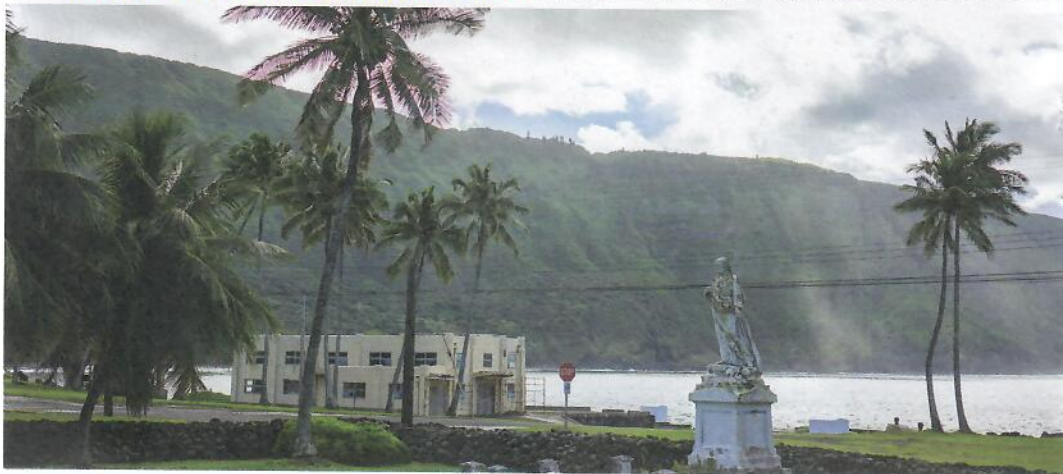




faces of
KALAUAPA

FATHER PATRICK KILLILEA by Sarah Yamanaka



“I’ll try not to say any bad words,” replies Father Patrick Killilea when I tell him I’ll be recording our conversation for the story. Throughout the course of our time together, I come to find he has quite a subtle sense of humor. His email indicating he’d pick us up at “Terminal 1” should have been a clue.

After picking up photographer Chase Nu’uhiwa and myself at tiny Kalaupapa Airport, Father Pat takes us on a short drive through the neighborhood, pointing out places that had been, and continue to be, important to the residents.

Upon arriving at Father Pat’s residence, we’re greeted by Tony Tiger, Mr. Gray and Bailey, cats who have adopted Father Pat (so he claims). “E komo mai (welcome),” he says, as we enter his home.

“Some people suggest that I was found under a head of cabbage,” says Father Pat with a straight face and smile. “I say I was found at the end of a rainbow in the west of Ireland, in County Galway, Ireland. I was born and grew up on a small farm.”

I’m curious as to how he ended up in Kalaupapa, but Father Pat has a story to tell first.

His inspiration to become a priest took root when he was a young lad who had served priests returning home from overseas to spend their summer vacations with their families. Then in his secondary schooling (high school) at a diocesan seminary, he encountered many priests. “Some of them were great and some of them were sons of ...” shares Father Pat, chuckling as he trails off. “In those days they were allowed to use sticks, like canes”

Then one day while cycling home from town with groceries for his family, Father Pat saw someone who caught his attention.

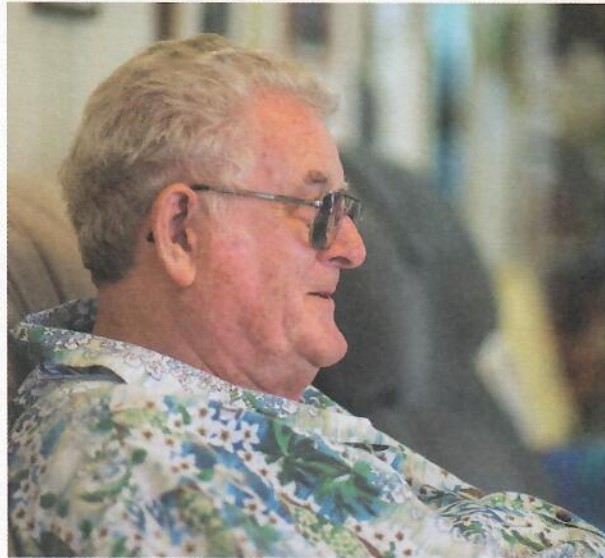
“This Volkswagen passed me,” he shares, “and even though I’d never met the man before, I had seen pictures of him. He was

a great priest from my now religious congregation, Sacred Hearts. And he was a great footballer. So I think that was the attraction.

“I had a feeling this guy was probably going to come around and see me, which he did that afternoon. So that was basically how it all started.”

That was in August 1962 when Father Pat was 18. He had graduated earlier that year in June. “I went to what we call the Novitiate,” he explains. “It’s quite like a church’s version of a religious bootcamp.”

After a year there, he and five of his classmates flew to Massachusetts, arriving on September 14. It’s a place where snow



falls in October and they spent many a long winter shoveling snow. They studied philosophy and theology, and went hiking in the mountains on their days off. Father Pat didn’t get to see his family from 1963 to 1969.

“Didn’t even get to call them,” he says, “because while the seminary had a phone, my family and most of those who lived in the country where I grew up, did not have phones.”

He was ordained in his homeland on May 25, 1969 and spent most of his years



of ministry in Massachusetts except for three years in the Bahamas and one year in Ireland where he taught religion in an all boy's school. "It was like trying to teach a bunch of monkeys," he says with smile, "but I survived."

Father Pat initially visited Kalaupapa in 2004. "I had come to O'ahu for a meeting in Kalihi Valley where the sisters have a retreat," he says. "And at the end of that retreat, a plane full of us came out here. I remember well because it was on a single-engine plane, and I was, 'No, I don't want to go on that single-engine plane.'

