

CREW MEMBERS DEVELOP FAMILIAL BOND WITH HOKULE'A

July 11, 2015

After sailing up the East Coast of Australia, inside the Great Barrier Reef, Hokule'a just turned west through the Torres Strait, leaving the Pacific for the first time in its 40-year history. The strait, a narrow passage between the southern edge of Papua New Guinea and the most northern tip of Australia, is the entrance to the Indian Ocean. Sailing through the night, one wonders whether the traditional Polynesian voyaging canoes of old ever plied these waters. Watching the half moon set as we steered the canoe, the anticipation was palpable.



Seafarers do not think of their vessels simply as floating objects that provide transportation. They give them names as though they are people to reflect the intimate and complex relationship they experience. Hokule'a, named after the zenith star at Hawaii's latitude, is a home, a refuge, a doorway to the ancestors, and it represents hope for our children's future. It has catalyzed a renaissance in Hawaiian culture. The mission of its around-the-world voyage is to inspire a shift in global culture toward a more conscientious way of life.

I recall like it was yesterday flying to New Zealand three years ago for the blessing, launch and sea trials of Hikianalia, Hokule'a's sister vessel. Hawaii's Kaniela Akaka and the Maori king's son offered the blessings before it touched the water. Master Polynesian navigators from throughout the Pacific attended the celebration. The event felt like the birth of a new being.

One senior crew member, whom some refer to as "Uncle Maka," remarked that our role was not just to ensure it was seaworthy and then bring it home to meet its elder sister. We also needed to introduce it to the great ocean and train it so that it could join the voyaging ranks of the ancestors.

Hikianalia just finished accompanying Hokule'a from Hawaii to New Zealand during the first year of the around-the-world voyage and recently returned to Oahu. The canoes will meet again in early 2017 at the Panama Canal for the final legs of the voyage in the Pacific.

It struck me as we approached the Torres Strait and Hokule'a got the first scent of a new ocean that like with the launch of Hikianalia, the crew now held a pivotal role as we steered it.

Throughout the years, Hokule`a often has been referred to as "Mom" with the sense that the bond between this precious vessel and its crew is that of family.

The opportunity to serve as crew leaves one with the sense that Hokule`a gives to each of us more than we could ever hope to offer in return. One crew member on the recent leg, Keala Kai, remarked that "so many things have happened to me because of the canoe. I think of all of the places I have seen and all of the people I have met. None of this would have happened without Hokule`a."

"For you too, doc," Kai said. "Hokule`a is a doctor's doctor." It's true. To be aboard it, sailing through space and time, to voyage in the wake of the ancestors and adventure beyond the Pacific with the quest of Malama Honua (caring for the earth), is a transformational and healing experience for all aboard, including the medical officer.