the main highway, so our members occupied the guard shack.

GK: I know the local syndicate in Hawaii was also following the anti-eviction struggle and their sympathies were with Kokua Hawaii and the Kalama Valley residents?

LK: Late in the struggle before the arrests, Kalani and I met with the local syndicate. The purpose of the meeting was the syndicate's offer to provide Kokua Hawaii with armed men in Kalama Valley. The meeting was held in the early evening. There were about 20 members of the syndicate present. Kalani and I spoke about our purpose for being in the valley. At the conclusion of the meeting, I thanked them for the support and told them Kokua Hawaii did not need their help because the struggle was non-violent. They accepted the decision and the meeting ended.

GK: I know that support was growing to oppose the eviction but there was also concern about the growing number of non-local supporters who were viewed as “outsiders” by the news media and public? Can you explain the reasoning behind why non-local supporters were asked to leave?

LK: Kalani and I were at a meeting outside Kalama Valley, when the decision by the steering committee was made to ask the non-local supporters to leave the valley. It came as a surprise. A plan I had suggested was to have valley supporters leave at a later date—closer to the date of arrests. The May 11 arrests did not occur until at least two months later. Still, I was left the task to announce the decision of the steering committee. I went on stage to thank the supporters for assisting the residents. I explained to them why they had to leave—the importance of the struggle being a local one, and that for too long, “outsiders” were seen as leading local struggles. It was a hard pill for our supporters to swallow! I recall Noel Kent expressed disagreement with Kokua Hawaii's decision. John Kelly and John Witeck, on the other hand, supported our decision.

GK: Could you describe where you were around the period of the arrest in Kalama Valley on May 11, 1971?

Lawrence (Larry) "Harbottle" Kamakawiwoole Interview

LK: As you well know, I was not present in the valley on the morning of the arrest. It was early May and final examinations for the spring semester were about to start. At that time, I was an instructor in the Religion Department. We had a faculty meeting to discuss final exams the evening before the morning of the Kalama Valley arrests. I left the valley at 4 p.m. Before leaving, I spoke to Kokua Hawaii members Soli Niheu and Ed Ching. Ed was on duty at the guard house that evening. I told them I had a meeting at the University of Hawaii-Manoa, and I would spend the night at my parents' home in lower Alewa Heights, and I would return to the valley early the following morning. I gave Ed my mother's phone number and told him to call me if any problems should arise.

The faculty meeting ended about 8 p.m. I then left for my parents' home. At about 10 p.m., I was preparing to go to bed when I received a phone call from Georgiana Padeken, a social worker at Liliuokalani Trust and a friend of mine. She said the Bishop Estate trustees wanted to meet with me the following morning at 10 a.m. at their office on Halekauwila Street. They wanted to come to a settlement on the valley. I said, "That's a bunch of ----- ! They never wanted to settle. . ." Georgiana said, "No, the trustees are serious, they want to work out a plan for the valley with you." I agreed to meet the trustees the next morning.

On May 11, 1971, at 6 a.m., I got a call from Ed Ching. All Ed said was, "They're coming in." I dressed as quickly as I could and sped to the valley. It took me about a half-hour to get there. When I got to the valley, there were well over a hundred armed and unarmed police officers standing in a long line along Kalaniana'ole Highway fronting the valley. The gate at the entrance was closed and secured with a padlock. I drove my car up to the entrance of the valley and exited my vehicle. Ed Michaels, the Bishop Estate's East Oahu land manager, walked up to me and said, "You can't go in, it's private property." I replied, "This valley belongs to the residents. Get out of my way." He refused to move and there was an altercation. But I was too late. Police vehicles carrying arrested Kokua Hawaii members were fast approaching the highway.

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