

OUTSPOKEN!

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Ho'opili•i•ke•kia

THE 37TH ANNUAL Queen Lili' uokalani Canoe Race

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REGIONAL NEWS

Madelyn Scanlan Receives
Celebration of People Award

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Wayne MacDonald competes with his team against 168 other outrigger canoes, in Hawaii's premiere endurance race.

Cover photo: Hawaii Tourism Authority (HTA) / Tor Johnson



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EDITOR, ADVERTISING, SALES
Bev Jenkins bev.jenkins@cpaont.org

CONTRIBUTIONS
Bill Adair, Jim Anderson, Jackie Bloom, David Borthwick, Tory Bowman, Mary Dilly, Scott Giambalvo, Ann Kennedy, Cassandra Lebel, Kristy Luker, Stacey Newell, Joanne Smith, Wayne MacDonald, Lynn Miñeque, Carol Mishaw, Robin Mobray, Sheryl Rose D. Newman, Ron Rattie, Kevin Rogers, Lynda Staples, Robert Wilson, Elizabeth Zarnowiecki, Jenya Zukershtein

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Ho'opili i ke kia

THE 37TH ANNUAL QUEEN LILI' UOKALANI CANOE RACE

Tied Together by the Ocean

By **Wayne MacDonald**

The big island of Hawaii is a backdrop to the “largest long distance” paddling race in the world. Its creators, Louie Kahanamoku and his wife Mary-Ann began the race in 1972 with just a few local crews competing. It is named after Queen Lili'uokalani (1838-1917) who was the last monarch and only queen to rule over the Kingdom of Hawaii. Hawaiians revere their elders with deep respect.

The first race fell on the Queen's birthday on September 2nd. Hawaii became a state of the union on August 21, 1959, making it the 50th state. Louie's brother Duke (the father of surfing and a Hawaiian legend 1890-1968) was Hawaii's most famous citizen. Duke set the world record for swimming the 100m dash at the 1912 Olympic Games, which was only one of his many accomplishments. He was instrumental in the further development of

the ancient Hawaiian water sport of outrigger. The Sandwich Islands, the name given to the Hawaiian Islands by Captain Cook, are rich in paddling history with 60 clubs and over 8000 registered paddlers. 4000 of these members belong to a club that began in 1908 located near Waikiki beach. Named the Outrigger Canoe Club (kuima'olelo), it's most famous member, Duke Kahanamoku remained active with the club from 1917 until he died in 1968.

Hawaiians have a primal connection with the universe, nature, land and the sea. They refer to themselves as “Keiki o ka 'aina” (children of the land). The word “aina” literally means “that which feeds.” This respect of Mother Nature is deeply embedded in the Hawaiian spirit. To a Hawaiian the land is not just soil, sand or dirt. You can read more fascinating facts at <http://www.surfingforlife.com/culture.html>.

I was also amazed to find that the Hawaiian alphabet consists of only twelve letters, five vowels and seven constantans. That helps explain all the very long names in the Hawaiian culture.

Good luck charms given to me from Alexander, Katelin and Stephanie.





Being invited to be part of this history-rich event with teams from around the world was going to be an honour.

I began paddling at the tail end of 2007, after meeting 1984 gold medal Olympian Larry Cain at a CHAT presentation in 06. Since that time I had many practice miles under my belt along with a couple of races. I had raced in Rochester, New York and competed in the Toronto Island race. I am not a competitor by nature, but this sport had the main ingredients to nourish my soul, namely boats, water and exercise. I know the club I belong to has been featured in the *Outspoken* before. For the benefit of those that do not know, it is Wai-Nui O'kanaka. Our Commodore, Wendy Perkins, started the PaddleAll program with the club in 2007. She wanted those with disabilities to feel the freedom of the open water along with the art that is outrigger paddling. The club's compound is located on Sixteen Mile Creek in Oakville.

This past summer we worked hard and paddled as often as possible to train for the upcoming Queen Lili. Those of us who had been part of this mainstay of Hawaiian culture could not explain the feeling of honour that came with participating in such a prestigious event. Its history is unprecedented and I was caught up in the excitement. I had booked my flight to leave on August 21st. 35 paddlers from the Wai Nui camp would be competing in the race; four women's crews and two men's crews. My flight left Toronto on my first leg to San Francisco. As luck would have it I was seated in first class, SWEET! With no one beside me, DOUBLE SWEET!!



