BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Kuʻumeaaloha Gomes

Kuʻumeaaloha Gomes is a hoʻoponopono practitioner originally from Keaukaha, Kauaʻi, who is known for her social justice advocacy. Gomes worked in numerous mental health and social service contexts before becoming the director of Kuaʻana Student Services at the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa where she impacted many Hawaiian students. Gomes is perhaps most well-known for her work in founding Nā Mamo o Hawaiʻi and being on the Commission on Same-Sex Marriage and the Law, a very public role at the height of debates over same-sex marriage in Hawaiʻi in the 1990s. Gomes and Nā Mamo were public advocates for Hawaiian sovereignty and LGBTQM rights and worked to change the perception of "gay people" in the Hawaiian community while also bringing Hawaiian issues to the LGBT community.

INTERVIEW INDEX: Kuʻumeaaloha Gomes

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
With
Kuʻumeaaloha Gomes (KG)
Honolulu, Hawaiʻi (by phone)
June 1, 2021
BY: LT Teves (LT)

KG: Aloha Lani.

LT: Aloha, I'm sorry for the delay.

KG: No no, it's okay, it's quite alright.

LT: How are you this day, this morning?

KG: Maikaʻi, really good. How are you? Your children are how old now?

LT: I have one son and he's about three and a half.

KG: Oh wow, baby!

LT: Yeah he's little.

KG: Oh, and the others are how old? Just one?

LT: I don't have any, just the one.

KG: Oh maikaʻi, great great. You've been very busy.

LT: Yeah I don't think I could handle more than one I think. I give people credit, I don't know how people do it.

KG: Yeah, I know. It's so hard in today's world. You know. Okay, so this is your show, let's see, yeah.

LT: Yeah so since we talked last week I've been thinking about you know like what, for you, what should we focus on so that you know whoever interacts with what you share you know what, what would they want to know? And so, for me when I think about it, I think we, one thing is like we need to learn from people who lived through the 70s and 80s and 90s in Hawaiʻi.

KG: ʻAe.

LT: At the same time as sovereignty and at the same time as LGBT rights coming up, yeah. And so, I feel like that's kinda the biggest thing that future generations would wanna know about and learn about.

KG: The ancient history [laughs].

LT: [laughs] Well to them it's like yeah, you know I tell them 1985 and that may as well have been 1945 to them. It's just so completely the past in their brains and so I was doing research on yourself [laughs].

KG: Oh my gosh.

LT: And it's kind of places where you've done interviews before, and thinking about how you've done so many things and have been involved in so many aspects of activism and I think that is important for people to know too. That you have been involved in so many things, so then I thought well, why don't we think about the interview as an opportunity to, to kind of like learn about your life, you know where you come from all that stuff, and how that contributed to the different kinds of activism you did and then specifically as we get on in future conversations about gay and Hawaiian issues.

KG: Good idea.

LT: Yeah.

KG: Okay, maikaʻi. I can do that. Let me start with who I am. My name is Lenore Kuʻumeaaloha Gomes and um, in those names it's like Portuguese Hawaiian, or Hawaiian Portuguese, depending on where you are in the world. Someone once asked me, "You're Portuguese, besides being Hawaiian you're also Portuguese, so why didn't you take on any Portuguese struggles?" and I said perhaps if I was in Portugal I would, but I live in Hawaiʻi. [laughs]

LT: Yeah.

KG: And I grew up in Hawaiʻi and this is where our struggles are. Our struggles and our celebrations and what we honor. My mom was, Native Hawaiian, she is no longer with us she passed away a number of years ago and my dad is Portuguese and he also passed on. From both of them, their lives shaped who I am today and let me clarify what I mean by that. When I was born my grandmother, my maternal grandmother, dreamed me being born. And I was born at St. Francis Hospital, my tūtū wahine lived in Kona, Kailua-Kona on Hawaiʻi island. When my dad called her to tell her, "Malia gave birth and it's a girl", my tūtū answered the phone and before he could even say anything she just picked up the phone, she picked up the phone and she said into it "Her name is Kuʻumeaaloha", and my dad said "How did you know?" and she said it's because I dreamed her being born, which is very Hawaiian.

LT: Yeah.

KG: And then she said "I give her the name Kuʻumeaaloha" and she said "It's not because it's a pretty name, it's a hard name to carry" she said the "Ha at the end of aloha is the most important part of the word. This girl is going to grow up giving to other people, giving of life to other people, that's going to be her ʻano, that's what she will do" and then she went on to say, "and she may have one child or no children, because her life is going to be about giving, yeah." Then she also said, "That I just want you and Malia to know that I am going to share my ʻike with her. You tell Malia that and Malia will understand what that means." My Tūtū lady was a lāʻau lapaʻau practitioner as well as a hoʻoponopono practitioner. And from her I didn't learn too much about lāʻau lapaʻau but I learned a lot about hoʻoponopono. That kind of like set the stage for my life. When I was two years old, in Keaukaha, Kauaʻi, my dad and my mom lived with my paternal grandfather, the Portuguese side. And my maternal grandmother has already passed, let me see I must have been there, she passed on, I think I was four years old when she passed on, but she was a tiny little Portuguese woman who would bake bread every morning in the outside brick oven. And it was later on in life when I was an adult that I learned from a waiter at the old Tahitian Lanai, he was serving us. I was with a friend and we were having breakfast, and he was serving us and his name was "Kawau" on his name tag. And I said "Oh, a Podagee waiter and he looked at me and goes "Oh since you said that you must be Podagee too" and I said "I am" and he said "What is your last name?" and I said "Gomes" and he goes "You don't happen to come from Keaukaha, Kauaʻi, do you?" and I said "I do, I do. I grew up there part of the time, my grandparents were from there" and he goes "And your grandmother was Mildred Gomes" and I said "Yes, how do you know?" and he says "Well I am one of the recipients of the hearty breakfast that she made every morning and took to us in the camp" and he talked about her breaking bread and then delivering it to the families. So that children could have fresh baked bread in the morning, and I never heard that story from my family, I heard it from him, so that was really really nice.

