

Views of the Vision

The Ministry of Gay and Andrew Hongo

June 2020

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Ministering to our Native Hawaiian Family



Gay and Andrew led a Sunday morning worship service at the beach for the Kelekolio family.

Randy came from a big Hawaiian family in Kona, on the Big Island. His mother, Ida Kelekolio Hongo, was one of thirteen children! I first met the Kelekolio 'ohana when Randy and I were just newlyweds. Randy's cousin was getting married, so we went to Kona to attend the wedding. Even though I'm Japanese, I wanted to impress all the Hawaiian relatives, so I decided to sing a song completely in the Hawaiian language, *Kamehameha Waltz*. I made sure to practice hard so I could get all of the Hawaiian words right. When I sang it for them, they all said, "Wow, not bad for one Japanese." High praise!

Throughout the years, Randy and I would see the Kelekolio side at weddings, funerals, and in more recent years, family reunions. At the last reunion we went to together, Randy had a wonderful time seeing all his relatives, leading the music from the piano as his cousins danced and played ukulele and sang. Randy was always the life of the party. On the Sunday morning of the reunion, the family worshiped together as was tradition. Randy had the opportunity to lead the whole service, preaching, ministering, and singing. Randy had such a heart for his relatives, some of whom did not know the Lord or were far from Him. After the service he said to me, "I wish I could come every month and be the kahu (Hawaiian for pastor) to my family here in Kona." But that was never to be, since not long after that reunion, Randy went home to be with Jesus.

So when Randy's cousin, Kealoha Kelekolio, called me last year to tell me they were having another reunion weekend, this time in Wai'anae (on the island where I live), I knew that this was a wonderful opportunity to share the Gospel with Randy's family. Kealoha asked if Andrew and I could lead the Sunday morning worship service, which was going to be at the beach. I knew that our reunions usually drew more than a hundred people, so I asked Kealoha how many people would be coming on Sunday morning. He said, "Well, we usually party pretty late Saturday night so I'm not sure how many of us will wake up Sunday morning!"

Randy's sister, Ruth Binyan, flew in from the Big Island, and Andrew flew in from Alabama. Every family unit prepared a musical number for a Saturday night talent show, so we practiced *Pretty Red Hibiscus* (the song Randy's dad would sing to his mom) and *How Great Thou Art*. I also told Andrew, "I'm not sure how many of our family will come Sunday morning so you better share the Gospel Saturday night, too."

There were maybe 150-200 people who attended from all over the mainland (Alaska, Indiana, Florida) and several neighbor islands. The family had arranged for a big luau (feast) with all of our Hawaiian food favorites (poi, chicken long rice, kalua pig). Andrew was in heaven since he doesn't get Hawaiian food in Alabama.

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Our branch of the Kelekolio 'ohana: Ida Kelekolio's children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren.

When it was our turn in the talent show, Andrew shared before we sang. He said, "As many of you know, since our last reunion, my dad, Randy Hongo, went home to be with the Lord. He was so proud to be a Kelekolio, so proud to be Hawaiian. He loved being Hawaiian, and he loved all of you. Thank you so much for loving him." Then Andrew went on to share John 3:16, which says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." Andrew explained that Randy's greatest desire for his family was to have them receive the Lord. I don't think there was a dry eye in the house.

When Sunday morning came, a pretty good crowd – maybe people – turned up at the beach. I guess people didn't party too hard! We sang some praise songs, including *Kanaka Waiwai*, and Randy's cousin, Binky Tanita, danced a beautiful hula. There were several other families that lost loved ones since the last reunion, so I led a time of remembrance and ministering to those who were grieving. I handed out programs from Randy's celebration of life service which contained an explanation of the Gospel and how to receive Jesus as Savior and Lord. Andrew closed our time by leading in a sinner's prayer. We all held hands, there at the beach in Wai'anae, and prayed together, and I was grateful that the Lord allowed for Randy's dream to come true in His perfect time.

**If you would like a copy of Randy's celebration of life program with insert, please write or email Gay.*

JOHN 3:16

Trusting God in the Pandemic

By Andrew Hongo

Due to this global pandemic, Meaghan and I (like most of America) have had a lot more free time on our hands – stuck at home. We're trying, to varying degrees of success, to spend that time wisely and productively: cleaning up our yard, taking long walks with the dog, reading books together. But I'll admit we've also spent a good amount of time binge-watching cooking shows on Netflix and revisiting old favorites on Disney+ (like *The Princess Bride*).

