



Randall Roth lit a flame 27 years ago that still burns brightly

By David Shapiro

July 21, 2024

In 1997 the University of Hawaii law professor was alarmed by the malfeasance of Kamehameha Schools/Bishop Estate trustees, who had turned the \$10 billion trust founded by Princess Bernice Pauahi Bishop to educate Native Hawaiian children into essentially a private investment club that paid each of the five trustees more than \$1 million a year.

Roth also wanted to support Kamehameha Schools alumni and teachers protesting the trustees' heavy-handed micromanagement that threatened the school's educational mission.

He enlisted four Native Hawaiian leaders — U.S. District Judge Samuel King, state Appeals Judge Walter Heen, educator Gladys Brandt and Monsignor Charles Kekumano — to co-author a groundbreaking essay that came to be known as “Broken Trust,” detailing the misdeeds of trustees and the judges and politicians who enabled them.

“Broken Trust” ran in the Honolulu Star-Bulletin, where I was managing editor, on Aug. 9, 1997, a weighty 6,400 words that took up most of the four pages of our opinion section.

It was a gut check for all involved; the trustees were immensely powerful and vindictive against those who crossed them.

But “Broken Trust” was on target and its facts unassailable. It galvanized the Hawaiian and broader communities, leading Gov. Ben Cayetano to have Attorney General Margery Bronster investigate.

The state's probe joined other investigations by probate court master Colbert Matsumoto and the IRS, as well as scrutiny by attorney Beadie Dawson on behalf of the Kamehameha ohana.

In the end, the IRS forced the issue by threatening to revoke Bishop Estate's tax-exempt status at a cost of more than \$1 billion to the trust unless state courts ousted the trustees.

Roth, now retired, said in a Hawaii Public Radio interview that the forced reorganization led to a return of the trust's focus on educating Hawaiian children.

But he and King weren't satisfied to end it there. They wrote the landmark 2006 book "Broken Trust: Greed, Mismanagement & Political Manipulation at America's Largest Charitable Trust," for which I helped with editing and wrote the introduction.

The book further detailed the scandal and meticulously exposed how it fit into a web of corruption at the heart of Hawaii's political and legal institutions.

Roth has worked to expand access to the book, using a Kamehameha Schools grant to make the digital edition free on Kindle and other platforms. Now, again with support from Kamehameha Schools, he's issued a free audio book available at randallroth.com/broken-trust.

It's a personal rush to hear my introduction read by Louise Keali'iloma King Lanzilotti, Samuel King's daughter and host of HPR's "Kanikapila Sunday." The book remains highly relevant after all these years.

Roth says he's proud of the impact of "Broken Trust" but disappointed that public corruption persists in crimes such as those committed by former Honolulu Police Chief Louis Kealoha and his prosecutor wife, Katherine, who he believes were emboldened because Bishop Estate trustees and their enablers were never held fully accountable.

"The people in power at the time just kind of brushed it under the rug and said, 'We want to look forward, not back, we want closure and healing,' where we needed transparency and accountability."

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