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 3, 2021
BY: Lani Teves (LT)

KG: Aloha Lani.

LT: Aloha Kuʻumeaaloha, pehea ʻoe?

KG: [laughs] Maikaʻi nō, mahalo. A ʻo ʻoe?

LT: [laughs] Maikaʻi, maikaʻi, um are you having a nice morning, sort of?

KG: Yes, I just came shoot back from our walk, two mile walk, two and a half miles. And so I made my dogs breakfast and I made my breakfast and I'm sitting down having it and waiting for you to call.

LT: Oh okay [laughs]. Okay well here I am.

KG: Wait, could I, you know the other day you were talking about wanting to get some timeline stuff, right so?

LT: Yeah.

KG: I wanted to make a correction here, in 1980, 1986, between 1986 and 1988 was when I went to Aotearoa to participate in the Waitangi March and was introduced to the Māori dykes, that's who hosted me yea. It was there, it was there that I first really felt that that attachment to women, that whole thing that, that chain inside of me just broke. And then in 1990 was when I went to San Francisco to UCSF.

LT: Okay.

KG: And then became involved in the lesbian community there, the difference between the two communities in Aotearoa, it was, it was more conservative in terms of women with women in traditional, I would say traditional homosexual relationships, in other words not sharing not having multiple partners and stuff like that, in San Francisco it was different. In San Francisco it was, it was it was very creative, relationships were very creative. So in other words, a woman could be married to a man and have a female partner, you know.

LT: Right, right.

KG: And I would see that and I was like, cause I knew this woman who was married to this guy she was an attorney, we would go to women's parties and there she would be with another woman, and I was like what. And when I got to know her better we were able to talk and she said "Yes my husband is aware of my female relationship, the agreement is as long as we don't show this in front of him, and were not in his circle of friends." You know that kind of stuff.

LT: Yeah.

KG: We had S & M relationships, you know different kinds of partnering is what I saw in San Francisco, um which was really different from Aotearoa. So I was exposed to all this difference and then when I came home it's like, it's like time to come out. It's like I could no longer remain in the closet, it was too oppressive. Yea. It was too oppressive and I couldn't express myself. Now what kept me there all of these years is that I came out of a very strong Catholic family. In our family we had a nun and a priest, right and my aunt who was a nun, we had two nuns! And my aunt who was a nun wanted me to go into the convent when I was a freshmen in high school, and I remember crying during the summer like "I don't want to do that" you know.

LT: [laughing]

KG: Fortunately my parents didn't agree [laughs]. So the Catholics upbringing you know kind of like restricted me to, from, you know being around people who were gay and stuff because the language that we had at that time, and especially if you were Catholic. Um yea. Okay so that was what I wanted to.

LT: That was really great, that's great. I appreciate that because I was gonna actually ask about that because I, uh, was doing more research about you [laughs] and I found a magazine from a Māori I guess women's magazine that had in in Broadsheet, that had an interview of you in it.

KG: I remember that.

LT: Yea and so I found that and then I wanted to talk to you more about it and you kinda just answered it actually

KG: [laughs]

LT: About like you know how important it was to be at the march and be cared for, because I remember last time you said you got sick, and so they were you know these Māori dykes were taking care of you and making you better, and then it was after that where you were kinda like you know just felt this connection with women and you were like "I cannot do this anymore I'm just gonna you know break the chain" and so I was gonna ask you about that.

KG: Right, the thing in Aotearoa that I saw too was, cause a lot of the women had love for eachother that was so intense, just not just the dyke relationships, but women in general supporting women. So for instance, while I was there I got to experience this, how women organized about a woman who was experiencing in spouse abuse. So after the march we were in Matarawa, one of the women who is heterosexual invited us, some of us to stay at the Matarawa farm, their farm, her and her husband, to r&r. And while we were there we got word that one of the women, heterosexual women with her husband and a, and two children, had been beaten by her husband. The call went out in both the dyke and the heterosexual community, and women held meetings and what they did was um a group of women were assigned to go to support the woman, the victim, and they took over her house, they kicked the guy out, took over her house. Not only did they kick the guy out, they had met with their husbands and told them what had happened and held the husbands accountable for taking care of that guy. And the husbands held meetings to hold him accountable, the women took over the house, took over the you know massage this woman back to health, cleaned her house, washed the clothes, everything, took care of the children so she could just heal you know. And they spent time with her, listening letting her cry you know that kind of stuff. Another group of women went and met with his boss where he works.

LT: Wow.

KG: Some of them carried picket signs: this establishment hires wife beaters, in the front of the establishment. So they could hurt the guy's pocketbook, right. And there, so that they could have a meeting with the boss. They met with him and they said we don't want you to fire him because he needs this job to support his family. What we want you to do is we want you to hold him accountable and let him know that you do not condone that kind of behavior you know, and that you will be monitoring him, that's what we want you to do. So it was that kinda stuff you know that I never saw happening here in Hawai‘i

LT: Right.