The next thing on my to-watch list is *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. I haven't watched it in a long time, but I remember it came out in the years just after 9/11, when we all were feeling a bit unsettled, and we needed something like this – a story that made sense of the sorrow and uncertainty all around us, in which joy ultimately triumphed over sadness. A time maybe not so different than the one we all find ourselves in now.

Here's the extremely quick summary of J.R.R. Tolkien's tale: our unlikely hero, Frodo, must find a way – against all odds – to destroy a ring of terrible power lest darkness overtake the world. In a moment of difficulty, he confides in his friend, the wizard Gandalf:

"I wish it need not have happened in my time," said Frodo. "So do I," said Gandalf, "and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us."

There are many things we wish had not happened in our time, whether it be this coronavirus, or the many other forms of trials and suffering that inhabit our lives: sickness, disability, besetting sin, broken relationships, addiction, anxiety, selfishness. But as Gandalf so wisely says, it's not up to us what happens in our time; but what is up to us, is what to do with the time given us. In spite of the anxiety and sadness I feel during this pandemic, what will I do with that? Will I succumb to those dark feelings and let them overwhelm me? Or will I bring them to the Lord in prayer, and trust that somehow, He will use even this – especially this – for His glory. Can I trust that, as Romans 8:28 says, "in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose"?

Our pastor here in Alabama gave a sermon a few months ago (before the pandemic) on spiritual depression – those seasons when God seems hidden or distant, when everything feels difficult and hard. One thing he said that stuck with me is this: *What do we do in the midst of a spiritual depression? Two things: We obey God; and we worship God.*

That really resonated with me. We may not be able to will our ourselves out of a spiritual depression immediately; nor can we wish away the coronavirus with a wave of

our hand. But we can, in the midst of these trials, still be faithful to God. We can still obey and still worship. For me that means, whether I feel like it or not, obeying His call to love others – texting or calling friends to encourage them, praying with them, reading Scripture with them. And, whether I feel like it or not, sitting at the piano or pulling out my guitar, and singing praise songs to the Lord. Declaring, like Job, “The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

One silver lining in this whole thing is that Meaghan and I have been able to spend more time preparing for our upcoming move. She is finishing her pediatric residency in June (thank you all for your prayers that have sustained us through a very busy couple of years!). We’ll be moving to Northern California, near Meaghan’s family – and closer to Hawai’i! She’s found a position as a pediatrician at a group practice in Modesto; it’s a great fit in that it will allow her to minister to an underserved population, and she’ll have some flexibility to eventually do short-term missions trips (which we’re both excited about). I’ll be starting in the fall as an assistant professor of broadcast journalism at San Francisco State University, both teaching students and doing documentary film work.

As you can imagine, there’s a lot of moving parts to this move (no pun intended), between putting our Alabama house on the market, finding housing in California, and planning a cross-country road trip with our dog, Boaz, in tow. Please pray that the move will go smoothly, and that even more importantly, the Lord would prepare us for the work He has for us in California – the work He will do through us and in us as we enter this new season of life.

From Gay...

People are always asking me how I am during this time of quarantine. Like many of us, I miss the fellowship with others – especially my church family. But I am grateful for technology which keeps me in touch through Zoom meetings, emails, texts, and calls. Having gone through a class studying emotionally healthy spirituality and relationships, I have a good foundation for daily devotions, prayer, and listening to God. I am now using *My Utmost for His Highest* by Oswald Chambers. It is sometimes difficult for me to understand fully, so I also use a study guide called *A Daily Companion to My Utmost for His Highest*, which gives further explanations and simple applications. I am also reading Leviticus for my Bible study class on Zoom with Pastor Clive Cowell.

Every day I see evidence of God’s grace and mercy. I keep busy with one project after another, and amazingly the days are speeding by. One project was making an Easter greeting video, which you can see on our website. It featured Randy and me singing *He Is Not Here*, with Kalihi Union Church’s praise dance team led by Shelley Ige. As I say on the video: “God is faithful, God is in control. So let’s celebrate!”

Waikiki Beach Chaplaincy



Gay sang Kanaka Waiwai with Pastor Alex McAngus and the Spirit of Joy hula ministry for Waikiki Beach Chaplaincy’s 50th Anniversary.

