

Interview with Leroy Dikito 2/28/2010 by C. Langlas
(wife Betty also present)

CL: Leroy, was it you that had the idea to start KalauonanoeoPuna?

LD: No. That's another story that. I was just... At that time they didn't have a president, so they told me, "Lee, just for two weeks." Cause we was trying to get that land, Kahauale'a. Cause Campbell Estate gave em to Land for Public Trust, eh? So they wen ask us if we wanted em, instead of National Park. National Park said for ask us first. So we had a meeting and then, yeah, yeah, okay. So, Kalapana 'Ohana Association and Kalapana Community Organization, they asked all them, they didn't want.

CL: They didn't wanta take the responsibility.

LD: Yeah, right. So we figure would be a good opportunity, so we decided, yeah, we going take em. And at that time they needed one president. So they told me, "Lee only two weeks." "You sure two weeks?" "Yeah, yeah." And I don't know nothing, yeah? And it's been about four, five years. I don't know how long already. So it was the umbrella so they can get grants yeah? as a nonprofit.

CL: For this subdivision here?

LD: Yeah, right.

(bit omitted)

 When they formed that nonprofit, that's when I got involved. Because that land up there, Kahauale'a, that's where we used to hunt like that.

CL: What kind of plans do you folks have for that?

LD: We had committees on what they wanted to do, yeah? but because of the eruption and all these things going on, everything came to one stand-still. But we had plans, that they really wanted to go back up there, you know, and work the land, and see what can do.

CL: And then the flow started coming this way.

LD: Right. They wanted to form like a museum. You know, like how Waha'ula, eh? 'As was the plan. We had one plan what they wanted to do. But because of the eruption still going, thing's not going right, so everything stay like holding back now.

CL: Was anybody thinking about building over that side?

LD: If the lava went stop, yeah. They was thinking for open up the road, because some of... to reach over there, had some families on the side that they wanted to go back too. But nothing for sure now.

But that's where they wanted to start a museum, like Waha'ula, and then maybe can get jobs for us, so we no need travel far. And the people who from down there, they wanted us for work down there.

CL: How does it feel when you come back down here to Kalapana, after so long?

LD: Ohhh, I always wanted to come back. I wanted to go back home, Kapa'ahu. But this is just like home already. I always wanted to come back. My wife like this too. I belong down here, that's how I feel. There's no other place. Sometimes the traveling [is hard] yeah? but that's okay, that's what we useta to before. It's all good. Soon's you hit 'Opihikao hill, you trow em neutral, you going down already. No, but I wanted to come back. Different area, but it's the same.

CL: Feels the same?

LD: Well, it's not like our home was, yeah? but it's good, just different. Our access to the beach, we had that. You know [here] not like how we had Queen's Bath was, like that. But it's okay. I like, I wanted to come back.

CL: What about as far as people?

LD: Oh, well, a lot of things change for plenty of em. They already establish a home somewhere else. Some of my cousins they tell me, they don't know if they like come back. Because they kinda set already. You know, some of em live in Hilo, up Pahoia, Nanawale, Paradise Park, and it's easy for them to get to work. You know, they feel [it's] better. The ones that like come back, maybe get no more nothing else on deck, so they like come back, yeah. Like, I think by Auntie Maile get one other cousin too stayin over there, Valen. They movin back too, they cleaning their lot. So, for the ones that coming back... either you love it or you don't love it. You gotta love this place again. For me, I'm happy. I feel I belong here.

CL: Even though there's not so many people around here, it still feels good?

LD: Yeah, yeah. When we was living Kapa'ahu, we only had like couple families. And then branch out again. So it's good. Maybe later when they... I guess some of em thinking only for their kids the land. For myself, I happy. Everytime I come down I feel good. Me and my wife feel good.

BD: It doesn't matter if we don't have TV, you know?

LD: That's how it was.

CL: Cannot get TV down here?

BD: We can, but...

LD: Later, yeah, in time. The thing too is, I think my roots is really deep down here. That's why I like come home. That's all I knew when I was growin up. We stay up Pahoa, yeah it's alright. But I always like come home. Now I get one place I can come home now. And like I say, we get the beach. I like fishing. Not like before, you know, we had the mountain, we had the ocean. But I just do mostly fishing now.

CL: So, you never thought about trying to move back to Kapa'ahu?

LD: You know, we had times when we thought about it, yeah. But the way things going it's hard, it's scary. I don't wanta put plenty things there and then we gotta move out again. Cause my grandfather told us, once the lava come, can always come again. But at one time, I wanted to go back. Underneath that lava we get good dirt you know. We get plenty stuff down there. But wouldn't be like before, you know. But now, I happy over here. At first, we was kinda like, yeah, yeah... We come ma'a now. Slowly by slowly. But we alright now.