KG: And when I came back, I was involved in the PKO women's group here on O‘ahu. Haunani-Kay, Mililani Trask, Anette Menke, Pi‘ikea Miyamoto, , Marion Kelly, all of us and I shared with them what happened, what I saw you know and Haunani-Kay says "We need to name ourselves wahine koa" [laughs] "and we need to be the women warriors and we need to do that kinda thing" but it just so happened that one of the women in the group, her husband was having an affair with another woman, and she was hurting you know and so and so we decided were gonna go meet with him and gonna confront him and tell him that he's got to cut it out. And we did and we did and he was so pissed. Anyway, so he called Sol Niheu and tells Sol Niheu that these women are out of control. You know and we just met with him and da da da da da, so Sol meets with us and were like "You know this is not your business, you should be holding him accountable" like that kinda stuff. So we became known as these kind of terroristic women. [laughs]

But it was, it came out of the Aotearoa experience. But that that didn't go too far, but it did raise consciousness with the women in terms of there's a way to organize women,

there's a way to organize amongst our friends you know who we see as happening, we don't need to allow it to condone it. And the need for us to support DVAC.

LT: Yeah.

KG: Better, yeah that kinda stuff. So that's one of the things that we derived from the women in Aotearoa. I didn't bring home anything except the use of the language lesbian from San Francisco because I wouldn't bring home all of the expressions of partnership. [laughs]

LT: [laughs] Yeah the Hawaiians not ready for that.

KG: No, they would ship me off back to San Francisco, out of here [laughs].

LT: Oh I love that you like learned so much in Aotearoa and like brought that back and like just thinking about our broader Pacific connections and how it's actually that relationship or seeing that too and them seeing you recognizing you as a dyke [laughs] and then being able to like have self-growth because of seeing each other in that way. I love that, so that kinda connects to the question I wanted to ask kinda more broader is so how do you see your sexuality and spirituality connected to being like a Hawaiian.

KG: In a Hawaiian sense I always had a hard time with, I had a hard time with the lesbian thing and just being lesbian, because moe aku moe mai, it's like Hawaiian sexuality is expressed in a spectrum, it's not just, were not meant to be in boxes, right the labels that's really a western concept, you know to set people apart, so I always had a difficult time with that which is why I had a difficult time in same-sex marriage project because of the labels that they used and the failure to recognize that Hawaiians, you know being here in Hawai‘i, in Hawaiian culture express sexuality in a very different way. The gay movement was always trying to make Hawaiians fit into their boxes and we didn't fit. So you know so so that's kind of how I always saw things and I never really, I never really, at first because of my experience in these other places I saw myself as lesbian, and then later on I saw myself as expanding. You know I could do whatever I wanted to do, I was not meant into a boxes, into the box that was created for me. I had to take those walls down and just express myself on a very broad spectrum, to have the freedom to do that, you know for my soul, so my soul could be happy. And what feeds my soul, what feeds my na‘au, what makes me comfortable in terms of who I am, and it's the spectrum of expression of sexuality, the spectrum of expression of who I am. I hope that answers your question.

LT: Yeah.

KG: Yeah.

LT: I remember I was talking about this and somebody said something similar.

KG: The other thing too is our people, our Hawaiian people always looked to nature for their answers, you know like I always wondered where did they get, how did they know you know how did they get the design for kapa?

LT: Mhmmm.

KG: And it came from plants you know, it came from plants. Cutting a stem, and that when you cut the stem there's this design in the stem, right. Or you're looking at the leaves and the shapes of leaves and things like that, and then I began to look at sexuality in the same way. Looking to nature is like looking at how plants are mating, looking to plants, you know to see when a seed germinates with another seed you know that kind of stuff, and you know that's how my mind works, seeing that kind of thing and um and not necessarily looking at books but looking to nature you know what I mean, where are the expressions, why is this so different, what what causes this thing to look this was, this different from this. And I would giggle to myself and I would say oh this is the homosexual group and this is the heterosexual group, the homosexual group is more beautiful than the heterosexual group you know [laughs] and I was just kinda giggle about that um but yeah that's yeah. Okay.

LT: Yeah, I like that, it reminds me of something um I read that um I think you said at like a maybe a forum that was at Hawaiian Studies, where you said um "you know Hawaiians had all these different ways of expressing themselves and relating to each other and to nature but then what has happened is that we've had a mahele of our bodies.

KG: Right.

LT: Yeah, and I, I was wondering if you could maybe say a little bit more about that because it's such a powerful statement.

KG: So, so in the Māhele Hawaiians were asked to register their land so again it's like register your land, and then it's about being put in boxes, right.

LT: Right .

KG: So it sets you apart from other people, those who have those who don't have. You create those fences around you know, so I register my land before I have and that kinda stuff and you know not everybody could do that because not everybody could read, not everybody could go to where officials said you had to go to register stuff. So again it's like all of these barriers were put up you know for people, the same way with our bodies right. Our bodies are not meant again to be put in chains, our bodies are not meant to be restricted you know, our bodies are meant for us to be very expressive, Hawaiians were like that right. It was hot, so we were intelligent people [laughs].

LT: [laughs]

KG: So we never like wear clothes, cause it was hot, you no wear clothes you no need put nothing on you know. You know how clothes, you know how to regulate the temperature you know what to wear, what not to wear, until we were told "you gotta clothe because these people over there come with their clothes up to their necks and their around their wrists and whatever you know", they're afraid of looking at you because you know heaven forbid that they should be asked to take off their clothes so you know so it's you know that's, that's to me it was an expression of the mahele of our bodies, the restriction of our bodies, the control of our expression of our bodies, that's what that was about. Whereas before we didn't have to have that ownership, now, now because of these western concepts you know that is based on economy and ownership you know all the sudden now we're being restricted in the way we express ourselves and allow our bodies to be.

