A SERVANT OF GOD: A STORY OF JACK SING KONG
by Kuulei Bell

Today is a special day for me to be here to speak about a man who was SPECIAL, not only to me, but to all the members of the Kalaupapa Branch and the Kalaupapa Community, as well.

His name was Jack Sing Kong. He was born on December 4, 1892 in Canton, China. His father was Hoi Tak and his mother was Shee. They had eight children, two girls and six boys. They came from the Kong Dynasty. They moved from Canton, China, to Hawaii to the island of Kauai in Hanalei, which was their first home.

Jack's dad purchased some land and started to grow rice. With the hard work of the family it became a very profitable business. Later, they moved from the island of Kauai to Honolulu and lived in the Kaimuki district. Jack's only education was up to the eighth grade, but he had a business mind. Personally, I would give him a master's degree in business.

Jack had many talents and one of them was to sing and perform, which he loved to do. He would sing at many of the parties that we had in our community. Kalaupapa was know for its parties. He really was a HAM. Once he told me that he sang in a barbershop quartet and his part was to sing the bass. They placed second in this contest and he boasted about that a lot.

In the year of 1918 he contracted Hansen's Disease (leprosy), and was sent to Kalihi Hospital, a receiving station for leprosy patients. A year later he was sent to Kalaupapa and came by the interisland ship called the Humuula, or Waialeale, that transported the patients to Kalaupapa. He arrived at Kalaupapa June 19, 1919, at which time he was twenty-seven years old. Upon his arrival it was a special holiday in the settlement and they were having a horse race, which was a big thing in Kalaupapa during that time.

Jack said he was assigned a room at the Baldwin Home in Kalawao, which was operated by the Catholic Church under the supervision of Brother Dutton and the Sacred Heart Brothers. The women patients lived at Bishop Home under the supervision of the St. Francis nuns of the Catholic Church. This home is located in Kalaupapa Settlement Proper. Baldwin Home wasn't the best place to live. Jack said the living conditions were very poor. The brothers did all the cooking and the staple food was poi and stew.

Many of the patients at that time were very sick. We call them heavy case (open sores, etc.). Once Jack said he hated to go to meals because everyone ate from the same bowl of poi and stew and he couldn't eat. He and a friend used to cook outside on an open fire and use empty cans to cook fish soup. At that time fish was plenty. Later, with good luck, he moved from Baldwin Home to McVeigh Home in the settlement, which was run by the Territory of Hawaii. It was a nice home, clean and the meals were good. During that time this place was for the important white people to live and it was hard for anyone to get into this home, but he made it.

His first job was as a photographer for Dr. William Goodhue. He took progress pictures of patients and he also worked in the dispensary and earned $20.00 a month.
He saved his money and bought himself a store from this Chinese man, also a patient. He sold Chinese groceries and many other things. He even made his own beer that he sold, too. At that time his store made money as there weren’t many private owned stores. He also bought a car from another friend and had a taxi business. He was always wheeling and dealing.

Jack was married twice. His first wife was Daisy Rebecca Bell; they were married for one month and she died because of her illness. Sometime later he married Mary Kaehukulani, on January 24, 1931, and they were sealed to each other at the Hawaii Temple in 1952.

President Jack Kong Sing and Mary Kong Sing were converts to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Sing was released as an active patient in 1944 and Mary Sing [was released] in 1947. They had no children.

President Sing became branch president in 1952 and remained so for thirty-two years before his death. He was the father of our Kalaupapa Branch and a true and faithful servant of God. He did many good works for our branch, as well as our community. Some of the things I remember of him is going out to get donations for the Kalaupapa Lion’s Club annual community Christmas party. He repaired and fixed our church building and never asked for help from our church. He gave financial and spiritual help to anyone who came to his door.

Every Christmas we had a box of candy from him. Every missionary who was here also got one, too. He did this for thirty-two years. He remembered all the nurses and doctors and many others in the community, as well. I know, he had me wrapping boxes of chocolate candies for all of them. If I missed anyone, I would be reminded. There are many more wonderful things that he did. It would take me more than twenty minutes, and that’s all the time that I’m allowed to speak. Because of his kindness and generosity, the Lord showered his home with much and everyone loved him.

Many dignitaries came to Kalaupapa from our church. Apostle Charles Albert Callis was the first apostle to come to Kalaupapa. Joseph Fielding Smith—Jack remembered him well because he was a soft spoken man. President Ezra Taft Benson came and I remember him very well because I had the honor of taking him on a tour in the settlement and I [was] his guide for the day, with the permission of Jack Sing. Mark E. Petersen and William Waddoup, who was the mission president then, also came to visit. Later, William Waddoup became Superintendent of the Kalaupapa Settlement for the Department of Health.