I was able to participate in Waikiki Beach Chaplaincy’s 50 Anniversary Celebration this past February. As I mentioned in my last newsletter, WBC has had a thriving, anointed ministry for many years now, doing evangelistic Sunday services on Waikiki Beach for tourists and locals. Randy and I have ministered there many times over the years, and the founder of WBC, Pastor Bob Turnbull, was the one who led me to the Lord when I was a college student. Several long-time friends came to Hawai’i for the event, including dear sister and Gospel singer Lillie Knauls; and Beverly Mossman, a Christian Vision supporter whom we originally met through her son, Tim Mossman, who had been a missionary in Oita, Japan.

I was invited to sing at the Saturday night banquet, and the coordinator, a gentleman named Brian Jahnke, called me to arrange the details. He asked me, “Is anyone coming to perform with you?” I jokingly replied, “No, I’ll be all by my lonesome self... unless you want to sing with me!” I always say that, and people usually reply, “Oh no! I don’t sing. You’re the professional.” But this time, to my surprise, Brian said, “I’d love to sing with you! Let’s do *Lord of the Islands* (Randy’s signature song).” I had no idea if he was a good singer or not, but I went with it, and when it came to our Saturday night performance, I found – thank goodness – that he was a good singer and wonderful performer.

That night I shared my testimony of how I became a Christian when I was invited to a youth camp sponsored by Kalihi Union Church 52 years ago. A handsome young pastor named Bob Turnbull was the speaker – the same man who founded Waikiki Beach Chaplaincy. Afterward, Bob came up to me, gave me a great big hug, and said, “Gay, does that make me your spiritual father? I am soooo blessed!”

Sunday morning, I ministered at WBC’s beachside service, at the Hilton Hawaiian Village. Joining me were Debbie Rutkowski and several of her Spirit of Joy hula dancers. We always asked Spirit of Joy to come with us. As soon as tourists see hula dancers, they start gathering around. It’s a wonderful attraction for non-Christians, especially the Japanese, who really love hula.

I had called Debbie to arrange for the service, and I asked her, “Are you going to wear your matching hula uniforms?” And she said, “No, all of us outgrew them. So we’re gonna wear kalakoa (all different colors).” One of her dancers, Kats, made beautiful haku lei (headbands) to wear. Pastor Bob and WBC pastors Gene Osbun and Alex McAngus had ministered to Debbie when she was a young Christian going through difficult times, so she was glad to come, and it was a very emotional reunion for her.



Debbie Rutkowski’s Spirit of Joy hula group pioneered the use of hula in Christian ministry. Left to Right: Trish, Judy, Kats, Pastor Alex McAngus, Gay, Audrey Hongo Adachi, Debbie Rutkowski.

I also asked Pastor Alex McAngus, another WBC pastor, to sing a duet with me on Kanaka Waiwai. Pastor Alex is a wonderful singer, but he had been going through radiation therapy for cancer. He told me, “I don’t know if I’ll feel up to it, but Lord willing, I’ll try to sing with you.” When the time came, the Lord gave him strength, and Pastor Alex was in great voice.

I’m grateful that amidst all the busyness of the weekend, I had a chance to sit down with Pastor Bob and his wife, Yvonne, to talk some more. In my last newsletter, I wrote that Bob told a story at our youth camp about seeing his parents killed in Pearl Harbor. When I mentioned that to Bob, he told me that actually was not the case – I think I got it confused with another story. Nevertheless, Bob was amazed to hear how his ministry had impacted me and set me on the course to dedicate my life to music ministry all around the world.



Left to right: Yvonne and Pastor Bob Turnbull (who founded WBC), Gay, Donnie and Chuck Antone (WBC volunteers). Chuck is also an author and musician, and recorded a version of Randy’s original composition, Aloha Ke Akua.

Kalihi Union Church’s Hawaiian Choir



*Front row, left to right: Sharlene Chun-Lum, Buddy Macapagal, Rowena Lum, Janice Dankel, Carol Kamalu, Lisa Ohata, Dorothy Chong.
Back row, left to right: Robin Macapagal, Lei Hilton, Gay, U’ilani Ciacci, Laurene Oride, Rowen Young.
Missing: Mel and Tammy Yamamoto.*