But that, uh, my grandfather, my paternal grandfather was a luna on the sugar plantation in Keaukaha, the Kauaʻi sugar plantation. My grandfather, my dad was a machinist, my Uncle Richard was a (inaudible) man and the (inaudible) carry cylinders of chemicals, liquid chemicals on the back to kill um weeds, so you know they sprayed it on weeds, and later on in life he died of lung cancer, and they hadn't made that correlation between their occupation and the lung disease. But my dad was involved in helping to organize, and my dad was a very staunch organizer, he was helping to organize um medical rights and vacation, vacation and sick leave for the workers of the plantation. And I remember two years old sitting on his lap and he's arguing with my grandfather, and my dad has tears in his eyes and he's sharing this story of his friend Masa and he's telling my grandfather, dad "You have to help management to understand that the workers need medical, free medical you know, work sponsored medical. They need vacation and they need sick leave time and not to be penalized for taking time off of work, Masa's wife has cancer. Masa has to work in order to pay the hospital and medical bills. He cannot take off from work because if he takes off from work he doesn't get paid." You know and then he shared about another family in the same kind of situation and he's begging my grandfather, you have to, you know your position in management you have to help

management to understand. You know and I'm seeing this as a kid and I'm watching this. You know and very passionate and I, I get to meet all of these workers too because my Uncle Richard comes home after work, and um everyday he comes home after work and my, my dad is off organizing right, but my Uncle Richard comes home and he's like filled with like you know his clothes um his dust and stuff like that and his shoes and he sits down on the back porch and you know he calls me "Hui come, come, come" everyday you know, and what it is, he plays at me, he wants me to take the strings off of his shoes and pull his shoes off and then take off his socks like that and then passes me his kaukau tin and in his kaukau tin is one piece of meat and a little bit of rice that he saved for me, and a piece of daikon. And everyday that's my reward for helping him, and he goes and he takes a shower and stuff and he changes his clothes and comes out and he grabs me by the hand and he goes "Kay lets go" so one day we go to the Filipino camp, another day we to the Chinese camp, another day to the Hawaiian camp, cuz there were those ethnic camps.

LT: Right.

KG: So in the Filipino camp they kneeled down in their hunches with the chickens and the looking and petting the chickens for you know chicken fighting and stuff like that. They don't have the chicken fights there but you know just sharing with each other about their chickens and stuff. And at the Filipino camp they feed me like bibingka and you know delicacies and desserts. When we would go to the Japanese camp I would get fruits like tangerines and stuff like that and at the Hawaiian camp I would get to play with kids you know, so that's how I get to meet all of these different people. Cuz we come out of the manager's house, yeah, the luna's house. You know it's different, it's different, it's closer to where the manager lives and stuff like that. But so I, I come from that kind of working class background and understanding working class struggle on the Portuguese side.

On the Hawaiian side it's tutu who teaches me you know like, I get sick, my parents used to send me all holidays and stuff like that as much as they could because tutu would request for me to come. I wasn't punahele meaning she didn't adopt me and keep me there, because my parents, especially my dad wouldn't allow for it. So you know so they would send me over for vacations, but from her I would learn um if I was sick or anything like that she would send me with my older um cousins um into the field in the back of her house to go pick lāʻau, and and I would learn how and she would always say "remember those are your friends who are there to help you heal, so be careful when you walk, you know be careful for how you pick them, and always ask for permission before you pick. And so my cousins would teach me and stuff like that, so that was the lāʻau lapaʻau side. When my parents were going through a divorce I was five years old and you know I didn't know all this stuff but apparently they had talked to my tutu and stuff like that and so she was very much involved in that, and then I became depressed of course, you know children a lot of time absorb some of that, that struggle and my tūtū I remember sitting me down in her living room with the lights and the terracing lamps you know on at dusk and we were sitting in her living room in Kailua-Kona overlooking the bay and stuff and sheʻs holding me as she says "you must forgive your parents, you must forgive your parents" and then five years old and I don't understand what that means.

And then she talks to me about Papa and Wākea, you know and basically she tells me that Papa and Wākea are our parents, Papa you know you walk on Papa all the time I told you about Papa and that's why you have to respect the ʻāina, the ground you walk on you know and Wākea is in the sky, and the air you breathe and the sun and the rain. She says "these are our parents, they will never ever leave us. They are your parents and they are the parents of your parents, your mama and your Papa you know. Your mama and your Papa will make plenty mistakes, plenty mistakes, because they're like children sometimes you know, they will make mistakes. But Papa and Wākea will always love you, just like you will always love your Papa and your Mama. You know, right now it's hard for them just like it's hard for you, but in order for you to feel them you have to feel better, you have to say "Mama and Papa, it's okay, it's okay I am okay, you know, I am okay, and let them be. That is what forgiveness is for you." That was the beginning of me understanding hoʻoponopono, and from there you know I learned more from her. Those things shaped my life yeah, that's what shaped my life.