"Two years later, I was asked if I could cover here for the summer, and I couldn't pass it up, so I spent three months here. I was told by the superintendent (at the time), Tom Workman, 'Make this like a prolonged vacation.'

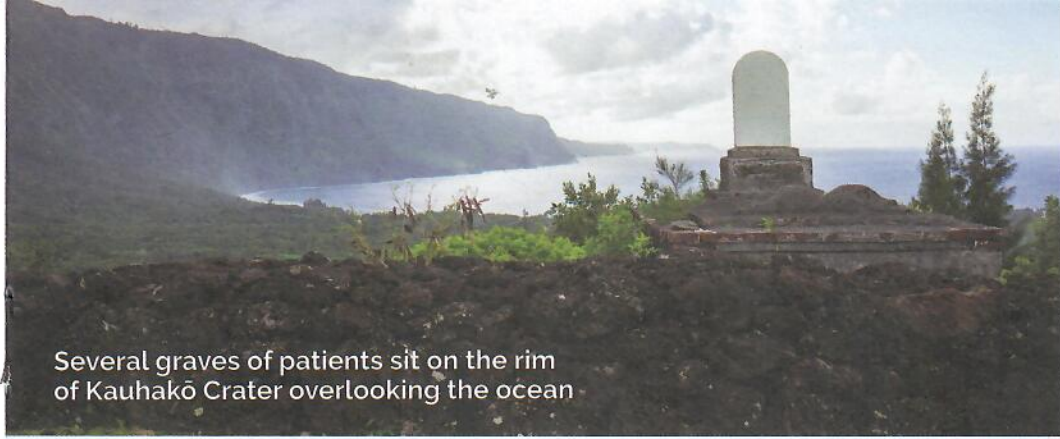
"So afterwards, I volunteered to come back and returned in 2012 (permanently). (It was) six years, seven months and nine days ago, at this hour, on the same plane you came on," Father Pat says with laughter.

"Happy anniversary," chimes in Chase.

Father Pat conducts services in Kalaupapa Monday through Friday at 5:45 a.m. On Saturdays, there's a service at 7 a.m., and one at 9 a.m. on Sundays. He usually conducts Sunday mass at St. Philomena's Church in Kalawao at 9 a.m. on the first Sunday of each month, weather permitting.

"I've always believed in being brief," says Father Pat. "I'm probably a little more brief here because of the patients and so on, but I've always been brief. One of my favorite lines is, 'When one gives a homily or sermon, it should be brief like Fruit of the Loom.'" The room fills with laughter.

"I try to make my message uplifting," he adds. "I try to relax them with a story or a little joke, some of which are very corny or some of which are very dry. Any kind of reaction, I realize they're at least awake!



Several graves of patients sit on the rim of Kauhakō Crater overlooking the ocean

I feel people should leave church uplifted regardless of what the subject was or the seriousness of the message is.”

In addition to his priestly duties, Father Pat also writes for the “Molokai Dispatch,” the local newspaper located topside, as well as a few other publications. He shares stories of the local community, often with some added humor.

“They’re supposed to be based on a person or something that happened,” he explains. “I, um, maybe take a little license — though not with actual facts. You know, a slight exaggeration.”

When visitors come to Kalaupapa on tours, Father Pat tries to meet them at St. Francis Church, built in 1908. An earlier version had been built in 1900, but burnt to the ground after six years. The original church, built by Father Damien, had been moved and modified over the years.

“I introduce myself and share a little bit of the history of this church,” he says, “and what’s happened here on this (Kalaupapa) side.”

St. Philomena Church in Kalawao, the original site where Hansen’s Disease patients lived before moving to Kalaupapa, is well known as Father Damien’s church. The original church was built in 1872 by Brother Bert, and when Father Damien arrived in 1873, it was expanded twice. Father Damien’s gravesite is located there.

There’s something about Kalaupapa that

inexplicably draws you in. Father Pat explains it this way: “It’s a special place because it was a tragic place,” he says.

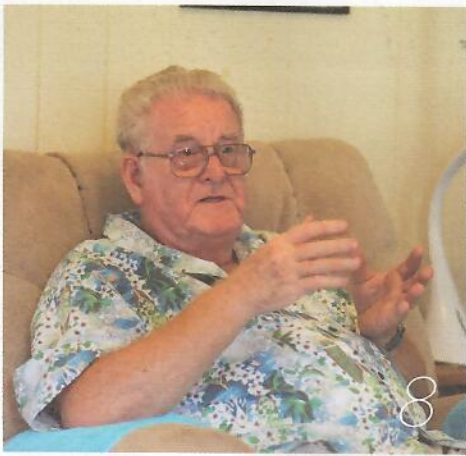
“That tragedy was two fold. First were the patients being discarded here. And secondly, the settlers here were displaced and had to leave. They were descendants of the original settlers, going back hundreds of years.”

“Until that time, they were pretty self sufficient in the valleys. Certainly the east side valleys provided plenty of water and good soil for vegetables, taro, onions and whatever else they planted. That’s really the second tragedy of people who were almost forgotten, who had to leave their ancestral home, displaced by the patients. And then of course, naturally, Damien’s coming and then Mother Marianne’s coming, and doing what they did for the patients.”

For his role, Father Pat arrived in Kalaupapa six years ago with a mission he hopes he’s accomplished.

“I came here with the intent of uplifting people, their humanity,” he shares, “and sometimes that might be what the service or homily is about. Sometimes it just might be saying crazy things or just mixing at the different events and such.

“It’s not like I’m here to convert people to Catholicism,” he continues, “but basically, it’s a conversion of hearts and uplifting their spirits.”



hele mai

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DION DIZON
PRESERVING THE
AUTHENTICITY
OF HULA

PROTECTING
MOLOKA'I'S
NATIVE
SPECIES

MAKANI KAI AIR