LT: Mahalo, mahalo. I think that's a good segway to start talking about the LGBT Commission.

KG: Okay. That was a hard one.

LT: You told me, so last time you told me that you told Amy Agbayani that you wanted to be a commissioner, why did you want to be a commissioner?

KG: Because when I was working in Waiʻanae, the Waiʻanae Mental Health Center, one of the things I realized is that, and I was working as a mental health counselor and working with people, and you know we had a lot of homeless in Waiʻanae at that time cause they not, this was in the 70s yeah and there's a lot of evictions going on and stuff and you know I used to take the kids to go and watch the police evicting you know sometimes their relatives, stuff like that.

LT: Right.

KG: You know so they could talk about it cuz it was traumatizing and I knew here I was in a mental health center it's like I'm not gonna sit down and talk to them like "Okay why, why is this toy not relating to that toy and what is this drawing about." No. I wanted to take them to see the real thing and be able to express themselves and be in touch with their feelings. So we saw a lot of that going on, and one of the things that happened is the result of that and looking around and seeing you know the discrepancies between, like the school in Waiʻanae, I remember being asked to come and do a presentation and I go into this classroom and its hot and so um the teacher had left the classroom to me and had gone off to the office so I said to the kids "Oh can you guys open the windows back there in the back door?" And they go "Miss we can't do that" and I said "No, no its okay I'm in charge of the classroom you can do it" they go, "No miss you don't understand, its nailed shut." I said, "What?" They said, "The door is nailed shut and those back windows are nailed shut." I said, "Why?" "Oh because the door is broken and the windows are broken." And another place I went to, which was the class was held in this part of the gym, the kids were sitting on tires.

LT: Mmhmmm.

KG: I mean it's a classroom, they're sitting on tires. I said "Where's your chairs?" "Well no more enough chairs so we gotta sit on the tires." and um, "Where's your books and pencils?" "Oh we no more books and pencils" you know I mean that's what I saw when I was in Waiʻanae you know and that wasn't happening in town, and yet it was happening out there.

LT: No.

KG: And one of the things I realized that people who make a difference are those people who who, you know who are involved in policy making and that's why I wanted to be on a commission, cuz I didn't want to leave my job, but I thought being on the commission was one way of making a difference, yeah. And to give voice to those places that that where you needed to illuminate the light in, and you know be able to speak for those who weren't at the table, be able to speak for themselves. And that was the other thing too, it was like you know in our society often times its those with privilege who speak for those who don't have privilege and we never ask you know we make the policies and the rules you know for those who are the most affected yet they're not at the table to speak for themselves. You know and we see them as the victims yet you know yet we don't allow them to express their power, in fact we render them powerless by continuing to keep them as victims, yea. So that's why I wanted to become a commissioner.

LT: Mhmm, mhmmm. Okay. Are there some like key memories you have of being on the commission? I read the report yesterday and um the, the second half of the report, the minority report is pretty terrible [laughs].

KG: I know.

LT: Yeah so what was it like to have to deal with all of that?

KG: Well first of all for me on the commission, I felt like a fish out of water. Because some of those people were way more experienced than I was and I, I come out of community and most of them were directors, politicians, you know and they come out of that kind of professional kind of setting and I was the one who was, who you know came out of community, and also from the gay community. So it was, it was difficult often times for me to keep up with them in the discussions and um trying to balance what are we doing here and what works and where is my value and how can I contribute you know that kinda stuff. So following along and because I come from that perspective of you know always making sure that there that people have voice and ability and that their stories are validated that was, you know that was, that's my value, that's the place I come from. And I'm sitting at the table talking policies you know and it's like, wow this is what that's about yeah. I don't know if I want to be in that arena, so that was one thing and the second thing was, the most horrific, was sitting through all of the testimony, you know sitting through the testimony from the far right. That was soooo so hard. It was like, it was like being punched over and over and over again and you couldn't do anything. And

the, the horrendous things that they were saying you know it made me feel like I mean I used to think "Who is their Jesus?"

LT: Right.

KG: You know, because their Jesus is not my Jesus. You know my Jesus is compassionate, my Jesus is loving, you know my Jesus cares. You know my Jesus wouldn't use words like this but you know things like you know "these people are an abomination to society and to the human race" and I'm like "who are you talking about" they're talking about me, they're talking about my community and its like you know I would put my head down and I would just say to myself "where do they get this from, how do, how did they come up with this?" I mean but it was a theme, you know, it was like they were from a different world and this was the language they spoke and it was you know, I mean they came out of the churches and they were captive audiences and so this was the language, and over and over again and they were bussed in by the busloads. You know their only purpose there was to take up space and to testify and get on record and say this horrible thing about other human beings that they know nothing about, you know. And that was the hard part, that was the really really hard part.