Again my journey as a very very young kid I felt sometimes like I was a square peg going into a round hole, because I would be with other kids and be able to see things that they couldn't see, you know, because of what I was taught. Um and how I you know at a very young age I could remember, you know that far back, and it wasn't it wasn't remembering toys, it was remembering struggle, and so for long time I felt that and I became as a child growing up I became that person who would, who would protect the underdog in classes. You know if somebody was being picked on, you know I would go up to the person, the offender and say, "Leave that person alone" you know "Leave them alone", "Oh why why? Oh you like him, you like her?", you know that kind of stuff, and sometimes I would get aggressive and just grab that person and just say "I said to leave them alone" you know that type kinda thing. But you know for me it was hurtful to see people being harassed unnecessarily being picked on because of who they were or how they walked or what their color was or things like that. I also went to an elementary school um that was premised on the idea that and the public that was how the Hawaiʻi public school systems were run at one time. It was premised on the idea that Polynesians have smaller brains therefore they were less intelligent. So, it was the schools were like A, B, and C right, A class is the smarter class, B class average and C class the dumb class, right.

So you know so for me it's like people who look like me ended up in the C class. And all the Asians and Japanese were in the A class, and the leftover Asians were in the B class. My sister and I were in the A class because my dad was very much involved in with the school and close to the principal because they worked on a project in the community so we ended up in the A class, not that we were smart but that we had some kind of privilege what happened as a result of that, again you know I saw the discrepancy in the way people were treated and again as a child I took it upon myself, because I didn't see adults standing up for it so I took it upon myself to be that person to rescue other kids who were being picked on. It was in the fourth grade when I first noticed a young gay couple in school, I think they were in eighth grade you know, and I noticed them touching eachother and I was like fascinated by that. I was like wow you know I had never seen that before. Something stirred inside of me and I thought to myself "I want to be like that,

you know I want to be like that", that was different for me you know. And so it became and then I had my first crush on a girl and her name was Barbara [inaudible] and I was in the fifth grade and I was carrying her books and she didn't know I had a crush and she thought I was just a friend but I had crush on her and that was my only crush in school, after that I just like never paid attention to things just you know. I got into just being in school.

So that's kind of, that's kind of way back when the things that shaped me, and then when I was in high school I studied the Bolshevik revolution for history class, the Russian workers struggle. And then I asked the teacher if I could do a project for my grade, so the project I did my dad by this time was a contractor and building fences, industrial fences and things like that, and so he had workers who worked for him and stuff like that. My dad was a very kind man. I mean he hired people coming out of prison, he hired plantation workers who had retired but were still of an age where they wanted to work you know, so he hired these people. So what I did was, without his knowledge um I went and I interviewed his workers and um they knew who I was, that Jimmy's daughter, they knew who I was and so I told them that I was doing this school project and I had questions for them. They kind of laughed at me and I said "no seriously you know I wanna hear from you guys because what you have to say is really important" so I asked them I said "are you happy doing this work" and most of them said "yeah we're happy because we get paid" you know "It's a job you get paid, and your dad is good to us". And I said "wWell um is the pay enough?" and they kind of like looked at each other and said "Well we haven't, well we never get Christmas bonus last year, I hope we get Christmas bonus this year." And I said "How come that important?" and they said "oh we get kids and want to buy plenty Christmas present so we hope we get Christmas bonus."

And then I said "If there was something you guys could change, what would that be, to make you feel better about working" and they talked about riding home in the back of the truck, the pickup truck you know for some of them, you know one person driving one person in the front and maybe there's three sitting in the back, you know in the bed of the truck and it's raining and they're getting wet and they're like "So you know maybe we can have raincoats or something like that because we're getting all wet." And I say "Okay" so I would write this down and things like that and then "You know we never get raise long time, would be good if we get raise even twenty five cents an hour is good, if we get raise." Write this down you know that kind of stuff, so anything they told me you know I wrote the good stuff and I wrote the stuff they wanted. And when it was payday, my step mom, by this time my parents were divorced, my step mom was my dad's accountant, so she would always do the payroll at home in our dining room and stuff, and my dad would come in and tell her "Okay this is how many hours, this was this person, this person was asking for more this week and da da da da da, all that kind of stuff." So I waited, I knew that was going to happen so I waited until it was payday and when it was I came with my little book, my little tablet and I said "Dad um I have to talk to you" and he looked at me and goes "Not now I have to do the payroll" I say "But Dad this is about the payroll" and he looked at me like what are you talking about? And I said "Well it's about your workers, and they haven't had a raise in a long time." And he turned around and he looked at my mom and said "Can you tell this girl who puts the food in her mouth and a

roof over her head?" And I said, "Dad you have to listen to me because…" and then I started blurting off all these things and he looked at me and goes "Why are you doing this, why are you doing this?" and I say "Well you know besides the fact that its a school project" I said "Dad how different is this from when you told Grandpa about your friend Masa needing medical, you know from the plantations." And he looked at me and he said "Where did you get that from?" and I said "I got that from sitting on your lap at three years old and listening to you and seeing the tears come out of your eyes, you know and I got that from later on, workers getting sick leave and vacation benefits and medical benefits. That's where I got it from Dad, you taught me that." And the tears started to roll down his eyes, and that year his workers had Christmas bonus, and they got a raise.

LT: Wow.

