

KOKUA HAWAII ORAL HISTORY PROJECT INTERVIEW WITH
Francis Kaholi



Francis Kaholi
Photo courtesy of Gary Kubota

Francis Kaholi was a teenager when his family left Kalama Valley after receiving a notice that they had to move to make way for a future residential development. Kaholi, who recounts life in the valley, was interviewed at his home in Ewa Beach on May 2, 2017, by Gary T. Kubota.

GK: Good morning, Francis. When and where were you born and raised?

FK: I was born in October 1952. Our family started off living in Kaimuki.

When I was four to five years old, we moved to Jack Lane in Nuuanu with my grandparents.

Then, after a year or so there, we moved in 1959 and ended up in Kalama Valley and lived on Ehukai Street near Sandy Beach.

GK: So, who were your parents?

FK: Benjamin Kaholi and Jennie Lum.

GK: What did your dad do for a living?

FK: He was a stevedore working for various companies, including Castle & Cooke. My mom was a housewife taking care of nine kids in the family, then worked as a nursing assistant at Leahi Hospital for many years.

GK: How many brothers and sisters?

FK: I had six brothers and two sisters. The oldest was Howard, then Benjamin, Yvonne Roldan, William, Richard, Olinda, then myself, Dolinda, and Fred.

GK: How was life in Kalama Valley?

FK: Oh, it was a hard life, but it was satisfying. We could do what we wanted to do whenever we wanted to do it pretty much. No complaints from the neighbors pretty much. A lot of the neighbors were related to my dad. We lived about a mile up the main

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road. His brother Henry Kaholi lived across the street. Henry was married to Phoebe Kapiko. My Aunt Phoebe's mom lived next door. She was one of the pig owners. She had a small little pig farm there.

On the other side of my Uncle Henry and Aunt Phoebe was Aunt Phoebe's other brother, William Yockman. On the left side of them, there was the Richards family, which had a big junkyard. Then on the other side of them were the Jeremiahs. On the right side of my house, there was the Sumida family who moved out. The Price family moved in; it was a Hawaiian lady married to a haole guy. It was a pretty colorful family. A lot of fights. Across the street from them, there were the McNeelys. On the right side of the McNeelys were the Wongs. They had a pig farm. And above that, on the right side, there was a . . . Hizer family. After them was Black Richards.

GK: Where did these people come from?

FK: During those times, people were moving out of Hawaii Kai in a place known as Lunalilo Home Road. A Puerto Rican family picked up their house and moved it over to an empty lot next to the Cuizon family. Later the Cuizon house was occupied by Black Richards. The Puerto Rican family eventually moved out, but one son actually lived with us because he wanted to finish high school. He actually married one of the girls from the Cuizon family. The families in Kalama Valley were tight knit. If you go further up the road, there were two more pig farms, one owned by a Portuguese family. There were also the Rezens and Miyashiros.

GK: Where was George Santos' pig farm?

FK: Santos' farm was closer to the beginning of the road. A stream was behind to his house. It was mostly dried up.

GK: How large was the community?

FK: There were 98 families. I never knew them all because some of them were part-time living there, and some of them were real private. I only knew them because I and other members of my family used to deliver newspapers in Kalama Valley. My brother William had the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* paper route. We delivered to more than 50 houses in the afternoon, after school.

GK: How'd you do it?

FK: The whole route was about a mile-and-a-half long on a road, some paved, some dirt road with a little gravel. We piled up all newspapers inside of this old car, and we would drive the car up the road, with my brother on one side of the hood, and me on the other side of the hood, riding it like a horse. My mom would drive her '53 Mercury. There were pig farms and a chicken farms.

The Yamada chicken farm was one of the largest one on this side of the island at that time. They later moved out to Waimanalo.

GK: What did you usually do when you were home as a kid?

FK: We had fun. I never did my homework after school. (Chuckles) If we could, we'd go play touch football on the road with neighbors, cousins and friends.

GK: So, you could field a football team on both sides?

FK: Oh, yeah. Definitely. I mean, we couldn't get enough space to play everybody. It was a real family-oriented-type neighborhood where we lived, because a lot of the players were family or relatives. So when we had parties, everybody in that area was gonna go, plus outsiders.

GK: What else did you do for recreation?