BD: It's like, when we started I would get mad with him. He say, oh we cannot go today. Then he would say, What, you like go then? Come on then. Let's go.

LD: When we never have nothing here, we have to come up the hill. We come up the hill, we clean one spot, eat lunch.

BD: We just don't wanta go home.

CL: It's really nice down here.

LD: Yeah. I love it. It's my place.

CL: Then I wanted to ask you... When you moved to Kapa'ahu to live with Sam, was he already retired?

LD: Well, not really retired. He was... I think because of me he never accept some of the jobs. Because was Waikoloa, Kona, and then he look at me, ah, you no can stay home yourself yet. So, I think that's why he wen retire already. He hit the age, he wen retire. He was 62 I think at that time.

CL: So that was probably before you graduated H.S.

LD: Yeah, before. But I think that's why he never take too many jobs.

CL: And then, you folks kept going down to 'Apua and Keauhou until the flow?

LD: Yeah, all the way. In fact, until he couldn't go. I was going by myself.

CL: Did he keep going up to the 87 flow? or not that long?

LD: I think so, you know. Cause we was going steady. Even the lava was coming down the hill, we would be still going, you know. I think, what, two, three time went cover the road, the Chain of Crater road? And I remember one time we went down, the lava was still up there, and I think Uncle Kaipo Roberts was the ranger, Waha'ula. So my grandfather, "Oh, we gotta see Uncle Kaipo first, see if we can go down. Maybe they no going let us." "Eh, e stay way up yet. Go." So we spend that three, four days down there, when we come back that thing was coming down the last pali. Was coming down already. Was mean. Had three big fingers coming down. I no forget that. We was coming back. He went until he couldn't go already. Then I was going after that. That was our ____, for pay our dues.

CL: So then you moved up to Pahoia—with Betty's mother?

LD: Yeah.

CL: And is that the house you folks are still in?

LD: Yeah. We move up there when the lava was just about down, yeah? Little before that. I was working Kapoho at that time. Orchid. Working the vanda orchid with Orchid of Hawai'i. So that's how we go back and forth, back and forth.

CL: So, if you think about how life was when you were down Kapa'ahu, what was it like after you graduated high school and you were staying down there?

LD: Oh, was the best that. That's what I used to love to do. I never worked, you know, after I graduated. I was just living off the land with him. Fishing, hunting. I never worked for two years. Until I had to work. Cause I had one baby coming, so I had to work. But, oh was good. Like I say, was riding horse, fishing. Was all good stuff for me, cause I wen like that. Anytime my grandfather say we going holoholo, oh, I ready. Whatever. You just gotta watch what he grab, you gotta be ready. You know what I mean. But yeah, was good.

CL: Was there a lot of families around that you folks shared food with?

LD: Well, usually my auntie, Nona, she was up Keokea. And Auntie Lei them too. They was neighbors. Emma Kauhi, and then Auntie Lei them live on this side. If we—you know we get extra fish, eh, if kalua, we'd have all the [neighbors], eh, just come over. Grind. That's how it was. And then we had times when only had us. Everybody wasn't around. At one time, my grandfather we kalua every week, you know. Yeah. Cause my grandfather had. Eh, we like kalua, we eat, every week. We catch the small pig. (CL: Wild pig?) Everything was wild pig, yeah. We'd raise em for like one week. Then he tell me, eh, tired feed this guy. He tell me, you know, raise pig, that's every day job. So we raise em till we come tired feed em, then we eat em.
(bit omitted)

His theories was simple, eh? Like that.

CL: Were you folks having lots of parties down there that time—like birthday lu‘au?

LD: No. You know, maybe at Harry K. Brown Park we get parties. Me and my grandfather, we never had too much. Only when family come over. Our birthdays, Christmas, was most time us would go to my auntie them house. Other than that, we would be home. As far as party, we’d get together with my auntie them if they were giving party, or something like that. Yeah. As far as my grandfather house, maybe after the funeral of somebody they would come down to the house, yeah, that kind. The after party. But wouldn’t be one of them. My gramps, he never like host one party. If they’re there they’re there. If they’re not there, they’re not there. Cause came to a point where he don’t drink after that. He would drink with his brothers, lidat, but he wouldn’t drink every day. When the brothers would come, then they talk story and he drink, yeah. He wasn’t one, hey, we going have party this week. If they there, they there. If they not there, eh, next day. Sometime they just show up, that’s why. Cause you know, we no can do what we supposed to do the whole day. That’s it. Put away the tools already. Whatever we was doing, pau already. But other than that, we wouldn’t get parties like that.