Upon my arrival I only had a brief stay in the San Fran airport. I called my contact Celeste and said I would call her once landing in Kona. Her response, "It's not that I don't love you Maverick, but it will be two in the morning here." I forgot about the six hour time change. I would soon realize that "time change" would hang on me like a stubborn monkey.

Our flight from San Fran descended through Kona's very dark ominous sky. I was told it was the result of the active volcano on the island. Rich and Wendy did an amazing job coordinating accommodations, van rentals, along with race registrations. I would like to say mahalo nui loa (thank-you very much) many times over.

We stayed at Kona by the Sea. They are private condos rented out when the owners were not using them. I had a top floor room with a spectacular view of the ocean. I was sharing the room with Rich, Wendy, Shaun and his wife.

Although Rich had found a company that could supply a van with a ramp, the rest of my trip would be not very accessible. I have adopted a mantra I heard years

ago from a veteran wheelchair user of 40 years. She said that she planned her life first and then planned it with the chair. Amen sister.

I had heard from Rich that the weather in Hawaii was always the same, day in, day out, like Groundhog Day. It turned out just as predicted. The morning fog would burn off and the day would warm to a constant 87 degrees with a hot, blazing sun. The other nugget of info was that we were there for a purpose. We would train as teams and be ready for race day. This meant early morning paddling drills with the Hawaiian shoreline as our canvass. One particular day had pods of dolphins flanking our boats from all sides. They were showing off their acrobatic abilities as we all watched in awe. I loved the training days. It seemed surreal that I was going to be part of this amazing race in a matter of days.

Our first official event to get our 'feet wet' took place on August 23rd at the Great Waikoloa Canoe Race. It was a mere two days since our arrival and that jet lag son of a \$*#\$ was not

*Clockwise from top left:
Carried by my crew before the start of the Waikoloa race.
Preparing for the Waikoloa start.
Ceremonial torch parade in Kona.
The Wai-Nui contingent before the Queen Lili women's start.
Cooling off after the Waikoloa race.*

letting go. We arrived at the beautiful Anaeho'omalu Bay bright and early. The buzz of activity grew as team after team arrived. It was clear that this event was taken as seriously as the Queen Lili. It was a ten mile race, with one heat for the women and one for the men.

The highlight for our crew was the opportunity to race a Koa boat. These boats hold a special position in outrigger history. They are handcrafted from wood of the native Koa tree. The



Closing ceremony of the 37th annual Queen Lili.



trees are very scarce today and Koa boats are very expensive.

I guess you can figure out that I had to be in the boat before the start. The women completed their race and now it was our turn. The boys hit the water running. It was decided that we would not engage with the locals at the start. Things can get hairy when boats are jockeying for position. We worked hard against some very rough seas and made a respectable finish. It was an amazing experience.

I have adopted a mantra I heard years ago from a veteran wheelchair user of 40 years. She said that she planned her life first and then planned it with the chair. Amen sister.

There was music and food following the race. I marveled at the scenery as I listened to the band. I even got up and played a couple of numbers for the crowd. I rocked on Anaeho'omalua Bay dude. Needless to say I had no trouble sleeping each night with the non-stop activities.

Along with training and the first race still sinking in, I was snorkeling quite a bit. One location in particular was a large picturesque half mooned bay called Kealakekua Bay. It is where Captain Cook was beaten on the shore in 1778 by the natives. The history behind this is fascinating, but too long for this story. It has been said "never upset the natives". The Polynesians were very hospitable on his first landing but then he came ashore again. There is a monument erected in his honour at the sight of his demise.

The only access to the reef around these shores is by kayak. So Rich, Wendy and I rented a kayak and made our way to the reef feeling dwarfed by the sheer cliffs of this breath taking bay. We spent well over three hours

exploring the undersea world. I even witnessed a pilot fish befriending a Moray eel. On our drive back we stopped and bought fruit native to the island. (I love planning my life first!) The roads to get to other parts of the island such as Kealakekua Bay were cut into the mountain that is Hawaii. It is the youngest of the Sandwich Islands. It was cool getting a bird's eye view of the countryside and coastline.