KG: Yeah. And so you know from a very young age to that, that incident taught me that you can fight for something and you can get it. And when we were going through the LGBT struggle, I remembered that. You know that came back to me and gave me the impetus to keep going for the same sex marriage thing. It's like and my dad, my dad died, ah I can't remember what year he died but it was, it was a couple of years before we got same sex marriage, and before he died he said to me "Keep doing what you're doing, someday your people will get what you want." And I knew that even thought I hadn't come out to my father, I knew that he uh, cause he knew that I had been on the Commission for Same Sex Marriage and the Law, so for his birthday I gave him a copy of our findings of a book that we had put together. And at his birthday party he didn't acknowledge any of the other gifts, but he held it up for everybody to see and said "This is the most precious gift I have today." You know and because struggle and fighting for it meant a lot to him, that was his passion, yeah. And that was the gift he gave to me, so yeah.

LT: Wow.

KG: And my tūtū on the other hand gave me the gift of hoʻoponopono and so with my work with you know I worked in the field of mental health for many years before I came to the University of Hawaiʻi. For 19 years I worked in community mental health, women, single women with children, with families and then at the University of Hawaiʻi with counseling students. I wasn't technically a counselor at the University but because of my background and because of my knowledge and the skills I had, I used it. You know and to help students, I mean I saw the need and I knew that hey you know they're presenting right here right now why am I going to tell them go to the counseling center? You know. Where I can feel this, I can see this and I can help, right. You know what my tūtū taught me. I also was able to see that. This year the first Sunday in August I'm opening up my first hoʻoponopono class with six students. Um and it's part of the movement, the movement started by ʻAha Kāne, to put one haku hoʻoponopono in every Hawaiian family as a means of healing our nation. So myself, Earl Kawaʻa, Aunty Lynette Paglinawan, Dennis Kauahi, Carol Malina Kaulukukui, and what is her name? She's from the Big Island anyway. They already had they started their classes four years ago, I'm just coming into it now because I had to prepare myself for retirement. And so my first class, my first session, will be the first Sunday of August, and for the haumana I have six

haumana and for the haumana it's like a four to five year commitment, and its taught traditional style not University style you know, yeah. So that's who I am, that's what I am, that's where I came from.

LT: [laughs] Wow! It's so wonderful to hear how you know from such a young age, and then even just from the name you were given and how that has carried through your life and the work you've done and you know all the ways that you've committed yourself to continually helping like the underdog, yeah?

KG: Yes and it its always so comfortable doing that. It wasn't hard, it was like that was the right thing. The name also, I was involved in the Protect Kahoʻolawe ʻOhana in the early 90s and uh actually since ʻ88, and at one point and I was a spokesperson on Oʻahu because we had spokespersons on all the islands, and then what was happening was, what was happening also in the PKO was that although women were doing a lot of the work, the men were taking the front leadership and uh women were being made to be invisible. And so of course Kuʻumeaaloha being who she is started confronting that you know, these guys and it's like you know move over make room, we're here. That kinda stuff. We're not just gonna clean the dishes and set the table you know. Our manaʻo is important too. So that became sometimes very hard at meetings and I started getting sick. I started losing energy, my energy level was getting really really low, and I thought oh you know I must have something wrong so I went to the doctors, they couldn't find anything wrong. Took a lot of blood tests and everything, couldn't find anything wrong. But it's like my energy just wouldn't come up, so I contacted Uncle Danny Hanakahi, who was one of the kupuna who was always present in the Kahoʻolawe meetings and someone that I had formed a relationship with and he became kind of my spiritual mentor. And I called him up and I told him, "Uncle Danny you know I gotta come see you, somethings wrong" and so he said "Come get somebody to drive you up", he lived in Nānākuli and I lived in Kalihi. And when I got to Nānākuli I parked the car, you know Nānākuli Avenue right by the sidewalk by his house and I was getting out of the car and he comes out of his house and he goes, "E nei, go sit underneath outside underneath the mango tree, you know where," because that's where he and I would often meet. So I went out there I walked really slowly and felt very weak and sat out there for a little while, and finally he came out and he said to me "you know why it took long time for me to come out" I said "No" he goes "When I saw you I saws you come out of the car, I had to go back into the house for pule." He goes "because what I saw when you got out of the car was your ʻuhane above your head. It wasn't in your body. And what that told me is that your ʻuhane is getting ready to leave you. And when that happens you will hala, you know."

LT: Right.

KG: And of course the tears were coming down, and then he said, "but there's a way to fix this." And then he said, "You know your tūtū gave you the name Kuʻumeaaloha, and remember the "ha" in your name means that your place in life is to give life to others, to help, to heal others." He goes "In the PKO you really good." He says "You really good, you really strong, you come out really strong." He goes, "But what I see is like you, you

are fearless, you no scared confront people." He said "But you don't go afterwards. You don't go check in with them." He says "Not everybody is your enemy and that's what you need to learn. Your tūtū, your tūtū meant for you to know that you're a healer, you're not somebody who destroys people." So I took a break from the movement and for one year you know just kind of focused on myself and I came out of that, I came out of that feeling like that not everyone is an enemy, that there are commonalities that we just have to look for that you know. I mean people weren't very happy that I took a break, but it was my life or no life you know.

LT: Yeah.

KG: And yeah, so you know and it's like in Hawaiian you live your name. It's not given to you just like a decoration, yeah.

LT: Mhmm.

KG: So that was another incident, I sorry I talking too much.

LT: No no! I want to hear from you, you don't wanna hear from me. I don't wanna talk about myself. So, I am wondering now so, you're talking about PKO in 1988, just so I can like get the timeline in my head right. So, when were you born?

KG: Oh okay, I was born in 1945.

LT: Okay, I just wanna make sure I have the notes, I want to make sure that I get that.

KG: May, May 10th, 1945, so I just celebrated my 76th birthday!

LT: Wow! Happy belated birthday!

KG: Thank you thank you!

LT: And um, where did you go to high school?