CL: Did Sam play music? and sing?

LD: You know, he had talent you know. He could play, but he wasn’t one pastime thing. For play music, sing.

CL: Not like the Konanuis.

LD: Yeah, yeah. He was more like talk story, tell jokes. He would just talk story, and just laugh.

CL: And what about you, you play?

LD: I play. Later on in life, I wen get the feeling for play music. Cause I used to watch all Ledward them. Cause I was living right next to the house, yeah? Oh boy, you watch all them, you like play something. I used to play the trumpet first. I was in the band, Pahoa School Band. But then after that, I wen give up the trumpet. I start play guitar after that. But until now I play. Not at much as before. We had a group, we used to play. And it was fun. And then after that, everybody go their own way after that. But I still play sometimes when we get together.

CL: I wanted to ask you, after the flow, when you moved to Pahoa, everybody moved out. How did that feel then? How did life change?

LD: I think wen change big time. As far as our life style went. Everything went. When that place went cover, all that went too already. We... I brought the horses up to Pahoa. You know, we couldn’t do what we used to do. We had the best place. You could just

hunt. You know, you could go where you like. But once that place went cover, that was it already. You cannot just, eh we go. You can, but not like before.

CL: Did you ever try taking the horses into the park after that?

LD: I went one time, yeah? Only one time and that was it. You gotta go through Volcano after that. That was it already. Then my horses all died. So I no more horses now. I like get. But then, you gotta get plenty stuff too. You gotta get placew for keep em, you know. We used to... Like I say, when that place went pau, everything change. Life style, everything change. We used to let it go, the horses, yeah? Behind Queen's Bath. And we had place up house, right by Earl Leite house, the road, we used to let it go, the horses, up there. We had one more house up there. (CL: the old Ka'awaloa house?) Yeah, Paea, e go up and then up house. We used to let it go. That's where our place too, so. When we used to go hunt, lidat, or my friends used to come over, my grandfather tell, "You guys go up house." We make big noise. "You guys go stay up there." But yeah, once we left, everything change.

BD: The horses wanted to go back.

LD: Yeah, one time my horse, he broke the rope. I had em behind the school, and then my cousin came my house, Darren. "Lee!" "What?" "I see your horse up by the road." I say where. Oh, by Leilani Estate. I go, what? Okay, I go up there, I tell, oh no. He broke the rope and he wanted to go back Kalapana. He was going home though. Cause I wen ride him all the way up from Kalapana. I no more horse trailer, so I ride him up all the way from Kalapana I ride em up to Pahoia, I take em behind the school. And he went take the same route I brought him. He wanted to go home. So I catch em, I had to bring em back. But yeah, everything change, yeah? Just what we used to do, we cannot do em now. Not that you cannot do em, but not like before. Before you just get up, you just go hunt there. We go fishing, we had the access to the park, right through. Now, you gotta go far. You gotta get horse trailer, get horse, place to keep em. If we was still down there, oh, we would be still doing the same thing what we did all past time. Just now it's different. You can still do em, but you gotta hustle more. Work harder. The place not going change down there [in the park]. You can still do the same thing what we used to do, but as for get there. Take more preparation than before, yeah?

CL: How about people, seeing people, did that change?

LD: Yeah, you no see em all the time. Before we only had one road, eh? You call out, you pop your horn, everybody know your car, everybody know the sound, they know what house you going. They would know all this kind stuff, yeah? But once everybody was split up, you no see them. You only see them funeral. Mostly at funerals. Parties, you know, you see the ones like party. But usually you see them at funerals, mostly, after that. Or you see them on the road like that once in a while. But you no see em like before. Before, you stay Kalapana, everybody see each other, eh?

If they no see you, “Eh, I no see you long time. How come?” So they go by your house, eh, to check on you. Now, you don’t see them, “Eh, I wonder,” but you don’t know where they stay. Everybody move. Different. No can help, we gotta move out, yeah? So when they was starting this place, my grandfather told me, “Hey Lee, they going get the kind, land, over here.” He was tellin me, “Past the rubbish dump. They going make land for the guys.” Cause he was staying Makuu at that time. He tell me if I like. I say, “Oh, yeah. I like that.” So he say, “Okay. I going send the letter back then. We going accept one lot.” That’s how it start. That’s how we got this place, eh? From him. But, Yeah, when they tell they wanted to bringem back, the community, all this kind, oh yeah. My grandfather told me, “Oh, go try. You got nothing to lose.”

CL: So he put in for the lot, or you put in?

LD: Well, we did—through him. He had to write one letter we was living with him. Just to say that we was over here, stay with him at that house. And he wrote one letter.