But I remember at one point, going up to Mike Gabbard, I watched him and he was a leader and I told myself you know "How do, how do I what do I do so that I don't carry this animosity for these people, what do I do so that I can see past the rhetoric and see them as human beings also, who are the victims of their own captivity in the organized religion?" You now and Mike Gabbard you know was a very outspoken person and a leader and, and he was there all the time you know, he was in the legislature and he sat there in the hearings all the time, and I would watch him and I would listen to him talk sometimes and so one day I got up and I went to him and I said "Mike you know who I am. And I know who you are. And I just want to tell you that I don't hate you, but I admire you" and he looked at me and I said "What I admire is the commitment you make to what you believe in and how you stand by that, I may not agree with you but I admire the leadership you have, and I wanted you to know that" and I could just see him melt you know, he went from this, he went from this you're gonna fight with me kind of thing to him just melting. You know and after that whenever he saw me, he would come up to me and he would talk to me, very respectfully and very quietly and not have that facade of fighting and not ever using rhetoric with me, you know. So those were kind of the three things I got out of that, and then of course you know the courage um the intelligence, the insight of people like Nancy Kreidman you know who really carried a lot of this and Tom Gill, you know those are the two on our side that I really really remember doing a lot of work and working hard and there's one more person and I forget, but I forget his name. Anyway you know they worked really hard, and they were heterosexual and their commitment to peace and justice was just so overwhelming, um and you know and how fortunate we our, I felt how fortunate we are to have these people you know working for the betterment of our community in Hawai‘i, the nation and the world. And then I was just so proud of them and so proud that I was there with them, so humbled that I was there with them.

LT: Last time you also talked about how Nā Mamo would come to the hearings, to just hold space yea

KG: Yes.

LT: And so was Nā Mamo was there other like community groups that would always come just to like show presence?

KG: Sometimes it was the LGBT center, is that what it's called I forgot what it was called.

LT: Oh yeah.

KG: Yeah, but not as consistent as Nā Mamo, you know Nā Mamo o Hawai‘i was always there and came early, at least five, you know Nawahine Dudoit, Keli‘i Kealaiki, Monoiki Ahnee, Kalei Puha, Peter Silva, James Moore, those guys. It was always consistent, and if they they didn't, couldn't come, they would send a note or they would text you know one of them, you would get a text, I would get a text saying "I can't be there today, I can't be there today to sit but my heart is with you" you know that kind of stuff.

LT: Mhmmm, mhmmmm.

KG: Yea. And there were others, Donna Kalama uh she's an attorney today, yeah there were other people but they were always, they were either sitting with the Nā Mamo people or sometimes you know like Donna Kalama she would come from her office you know and she would kinda like stand by the door and wave.

LT: And so then what was the tensions like, so you talked about this a little bit, but with like the gay white [laughs] community in Hawai‘i around this ongoing marriage issue and just generally the gay community in Hawai‘i?

KG: Okay, so the people of color gay community was very separate from the white gay community. And the white gay community, the visibility was mostly gay men, white gay men. The people of color one was very diverse, so you had māhū, you had gay women, you had men you know, gay men you know, it was very very diverse and the white community, what I knew about the white community about the white gay women is that they tended to be, what I saw at that time was white women who were on the professional side and more closeted. There was a place on University Avenue called "the women's coffee shop" and the women's coffee shop was in YWCA building and it opened I think like Thursday, Friday, Saturday and um it was a place where gay women, local gay women gathered. And a lot of them were musicians and that's where I met a lot of the women of color who were gay, was at the women's coffee shop. Um and they were mostly, they had some white women, but you know how sometimes places start off as people of color and then it gets infused with white people.

LT: Yeah.

KG: And you know, not the women's coffee shop. It maintained that presence of women of color until it finally closed down and they cancelled the lease and stuff like that but, but the women of color it was their safe place and so they maintained that for a long time. But it was from that that I met a lot of other women of color but they weren't involved in political organizing, it was the white women who, and mostly the white gay men that were involved in political organizing. The women of color tended not to want to do that. They were more on the private side like were in relationships, were in our communities, we live together, were happy, Kuʻumeaaloha leave us alone!

LT: [laughs]

KG: "We'll support you but leave us alone" that kinda stuff. And yeah. And with the gay community, the white men did not, they did not want people of color to have voice, and so their boards, their positions, you know their management positions their staffing was all white. And it was like fighting to undo that and pushing back to undo that, like you don't have, this is Hawaiʻi, you don't have the monopoly. Around the same-sex marriage issue um human rights commission from that was the organization that came over to help with the same-sex marriage issue. No all of that their perspective and stuff like that was um "same-sex marriage is a civil rights issue" um and saying the expression of sexuality going back to Stonewall you know and our thing was "We're not from Stonewall" you know "We're from Hawaiʻi and we've been expressing our sexuality and our ʻaikāne relationships farther than you know, further back than Stonewall, so you have to see our expression also as valid in this whole thing and incorporate it into this, this whole expression of what we were talking about." They didn't wanna do that, they did not want to do that at all and today even til today, you know they, they expressed ʻaikāne relationships like they do hula in Hawaiian music you know, that kind of way but not, not a deep understanding of that's an expression of moe aku moe mai, that's an expression of a culture and it's broad acceptance of sexuality and the spectrum, they couldn't see that and they didn't want to see that. Yeah and there was tremendous value in that, and so all of that got silenced you know.