KG: I went to Waipahu High School.

LT: Oh okay.

KG: I really wanted to go to Kamehameha and my fifth grade teacher Mrs. Mountain was, had approached my parents, my dad and my step mom, to tell them that she would help me get into Kamehameha cuz she really felt like you know like that you know she saw my potential and stuff, but my step mom had a real difficult time with acknowledging Hawaiians. In fact, we were not allowed to listen to Hawaiian music, we were not allowed to have Hawaiian friends, I was not allowed to contact my Hawaiian family, including my real mom you know. And that didn't happen until I was graduating from

high school and then I contacted my Hawaiian side of the family, cuz I wanted them at my graduation, but I did it without my parents knowing. Yeah.

LT: Mmmmm.

KG: So yeah, so I graduated from Waipahu High School and even then [laughs] in school I organized because I helped my friends, who some of them were on the football team and I would help them with their homework and then the boys would say "How can we help you?" and I said "Okay, you're going to organize. And I want you guys to help me you know, I want to create this new program" and so they helped to sign this petition to create a, what it called? But it wasn't a song leader or anything like that, it was like somebody who helped to coordinate the key readers, you know that kind of stuff. I forget what title it is, but the football players all signed this petition and we created a new position.

LT: Wow!

KG: And I became yeah, I became that person [laughs] and even the principal said told me "Where did you learn how to do this?" I said "Plantation days, plantation days." [laughs]

LT: And so then, after high school did you go to college after that or did you go to work?

KG: Oh okay. So I went to in high school I actually wanted to go to law school, I really wanted to go to law school but my English teacher talked me out of it and she said "You don't want to be an attorney they have high divorce rates you know you're very good with, you're very gentle and sensitive with people you should really become a nurse." [laughs] So that's what happened, I went to KCC [Kapiʻolani Community College] and they had a LPN program there

LT: Yeah! My mom did that!

KG: Ahh there you go yeah, KCC when it was by McKinley High School. So yeah I became an LPN um and then I worked at Waimano Training School & Hospital and got married in the meantime, had a child, and worked at Waimano Training School & Hospital and from 60...let's see I graduated in '65, so I worked there I think from '67 or '68 to 1970, and then I got a divorce and then I moved to Kauaʻi with my son and worked at Sam[uel] Mahelona Hospital and then, that's where I first got into community mental health because I worked at the Kauaʻi Community Mental Health Center, and Dr. Fred Weaver who was a psychiatrist and a real novelty on Kauaʻi, because he was Black, you know and on Kauaʻi which is a real conservative community [laughs].

LT: Yeah, yeah.

KG: It was real different yeah, and we became really good friends and he and I did weekly visits out to Taylor camp. And that was real fun doing house visits to Taylor camp and meeting people there and understanding their lifestyle and things like that. And then I also helped to I also helped to develop the first halfway house for challenged teenagers

and I helped to coordinate with the police department their domestic violence response teams. So on the police department I became known as a 007, anytime they had a call on the radio they said "pick up 007" [laughs] That was fun yeah so those that was fun times yea, there on Kauaʻi. Yea working at Sam[uel] Mahelona hospital I actually worked in geriatrics with the elderly, with kūpuna, and you know did things like you know really saw really understood you know how lonely sometimes the elderly could be. So I would climb into, I'm a nurse now, I would climb into bed and just hold them you know, just hold them yeah. Just love them and hold them like that and talk story with them, read stories with them or sing in their ear, especially the ones who were really advanced and I knew they were going already and it's like, and no family around. And it's like you know give a little, give a little.

So like that yeah. I was in my twenties then, because I came back to Oʻahu when I was I think 30...31 or 32 around there. And then I went to work for Leeward Mental Health and ended up working at Waiʻanae Mental Health Center and the way that happened was, I was working at Leeward Mental Health Center with the statewide children's mental health change, so we were doing a lot of schoolwork with children and then I was also doing parenting classes and the center had been contacted by Lualualei and a group of women in Lualualei who were you know military wives and they wanted to understand better adjusting as parents to living in Hawaiʻi. So I became that person assigned to work with them and that led me into another thing [laughs], I was working with them and one of the things I understood about and I had already gone through some training for group facilitation, and so one of the things I understood is that when working with groups, groups tend to coalesce after so many weeks, and then you can insert some challenges for them so that they're, so that you can promote more group development and personal development.

Well one of the things I noticed was that that coalescing wasn't happening so I said to the my person that was helping me out who happened to be a haole woman that they had assigned to me from the base, and I said to her you know I shared my perspective with her and I said "I think this has to do with the fact that Iʻm Native Hawaiian" and she said "you think so?" and I said "I think so" you know because they're looking at me and they're not opening up and I think they really don't know who I am, so I'm going to put it to them and see what happens. So the next session, I just put it out to them and I said "I wonder" you know I said "you're not getting close but I don't feel the trusting atmosphere in here between you and I'm wondering if that is because of who I am as a Native Hawaiian" and that did it. That just boom just broke open everything and they talked about how when their husbands were assigned here they were taken to Fort Ruger and they went for an orientation center, session, with the basic commander who said to them "The people here in Hawaiʻi, especially Native Hawaiians do not like you. Do not take your children into the community to any playground, to the beaches, to the theatres, to the school, because you will get beaten up." And so they said to me "So what are you doing here conducting this session if you hate us so much?" and I mean I was just flabber-I was floored when they told me that and then I said to them, this is right around the time that Kahoʻolawe was, it was one of the RIMPAC exercises it was just gonna start, and so I talked to them about RIMPAC and I said "It's not you, it's not you

