

“She is Ours” Restoring Family Ties – From Ghana to Hawaii



Yaa Foriwaa (right), age 60, returned home in March, 2012, after living in a leprosy camp in Ghana for 40 years. With her is her relative, Esi Mansa. Photo Courtesy IDEA Ghana.



Donna Sterling points to the name of her ancestor, Nahuina, who was one of the first 12 people sent to Kalaupapa on January 6, 1866. Ms. Sterling was attending a family workshop conducted by Ka ‘Ohana O Kalaupapa on the island of Maui. IDEA Photo.

Ghana: “As of now, we have 312 people who have gone back to their home towns. In 2012, we already have nine people ready to go back to their families.” -- Kofi Nyarko, IDEA Ghana

Hawaii: On January 6, 1866, twelve individuals were taken from their families and isolated on the Makanalua peninsula in Hawaii, commonly known as Kalaupapa. One of the women was named Nahuina. These individuals were the first of an estimated 8,000 people who were relocated to Kalaupapa between 1866 and 1969. Only about 1,000 of these men, women and children have identified graves.

On March 30, 2009, as a result of the efforts of Ka ‘Ohana O Kalaupapa and Hawaii’s Congressional Delegation, legislation to establish The Kalaupapa Memorial was signed into law by President Barack Obama. This legislation authorizes Ka ‘Ohana O Kalaupapa to build a Memorial that will list the names of everyone sent to Kalaupapa because they had leprosy. The first woman on the list is Nahuina.

“Our Everything”



Maame Comfort with her family. *Photo Courtesy IDEA Ghana.*



Vitoria Sapon on her long journey home. *Photo Courtesy IDEA Ghana.*

“Today is a happy day for us! Kofi! She is our Mother, sister and a friend. Her brother Opani Mensah told me last week that you are bringing her back to us. Everybody was happy, that is why nobody went to farm today! We are all waiting to see our sister, mother and our everything. We have heard so much about IDEA’s work -- there is no more discrimination! She is ours so we will make sure we will include her in whatever we will do!”

-- Nana Bako, Chief of Maame Comfort’s village, Ghana

“Kofi, as you know I was in leprosy camp when I was 16 years, but now I am 63 years, so I have spent 47 years in leprosy camp. Some years ago there was a lot of stigma in Ghana but now there is no more, that is why I said I will come back home. See the people around me because of my coming home! Please tell everybody I am a happy woman!”

-- Vitoria Sapon, Ghana, who returned home with the support of Kofi Nyarko, IDEA Ghana, and the Damien-Dutton Society.

“We are so happy to have Atoo Kwamena back. He is older than anybody in this village and there are a lot of things we need to learn from him. For him to come home is a blessing to us.”

-- Nana Owusu, Chief of Atoo Kwamena's village, upon his return after living in a leprosy camp for 32 years.

We Must Bring the Family Home

“Some people who are trying to learn about their family history will come to find out that they had relatives at Kalaupapa. If they feel at all the same way that we do, they will be proud that their family was part of the ‘aina, part of the soul of this land.”

-- Bernard Ka'owakaokalani Punikai'a, President of IDEA and Chairman of the Board of Ka 'Ohana O Kalaupapa, 2003

“They are waiting for us. We must do everything we can to find them. We must bring the family home.”

-- Kuulei Bell, first President of Ka 'Ohana O Kalaupapa



The first family reunion for descendants of Kalaupapa residents who live on the island of Oahu was held in July, 2010. Most of the descendants did not know each other before the gathering, but soon felt like family because of their strong common ties to Kalaupapa. *Photo by Henry Law*

Ka 'Ohana O Kalaupapa ("The Family of Kalaupapa") is a non-profit organization made up of Kalaupapa residents, family members and descendants of individuals sent to Kalaupapa, professionals involved in preserving the history of Kalaupapa, and longtime friends of the community. In 2011, Ka 'Ohana O Kalaupapa assisted family members find information on more than 500 relatives who had been sent to Kalaupapa.

For more information on Ka 'Ohana O Kalaupapa and The Kalaupapa Memorial, see www.kalaupapaohana.org

Nana Aboagye Returns Home after 56 Years

As Recounted by Kofi Nyarko, IDEA Ghana



Kofi Nyarko, IDEA Ghana. Photo Courtesy IDEA Ghana.