Yeah and we were being forced to again, fit into this box, yeah that their policymakers could relate to, fit into this bigger picture that they saw. So when we had, we had a public debate on TV with, I was on it with Jackie Young and Mike Gabbard and I forget who was on the other side Huckberg or whatever, anyway um. And it was really hard because, nobody was helping to prep me, and I was kind of alone because I was the Hawaiian voice. So nobody from the civil rights, from the Human Rights Commission, they were prepping Jackie you know. But nobody was prepping me, I was totally on my own you know so again it was like "Woah how do I manage this, you know how do I do this?" and in Nā Mamo o Hawaiʻi I was the most progressive person and I was the one who was training and bringing along the others, right, so for them they couldn't they couldn't help me to really strategize, and I didn't know who to turn to yea. So that was, that was really really difficult, you know very challenging, had I known better I would have reached out you know to some of my friends from Aotearoa or some of my friends from or some of my people of color friends from San Francisco you know to help me kind of strategize how to do this. But it was like, first of all fighting to have a position you know to have

the Hawaiian voice in the debate, fighting for it, until the last minute, you know not knowing whether we were gonna have the voice or not you know that kind of stuff and you know always pushing, pushing, pushing like this is Hawai‘i, this is Hawai‘i you know, that kinda stuff and that’s what we had to do all the way through. That was the really really hard part, I mean it was I remember feeling, I remember feeling at times um not that I wanted to give up but that it was just taking a lot out of me like draining my mana you know and not being refilled, you know that kinda stuff you know walking around sometimes feeling betrayed yeah, by your own gay community, not the Hawaiian part, but the general part, and it’s just like feeling like I let people down because I wasn’t good enough you know to be more forceful and that kinda stuff and so it’s like being victimized all over again but in a different way you know.

LT: Yeah. Where there Hawaiians not involved in Nā Mamo that were like reached out or were supportive of you?

KG: They were supportive, they were supportive. I mean you know people who were there were supportive, but you know just on that kinda level they didn’t know how to be. You know folks were giving me advice but it wasn’t, somehow I must’ve missed some translation I got the rhetoric in terms of, you know, the political rhetoric, in terms of format and stuff like that, I didn’t know how to do that, quite know how to do that you know. Um it would’ve been good to have had practice sessions and I didn’t have that, yea, it’s those kind of things. So I found myself in those kind of situations feeling inadequate and not performing you know optimally as I should have.

LT: It’s hard to debate, I mean it’s really hard, it’s like a real skill and like to be in public like that and to be on your feet like that.

KG: Yeah it’s really hard. What really was heartbreaking was seeing some of the HRS’s as they related to Hawaiian homelands, and seeing things like, you know you had to be heterosexual.

LT: Right.

KG: To be able to inherit land, you couldn’t be gay because you couldn’t be in a gay relationship that was recognized. So people could be together for years, like my auntie, my Aunty Lei and my Aunty Maxie, together for 50 years. One of them died and they had Hawaiian homelands, one of them died and the other one couldn’t be there legally, couldn’t be there, legally couldn’t be there. You know if the one who had it died, the other one had to leave, you know and I thought about them and I said to myself “This could’ve been my Auntie” you know. And, and what would happen to them you know. It’s things like ownership of furniture, there wasn’t any recognition of any legal divorce or anything like that, they couldn’t nothing. You know gay people were like nothing, they had no rights. You know and it’s like wow you know it’s just really really bad like they are citizens paying taxes with no rights. And it was like how can we live in a society like that, yeah?

So yeah and it was those kinds of discussions that you couldn't have those kinds of discussions because people kept it on a different level you know, the policy level, and we needed to bring it down to this lower level, you know this other community level where I was more comfortable at, you know and it was the policy people you know that [laughs, inaudible] so it was really hard, yeah. But in Nā Mamo I could talk to them like that, on that level so everybody you know felt empowered they felt their part because they could understand that you know when I would tell them about the HRS and what it said, the HRS and what is said, you know somebody would cry and it's like wow, you know that could be me, you know that kinda stuff. So they understood it at that level, but all these other kind of rhetoric, mainland rhetoric and stuff and policy rhetoric you know that's not where our community, the people of color community was at.

LT: And then so after all that, so after the vote and everything is like things seemed to quiet down a little around this issue, and then when civil union came, reemerged, and then well emerged, and then marriage things like marriage comes back, um what was, were you involved in any of that? Or what were your thoughts as they kinda all came up again?

KG: What, well what happened for me was, I was in a relationship for 19 years, and in '06 my partner passed away, and it was the year before same-sex marriage was passed, um so on a personal level it was really hard for me

LT: Yeah.

KG: Because as much as we fought for that, I couldn't take advantage of it.

LT: Right.

KG: Yeah so that I had to go through healing after that, you know and that was hard, that was really hard. And then I remember at my partners funeral Amy came up to me and she said "I just want you to know that even though she's not here, you know she's not gonna be here when it gets passed, that it is getting passed, and in the eyes of God you are married" that's what she said. You know yeah. So that was a real victory. And a really nice celebration and it's like wow all that hard work paid off, and we did it, we did it, yeah. So it was, for me it was bittersweet.

LT: Right.

KG: You know, Lani, that I have not been to a gay marriage.

LT: Really?

