

HOW MY MOLOKAI CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES LED ME TO THE CHURCH

by Martha Kalama

My name is Martha Washington Ahia Kalama and I lived on the island of Molokai from 1921 to 1954. Although life on Molokai was not easy, especially during the early years, Molokai is and will always be very special to me.

It was on Molokai that I learned the value of hard work. It was on Molokai that I learned to love music. It was on Molokai that I was introduced to the gospel of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and was eventually baptized. It was on Molokai where I met my husband. Our family had its beginnings on Molokai.

In 1921, at the age of four, I moved to Molokai with my aunt and uncle, William and Lizzie Aki, and their six year old son, George. Arriving by boat one evening after sunset, we felt the thick darkness as we drove through Keawe trees heading for Kalamaula. It was eery and a little scary. If you've been in the middle of Keawe trees after dark, you know what I mean. We drove until we came to a one room house with two windows, no bathroom or kitchen. It stood all alone in the middle of the Keawe trees. This was our new home. My aunt said to my uncle, "This is the last place God ever created." She repeated it many times during our first few years on the island. When you consider that we had just moved from a beautiful home on Dillingham Boulevard in Honolulu, I'm sure you can understand her feelings.

Why did we move to Molokai? Like many other Hawaiians who moved here, we came to farm on Hawaiian Homestead lands. My uncle loved farming. When he learned that we could obtain a ninety-nine year lease for twenty acres at \$1.00 per year on Molokai, he immediately applied and was accepted. That was the easy part. The most difficult job came after our arrival. We had to cut and burn hundreds of Keawe stumps in order to begin farming. Although my uncle hired a Filipino man to assist him, it was a huge job that required the sweat and toil from all of us.

Other adjustments included the use of an outhouse, using lanterns, cooking outdoors, and literally living off the land. But we were blessed. The soil was rich and everything grew in abundance. We had a vegetable garden, papayas, bananas, sugar cane, and plenty of fish. In fact, I never saw so much fish. In Hawaiian they called it *Peku Wawae*, which meant that you could feel the fish between your legs as you walked in the water. That's an accurate description.

My uncle, who was three-fourths Chinese and one-fourth Hawaiian, was an excellent businessman and carpenter. Several years after moving to Molokai, he received a Hawaiian Homes Commission loan to purchase farming equipment, seeds, and materials to build us a home.

Although the work was difficult, he built a lovely two-bedroom home with all of the modern conveniences for the time period. My cousin, George, and I were his assistants.

He also expanded our farm. We raised three hundred leghorn chickens and two hundred pigs. We planted alfalfa for the hogs. It was during this time that the Hawaiian Home Commission dug a well between Kalamaula and Kaunakakai for

irrigation purposes. Flumes were built through the homesteads to water the fields. It was a beautiful site to see green alfalfa, papaya trees, corn and many other crops flourish.

Kalamaula grew into a fine homestead community. Our neighbors were like family. We would help them plant their crops and they would do the same for us. This was called *lima lau*, or "helping hands" in English. After all of the fields were planted, we would celebrate with a luau, lots of Hawaiian music, and food. In those days we were healthy because we ate from the sea and the ground.

With no market outlet on Molokai, our crops were shipped by the boat, *Mo'i*, to Honolulu. Pineapple was shipped by barge. My uncle became a warfinger for Young Brothers, Co., which allowed our family free travel by barge.

We were a religious family. My aunt and cousin were Protestants. Although my uncle and I were Catholics, we attended the Protestant Church as a family.

We were first introduced to the Mormon faith by Clarence W. Kinney, a friend who, unbeknownst to us, was also a missionary for the LDS Church. An avid reader, my uncle read all of the LDS scriptures introduced to him by Mr. Kinney. Although we continued to attend the Protestant Church, uncle began to develop a testimony of the LDS faith, and on one of his business trips to Honolulu, was baptized by Clarence Kinney. When Aunt Lizzie learned of his baptism, she was very angry and refused to have anything to do with Kinney or the Church. To keep peace in the family, we continued to attend the Protestant Church.

One Sunday, uncle used references from the Book of Mormon in a Protestant class. The teacher, who happened to be a close family friend, stood up and said in Hawaiian, "Beware, members. We have Satan among us." Uncle quietly put all of his books in his briefcase and walked out of that church, never to return again.

Being close to my uncle, I attended the Mormon Church with him. In 1935, I was baptized on Christmas Day. Today, as I reflect back, I feel a sense of deep gratitude to my uncle and Clarence Kinney for bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ into my life. I know that my journey in life would have taken a different path without the gospel.

On November 19, 1935, I married Melvin M. Kalama in the Hawaii LDS Temple. Following our wedding, we returned home to Molokai. Our three children, Theresa, Napua, and Melvin, Jr., were born in the Shingle Hospital in Ho'olehua. We attended the Kaunakakai Branch, with Albert Kahinu as branch president.

After living in Kalamaula for ten years, we were fortunate to obtain a forty acre lot in Ho'olehua, move a military building onto it, and remodel it into a large three-bedroom home overlooking the pineapple fields and ocean. Featured in the Homes and Gardens magazine, our home was beautiful. It was also a home away from home for visiting leaders of the Church and a gathering place for local members.

Back then the most profitable form of fundraising was the game, Bingo. We played Bingo to raise money for church activities and other needs until the brethren instructed us to stop because it was a form of gambling.

In need of funds to build a cultural hall/gymnasium, the members of the Ho'olehua Branch decided to fast everyday for one week. We met as a branch at 4:30 am daily to open our fast, which we concluded with our families in the evening. We could feel the spirit of the Lord as we sat in the chapel each morning. It was a beautiful experience.

After a week of fasting, an appointed committee decided that we should sponsor a carnival. This required tremendous support from the members who came through with flying colors, willingly giving of themselves and their resources. Pigs, cows, eggs, chickens, baked goods, and milk were just a few of the donated items. Everyone gave something, even though their funds were limited. My sister-in-law and I baked over one hundred cakes from scratch. We were so busy, we didn't make it to the carnival, which was a huge success, ALL BECAUSE OF THE FASTING.

One of the most influential people in my life was my mother-in-law, Emma Makahanohano Kalama, a faithful member of the Church who was raised in Laie and later moved with her husband to homestead in Ho'olehua. Unfortunately, Mama Emma lost her husband, who died at the age of thirty-eight. She was left with five children. Melvin, her oldest son, was then fifteen.

Although her life was not easy, her faith and reliance in God helped her to meet every obstacle with hope and optimism. Mama Emma was prayerful. In fluent Hawaiian, she thanked the Lord daily for her many blessings and sought His guidance and inspiration.

She was obedient. When the leaders of the Church counseled members to store food, she turned one of her bedrooms into a food storage room and filled it with home canned vegetables, fruits, stew, and even *poi*. During the war, Mama didn't have to stand in line for food rations. She had ample to feed all of us.

Mama Emma loved to read the scriptures, which were kept alongside her rocking chair with other Church books. She knew the doctrine.

Because her life reflected her love for the Lord and His gospel, Mama Emma was my greatest inspiration. From her, I learned the gospel. Through her faith and example, my testimony grew.

I thank the Lord for the gospel of Jesus Christ which is the most precious gift in my life. I thank the Lord for my uncle who brought the gospel into my life. I thank the Lord for my mother-in-law who taught me the gospel. I thank the Lord for leading my family to Molokai, where all of this took place.

For me, Molokai is truly a special place!