

KOKUA HAWAII ORAL HISTORY PROJECT INTERVIEW WITH
Ed Greevy



Ed Greevy
Photo courtesy of the Greevy family

For several decades, Edward “Ed” William Greevy III has been the photographer documenting land struggles in Hawaii. His photographs have been exhibited in a number of venues, books and magazines, such as a one-man show at Linekona near the Honolulu Academy of Arts and a photograph of Hawaiian activist Haunani Trask displayed at International Center for Photography in Manhattan. Greevy came into contact with a number of leaders who were pivotal in helping to fight evictions. He was interviewed by Gary T. Kubota at the Kapiolani Community College library during March 2016 during a black-and white-photography exhibit at the Lama Library at Kapiolani Community College.

GK: Good morning, Ed. Tell me a bit about yourself.

EG: I was born in 1939 in Los Angeles. My father Edward William Greevy Jr. was a carpenter. Our family moved to Hawthorne in the greater Los Angeles area. It was a lower-middle-class community in the 1950s, near aviation-related businesses like Northrop Aircraft and Douglas Aviation.

GK: What made you come to Hawaii?

EG: Well, I was from California, beginning to surf, and came to Hawaii in 1960 with three friends on a four-engine prop DC-4. It was \$100 one-way, and we flew out of Burbank Airport. Hawaii was just becoming a state. There were no jetways. You had to walk on the tarmac and then up a ramp to get in the plane.

GK: Sounds like you found a no-frills deal?

EG: I swear the plane had caged chickens as freight. (Chuckles) Those props didn't go very fast or very high. We had a lot of headwinds. It was an 11-hour flight. Almost everybody was sick on the plane because it was so rough. It was a real bumpy trip. United Airlines and Pan American had just begun 707 jet service to Hawaii, but it was expensive.

GK: Who else was on the flight?

EG: We met a couple of girls who were returning to the islands from winter break. They were going back to the University of Hawaii. It was early January 1960.

GK: Sounds good?

EG: Yes. We sort of made friends with them and they persuaded their boyfriends who had pickups to give us a ride to a youth hostel. The boyfriends kind of grumbled about it but did it. They also carried our surfboards and cardboard boxes we had for suitcases. The youth hostel charged \$4 a night and had a four-month waiting list, so we ended up sleeping in Ala Moana Park.

GK: Then what happened?

EG: The next day was the first day of registration at the University of Hawaii. I attended the University of Southern California for a year, and I along with my friends decided to take courses at the University of Hawaii. The park caretaker let us store our surfboards and other stuff in a shed. We entered as unclassified students, and we got all the classes we wanted in a day. It was very laid-back.

GK: So what happened on the second day.

EG: We looked through the classifieds in a newspaper and found a place to stay on the second night—a little place off Date Street within walking distance of the university. We bought a 1947 Dodge pickup. (Chuckles) That was our transportation. I was there five months. I went back to Long Beach State to finish school as a political science major.

GK: When did you begin to take photographs?

EG: All through college, I wanted a good camera but could not afford one. After college, in December 1962, I went to Japan. I bought a Nikon F and a 500-millimeter lens. I came back to California in February. I thought I was gonna be a surf photographer. In those days, big companies would go to college campuses to recruit in May every year. Everybody was set up for all those recruitings in May, not in February. So, my sister was working and living in New York. She says, "Come on back here. Work for a life insurance company. They have a management training program. They hire about a dozen guys every year. They'll hire you." And they had a law school tuition reimbursement program. So, you could go to law school. So, I ended up doing that, drove across country, went to work for Mutual in New York, and went to NYU night law school in the mid-1960s.

GK: So you became a lawyer in insurance?

EG: Well, surfing was booming on the East Coast in the mid-1960s, so my sister's husband and I started a national surfing magazine in Greenwich. We would do stories on Hawaii

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and concentrated on surfing competition stories at the East Coast beach towns and Hawaii. Part of my job at the magazine was to find people to send us pictures and stories. We would get these submissions from college graduates. Usually, I had to rewrite everything. But we did have a teacher from Long Island in New York who moved to Florida to surf year around and sent us these really sharp photographs. He later became the editor of *Surfing* magazine in San Diego. Eventually, I developed a chronically dislocated shoulder, got it fixed, and met a night nurse whom I married and came back to Hawaii in 1967. So, a couple of years later, the editor from *Surfing Magazine* writes me a letter and says, "We've heard of an organization called Save Our Surf, and surfers now are interested in environmental issues because we're losing surf sites to boat harbors and pollution and whatever. He said, "So would you look into them for me?" At the time, I was working on and off as a claims adjuster for an insurance company and I had a one-man commercial photography studio. Soon thereafter, I was looking at a poster protesting the widening of Kuhio Beach and see a phone number for Save Our Surf. I called, and John Kelly answered the telephone, and he invites me to his home. This is back in 1970, 71.