One of the most remarkable and memorable experiences on this trip was

my night snorkel to watch the feeding habits of the Manta Rays. These majestic mammals are one of the top three must see experiences on the travel channel. Their size ranged from six feet across to a mind blowing fourteen feet. I was loaded onto a Catamaran with thirty five other divers and snorkel swimmers. We were told what to do once in the water, "swim towards the light. Why, you ask? Light attracts plankton and mantas feed on these microscopic organisms. I followed the instructions to the letter and had a manta doing multiple ferris-wheel rolls inches from me many times! This mammal was about six feet wide and would come towards me with its mouth wide open. It would then back flip and our bellies were inches from each other. I have a video of the experience and was told by the crew on our ride back that I was manta molested. Wow! What an experience.

My time in Hawaii and the adventures and lessons in Hawaiian culture I experienced would culminate with the big race day on Sat Aug 30th. The Wa'a

Kaukahi (single hull boats) would race an eighteen mile course from Kailua Bay to Hanaunau Bay. We all rose before the sun to take part in the 6:30 a.m. blessing and to drink in the sight of ONE HUNDRED AND SIXTY-EIGHT BOATS waiting to be launched. It was a very emotional moment as the Ancient Aunty blessed the spirits of the paddlers and boats together as one.

Once the ceremonies were finished a swell of electricity filled the air. Boat after boat entered the water from the beach and points all along the pier. Our women's crews would start from Kailua Bay and the men would race back from Hanaunau Bay. The men cheered from the pier as our women paddled out to the open sea from the safety of the lagoon. It was a beautiful sight. Once the women were off on their quest the guys drove to Hanaunau Bay. A throng of men's crews waited for the sight of the bow from the first boat to round the point. In terms of an eighteen-mile race the boats came in consistently close. Our teams placed well. Bravo to our iron women.

It was now the men's turn to battle. Our crew paddled out to the starting line with full blown adrenaline. The start was policed by sea-doo's to keep all the boats honest. Rich gave our steersman instructions as to where the bow should be pointing on the horizon. Our boy was not to let the bow deviate from that point until we passed it. Then Rich would call out a new point. It seemed forever as boat after boat left Hanaunau Bay to the open ocean outside its mouth. We were in the iron man class. This meant full engagement for the full course. Some crews would change with fresh arms at intervals throughout the race.

The signal went and the crews began the race of a lifetime. We burst with full power to get the boat on top of the water and settled into a rhythm as we picked up speed. We had to keep our minds focused on the quality of each stroke and its timing with the other members of our crew. We had stiff competition against local teams from all the islands that paddled year round, but were looking for a respectable finish. The wind had picked up so we had to maneuver the boat with the swells of the sea. Because it would be some time before we saw any hint of a finish line, we concentrated on our stroke after stroke. I repeated the mantra of "one boat, one mind and one spirit".

Rich would call out a boat as our target of prey to pass. For a race on such a large body of water, it's all about lines. Getting too close and the surf would show no mercy carrying us into the jagged lava coast. If we were too far out, crews would pass on the inside. Most of our crews were only freshman in this race. We would break the stride at moments and then quickly gather ourselves. I could hear the call from other boats as their paddles changed sides. As the race progressed I would glance at the coastline recognizing landmarks that were part of our practice route. We passed our final marker on our way to the finish line. We were fortunate so far. There was nothing preventing a rogue wave from hitting us at a strange angle and join our fellow paddlers. As the finish came into sight, the race became not about 168 boats, but between our crew and a crew from Japan. We had passed them earlier and continued a strong pace. Five miles turned to four, then three, two, one and we powered over the finish line. The final result was that our boat placed 8th out of 16 in our division. A respectable finish we all agreed. That night we spent reflecting on the day's events and resting weary bones.

On Sunday the fun continued with a Wa'a Kaulua (double hull race with two boats lashed together and twelve paddlers). This race was only 5 miles which was a spit in the bucket for veterans like us. That evening awards were presented with the blind men and women's crews being honoured for their participation. I then helped paddle one of two boats from Kailua Bay to Keauhou Bay clocking another 10 miles. It was a relaxed paddle watching the sun set into the pacific horizon.

After an early morning swim Monday, I packed up for my journey home. I still had not fully realized the significance of what I had accomplished as an individual and as part of a team. I had plenty of stories to share about my adventures as well as the colourful characters I met, with my family, my lovely girl and the kids. I was going to enjoy the warmth of their tiny arms when I got home. I would like to say Mahalo nui loa to all the people of Hawaii for a great experience. 