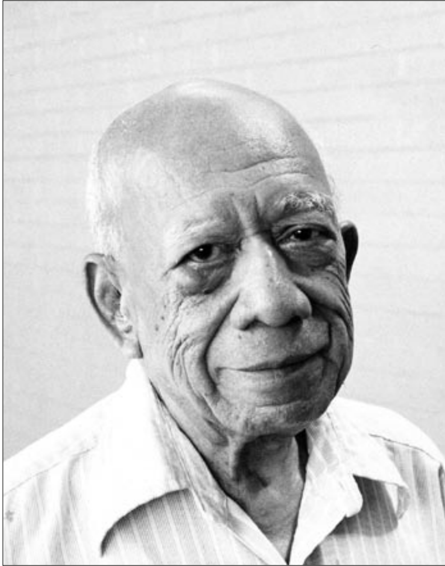

Albert Nawahī Like

Interviewed by Warren Nishimoto(1984)
Narrative edited by Cynthia Oshiro

Albert Nawahī Like was born 1900 in Honolulu's Chinatown. When Like was eight years old, his family moved to Kalihi. After the death in 1912 of his father, Edward Like, who was editor of the Hawaiian-language newspaper *Ke Aloha ‘Āina,* and the remarriage of his mother, Like returned to Chinatown and attended school at nearby St. Louis, then located on River Street.

Upon graduation, Like enrolled in classes at the University of Hawai‘i in 1924. Three years later, after taking classes at the Territorial Normal and Training School, Like began teaching young patients at Kalihi Hospital, the Hansen's disease facility also known as the Kalihi Receiving Station.

With the closing of the school shortly after the start of World War II, Like transferred to Central Intermediate School, where he taught for over twenty years until his retirement in 1965.

At the time of these interviews in 1984, Like was devoting much of his time working and doing research at the genealogical library of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Kalihi ward.

Growing up

I grew up in Chinatown, right in that ‘A‘ala Park district. From *mauka* [inland] of Beretania Street, that was all tenements. They had many little lanes, little alleys. Chinese were all living there. They had *manapua* [pork cake] stores, they had tailor shops, all around that area. Then the market, of course. That Kekaulike [Market].

And then, there was also opium smoking. All those little dens along Pauahi Street and Maunakea. It was not only men but women were smoking opium at that time.

Right across, they had the Chinese opera house. That's where Chinese shows, operas, used to come and perform.

I was born [in] 1900, just across the old [O‘ahu Railway & Land Company] railroad station. My father was the editor of a Hawaiian newspaper, and that's where the print shop was. We lived above, and downstairs was the print shop.

My father was *hānai*ed to [i.e., adopted by] Joseph Nawahī. Joseph Nawahī was [an] activist during the time of Queen Lili‘uokalani. Joseph Nawahī started this paper to support the love for the native peoples. That's why they say *Ke Aloha ‘Āina*—A Love for the Land. That's the translation of the paper.

St. Louis School was not too far away from [where] we were, because it was just at River Street. I went to have my early first grades at St Louis. Prior to that, I went to the Pālama Settlement kindergarten.

My education was in a Catholic school, although I didn't join the Catholic church. But most [students] were converts to the Catholic church when they went to St. Louis, the Chinese boys were. And also, we had a few Japanese boys. The Japanese boys, they used to give 'em English names. They call them "Gilbert" or "Joseph."

In 1908, '09, we moved up to where the Pālama Fire Station is. The newspaper print shop was still there [at ‘A‘ala], but the family moved over to this place. There was a lane they called Alapa‘i Lane.

While there, he [father] bought this place here in Kalihi. It was close to a half an acre. He bought it for about $250. Well, it was taro patch land at that time. So, in 1909, we moved to Kalihi and settled there.

We used to hike up into Kalihi Valley. As you go up toward Wilson Tunnel, there were two pools on the right side, which is now [a] water reserve. That's where the boys and girls would go swimming.

Our means of transportation, the transit, was way down at King Street. The means of getting down to King Street, we had what they call a "coach." Horse-drawn. We used to pay twenty-five-cents fare to go down and catch the transit to go to town or go to Waikīkī.

He [father] died in 1912. We [moved] to the corner of Maunakea and Pauahi [streets, in Chinatown]. We lived in the tenement there. That's when we moved over. We needed the money, so we rented [out] the [Kalihi] home.

My mother raised us, took care of us. And then, my mother got married again to my stepfather who was Chinese. My stepfather was a butcher at the Kekaulike Market there. That's what he was until he retired.

After 1912, I had an attack of polio. So I was hospitalized for over a year until I got back my mobility. Then I went [back] to school. I was in St. Louis until my freshman year.

March of my freshman year, I was hospitalized [again]

because 1919, there was an epidemic—Spanish flu.[1] That took me out for quite a while. So when I came back, I was twenty-one at the time. I went right back [as a] sophomore. So, I only spent three years and a half in high school, and I finished and graduated.

