

## Transcript of Interview with Colette Higgins (March 27, 2014)

### **How do you think the political change during the late nineteenth century (monarchical government to United States territory) impacted life at Kalaupapa for the patients?**

Changes actually occurred at two points in the monarchy's history: the year after the Bayonet Constitution of 1887 and six months after the overthrow of the monarchy. More patients were sent to Kalaupapa in 1888 than in any previous year. Six months after the overthrow of the monarchy in 1893, the people of Kalalau Valley, who had refused to go to Kalaupapa and chose instead to isolate themselves in Kalalau Valley with their loved ones rather than be separated from them, were rounded up and sent to Kalaupapa. Both incidents demonstrate that a change in government resulted in stricter enforcement of the isolation law. Conditions actually improved in Kalaupapa after Hawai'i became a U.S. territory, in large part because of superintendent Jack McVeigh.

### **Do you think it was within the government's responsibility to enforce medical isolation on those afflicted with Hansen's Disease?**

Yes. The government has a responsibility to protect the public. They didn't know what caused the disease. At the time, leprosy was thought to be very contagious. There was no cure until the 1940s. Isolation had long been used in human history for leprosy. The problem was with the way isolation was enforced, and whether the government adequately cared for the patient. During the monarchical period, especially early in the colony's establishment, the government did not provide adequate health care or provisions (i.e. food, shelter, clothing). However, during the monarchical period the government was more tolerant of having kokuas (helper who didn't have the disease, often spouses or other family members) live in the settlement to assist.

### **What rights do you think were violated for the patients?**

In the processing of those who were considered to have leprosy, they violated their right to privacy. Patients had to stand in their underwear in front of a panel of doctors who determined if they had leprosy and be photographed. Patients were denied basic freedoms that we often take for granted. They could not choose where to live, and the hardest part was that they were separated from their loved ones.

### **If the government didn't separate those afflicted with the disease, what do you think would have been the best alternative in containing Hansen's Disease?**

The best alternative would have been to establish a hospital on each island where patients with leprosy would be adequately cared for and family members would be allowed to visit them. Based on her research, Anwei Law speculates that the monarchy was considering such as strategy in the mid-1880s.

### **Do you think the American government or the state government learned anything from the history of this settlement or the perspectives of the**

**patients?**

I think the American government learned that medical isolation in a remote area is not necessary. Isolation can be managed at a hospital or at a person's home, provided they follow guidelines. In the 1800s, I don't think the Board of Health gave much thought to the patients' perspective. By the 1980s, the patients of Kalaupapa were expressing their perspectives, especially regarding the use of the word "leper." That word has a negative connotation of uncleanness that date back to Biblical times, and it defines a person by his or her illness. Today we use more sensitive language by describing them as patients with leprosy or Hansen's Disease.