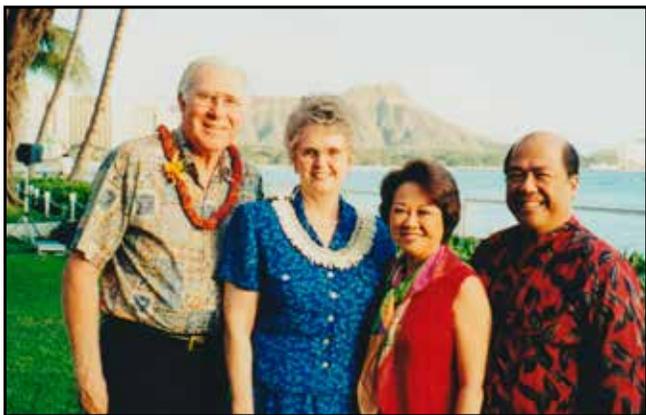
In 2013, Pastor Jonathan Steeper asked Randy to start a Hawaiian Choir to perform for Kalihi Union Church’s Easter service. It was a joy for Randy to find and gather all the Hawaiians in our church. Each rehearsal would start with everybody hugging and kissing each other. And, of course, we would start on Hawaiian time (late).

In recent years, we resurrected the Hawaiian Choir to sing on Hawaiian Heritage Sunday. This is the second Sunday in February, when many Hawaiian churches celebrate the anniversary of Henry Opukaha’ia’s passing. 2018 was the 200th anniversary of Henry’s death. This year, 2020, marks the 200th anniversary of the arrival of the Thaddeus, the ship that brought the first missionaries to Hawai’i.

We are grateful to the Lord for the bond he created among the choir members. One of our members, Rowena Lum, died suddenly of a heart attack just a month after our performance on Hawaiian Sunday. Another member, Mary Jane Chang passed in February. We cherish the memories of singing and fellowshiping with these dear sisters. We look forward to reuniting and singing again one day in His presence.



Aloha to Rev. Dr. John Boaz



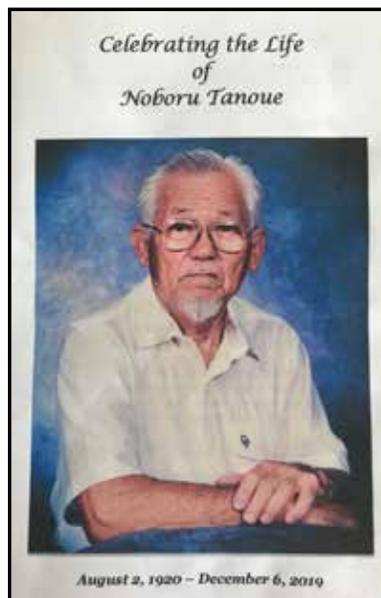
Pastor John Boaz was the senior pastor of Kalihi Union Church from 1989 to 2001. A few months ago, I received word from his son, Kevin, that Pastor Boaz had been diagnosed with multiple myeloma (the same type of blood cancer that Randy had). Just weeks later, I was notified that Pastor Boaz had suddenly taken a turn for the worse and went home to be with the Lord. He is now with his beloved wife, Charlotte, who passed a few years ago.

Pastor Boaz was a missionary in Japan for many years before coming to KUC. He even spoke fluent Japanese. So he was especially supportive of our ministry to the Japanese. Once when I expressed my regret that we weren't serving at our home church much, Pastor Boaz said to me, "We love you, but we don't want you here. We want you to be where God wants you." Once, when commissioning us for a mission trip, Pastor Boaz said from the pulpit: "God gave us His best, so we want to give Him our best. Hongo family, you are our best, so go with our blessing."

In 1994 Pastor Boaz helped Randy through the process of ordination in the Evangelical Free Church. Pastor Boaz gathered a group of pastors to interview and evaluate Randy's qualifications. Having passed the requirements and interviews Randy was officially given the status of an ordained minister of the gospel. Soon after Randy performed his first wedding for my nephew, Calvin Kaneshiro, and his wife, Pua. Many more weddings over the years would follow.

One time Randy wanted to thank Pastor Boaz for all his work and help, so we took Pastor and his wife Charlotte to dinner at the Halekulani hotel. Pastor said "Wow, Randy, you are quite a celebrity. Everyone seems to know you here." Randy said, "That's because I used to play piano here in the Lewers Lounge."