Then, I moved back to Kalihi here. My mother and them were staying down in Chinatown. But my stepfather was up with me at the home here.

One day, I happened to meet some of my neighbors. They said, "We saw your stepfather selling bananas and papayas." Of course, he was retired, [but] he couldn't just sit around. He had two dollars when he started, [and] he earned a little something.

University of Hawai'i

I was able to register in there at the U [University of Hawai'i], 1924. But I had no money. I had to borrow somebody else's book to know my lessons for the day. So when it came to test time, I didn't have any book to review.

So, came Thanksgiving recess, I had a note from the admissions board. The review board told me I either have to make up for this or I'd be dismissed. So, I borrowed a book and I got down to business and I passed [the course]. Then, I was able to stay in school.

While there, I began to get a little money here, little money there, to carry on. On the days when I really didn't have any money, I'd just take my shoe-shine box around [Chinatown] and [work as a] bootblack.

Then, after that, I did a little extra sales work. You know the American Savings [Bank] now? Well, when they first came [to Hawai'i], they came as American Mutual [Building & Loan Company]. [They] asked me if I'd like to go and sell some shares. That helped me out during my sophomore year to take care of some of my expenses.

In my junior year, I had to make a decision. That's when the dean called me in the office [and] said, "You want to come back to school in the fall or you want to go to work?" I dropped two of my subjects, Spanish and physics. And then, I went to [Territorial] Normal [and Training] School and took education courses in how to teach arithmetic, simple reading, and also how to conduct myself as a teacher in a classroom.

They made arrangements for me to come back [later] to finish up my subjects so that I could get my bachelor's [degree]. In '31, I got my bachelor's [from the University of Hawai'i].

Kalihi Hospital

Do you know Pu'uhale Road? At that time, the whole back area was one big, open space. There were very few homes along that road. It was more *kiawe* [algaroba] trees. That's where that [Kalihi] Hospital was. The whole hospital was for leprosy patients.

They had a little store there, which accommodated the patients within the hospital. So, if you want anything, you would call over to the storekeeper. Then, they'd get it for you.

Not very far from the hospital was a crematory. It was a Japanese[-owned] crematory. If any of the patients in the hospital passed away, they would take [the] body out there. The bodies were cremated, and the ashes were sent home.

My first teaching job, I was assigned down to the Kalihi Hospital. They established a school to take care of these chil-

Mount Happy School at Kalihi Hospital,1932 (Bernard Punikaia Collection)

dren. At that time they had close to about twenty children. These were children who had contracted the disease. They were separated from their parents. So, they were confined at the hospital there.

They had named the school "Mount Happy." They couldn't get anybody to go down there [to teach] at the time. So, I got my certification to teach, and I became what they called a teacher-principal for the school. I organized the curriculum, which was a simple program—reading, writing, and arithmetic, and a little history and other things.

When I went down there they told me some of the precautions. The precaution is to see that you wash your hands. You got to wear a gown. Well, not this long gown, but just like a coat. But after I got acquainted with them [patients], there was no more fear.

In that school, they had a big, wide-open building. So, they partitioned that, and they had a workshop. The Department of Health at the time provided all the tools, their little lathe, and everything for them. So, we had part of our times spent in the workshop making little lamps, making book stops. Some of their work—like lamps—parents or friends took them home.

Then, on top of that, the doctors were interested in the recreational program. So, [a] doctor got some of the organizations—the Rotary Club, the Elks Club—interested. They bought baseballs and bats, and other things. They built swings.

Then, we also had a [Boy] Scout program. The scouting group became interested in this group of youngsters because they had no outside activity. They could not go outside of the compound. Soon, the youngsters had their uniforms and scout equipment. They were Troop 12.

Many of them met their [qualifications] for badges, but they couldn't go out for hiking—fourteen-mile hike—to qualify for the first-class badge. But we had outside scout leaders come down and demonstrate calisthenics and all that.

At the upper end of the compound, there was a pavilion. Outside organizations who wanted to entertain, churches, would come on the other side of the fence and conducted their church services or whatever program they had.

Then, in return, the school would put up skits. They used to have a minstrel show. They would have *hula* and singing. They would have this program to entertain their parents and guests and whoever came to watch the show.

Every six months there, they would have a [physical] examination. This way, they determined what patients needed to go to Kalaupapa.[2] That is always a sad event, when your name is called that you were going to Kalaupapa. Because at that time, the feeling was that once you went to Kalaupapa, you never returned.

They would transfer these patients on the *Hawai‘i.* That was a cattle boat. The front part of that deck, the lower deck, where the animals [usually] were, would be cleaned up. And that's where the patients were put.

Some of them went into hiding until the boat leaves. When the boat leaves, they know they'll be there for another six months until the next—they call it "shipment"—when there's a next transfer.

World War II

[On December 7,] 1941, came the bombing of Pearl Harbor. From the hospital, you could see Pearl Harbor quite clearly. It was a front seat for that event. You see all these battleships in flames.