KG: Which is really interesting, is that I have yet to, and yet some of my really really good friends got married. But it's not that I didn't want to go to their marriage, I just, I would, I don't know what the universe is doing, but it's like when my friends, Emma and Shanel got married, I was in Arizona. And I already had this trip planned with a group of people, and then they told me that they were getting married, but I always had this commitment.

And then when Ala and Krista got, got married, I was someplace else again, I think I was in Costa Rica. You know so it's like, [laughs] I haven't been to a gay wedding, and my niece, my niece just got married, and it was during COVID, and I told myself, "I'm not going to the wedding" you know I'm not going, I can't, I mean you're gonna have all these people here, are you nuts? You know why can't we do this, why can't we do this virtual or something? You know so it's those kinds of things, I don't know why. You know, I don't know why and I don't know, anyway. Spiritually something is going on there, you know I'm not at that place, I don't know if, I don't know.

LT: Well when it's, I mean, you probably will. You know you'll get there.

KG: It'll happen, but it's like, it's like wow this is so bizarre you know, three already, and I'm being held back from it in some way yea. Like my soul is saying "you're not ready yet, you're not ready yet", and I think it's because, I think it's because of my healing process over that with my partner and that part I haven't totally healed from, so if I were to go to a wedding I couldn't get into the joy, I would just get into the sadness.

LT: Right.

KG: And that's probably what that's about, yeah.

LT: Yeah. Is there anything else?

KG: Oh wait, I did go to one, I just remembered, I went to the reception, that's right and it was (inaudible) wedding, and what was interesting about that, that I didn't know and she kept saying "Make sure that you're here with Keikilani" Keikilani is my hānai daughter that my partner, my partner's grandchild that we raised together, and they kept saying "You know we have a special table for you with [inaudible] da da da da" what she didn't tell me, what she didn't tell me was that my partner was going to be one of the people she recognized, and she had put together, she had put together this powerpoint. And so watching that on screen and people clapping, you know it was like wow, you know. And that was very very beautiful, because Kalei was very very staunch supporter of gay marriage and the Hawaiian gay community and you know the gay voices in the sovereignty movement. And yeah, so anyway. Whew, wow.

LT: I'm sorry, I didn't mean to.

KG: No no no, don't apologize, this is good.

LT: Okay, okay. So you, when did you retire?

KG: I retired in December 2017.

LT: Oh okay, okay.

KG: 32 years at the University.

LT: Wow. You felt it was time, yeah.

KG: Yea you get to a point where that was, I retired when I was 70...72?

LT: Oh yeah.

KG: Going on 72 yea, something like that. But I really felt like being around younger people, I kept saying to myself "I've been there, done that. We did that, were gonna do it again [laughs]" Okay, time for me to leave. [laughs] Okay, yeah. But as an older person, you really, you feel like make room at the table, make room at the table so others can take over. And the only way they can do that is you gotta move aside. And it's time, yup.

LT: Mhmmmm. Is there anything else that you would want to add that I maybe missed or didn't ask about or talk about?

KG: Um, I think at one of the, one of the things and I was reflecting on this just the other night, I don't know how young people um express it today or what they think or how they feel or if things have changed in the classroom, but I remember being in English class at the University of Hawai'i, um in the 19, what 1980s, 1990s and hearing the professors just tout gleefully about this poetry you know, this love poetry about a man and a woman and you're sitting there going "What's so great about that?" you know.

And you know when who I am is not part of that. So sitting in the movies and crying right, because, watching a movie and crying because you know there's no expression. But today it's different, today you see men and women um expressing themselves and stuff like that, but back then it was so hard and you know for myself and coming out it's like you know and having the Aotearoa and San Francisco experience, it's like I had a set standard for myself you know, cause you know I couldn't express myself as a "dyke" like the Māori, the Aotearoa people or flexible relationships like the San Francisco people were, but you know I had to be me, and I had to set my standards, and I knew that you know in taking on an activist role that I had to be a role model too, and you know stand by those standards and what does it mean you know be able to talk to, to talk to my peers and to people that I was going to mentor without being judgmental because that's what we grew up with, but how do we allow people to be and yet be proud of themselves you know and who they are, and um and not accept you know not accept lower standards so in other words, what I saw and what I'm sure you too in gay relationships, it's like gay relationships can be like heterosexual relationships, you can have abuse, you know there are people who abuse eachother, you know that kinda stuff. It's like don't glorify it, it's not the perfect relationship, there are issues there too and we need to talk about it, or we cannot heal from those and cannot set standards, so that's you know that's when I went through and in my time I didn't have mentoring, so I had to mentor myself right.