We also had Apostle Spencer W. Kimball, who came to visit the members of Kalaupapa Branch, too. I remember once we all went to the airport and we made a large banner saying “Aloha” to President David O. McKay, who wanted to stop and visit with us, but time did not permit. We told him to look out for our banner and the pilot of his aircraft flew around the airport. We all waved, hoping he could see us and we put the banner right in the middle of the runway, just to say ALOHA.

Many distinguished men of the political circle came. Jack said he had the honor to meet Governor Samuel Wilder King, Governor Ingram Stainback, and Vice-President Hubert Humphrey’s wife, Muriel Humphrey, who came with Senator Daniel Inouye.
Jack drove them in his Cadillac for a tour. All the big shots rode [in] Jack’s Cadillac. He was the only person in the settlement who owned a Cadillac.

When Jack’s Cadillac came to Kalaupapa, we all went to the wharf to watch the barge come in with his Cadillac and we were the first ones to ride [in] it. It’s a big day when the barge came. It used to be that it came three times a year, but now it’s twice a year. ALL the supplies for the settlement and the patients personal freight come off the barge.

During the Depression Jack said they had a shortage of poi. At that time Mr. McVeigh was the superintendent of the settlement and because the people needed poi badly, Mr. McVeigh had to find some. Someone told him to go and see Samuel Woolley, of the Mormon Church in Laie, because they had taro and it was for the Church. Mr. McVeigh went to Laie to see President Woolley. It was lunch hour when he arrived and asked to see President Woolley, who was having his lunch. Mr. McVeigh was asked to sit and wait. President Woolley heard that someone wanted to see him and left his lunch to see who was out there. He came, shook hands with Mr. McVeigh, and asked what could he do for him. Mr. McVeigh related the story of the people who were in need of poi at Kalaupapa. He asked President Woolley, “Could you spare me some of your taro?” He mentioned seeing all the taro patches along the way. President Woolley said, “Sure, we can spare some taro. How many bags do you want?” And in reply, Mr. McVeigh said, “Would you send us forty bags of taro for a whole month to feed the patients because by then our taro in the valley will be ready.” President Woolley said alright, and every week the boat came out and brought forty bags of taro for the patients a whole month. This story was related to all who lived in Kalaupapa at that time. Mr. McVeigh said that everyone should be thankful to the Mormon Church, [because] now they have poi. Jack and Mary said everyone was so thankful that our church came to help.

I remember Jack was honored by Brigham Young University [Hawaii] in 1978 to receive the Distinguished Service Award from the Church and University. They asked me if I could bring him to Laie. Sister Mary Sing did not want to go because it was hard for her to walk or get around. They put us up on campus. We had a big room and there was many showers. Jack commented, “Why so many showers?” We didn’t realize that we were in the dormitory. It was very nice and comfortable. We had dinner that night with all of the staff of the school. They had a party and Jack was having a very nice time. We were so happy to see Betty Jean Fuller and Cecilia Fong, also Hanaloa. They were there entertaining us for the evening.

Ishmael Stagner took care of us and made our stay very pleasurable. The next day was the big day. I watched Jack walk down the aisle with all the professors and dignitaries with their long robes and caps and he looked so small among them in his Hawaiian jacket and bow tie. I was so proud of him and started to cry to see him smiling with his beautiful white hair. When it was his turn to speak, he stood tall and spoke from his heart, thanking them for giving him this wonderful honor, which he truly deserved. He never stopped talking about this special occasion for days. There also was another time when he was ordained to the office of a high priest. I had the honor to be with him as he was blessed. I truly felt the Spirit of the Lord as they pronounced the blessings upon him. To be a part there at his blessing was just wonderful. I felt I was there for Mary because she couldn’t be there.
When Mary died January 23, 1983, she was really very ill. I tried my best to get her to go to the hospital; she did, but her kidney shutdown on her and she refused to be on the kidney machine. So she lived a week in the hospital and died in my arms on Sunday after church.

After her death, Jack stayed in the hospital because he fell and hurt his hip. I took him to Honolulu to a specialist to see what could be done for him. They said he was too old for surgery and he was in no pain and he could use a walker to walk and the wheelchair. They told me to take him home and care for him. I did. I repaired his home and made it clean and beautiful and moved in with him and became his full-time nurse, daughter, and friend.

Jack was a wonderful cook and did all the cooking for himself and Mary. He made the best Chinese food you could eat.

Once, Mary said Jack had his friends over [to] his home to watch TV, because he had the TV in the settlement. It wasn't that good of a reception, but every evening his friends came to his home to watch TV. Mary said they had so much fun. There were many more stories told to me, but I think you heard enough of my voice.

Jack Kong Sing died on December 8, 1984; he was ninety-one years old.

I conclude my talk with this scripture taken from Doctrine and Covenants, Section 4, Verse 2:

"Therefore, O ye that embark in the service of God see that ye serve him with all your heart, might, mind and strength, that ye may stand blameless before God at the last day."