FK: We did a lot of hiking in the mountains. We used to go up to what they called the "Cinder Pit." We dug through all the trash that was dumped there. Sometimes, we'd find some good stuff. We'd make camps. We'd walk a mile to Sandy Beach. Sometimes, we'd get a ride. George Santos' son Steve had a small little Datsun truck. We would all pile on that, and we'd go up to the beach. He'd come pick us up, but the main thing was getting the gas. And, the gas we had. We had no problem because we'd go to the junkyard. We'd get all the gas from there.

GK: You'd go to the junkyard to find gas in the tank of a junked car?

FK: Yeah. Just siphon it out.

GK: How was the road?

FK: It was a problem when it rained because the drainage system was never kept up because there was no drainage system, really, and the place would get flooded. And, if it was really bad, it would be all water from the Rezens' house up to the bridge and over the little bridge. It would be all water for 200 yards all the way up to the Jeremiah's house. Guys would get stuck in it. There was a time when we actually had a small little boat that we would drag and paddle down the road and pick up people and paddle back. They would wade through the other parts of the road because it was shallow.

GK: (Laughter) How did they get the cars out?

FK: Wait 'til it dried. Sometimes, the water would sit there for days. For a child, growing up in the valley was actually a very good, satisfying learning experience. We learned a lot about animals. We learned a lot about how to fix a car. My friends, the Richards kids, put together a car. And then we would get in the car, then we'd go down to the beach.

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My dad always told us, “If you go down to the beach, no come home emptyhanded.” He wanted us to pick up seaweed, limu, pipipi. He would be happy with whatever seafood we brought home. We’d take this Japanese guy named Melvin Kaneshiro, my sister’s boyfriend, to show us how to catch moi. Sandy Beach had like three places for fishing. One was Tiger Bowl next to the Blowhole, that had a little bay area. During certain times of year, we would cut our fingernail and use it for bait on a small hook. The fish see anything white, they’d bite it. That’s how we caught fish and put it in the bread bag. We’d fill the bag up with fish or seaweed or something from the sea.

GK: What happened when your dad received the notice to move?

FK: He was really hard pressed on trying to find another place. We moved out in 1970 back to Kaimuki by Mahina Avenue right behind Liliuokalani Elementary School. I’d just got back from basic training. I had joined the National Guard right out of high school. Dolinda was still going to high school, and there was Richard, Fred, Ben, and myself. So, we were forced out of the Kalama Valley, and all those people who were part Hawaiian who were qualified for Hawaiian Homestead—they went to the top of the waiting list—the Waipa family, us, my Uncle Henry and one more family. We moved over to Waimanalo in 1971.

GK: What were you doing back then?

FK: In 1971, I started working for Sheraton Waikiki Hotel. My friend got me that job. I was a housekeeper working the graveyard shift. After a couple years, I became the head houseman, which was the assistant supervisor to the night shift supervisor. The pay was little bit more. I got a raise to \$4.55 an hour. I stayed there until ’78. And in ’79, I worked for the State Department of Health at Leahi Hospital, and I stayed there for 30½ years. The guy who hired me was my old boss at the Sheraton. He knew my capabilities. I was well-versed in the stripping and waxing and buffing of floors and stuff.

GK: What were your family’s feelings at the time of the eviction protest?

FK: Actually, when I first found out you guys was doing this protest, I said, “Oh, look these crazy people.” We already got our notice, and my dad already was thinking about moving out.

GK: The protest got off to a late start and you’re right—many families had moved out. Were there many Kalama Valley people who had been previously evicted from other valleys?

FK: Yeah, from Kuliouou and Lunalilo. The developers were like building these suburbs that the people couldn’t afford. All these farms were being moved. I think besides the Santos, there was a pig farmer, Fuji. My friend worked for them. There was Sampaio. There was another Sampaio family who moved up there. I’m kind of thinking it’s the Kay family, they were living in the last house. I’m trying to think back. I ended up sleeping in the patio.

GK: So how long did your family wait before they received a Hawaiian Homestead?

FK: My dad waited 20 years before he got it. I think they said I was a year old when they applied for Hawaiian Homestead in 1953. I think they got moved to the top of the list because they got pushed out of Kalama Valley.

GK: Really?

FK: My mom gave my uncle Francis Lum a call, “Brada, what you can do for help me out? . . . I like get one homestead if possible.” He was really close to the governor at that time. I was named after him. He was the chief protocol for Gov. George Ariyoshi. About a year later, my family and relatives all got moved over to the homestead in Waimanalo.

GK: So, do you think Francis helped? Do you think the protest helped to get you relocated.

FK: It’s hard to say.