CL: Oh, cause it was his house.

LD: Everybody know I live with him, but I guess they wanted em on paper. Even for, when I used to go national park [for fishing in the Kalapana Extension], yeah, cause my name is Dikito, eh? “Who is this guy?” So it took time. They know me as Lee, or Lee Boy. Not too much guys call me Leroy. They only know me as Sam’s mo’opuna, they don’t know my name.

At one time he wanted to adopt me, my grandfather. I don’t know what happened. I was young that time, so. I guess never went through. But it’s alright.

So that’s the story about that. When everybody move, everything change. People change too. You know, we farther from each other. So, even though [we say], “Hey, how’s it?” you know, when we see each other, we talk story, the main one is “Oh, you work today?” “Oh yeah, I work.” You know how. Not like before, “Hey, I saw you down the beach today.” “Yeah, yeah, we down there, holoholo down there.” You know, talk story like that.

CL: Not as much to talk about now.

LD: Yeah, you know, it’s only the ones you stay close with, the one you see mostly all the time, eh? But because we [live apart], now change, eh? You talk story, but you come different. That’s alright. Everybody get adventures to do. Everybody concentrating on their thing. Nowadays, gotta work. No can relax like before, eh? Like every Sunday, everybody stay Kaimu, you know, the car getting rusty. _____ on top Sundays was the day, boy, you go to Kaimu and kick back. (CL: Harry K. Brown Park) Yeah, everybody would just meet up, and talk story. Now you, punt. “Oh, I busy this week. Next week I busy.” Yeah, everybody doing their thing. No more that...

CL: Well, there’s no place too.

LD: Yeah, that's right. As far as Pohoiki, I never did go Pohoiki. Until later on in life, going over. Because went pau, and more we was going Pohoiki, surf. But we usually stay this side. We don't go Hilo. We don't go Hilo beaches. We don't go Pohoiki. We only stay our side. Now we gotta go that side, cause we no more already, beach. So different now. But—as okay. Can't help.

When they come again, eh, we make noise again. And walk to each other house. All that kind stuff.

CL: You think everyone with a lot will end up building?

LD: The ones that can, maybe. I think some of them, they thinking about the future only, for their kids. Cause by and by they no can get land. So that's why some of them grab the place, for the future. And the ones that can build, I don't know if they wanta build. The ones that maybe there's nothing out there for them. And no can get loan because of the zoning. Cannot get loan from the bank. We tried. It's because of the lava zoning, yeah? And banks will not lend you money if you don't own the land.

(bit omitted)

Like us, most of the money came from our savings. That's what we doing, whatever we could get.

CL: So that's a big obstacle.

LD: That's a main one. And then the insurance, they like you pay. For down here is expensive. Even just to get the land, you gotta have insurance. The DLNR like us to have insurance. And some people cannot afford it now. So, they kinda lose fight, some of em. But me, I think this way, I think whoever can, can. And the ones that no can, I hope they can. But, I pretty sure not everybody can now. But I wish, one day everybody can.

(bit omitted about Habitat for Humanity. Mary Finlay tried to arrange for five homes. Not everyone qualified.)

Now, like I say, some guys established already, where they stay. I hope one day. Cause mostly everybody who come, we gonna know everybody. Cause that's all my age guys now. We all grew up together. And they get kids, now maybe I don't know their kids, but, they tell me they from Kalapana, I say, "Who you mother?" If I don't know the mother, "Who the father?" Then we work from there. Oh, okay, okay.

I think if they gave us more option, like that, like to own em outright and do what we like [would be easier to get loan]. But they had so much restriction. They had a thick book, you know, telling us that we cannot. We make the place for you, but this is how you gotta live. How can we live like that? Yeah, they like bring us back the way we used to do. But they never like us raise pig, all that kind stuff. That's why plenty of them went, at that time, they never like the place. Even though, how good to be true, when they had all these restriction, they never like. But my grandfather tell me, "Eh, hang on, Lee. Just

hang on. Cause you don't know. Might change." So look, this is seventeen years already. And I hope it going change.

(talking about trying to get loans going) You know, plenty guys give up. We went to these meetings, we go plenty workshop to get these loans. And fall through the cracks. And all that time—over eight hour kind classes you know. Three days, two days. It was killing us, but we went. It didn't work out. They wanted us to start one revolving loan fund. So we did go all through this, but never work. So in the end, we did this on our own. Cause I said, you gotta go, you gotta do em.

The second wave of people that came in and they gave the last nineteen lots, they was coming in and cleaning. So I think it gave energy to the old guys that had. Oh look at those new guys, they working already.