personally, it's the system you know this military system, that the American system that has done this to our people, not you personally" so I talked about that and just not here in Hawai'i, and I talked about the atom bomb going off in the Bikini Islands and the babies being born without bones and stuff like that and this woman stood up and I always wondered who she was, because she came in with a uniform every single session. She stood up and she said to me "I am from the Commander's office and this is exactly what we've been waiting for, we knew that you would take this opportunity to propagandize our women and you have thirty minutes to get off this base or you will be arrested. I'm going to leave now and return with the MPs." And I was like holy, so my first thought was number one I need to get off the base, but number two I got to take care of these women, cuz I cannot leave them just boom like that. So she left the room, I pulled the women back together again and I said "I'm sorry that this has happened but I want to make sure you're safe you know before I leave" and they were crying and some of them said "Thank you so much for sharing what you did, I didn't know" one of the women said "My husband holds a very high position here and he never told me about any of this, but you can be very sure I'm holding this baby in my stomach and tonight I am having a discussion with him" you know. And they all hugged me and you know things like that and they said it was something that they really learned and they thanked me for that. I left the base, Lani, and I went in Nānākuli and I went straight to the Nānākuli Beach, and I sat there on the sand and I just cried.

Cuz I thought to myself "This small little me, spoke truth to power and now I'm going to be banned by, from the base you know. And this little little me" and I was just like "this little little me" and I was talking to God and I was like "God why, why?" you know, this is so unfair and then I got in my car and I drove back to the Leeward Mental Health Center in Pearl City. When I got off the elevator I knew something was wrong, because usually when I come off the elevator it leads right into the reception area and everyone's like "Hi welcome back", the whole place was quiet, nobody said anything. I went into my office and my boss immediately came in and said "What the hell did you do?" and I looked at him and said "What are you talking about?" and she said "The governor got a call, the mayor got a call, the head of the divisions got a call, the head of the center got a call" you know "what have you done?" and I looked at her and I said "I spoke truth to power, there something wrong with that?" and I was scared I mean I was shaking cuz I thought oh shit I'm going to get fired right there you know, and then she said "I'm not finished with you and she walked out of the office" and I picked up the phone and I called the union, UPW, and I told him what happened, they immediately sent someone out the next morning and met with my boss and told her, the three of us sat down, and it was John Wittick and he said to her "If you're on a witch hunt, you better stop right now because she's protected and she's done nothing wrong." And then a few days later, then I talked to Hayden Burgess Poka Laenui, and I told him what happened and he laughed, I'm crying and he's laughing and he tells me "Congratulations" I said "About what?" he said "You just became part of the club" I said "What club?" he says "Do you know there's a worldwide club that people being banned from military bases and everybody celebrate, everybody celebrates that, so we add your name to that, yea" and in a few days I received my banned letter, and in a few days Poka Laenui said "Frame it". [laughs] But yeah, so that was the other thing that happened, and that was what propelled me into the

PKO, was that. Then I had people from the PKO calling me up "Congratulations" and "Come join us!" you know that kinda stuff, yeah.

LT: Wow.

KG: Lots of stories.

LT: I love hearing all these stories, I wanna be mindful of your time cause you did say we would maybe talk for an hour. So I don't want to keep you too much longer.

KG: I'm fine.

LT: Are you fine?

KG: I'm okay.

LT: Cause then I was gonna start asking you questions about kinda like coming out kinds of questions.

KG: Okay.

LT: You know what it was like, so you talked about having a crush on your friend in fifth grade but what it was like later when you started to come out or you know try to meet people and things like that and what time period that was in and you know what that was like?

KG: So basically what happened was I tried getting married in a heterosexual marriage but it didn't work because I always kept thinking of females it was confusing for me right, it was confusing. So and there was no community here that I was attached to, and it wasn't until I went to UCSF, I was at UCSF for about a year and a half in a program there for minorities in research careers and of course you know in San Francisco then you get involved in the community, in the in the gay community there and so that's where I met many women and that's when I began to like look and listen and observe [laughs] and feel good you know. And then because of the PKO I came home, and I was using language like lesbians, and like Davianna McGreggor said to me "Why, why are you using that word?" and I said "Because that's who we are" and she said "Who's we?" and I said "Me, like me. I'm lesbian" and she goes "You're lesbian?" and I said "Yes, yes. I'm a gay woman" and in Hawai'i we use "gay women" you know, gay men, we don't say "lesbians" and, and even Emmett. Emmet said to me "Why are you using that word?" and I said "Because I am, yeah" and then because of the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific Movement I was sent to Aotearoa and for their, the Waitangi, the Waitangi march representing Hawai'i and all these activists. And I was representing, I was one of them representing Hawai'i, and I, and they had me staying with the women there you know and I didn't know the women, I didn't know the women who were gay until eventually I found out [laughs] and what happened I was I got the flu. I ended up getting the flu while I was there and so these two women, like one on each side of me kept me warm and stuff

like that and would just like you know comb my hair back with their hands and massage me and stuff and just so loving you know that I felt inside of me like something breaks inside of me you know and I imagined it to be like chains that had kept me you know just kept me like really from expressing myself just break open. Yeah. And I felt this tremendous love from other women and they began to talk to me about you know "We notice, we know that you're, you know you're lesbian like us, you're a dyke" they used the word "dyke". They said "We know that you're a dyke like us, it's just that you haven't been expressing it" you know that kind of stuff. Nobody put the make on me or anything, they were just expressing all this love and taking care of me. And you know and that's when I really really started coming out.