LT: Right

KG: You know that kinda thing and um that's why I think um I saw the value of mentoring others yea, cause to do it alone was so hard and I didn't want others to have to do it alone, you know and fortunately for me I had uh, the women's coffee shop women play, sing and dance and be happy and joyful and you know a lot of them were um local Japanese women you know professional women you know local Japanese and you know they have their own standards and they're on the conservative side, but playful and stuff like that, and they can, they could you know express themselves, so it's like hanging out with them was really cool, yea. And and how to affirm for me like I'm on the right track you know, that kinda thing, um but I knew it's like I'm not a I'm not a like the māhū women who tend to be like little bit more radical you know and how flamboyant they are, it's like ok I'm not like that you know that kinda stuff and yea you know but figuring it out figuring it out yeah and then so Nā Mamo was that opportunity to organize and to have discussions you know and that's what we did, I mean we met weekly on Sundays you know and people came and more people kept coming, our living room started out with five people and soon we had 20 you know because people were hungry for those discussions, we would sit around and talk story, eat, you know and sometimes they never like go home, you know. Yeah I remember Mono just passing out in the living room and Kalei says "Eh you gon sleep over here, okay?" "okay" [laughs] and that stuff. But, we were able to have these discussions that [inaudible- brining something up?] and somebody would come up with something say "Well what do you think of this?" and you know that kinda stuff and, and being able to talk about it really openly, yeah which was really different, I mean first we thought we could do that in the Gay Community Center and that was like "no, no, no you cannot do that" you know it's really different you know, they control the agenda and that's not our agenda.

LT: Mhmmm

KG: So Nā Mamo o Hawai‘i afforded us with that experience and you know people went on from there you know like Mono, s where he is now with the Harm Reduction Center and you know how to set policies up and if you know recognize leader in the community and working with trans people you know um what's his name, Cameron Miyamoto at the University of Hawai‘i LGBTQ Center and things like that you know. So all over, you know Peter Silva, people in different places, and they all came out of Nā Mamo you know so, and being able to we run into each other we celebrate it with each other you know because those were very special days and special times. And I wonder, I often wonder what the young people are doing today and how they are doing it.

LT: I don't think they're doing so well. I think it's a hard, I think it's a hard time, I mean I think with COVID and everything things are very very hard, from what I've interacted with my students they and a lot of them are LGBT identified in some way, and they're just having a hard time you know like they don't have mentoring in terms of that part of who they are, they don't have like an in person community, even before COVID, like everything is digital so they have this online life and community but it just sounds like they don't have anywhere that they could like go to just be together you know even outside clubs or things like that, it just seems like they‘re disconnected to each other even if they're connected all the time, it's just a weird thing.

KG: Yeah and COVID doesn't help.

LT: Right, right.

KG: A young woman just reached out to me and she said "can you please mentor me, just talk to me" especially now with gay pride stuff is coming up for her and you know she said do you mind if I call you? I said call, just call let's talk story, and you know that kinda stuff and maybe we can go for a walk you know Moanalua Valley and talk story and walk outdoors and things like that. Oh sounds like we've gotta like get some panels going talk to them encourage them be like you know reach out, organize, come out of the bubble. Yeah and feel validated.

LT: Yeah.

KG: How do they navigate with their community and their parents and friends and, cause I remember I mean I came out as an adult but I had more control, I didn't have parents that I had to go worry about right, but even then, it was scary you know, cause it was like holy crap what are people gonna think. But one of the things I learned for myself is that the easiest way to come out was with people I had relationships with that knew me, you know that I trusted and we had trusting relationships cause I knew they wouldn't reject me, um I couldn't do it with strangers because I don't know if strangers you know they could just cut me off, and that would hurt and I didn't need that, yeah. So and then when I came out at the University it was like you know I did it because I felt like somebody had to do it you know, and that somebody is going to be me because I couldn't turn around and go well somebody has to do it, who's gonna do it? You know, because nobody is in the back of me, so it's like I gotta do it you know, and it's like open up. And once I did, it's like so what now? And it was pushback from like one of the professors in Hawaiian language whose son was working for me.

LT: Oh god.

KG: His son was working for me and he was on a scholarship and one of the young gay students came by one day and she was really really upset and she goes "I gotta talk to you aunty, I gotta talk to you" and she sits down and she's crying and I say "What's the matter?" and she says, "I just came out of Professor so and so class and he said that "you know for all you people who are considering Kuaʻana scholarships you better think twice because they only give scholarships to gay people" and she told me that professor said that in the classroom.

LT: Oh my god.

KG: So I picked up the phone, I picked up the phone and I called her and I said "A student just told me, first of all I want to let you know that yes I am gay but the people, the students that I see and that I'm responsible for and that qualify for scholarships, I said maybe a

small small small maybe 5 not even 10% are gay, so if you're telling the students that then is your son gay? Is that what you think?" you know and that shut her up real fast.

And then there was, she was telling students they had to choose, they had to choose between being gay or being Hawaiian. You know and it was like how do you choose? And so some of them were coming back like really upset and confused. Yeah about that and we had to talk about that you know and put them back together again, so yeah the push back was like that in the community. But those, I mean at least, I don't, I don't know what it's like now on the campus for our gay students, and Lani, if there is any way I can help, please let me know.

LT: There's a growing presence, I think, I mean I remember when I was Hawaiian and on campus and I would be in an ʻōlelo class and I would feel very like afraid and shame and you know not like not wanna like say anything or do anything and just kinda stay quiet about everything you know I felt very uncomfortable, but I don't think they feel that way as much anymore.

KG: And I think that it's really good and we have a responsibility to, both of us are older, have the responsibility of you know putting our voices out there yeah and being visible. And, and sharing our insights about organizing and why that's important, why it's important, why it's important to do that and you know especially in our society today where you know that whole thing about um transgender sports and people being banned from that.

LT: I know.

