

Journal of Momi Kawelo

Nature as a Guide

(Week Two)

Day 1- Oh, oh. Nainoa said we were supposed to leave today, but I see threatening skies. We met at the docks all ready to shove off, but Nainoa said he didn't want to risk our safety. So we've delayed our departure another day.

I'm terribly anxious to go, but I still have mixed feelings. One part of me is sad, the other happy. It's great to have a family like mine who supports me. I wouldn't be able to do this any other way.

Day 2 - Today we said *aloha* to our friends and family.

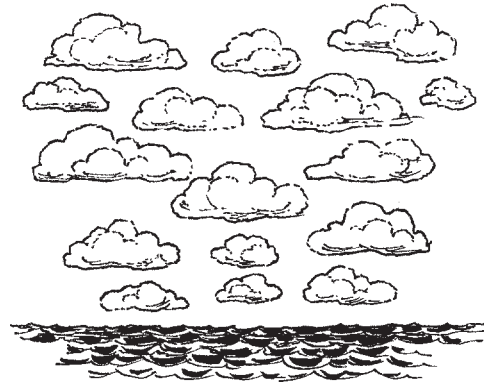
As I turned toward the shore to wave good-bye, I noticed huge stationary clouds bunched up around Mauna Kea's summit. That's a clear indication to any navigator when he's out at sea that land is just ahead. I'm sure Nainoa will be looking for such a sign as we get closer to our destination.

As I waved good-bye from the deck of our canoe, I saw Auntie Tita and all my cousins. Malia, Ku'ulei and Uncle Bully were there too. And I can't forget Ma. There she was on the shore waving frantically. I'm not too sure what she was holding in her hand. But it looked like my Kodak Instamatic. Oh well, I guess I forgot it. Now, I'm going to hear it from her when I get back.

Today as I look out to sea, I notice the 'ōpua (puffy, billowy) clouds banked up near the horizon. Nainoa said that since the leaves of the clouds

point upward, there should be calm weather for the next few days. That's exactly what we need. It's so exciting to be sailing out in the open sea. I've never been so far from land! I love the feel of the wind and sun and it is so peaceful out here.

Day 3 - This morning, before dawn, I cast our two fishing lines. One on each side of the canoe. Not two hours had gone by when we got a bite. The crew pitched in to *huki* (pull) the line. We struggled with the fish and eventually hauled in a 200 pound *a'u* (marlin). What a catch! Our cook was congratulating all of us. Tonight we will eat until we're full, and then we'll dry the rest of the fish.



I can't help but think that it was my *'aumakua* (family guardian) - the *manō* (shark) - who helped us catch that *a'u*. Daddy always told me that we had an ancestral god who watched over the family. I never really believed him when he told me this story:

He told me about something that happened to him while he was fishing at sea. I guess he was hauling in *akule* (scad fish) when his boat went *huli* (turn) over. He tried to turn the capsized boat over, but wasn't able to. I guess he gave up and decided to swim to shore when all of a sudden out of the corner of his eye, he saw a gray tip fin slicing through the water. Daddy knew it was a shark. He grabbed onto the bottom of the boat but his legs were still dangling in the water.

Within seconds, the *manō* swam up to the boat. Daddy was scared. He nevah know what to do. But he had this feeling in his *na'au* (gut) that the *manō* didn't mean any harm. So he slid off the boat and grabbed onto the *manō's* fin. The shark headed straight for land. Daddy was safe and the *manō* disappeared.

When I was little, every time I would go in the deep water with Daddy, I would get the "hee-bee-jee-bees." But Daddy reminded me about his *manō* story and I felt safe — like my *'aumakua* was looking out for me. Sometimes I wonder if Daddy was telling me the truth, but I know there's plenty of *kūpuna* (old-timers) who believe in their *'aumakua*. I guess I do too.

Day 4 - I'm on the 2 a.m. to 6 a.m. watch. Out on the ocean there are no city lights to brighten the sky. When I looked up into the sky I could easily identify *Hōkūpa'a* (North Star) and *Hōkūle'a* (Arcturus-star of gladness). They never looked so brilliant.

Just before sunrise, Nainoa noticed that the clouds on the eastern horizon were a brilliant red. Nainoa says they're called *kāhea* (call) clouds because they're a sign that it's going to rain.

All crew are on deck now tying things down. We've strung up several tarps to catch rain water. Some of us have rain gear on and others of us use the traditional dried ti-leaf cape. It acts as a repellent to water. Many of the crew prefer using it to the modern squall jacket because there's more ventilation.

It rained all day. It was more of a friendly rain. Not very heavy but not a drizzle. We were able to gather some rain water so that we could use it for washing and cooking.

Nainoa noticed that the skies were red just before sunset. Hawaiians call it *aku'ula* (red shadow or glow). He told us that the rain should let up by tomorrow. I hope so. It's a good thing that Nainoa doesn't depend entirely on the stars for navigation because with all this rain today there may not be many out tonight.

Day 5 - Last night, we almost lost Kalani. He was using the bathroom, when his safety harness broke. No one heard the splash. But the watch captain, Sau, heard Kalani yell.

The first thing Sau did was holler "man overboard" and threw out the line that had the life ring and strobe light attached to it. Then he radioed the escort boat and shot a flare into the sky. The rest of us raced to slacken the sails and face the nose of the canoe into the wind. Once that was done, we immediately dropped the sails. All of this was completed within 5 minutes. In fact, we did it so quickly the crew who had been sleeping earlier didn't even have time to wipe the *maka piapia* (sticky matter) from their eyes. Kalani grabbed onto the life ring and turned the second strobe light on. We knew he was on the ring and safe. We pulled him in. Good thing we practiced!