Fortunately, over our school [i.e., on the roof]—I don't know who thought that up—was a big red cross. So, naturally, [in case] the enemy's planes flew over, they would not disturb that section.

From that time on, the whole hospital was under strict security supervision. The school continued until the latter part of May '42. Then they decided to transfer everybody to Kalaupapa, fearing that there probably would be another attack, because we were just in the war zone.

Before we left, they had a submarine circle the ship to see that there was no enemy. When we left the harbor, the destroyer was ahead of us. We slept on the upper deck because the patients were down in the hold.

We got to Kalaupapa late that afternoon. Disembarked the kids, took them out, and then left them, said good-bye.

The commissioner of the school board came and [asked] me to prepare a course of study for these children. They had two patients up at Kalaupapa who were former certified teachers. So, I prepared the curriculum for those youngsters, and flew over to Kalaupapa, and then made all the arrangements.

During the war, the whole city was blacked out. So, each area had their own block wardens. These block wardens at night would patrol the area to see that all lights were turned off. They wore steel helmets marked "W" and carried gas masks and identification passes signed by the chief of police. Every night they would patrol. They would look up at the skies [hoping] that nothing would happen.

In those days, every home had a little trench dug out [in their yards]. In case there was a raid, they would go into this. The bigger places, like the schools, they had their bomb shelters.

Prior to World War II, that whole area just *mauka* of School Street was an open pasture land, which was formerly taro patches. And there, the soldiers were trained to operate these [military] equipment during World War II. In the meantime, they also had built barracks up there where these men lived.

My house was just off School Street. And the boundary line of the military reservation came right down to our fence there. So he [stepfather] had an idea if he build a lean-to and had a little store, he might provide some snacks.

He bought crackers and sardines. Then he bought [Chinese preserved] seeds. His store was a twenty-four-hour store. He never bothered about blacking out his windows or anything.

One night, he was quite sick. So, I called my nephew. We took him to Kuakini Hospital. The desk [clerk] said to me, "Well, to keep your stepfather here, you'll have to put down a deposit of $100."

My nephew said to me, "We better go and see his box, if he has any money." And lo and behold, he had [silver] coins. It came to about a little more than $495.

He got well. We brought him home. He pulled out his Chinese book. And there stacked in between those pages were all his tens and five dollars. We got the silver dollars, but we didn't get this other money, see?

I told him how much the hospital was and that was all paid. Then he told me, "Ah, this [hospital expense] too much money. If I go Pālama Settlement [for treatment], I no pay money."[3]

He died in 1960. We took all his leftover groceries, we sold it. And then, we demolished that little lean-to. On the floorboard, you know, there's all those cracks? My grandchildren, they had a great day. There, they were finding nickels, they were finding fifty cents, they were finding quarters because they all fell through.

Anyway, before he died, he had made better than $10,000 out of [his original] two dollars.

Central Intermediate School

When the [Mt. Happy] School closed [in 1942], I went to Central [Intermediate School]. I was in the office of the supervising principal, Robert Faulkner, when a telephone call came saying that they wanted a substitute at Central Intermediate.

This was a science class. When I walked in the room there was on the blackboard a formula. So, what I did was complete the formula, and [I] taught the class. Chemistry was down my alley.

[Then] there was [another] vacancy, and I was available at the time. [That] was the finishing of an agricultural garden class. Since I did a good job, when the new school year began, I was called as a permanent teacher. I went into teaching math.

I went back to [another Hansen's disease treatment facility], Hale Mōhalu, in 1955, I think. I taught a whole year. They had a certified teacher [who] wanted to go on a sabbatical leave. They knew that I knew these boys. I had the teenagers. Some of them were already doing their senior work. We had a grand program that night [of] graduation.

That was the last time I was there. I came [back] to Central till I retired. I stayed at Central for twenty-three years.

Mr. Frank Loo came and said to me—he happened to have seen me one evening after I retired—to come over and take over his business. He was in the [debt] collection business. So I went in the collecting business for five years, and it was a tough job.

See, I'm not a hard person. When you have these [delinquent] guys, what can you do? You garnishee them because of failure to pay. I was with Frank till I sold the business out.

In the meantime, I had this other work that I'm doing now. So, today, I not only work with genealogies, I do translations. I work with the attorneys to do land searches.

I went into these other businesses, which was different entirely from teaching. [But] education was in my field, you see. Every day I meet one of my students. They come up and say hello to me. Of course, within the twenty-three years that I taught at Central, I had couple of thousand youngsters pass through.

Well, the Good Lord's been good to me, so I've enjoyed my life these many years. I'm just grateful that my mind (chuckles) is still active and alert.

Endnotes

[1] The worldwide influenza epidemic, known as the "Spanish flu," killed several millions of people.

[2] Hansen's disease settlement on Molokaʻi. The Kalihi Hospital was a holding compound for patients prior to their departure to Kalaupapa.

[3] Pālama Settlement, established in 1906, until 1943 offered free medical and dental care at its clinics.