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**Dana Naone Hall. *Life of the Land*. 'Ai Pōhaku Press, 2017. 248pp. ISBN 978-I-883-52844-7. <https://uhpress.hawaii.edu/title/life-of-the-land-articulations-of-a-native-writer/>**

*Life of the Land* chronicles the thirty-plus years of the work of Dana Naone Hall in her homeland of the Hawaiian Islands. As a poet and public advocate/activist for her lāhui and her 'āina aloha, she tells her story through public speeches, interviews, letters, essays, legal testimonies, and newspaper editorials. Adding another dimension of depth and insight, these accounts are interspersed with her poems. The beautifully designed volume reads like a personal journal as we move with the author through the conflicts she and others have shouldered for the protection of their kūpuna and their native land. Not only does the work inform the reader about the many and varied critical issues that Native Hawaiians currently face, it also speaks to the vigilance required to stand up to the relentless onslaught of an economic intrusion that profits the few at the expense of the many. *Life of the Land* illuminates the sustained strength and perseverance that Dana Naone Hall and her companions have expended over the years in the defense of what is unique to Hawai'i Nei and to our way of life. Her writings stand as a testimony to the continued presence of Native Hawaiians, past and present, in the world today.

“*All around us, wherever we live, land is being changed beyond recognition.*” (Hall p233)

Hall writes that witnessing the destruction of the landscape of her childhood in Kane 'ohe on the island of O 'ahu, motivated her to become active in trying to prevent the same kind of destruction in her new home on the island of Maui. For many of us of Hawaiian ancestry who grew up in Hawai'i in the 1950s and 1960s the rapid transformation of our childhood environments has become a source of collective anger and grief. This loss, much like a physical wound, has shaped our psyches in various ways. Now as adults, we have new words to describe these losses: fragile eco-systems, critical habitats, endangered species, extinctions, but as children and young adults, we had a more powerful and instinctual understanding that something we deeply loved was being taken away from us. If, like me, you were born and raised in the islands, this book will resonate with your loss. If you are not an islander, this book will help you to understand how thoughtless development can transform and erase the unique and valuable places of this world. What this book gifts its readers is that these changes are not inevitable, that action and community intervention can preserve special places, and that we all have the right to assert ourselves as stewards of our homelands.

“*... activism is 99 percent trench work.*” (Hall p2)

*Life of the Land* reveals the dogged stamina required to engage with the government and with the public on critical issues. One gets more than a hint of what this might mean when reading the detailed testimonials in this book. It is more than apparent that the author had to become familiar and literate in many disciplines including history, business, archaeology, and law to name a few. Not only did she have to have a solid understanding of these fields, she also had to be able to articulate that understanding. That articulation would be essential in order to present challenges to old policy, or suggestions to create new policy, or to call for adherence to the law. The exhaustive study and preparation required for her presentations can only elicit our admiration. A

review of Ms. Hall's writings reveals not only a sharp and prepared mind, but also a mind attuned to thoughtfulness and wisdom.

This text is certainly destined to become a valuable historical record, documenting, from a Native Hawaiian perspective, the landmark achievements of communities to preserve places of historical and cultural importance. Particularly moving are those passages that recount the efforts to preserve burial sites and to oversee the handing of our iwi kūpuna with reverence, respect and love.

*“the Ancestress beckons,  
offering food, offering water  
a place in the shade  
to the passing travelers.”* (p202)

As a playwright, I am fascinated by subtext. When I read a story, whether fiction or nonfiction, I enter into a solitary relationship with the author, and all the while I am half listening for the “other” voice of the author that resounds throughout the work underneath the words and the story. I often ask, who is this person and what do they really want to tell me? *Life of the Land* reached out to me on two distinct levels. I heard the competent voice of a woman warrior, skilled in the art of beneficent disputation, a voice that touched my own love of historical, environmental and cultural preservation. But it was the voice of the poet that swept me away, captured my imagination and awakened the part of me that recognizes the larger, liminal space that contains our collective past and present. At first, when reading, I perceived these as two separate lines in the text, but at some point, I began to realize that they were not separate lines of thought, but a fluid reality that not only intermingled, but served as pillars of support to one another. In the end, one of the important things this book asks us is to join in honoring the infinite ways that the past permeates and influences our present. Equally important is the very real affirmation that goodness, when combined with intelligence, courage and resilience becomes a powerful force in creating a path for change.

*“...when we are told up front that there is no way we can prevail, we will continue to watch and wait and assist where we can in maintaining the life of the land forever.”* (Hall p109)

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