Farewell to Mr. Noboru Tanoue



In our last newsletter, we included a photo of Pastor Owen Tanoue, his dad, Noboru, and Gay. We told you how Noboru received Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior shortly after his 99th birthday. Well, not long after we printed that article, on December 6th, Noboru was called home to glory. On December 26th, he had a beautiful celebration of life service at Hosoi

Garden Mortuary. I

had the privilege of singing the beloved hymn, *Great is Thy Faithfulness*, and Noboru's favorite Japanese song, *Koko Ni Sachi Ari*. Pastor Owen arranged for an excellent accompanist for me, Sarah Grosjean, who is the daughter of Carl and Sharon Nagasako, who used to attend KUC.

Before singing I shared a little remembrance of Noboru. A few years ago, Randy and I sang at Pastor Owen's installation service at Auwailimu Congregational Church. Owen is known for his long sermons. So in the middle of Owen's sermon, just as it started to get a little long, Noboru stood up and shouted, "Too long the speech!" and walked out. Owen just laughed and said, "Okay, Dad, I'll try to keep it short – but I have so much I want to share!" So the running joke at Noboru's celebration of life service was, "Keep it short, Owen, or you might hear a voice from heaven!"

At the memorial service, I learned that Noboru was a World War II veteran who served as part of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, a famous regiment composed of Japanese-American soldiers. Noboru met his wife while stationed in Japan, so he learned the Japanese language and Japanese songs through her. In her later years, she suffered from Alzheimer's, and Noboru was her sole, loving caregiver until she passed.

Owen shared that his heart was full of joy and gratitude because Jesus Christ provided a way for his dad to have eternal life in heaven, and although the family will miss him, they know that they will see him again someday.

Photo Gallery



Ethel Kubo, Harriet Carmody, and Gay ministered at a chapel service hosted by Alice Newman at the Hawaii Kai Retirement Home. It was bittersweet because that's where Randy passed, but also a joy to share the resurrection hope we have in Jesus.



Kevin Fujii and Gay sang *When Love Was Born* (composed by Randy) for Christmas services at Kalihi Union Church. Also participating was KUC's hula ministry. Left to right: Yoriko Young, U'ilani Ciacci, Kevin, Gay, Sepe Ochoa, Rowena Puaai, Melissa Chun.



Elodie Hoa and Genie Keanu are residents at Hawaii Kai Retirement Home. Genie was pastor of Kalihi and Moanalua Church and Elodie was among the youth we served at Haili Congregational Church.



Gay and Andrew ministered at Leesburg Presbyterian Church in Pennsylvania and enjoyed visiting longtime Christian Endeavor friends. Front row: Jane Bartholomew, Gay. Back row: Karen and Jon Stewart, Andrew.



Gay visited Andrew's church, Covenant Presbyterian, in Mobile, Alabama just before Christmas. She sang a special number with the church's worship team, *Lo How A Rose E'er Blooming*.



Leesburg's youth group puts on an annual dinner theater to raise funds for missionaries like the Hongos. Andrew and Gay were the opening act this year.



Jim and Connie Marshall are former Kalihi Union Church members who came from Beaverton, Oregon to attend Waikiki Beach Chaplaincy's 50th Anniversary.



Long-time Christian Vision supporter Beverly Mossman (2nd from right) of Canada visited Honolulu and stopped by KUC's Joy Fellowship.



Gay conducted Kalihi Union Church's Christmas choir.



On March 15, just before the lockdown, Kalihi Union Church had their annual ministry fair. Daryl Hee of Kalihi Print Shop helped me make the poster board and banner. He also helps make our newsletters, adding a professional touch to everything he does. And he does it all for the glory of our Lord.

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Christmas concert at the Plaza at Moanalua at invitation of Ann Horiuchi. Front row, left to right: Marion Von, Joelle Lee, Lisa Lee, Gay.

Back row, left to right: Vernon Von, U'ilani Ciacci, Ray Suhl, Kevin Fujii, Pastor Jonathan Steeper, Ellen Suhl, Nelson Kanemoto.

Upcoming Events:

Thank you for your donations toward our upcoming mission trip to Japan and Southeast Asia. We are still hoping to go in July, but if we need to postpone because of COVID-19, we will wait on the Lord for another time to go.

For updates on performance dates, please go to our website at www.rghongo.com.

Announcement:

Feel free to email us at rghongo@hotmail.com if you would like to transition from the hard copy of this newsletter to our e-newsletter.

You can also donate online at www.rghongo.com. Thank you for your ongoing support and prayers for our ministry!

We pray that all of you stay safe and healthy during this difficult time. May you be sustained and encouraged by the love and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.