KG: You know all these kinds of things like that, no all for one and one for all you know. That's, that's our model. That used to be Nā Mamo's model. One for all and all for one, yep. But you know we need to continue to do that, and how in a Hawaiian community were very multigenerational and we need to exercise that you know. And you know share ʻike with each other, us older people can learn from younger people and younger people can learn from us, you know that kind of thing. Um and how we can help out, because for me young people feed my soul. And being around them is like oh god it feels so good, I feel like I'm sitting under a fresh waterfall you know when I see, when I listen to young people and I see their excitement and stuff like that it's so refreshing you know and um you know and that kind of connection that we really need to make with each other. And I thank you, I thank people like you and the work you do you know to bring us all together, and with what you do to feed their minds and their hearts. Yeah, maikaʻi.

LT: Yeah, well mahalo, mahalo for all this time, for everything you did and giving me tuition waivers too [laughs] and cause I had a few during that time.

KG: And it wasn't because you were gay okay, I didn't even know. [laughs]

LT: I'll take it either way. [laughs] But like mahalo for talking to me, you're the first like official interview I did for this cause you're like you were the first person I wanted to you're the first name that I kept you know knowing that I had to had to interview you,

and so I appreciate so much that you've been um, that you were able to do it and that you were sharing your manaʻo and your life with me, I really appreciate it. From here I'm gonna transcribe it and so then I don't know how you would want, do you want me to just email it to you, or I could print it out and mail it to you as well.

KG: Yeah you know you can email it to me and I can print it out on my computer if I have to. Or work on it on my it, probably, the way, as an older person Iʻm finding that we need paper in our hand. It's easier [laughs] than working off of a computer and sometimes it's you know easier you know I was helping my attorney, he's working on a case and he wanted me to look at something, and he sent me this document and it was like 6 pages long, and then there was all these numbers on the side of each sentence and I was like "Why is there a number?" and he go "Oh let me explain" he says "because if you have a correction to make you would tell me line such and such" and I went "ohhh that's easy" yea. But yea so um you can send it to me in email and I'll take it from there and then send it back to you. And then, let me give you some of these other names.

LT: Yes please.

KG: That I think would be really good for you to interview, and I can also send you their contact information.

LT: Oh okay, mahalo mahalo.

KG: Dore was somebody that I used to talk to a lot and I remember Dore telling me this one day, she said to me "Kuʻumealoha do you realize you have so much power?" and I looked at her and I didn't understand, honestly Lani, I did not understand what she said, and it wasn't until years later that I reflected on that and I thought "I did have a lot of power" you know I had power to educate these people and they were listening to me you know and I did not understand, and maybe at the time it was good that I didn't know that. You know how sometimes they say "it's good that that person didn't know how beautiful they were." It was good that I didn't know that I had that kind of power, because it didn't even phase me. What phased me what like I needed to share I needed to share my knowledge with other people. My thing was always you know reach out a hand and pull them over yeah.

LT: Yeah.

KG: So okay so I will send you those three their contact information.

LT: Mahalo.

KG: You going end up writing a book, girl.

LT: [laughs] I was talking to uh Noelani and she's like "I think you gotta write a book about Nā Mamo" I was like well I don't know maybe we will I donʻt know, and somebody should!

KG: You know it's that part of the community that's never been talked about, yeah. That part of the community that's silenced and, and if you do Lani, you will be the first person to write, to actually write about the gay community in Hawai'i. Cause I don't think even the white community has anybody that's written about them.

LT: No they just I don't know what they do with themselves.

KG: [laughs] But that's okay, we don't have to worry they transplants. And that was the other thing, the other thing too was like they were always "This needs to change and that needs to change" and we would go "You know what if you wanna change it go back to where you come from." You know if you, don't make it like your place over here, you know this is Hawai'i, this is our place, don't make it like yours so you can be comfortable. Yeah go back to where you came from.

LT: Yeah, no they don't get it. I mean you know yea they like hula and 'aikāne, the idea of 'aikāne and all this kine whatever but like you said they don't have a deep understanding and they can't or they don't want to do the work to get there.

KG: Yup, right exactly. And they don't understand uh interactions or why were so grounded in this place or how we feel as being part of the 'āina, you know were part of it. It's not part of us, we are part of it yea. They don't understand that because they don't have that, they don't have that. That's what I used to tell university students, you know who used to come to Kua'ana and they would come just so broken hearted over something and I would tell them "You know all of this is yours, all of this" look up into the window out of my office, look up into the valley and I would tell them "that's yours, all of that is yours" you know Mid-Pac over there, you can say "Thank you, thank you for taking care of my 'āina" you know cause it's yours, we all belong to that, yeah. And then when you tell them, our people that man, the pride we feel and it's because its' a sense of belonging, that we've been conditioned with that we don't belong in our own place. Anyway, yeah okay.

LT: Mahalo, mahalo so much.

KG: Yeah, as soon as thank you thank you it's been so enjoyable talking to you. Maika'i

LT: Aww you too you're so welcome and mahalo and a hui hou.

KG: A hui hou and we loving to your daughter, your daughter right?

LT: No, my son.

KG: Oh your son.

LT: I have a son yea, he's wild.

KG: Oh beautiful, how old is he?

LT: Three, he’s three and a half

KG: Oh gosh yes, let em be wild, let em express themselves, maikaʻi, okay, I love you.

LT: Okay I love you too a hui hou.

KG: A hui hou.