“Nana (meaning elder) Aboagye came to the leprosy camp when he was 11 years old. His father was an herbalist and a farmer. He is now 67 years old. Since he came to the hospital, nobody came for him anymore. When he was discharged, he moved from the hospital to the camp which is about four miles away from the hospital.

“I’ve known this man since 1984 when I also came to the hospital. When I started the IDEA work, many times I visited him but he never said he would like to go home. Last year, in July, 2008, I visited him again and he said, ‘Well, Kofi, this time I want you to take me personally to my home town. I want to go back. I don’t want to die in this camp. When will you be ready to take me? I cannot afford transportation.’ So I told him at the end of the month, I will go with him. I did not fail him.

“One Saturday I told him that this is the day I will have time to go with him. I had already informed those in charge of the camp and they gave me the authority and said if I had the money to take him, there was no problem. I chose Saturday because most of the people will be at the house. I wanted to meet people there.

“So I went with him and another IDEA man named Joseph Tetteh. Joseph carried his small bag for Nana Aboagye and early Saturday morning we set off. I remember some of the people in the camp came with us to the roadside, just to see him off. Some were saying, ‘Oh Nana, we will miss you. We will miss you with your stories.’ A few minutes later a taxi came and then we stopped it and joined the taxi. We went to the city and then joined another bus to his home town, Achiansi.

“When we got to that town, he was able to locate where he was. He recognized the place but nobody knew who he was. All his family had died and all the people his age had died. So I decided with Joseph to see the chief of that town. When we got to the chief’s place, he welcomed us because he saw that we were strangers. He gave us a chair for Nana Aboagye and then he gave us both chairs. Then they gave us water. That is their tradition.

“Then the chief asked the speaker for the chief to ask what brought us to the place. Nana did not let me talk. He wanted to speak. First of all, Nana said, I am a native of this town. Then he mentioned his father’s name and then his mother’s name. Then he started to tell the chief how the name of the town, Achiansi, came about. Then the chief stood up and he stated, ‘You are my great-grandfather’ and he went quickly and hugged Nana with tears. ‘Where have you been? Nana, where have you

been?’ And Nana said, “At the time I left here, you were not born. I was in the hospital since I was 11 and due to discrimination I decided not to come back. When I was sent to the hospital, no one came for me, no one visited me. And now, I have got some courage from this great man, Kofi. There are several times when he asked me if I wanted to come back home and I said no. but most of the time, especially in the night when I think, something presses me to come back; not to die in the camp but to come home and die.’

“The chief was 36 years old. His wife had died and he had no children. The chief said, ‘You are not going to die. I will take good care of you and the whole community needs you and we will support you to live long. I hope you will live to be 100.5 years.’ And then the tears started coming out from the chief and then I said ‘Nana don’t cry.’ And it was a memorable day.

“Since Nana left for his home town, many people in the camps who heard about this, they have decided to go one by one, because of his example.”

A Man of Inspiration

Voh Vincent was the second person who asked IDEAGhana to help him return home. With the assistance of Kofi Nyarko, he returned home on July 13, 2005 after living in a leprosy camp for 41 years.



The casket of Voh Vincent, who returned home to his village after 41 years.
Photo Courtesy IDEA Ghana.

“Voh Vincent was a real man of inspiration . . . Death has deprived us of someone special. He was my best friend when he came back from the leprosy camp. He gave respect to everybody in this village. The people in this village and our neighbors really love him. He was 72 years old.”

-- Nana Kwesi Bako, the chief of Voh Vincent's village

Welcome Home



Lillian Awai Kaho'ohalahala, who together with her husband contributed to Red Cross relief efforts during World War I. *Courtesy of Sol Kaho'ohalahala.* Right: Sol Kaho'ohalahala speaking at a Ka 'Ohana O Kalaupapa meeting. *Photo by Henry Law.*



Bishop Larry Silva views the gravestone of his great-grandfather, John Santos, at Kalaupapa. The stone had been moved by a tidal wave in 1946 but has since been placed upright by the National Park Service. *Photo by Wayne Levin.*

“I walked into the front yard of Siloama [Church] and there was my tutu’s headstone -- Lillian Awai Kaho’ohalahala. My very first time here I was changed in one day because I saw something that I never understood before and that was my family. I cried the whole weekend I was here because I did not know I was so attached to Kalaupapa and Kalawao and that my own family was here and we didn’t know about them.

-- Sol Kaho’ohalahala, Board Member, Ka ‘Ohana O Kalaupapa, recalling how he learned about family members on his first trip to Kalaupapa in 1996.