GK: So what happened?

EG: So, in a couple of days, I drive to his house at Black Point, and there's 15 to 20 teenagers running around, planning this big demonstration at the State Capitol, and they are also lobbying for a sewage treatment plant at Sand Island. The sewage outfall was two miles out and on a couple of kona days, you'd have shit floating back and pooling in Waikiki. They actually had to close the beach back then. Save Our Surf was lobbying for a beach park at Sand Island and sewage plant back then. Both happened.

GK: Really?

EG: Yes. At the meeting, the group had a treasurer's report, announcing their bank account was now less than \$10. So, I'm thinking, "This group isn't going anywhere." But I found out that John Kelly had his own printing press, and other activist groups had their own, too. There were about four activist presses. In those days, you may remember this—if you took a political anything to commercial printers, they wouldn't print it. You had to have your own press. That's why John built one under his house. John taught me that the only free press is the one you own.

GK: So what happened?

EG: As it turned out, I was like John's staff field photographer. He would call me up and say, "Can you meet with so and so or whatever and do this?" To me, it just didn't make any sense to destroy surf sites for tourists. That's not a good idea to destroy natural things that benefit few people in order to make a few more bucks.

GK: I guess John was a good organizer?

EG: And his wife Marion would do the typing for the text on her IBM typewriter or

whatever. John was a photographer too. But he didn't have time to go out and shoot a lot. So, he'd send me out. And I would shoot black-and-white and sometimes Kodachrome for slide shows. I had time, and I had the facilities. So, that's how I got started. At the time, government officials were trying to alter the surfing site at Baby Queens with more sand to enlarge the beach. A lot of Hawaiians were learning to surf at Baby Queens.

GK: I understand John was a concert pianist at one time. How'd John get involved in forming Save Our Surf?

EG: John was a graduate of Juilliard in NYC. I understand that at one point, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was going to realign the stream at Maili Beach, where it feeds into the ocean. They were going to change the existing rock revetment. Next to it was a surf site. John was a big wave surfer. He knew George Downing and Wally Froiseth and some of the other oldtimers. So, when John found out that they were gonna do this, he didn't think it was a good idea, so he and Downing and these other guys, these guys formed Save Our Surf. It wasn't a mass organization in the beginning. They just lobbied with the Army Corps and said, "You know if you do this, you're gonna wipe out a surf site. Can you change the plan a little bit?" And so the Army Corps did. There wasn't a big confrontation. So when you pass through Maili today, there's still a surf site there.

GK: Cool. Could you describe your own participation in all this?

EG: I told John, "You know, I'm not an organizer, but I want to help. I have a studio, and I can make big prints." I could do four-feet by eight-feet murals. . . I built a few frames to mount them, and John liked the idea. He had made his own two feet by three feet photographs. He called them his "hand-helds." The Save Our Surf guys would take these murals to high schools on the Big Island and other places. Very few had seen anything like that here at that time.

GK: What was the impact?

EG: He got invited to this group on Big Island, mostly Hawaiians. It was late at night. It was like a one-lightbulb meeting place. He didn't know anybody. Nobody knew him. And he started to do his presentation. And they're just sitting there. You know, it was, like, 30, 40 people. And John was a pretty good speaker, and he wasn't getting any response.

GK: Really?

EG: Then he held up one of the photographs from the days of the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy displaying the Committee of Safety and all the guys in their overcoats and guns who overthrew the queen. So, he holds this photograph, and the place goes bonkers, with people saying, "Those are the guys that stole our land." The photograph was like an icebreaker. From then on, there was communication.

GK: Wow. I guess certain photographs can touch off emotions?

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EG: It helped. In the early 1970s, Save Our Surf won most of the shoreline struggles. They got a sewage plant built, and they got a park at Sand Island. The government didn't widen Kuhio Beach at the time. And the government didn't build a seawall across Waimea Bay.

GK: What across Waimea Bay?

EG: A seawall. There was actually a public hearing on that. There were proposals to build a seawall to protect the beach.

GK: What did you think of SOS youth leaders?