And when I came home after that, it was, that was when I was like out there you know expressing myself more you know as Hawaiian and being gay and there's no stops after that. You know reaching out to different women, but I did not want, I couldn't, the white women in the community didn't resonate with me, you know as a woman of color, so it was looking for other women of color. And there was you know there was some Asian women that I met and other women and there were butchy kine women, you know Hawaiian butchy kine women, but I'm not a butchy type so I was scared and distant and kind of watched them and it's like "Okay I no like get too near them, you know, that's too aggressive for me." So that's what happened and then you know through the community, just the women of color gay community who happened to be a little shyer, more private. I was I would be the one talking politics and stuff like that and they would be like "wow Kuʻumeaaloha you really out there eh" you know that kinda stuff. Then eventually forming Nā Mamo o Hawaiʻi, yea. Nā Mamo o Hawaiʻi was formed in response to a voice of gay people for the sovereignty movement and at the same time for the same-sex marriage hearings. And we became very visible, very verbal you know in the community, so that's what happened.

LT: Were you scared to do that? To form Nā Mamo, I mean.

KG: Nope. Nope.

LT: To be very public that way?

KG: It was, it was really, because remember now I came out of San Francisco, right?

LT: Right.

KG: I was in San Francisco where I saw a lot of that kind of organizing going on, so I knew what had to be done. Yeah and I felt like you know it was my place to do it. Now remember this goes all the way back to my childhood you know.

LT: Yeah.

KG: So those places, those early places, right of confronting the need for peace and justice. So it was easy for me and talking to others who were where it was less easy, but knowing

how to talk to them about the need to put their voices out, yeah? That for peace and justice, I couldn't do it by myself and we needed all these voices and stuff. And well that's what happened. Yeah and then Amy Agbayani was actually the one who was responsible for me getting onto the Commission for Same-Sex Marriage and the Law. Cuz I had said to her one day "I'd like to be a commissioner" and she said cause you know she was close to Ben Cayetano, and she goes "Really?" like where...and I say "I don't know where but one day I'd like to be a commissioner" and so when you know when they were forming this commission, she called Ben and told Ben to call me. And so that's what happened, and I became a Commissioner on Same-Sex Marriage and the Law. The chairperson was Tom Gill. Little did I know that Tom Gill and my dad had been friends when they were younger.

So my dad, to watch this from a distance, made him feel so proud that his daughter was working with somebody that he had a lot of respect for on a peace and justice issue. And then, and the same sex marriage hearings, and of course it was really hard listening to all of that those bigoted comments and stuff like that, what made it easy was seeing the Nā Mamo people sitting in the front, the two front rows you know just sitting there and shaking their heads or looking at me sometimes and smiling, you know because there's a commissioner sitting there and its just like, you just wanna burst out, you know you can't of course. You just have to allow people to talk and say what they gotta say. But the Nā Mamo folks were just like, I mean they had committed themselves to coming out, and they did. You know some of them, you know expressed that they never even knew that they would ever do that. And the courage they had it was just amazing, yeah. So and the same thing in the Hawaiian sovereignty movement, you know people like um Kekuni Blaisdell, Aʻo Pohaku, um whoʻs that guy from Waimānalo, he was another one...um [pause] oh shucks he's really, he's very popular and has that land up there.

LT: Oh, Bumpy?

KG: Bumpy. Bumpy Kanahele. Yeah, those three were the three that really welcomed the gay community into the sovereignty movement, yeah. And they, they sort of gave people um yea and they were just, I mean, for them it was hands down of course. You know they understood that it wasn't an issue, we didn't come to them with an issue, it was just that you know, we want to sit at the table too. Cuz what was, and then what happened was there was pushback, right there was pushback in the white gay community, there was pushback in the sovereignty community for gay people to be at the table. Not that we wanted to raise our issues, it's just that recognize that in our community we have, there is homophobia and if we gonna form a nation let's not replicate that, you know, you know that kinda stuff. And that's basically what we were saying. What happened was because we came out like that, there were women, Hawaiian women whose husbands were leaders in the sovereignty movement who were coming up to us and saying "We're so happy, we're so happy that you're out there because spouse abuse is a really big issue in the sovereignty movement" and they talked about their husbands beating them up you know, or child abuse you know that kind of stuff.

LT: Right.

KG: I mean it was like holy cow, you know. And so we knew we had to take that then to the men you know and say to them "hey this is a real issue" and of course they were like "oh spouse abuse is not an issue, we talking about sovereignty and land here you know not that kine stuff, that's" and it was like no, no, no, no, no. This is an issue because again if we gonna form a nation we cannot have this.

LT: Right, right.

KG: Why do you think America has, you know why do you think America has passed laws against beating up children? Because it's an issue, they wouldn't do it unless it's an issue. Why do you think there's Planned Parenthood and you know and DVAC and all that? It's because it's an issue. You cannot deny that it's not an issue and we're not going to allow you to sweep it under the carpet, yeah. So, so that's, that's what happened in the sovereignty movement and then our response to that was of course the ʻAe Like decision making process, that we worked on for a whole year, and then took it in the Pūwalu to all the different communities, cause we wanted buy in from everybody. And the kūpuna were just really into it, in fact, in fact they were the ones that gave it the name ʻAe Like. It's like this is Hawaiian, cause we had consensus decision making process, said no change it to ʻAe Like. And it was really interesting because, because it was a decision-making process to make room at the table for all voices, and we started hearing from uncles and the community fishermen were like "You mean I can talk, you mean I can talk now. I thought that was only for the attorneys and the people at the University, they the ones who talk all the meetings. We no talk we just sit there and listen. And we would say "No uncle, this is your turn. You can talk, in this process it's set up so you can sit at the table." And they were like "Wow I can talk now" you know and the kupuna were like "Yeah you know those gay people they so good, you know those gay people they bring this stuff so everybody can talk" it was so funny because at first they talked about us like we were from a different planet, you know. "The gay people, it's the gay people" [laughs]

LT: [laughs] Yeah!