“My Kalaupapa relative was Chili (Charles) Kealawaiole. He was Grandma Emma Kai’s older brother . . . When Chili passed away in Kalaupapa, so did the Kealawaiole name. Today my ‘ohana [family] includes the Kealawaiole name as a middle name for our sons and daughters so the name lives on . . . In a sense, I feel we may be re-introducing him back into the family after having been away for a very long time. To Chili -- your ‘ohana [family] has not forgotten. You are loved . . . welcome home.”

-- James Michael Maluhia Coleman. Excerpt from Chili’s Page, Web site of the Gasper-Kealawaiole ‘Ohana (<http://www.gasper-kealawaiole.net/id11.html>).

Once Lost, Now Found



Willie Wicke, who was sent to Kalaupapa in 1904 at the age of 12, is one of the most readily identifiable people in Kalaupapa's history. This little boy pictured holding his hat, with his bicycle, at a waterfall, at a luau and playing the bass drum in the Baldwin Home Band, was identified in one photo by someone at Kalaupapa, probably a century ago, and this identification has led him back into his family's history.

Willie's grandfather, William Clark, had been sent to Kalaupapa in 1886 when Willie's mother, Charlotte, was just a teenager. William Clark worked alongside Father Damien as the postmaster and later planted some 10,000 seedlings in his job as forester.

Willie arrived at Kalaupapa four years before his grandfather died and was buried next to his grandfather when Willie died in 1922. In reflecting on Willie, his cousin, Emmet Cheeley, commented: "I felt so sorry for this kid that had to go through all of this all by himself. I was very happy, and my kids were too, to see all the photos. I really felt that he was home again..."



The Wicke family plot in Oahu Cemetery. The new gravestone for Willie, also shown close-up, can be seen in the foreground. *Photos by Henry Law.*

In 2011, Kelli Wicke Davis wanted to ensure that Willie Wicke and William Clark were afforded a permanent place in their family's history. While retaining their tombstones at Kalaupapa, she erected gravestones in the Wicke and Clark family plots on the island of Oahu. One gravestone in the Clark plot is for Willie and his grandfather. It is located near the graves of his mother and grandmother. Kelli then placed another stone in the Wicke plot, where his father and other relatives are buried. On this stone it says: "Frederick William 'Willie' Wicke, born, died Kalaupapa. Once Lost, Now Found."



Emmet Cheeley, Willie's cousin, holds a photo of him taken at Kalaupapa with his bicycle. *IDEA Photo*

Jerry Wicke created this composite photo of himself at Willie's grave at Kalaupapa with a photo of Willie. *Courtesy Jerry Wicke*



In Memory of Papa Mantey

Papa Mantey was featured in a special issue of IDEA's newsletter, Vol. 11, No. 2 (www.idealeprosydignity.org). He was born in Waja, where his parents were cocoa farmers. Diagnosed with leprosy at the age of nine, Papa Mantey lived in a leprosy camp for most of his life. In the interview he did with Kofi



Papa Mantey (left) with Kofi Nyarko. *Photo courtesy IDEA Ghana*

Nyarko, he stated: "It was in this camp that I learned how to make baskets. I have been using basket weaving to feed myself and buy clothes. I sometimes use some of the money I make from basket weaving to help those who are very old in our camp. I have trained about 17 people on how to weave and I am very proud of myself."

Papa Mantey died in 2011. Kofi Nyarko wrote: "Papa Mantey, the basket weaver, died last Sunday after he came back from mass. Papa Mantey was not sick. He

came back from church and after taking his lunch he decided to watch TV. He fell down in his hall and died. He was 84 years old according to some papers we found in his room. And we saw that he had written these words in a piece of wood: "We are visitors on this earth, so a time will come when we will go back home!"

With Thanks

IDEA would like to thank Leprosy Relief Canada for their ongoing support of all of IDEA's programs, including IDEA's counseling programs, expansion of IDEA's international network of support, efforts to promote a positive image, and the restoration of family ties. We would like to thank the Damien-Dutton Society for their generous support of IDEA Ghana's efforts to help individuals return to their families as well as IDEA's counseling program in Brazil. IDEA would also like to thank Ka 'Ohana O Kalaupapa for their support and partnership in many programs that are being developed to ensure that individuals are afforded their rightful place in history. IDEA is also grateful to the Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation for their support of the publication of the IDEA newsletter.

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