EG: They took the time to learn about sewage plants and spoke at the State Capitol rally—Scott Steuber and Michael Moriarty. The group had a PA system and everything and there were a couple of thousands of kids there. They partnered with Kokua Hawaii at the rally. At that time, in the early 1970s, that was a record demonstration. When I saw what they were doing and they were successful at it, I said to John, "You know, I can help out with the photography."

GK: How did you make a living while taking photographs for the movement?

EG: I did freelance insurance claims adjusting and lived in a friend's darkroom, rent-free, and taught young photographers how to develop and print film. One of them was P.F. Bentley, who later became a staff photographer for *Time Magazine*.

GK: What made you want to volunteer to take photographs of people being evicted?

EG: My father was a union carpenter. He always taught me to support the underdog.

GK: How did you meet people facing evictions?

EG: After winning several environmental battles, John Kelly announced he and a few other SOS members were going to focus on helping the anti-eviction efforts. I thought that was interesting and wanted to support them. I was also providing photographs about politics for the *Hawaii Observer* and went out with a writer to Waiahole Valley. I also worked with Haunani Trask on an unfinished book. She was then director of the Center for Hawaiian Studies.

GK: Can you describe how you came to get into Kalama Valley and what happened on the day of the arrest?

EG: John Kelly suggested I visit Kalama Valley while it was occupied. I did that two to three times. I was not there the day of the bust.

GK: What happened?

EG: John visited my photography studio on Kapiolani Boulevard and took a look around and said, "I'll put you to work." One day, he called me and said, "Could you go and meet with Randy Kalahiki out in Kahaluu, because there's a big plan for a zoning change coming up for Waiahole-Waikane? We need pictures of the community. If you could meet Randy, he'll take you on a tour of the community, which is what happened."

GK: What did you photograph?

EG: The photograph of his grandmother Tutu Kawelo was shot that day. We went around, met people and I photographed much of the Waiahole-Waikane community.

GK: How was Randy back then?

EG: I didn't know who Randy was. I'd never heard of him. He was a nice guy. While we were driving around, Randy stops to meet Honolulu Councilman Andy Anderson. I knew Anderson from the news. He was with the Honolulu City Council. When they were talking, Anderson paid a lot of attention and treated Randy with a lot of respect.

GK: So Randy was helping in the organizing at the time. Who else did you meet that were community organizers at Waiahole-Waikane and what do you recall?

EG: Pete Thompson, Joy Ahn and Ray Catania.

GK: You also mentioned the eviction fight at Heeia-Kea and 11 families facing eviction and Kokua Hawaii and Joy Ahn and Soli Niheu? Can you share what you remember about that struggle?

EG: There were several large-scale developments planned for the windward side. Hawaiian Electric provisionally bought land in Heeia-Kea for a new power station.

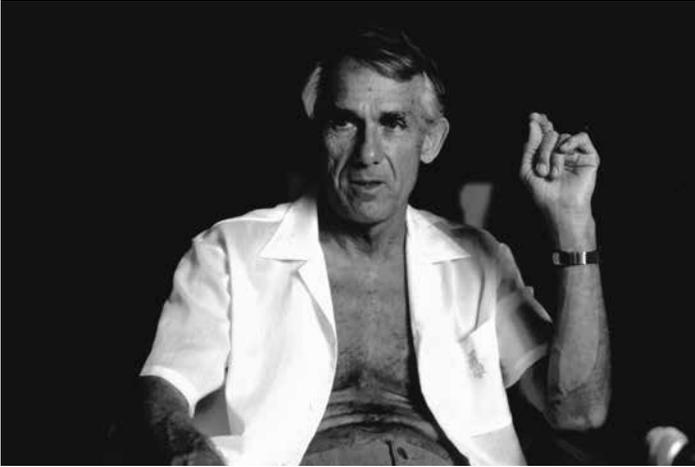
GK: Did you get to meet Pete Tagalog? You mentioned that Pete Tagalog visited various communities to talk about the eviction struggle at Ota Camp?

EG: I met Pete Tagalog at an anti-eviction rally in Waimanalo and at other protests.

GK: I remember Pete Thompson who worked as an instructor at the University of Hawaii Ethnic Studies Program playing a role in Waiahole-Waikane? Any recollections about Pete?

EG: Pete was very charismatic and always treated me with respect. He was easy to work with.

GK: Did you ever get a chance to visit with Stanford Achi at Nukolii or any other eviction struggles?



John Kelly
Photo by Ed Greevy

EG: I stayed at Stanford and June's home several times documenting their communities.

GK: How did you start taking photographs of the Chinatown evictions?

EG: John sent me to Chinatown to document evictions there.

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