KG: Yeah [laughs]. But anyways, they said it with affection, and afterwards it was like "wow" everybody wanted to take pictures with us and stuff like that and they would talk about you know the grandkids, or somebody they knew who was māhū and stuff like that. You know it became, you know people could then freely speak about it being gay and you know having māhū grandkids or sons or daughter or whatever you know, and that they didn't just play music, they were smart people they were lawyers, professors, whatever you know that kinda stuff. So anyway it was yeah and so the ʻAe Like continues to be used today, in fact Noe Goodyear-Kaʻōpua went through the process a while back with Hālau Kū Mana, we did a circle for them and taught them how to use it and then, I just, myself and Monoiki Ahnee from Nā Mamo we just did a session with Noe's class, on zoom just last week.

LT: Yeah she told me about it, and then she actually told me, cause I told her oh I was gonna talk to you soon, and she wanted to share with me the video from her class but she, but

she told me to get permission from you so I was gonna ask you if she could share the video with me.

KG: You're actually getting more information than came out in the video.

LT: Yeah. [laughs]

KG: Cause the video was our first time doing that and it was kinda eh yea, yea.

LT: Oh okay.

KG: So it was kinda like, it's good that you're following coming on because doing it with her was like the cobwebs, the cobwebs were still there you know. So a lot of the stuff cleared away and now it's kinda like more, more, more clear, the more I do it the clearer it gets because it's been so long.

LT: Oh, lucky me then! Alright, I think that...let me see, I think that this may be a good moment to stop for now

KG: Okay.

LT: And then if you're open if we can make another appointment to talk.

KG: Sure.

LT: More about kind of the ins and outs of the working on the commission and you know that time where everything was so intense more, yea?

KG: Okay sure. That'll be good, that's a good thing to talk about, cause I never talked about the commission work and how challenging that was and you know being a person of color and being Hawaiian in Hawai‘i

LT: Yeah.

KG: Yeah, okay. The gay community also you know, you know my perspective of sexuality is very different from white perspective, American perspective.

LT: Mhmmmm.

KG: Yea so wanting to make it just their way, it was challenging to translate that, it's like. And for the white gay community it was, well we can talk about that anyway that's another story [laughs] It's another hour.

LT: Yeah. And I wanna give you more time today and maybe you know you can think about it and then I can do a little more research but when would be good for you at a, I know

you're very busy caring about all this stuff you're doing still yet. So when would a good time be for you

KG: This time is a good time you know, like today was a good time.

LT: Yeah, Thursday at 11?

KG: Okay, that'll be fine. Did you know that today is um the celebration of gay pride? The beginning of gay pride celebrating gay pride month in June.

LT: Oh pride month, yes, yea I saw it on my phone [laughs] I told my, my Apple news told me. [laughs] But I, you know I thought it was cause I was at the store, I was at Target, and there was like this huge and I was like "woooow".

KG: Woooow. Oh maikaʻi. I was talking to Hoku Akiu because after I talked to you I started calling different people to ask if they would mind you know being interviewed by you and Hoku Akiu was one of them and then we talked about, we hadn't talked to each other for a longtime and we had run into each other sometimes but um and said "Hoku you know what would be really good, you know after COVID open up and stuff like that and don't have to do that? Um we should be in a gay pride parade all us Hawaiians and go get one trolley"

LT: Yeah!!!

KG: "Under the banner: He Hawaiʻi Māhū" [laughs] "He Hawaiʻi Māhū Kūpuna" yeah you know.

LT: Yeah you should!

KG: Kupuna and we get one trolley with Hawaiian music and stuff and he goes "yea shoots man we should do that!" I said yea would be maikaʻi, would be good fun.

LT: [laughs] Yeah.

KG: Okay, so Thursday 11 o'clock.

LT: Yes, that's good?

KG: Good

LT: Well mahalo nui for talking to me, it's just a blessing to have this opportunity, I really appreciate it.

KG: Kay thank you, I hope you getting something out of this, I hope it's useful.

LT: Yes! I get plenty. Yes yes yes!

KG: Okay.

LT: Yes I am.

KG: Okay maikaʻi. Alright Lani thank you for giving me the opportunity you know um, what's really interesting, the COVID experience has prevented us opportunities and one of those opportunities of course is being able to reflect, because a lot of isolation is stuff. So its like not talking to anybody else you talking to yourself.

LT: Yeah.

KG: And as a kupuna now, one of the things I realized is, and especially being Hawaiian kupuna, it's like for us to, for us to evolve into another world, that other world where we pass on, its like and I've always always been told this, by kupuna: we have to make ourselves light, you know. And you make yourself light by sharing your ʻike, yeah. And so this and I really really thank you because you know what you folks are giving us is an opportunity to leave this behind you know, we can't take this with us, and we need to leave it behind, leave our moʻolelo behind. Yeah.

LT: Mhmmmm.

KG: So others can learn, yea. So thank you, thank you for the opportunity.

LT: It's the least, it's the least that I can do [laughs]. Mahalo nui.

KG: So we'll see you on Thursday at 11 o'clock.

LT: Thursday, yep. Mahalo.

KG: Mahalo, a hui hou!

LT: Mahalo, a hui hou!