As Kalani hoisted himself onto the canoe, we could see he was visibly shaken, but okay. We joked with him. I told him next time he decides to go "bathroom" try do it in the day time. That way, if he falls, we'll be able to find him easier. He laughed, but I knew he was kind of embarrassed. In fact for the rest of the trip, Kalani never really mentioned anything about the incident. But he didn't need to. We knew that he was grateful. And he knew that he could depend on us.

That's the most important thing we learned in voyaging. Safety is first and foremost.

Day 6- Our weather conditions are just right for sailing. Nainoa was accurate in his forecast. The rain did pass. We have light tradewinds and a clear sky. There are some ocean swells — just enough to keep us moving and on course.

It's about 1 p.m. We've just finished lunch. We ate the last of the poi with fried aku and a green salad. I had a mai'a (banana) for dessert. Soon, our fresh food supply will be gone. Fish is the only fresh food we will be eating for the rest of the trip. But that's okay. We knew that the perishable stuff wouldn't last long.

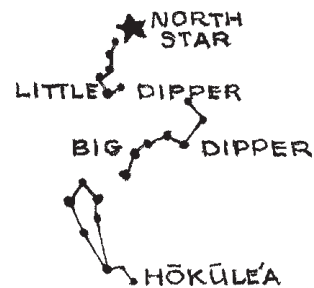
I have some free time now and decided to write in my journal. I really think it's amazing how our Polynesian cousins were so attuned with nature. Before we left on this sail, an elder from the Gilbert Islands came to visit us. He told us that navigators from his country would look for signs in nature to decide whether it was a good or bad time to sail.

If the weather was bad, there would be two signs in nature that he would look for to decide which day would be better to sail. One sign the navigators have recently learned to observe is the red ant. If red ants were returning to their nest with lots of food and blocking the entryway to their homes with particles of sand, then bad weather would come. If the ants swarmed out of their nests leaving their homes wide open, good weather would prevail.

Another sign in nature the Gilbertese navigator would look for is the spider. If the weather was going to be fair, then the spider would sit in the middle of his web. But if wind and rain was in the forecast, he would hide.

Nainoa said that our ancestors looked for many signs too. Most of those were in the moon, stars, wind, clouds, ocean swells and seabirds. In fact, on Nainoa's first voyage as a navigator he misread one of those signs. Fortunately, Master Navigator, Mau Piailug, was with Nainoa on that 1980 voyage to Tahiti. And everything did go well except towards the end of the journey. Here is Nainoa's story:

Only right at the end, I made a mistake. Mau had taught me so much, but there had never been an occasion to tell me about a very important bird behavior. We'd been seeing birds, so I knew we were close to land. But the islands I was looking for are atolls, real flat. It was getting dark, so we took down the sails in order not to run aground on a reef. We drifted through the night and at dawn set the sails again. But, we saw no birds; where were they? We kept sailing south in the direction we had seen them flying the evening before. After several hours into the morning — it must have been around 9:00 — we spotted the birds again. But they were coming from the north and flying south in the direction we were headed. Should they not be flying away from the island at this time of the day? In the morning they fly away from the island in search of food, and in the evening they return. Did that mean we had drifted past the island in the night? I didn't know what to do. Would it be safer to turn back? I decided to turn the canoe around.



At that moment Mau took over — completely — without explanation. he said, “No, go follow that bird. You wait one

hour, you see the island. The island is right there.” In about an hour, Mau, standing at the railing, saw the island...a thin line, a little disturbance at the horizon that we could not yet see. And sure enough, a little while later — there was the island!

What Mau had not had the opportunity to tell me was that during the time the birds have their young, they fly out again in the dark to search for food and then fly back to the island in the mid-morning to feed their babies before they eat.

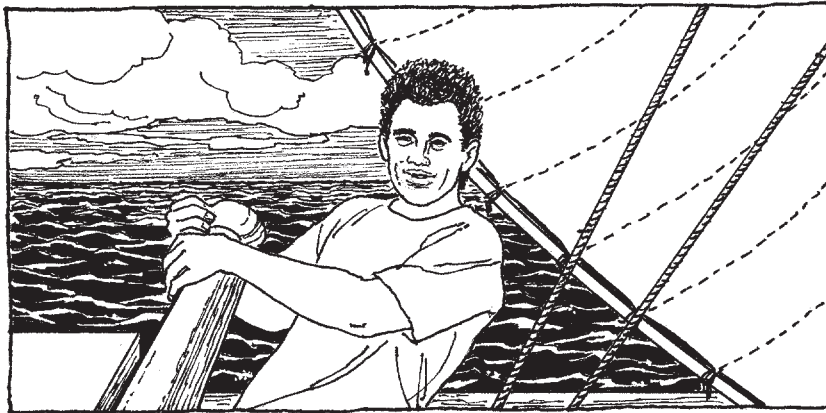
At the end of our voyage, Mau told me, “Everything was there in the ocean for you to learn, but it will take you 20 years to see.” Mau is right. For me to learn all the faces of the ocean, to sense the subtle cues, the slight differences in ocean swells, in the colors of the ocean, the shapes of the clouds and the winds, and to unlock these cues and glean their information in the way Mau can, will take many years more. Initially, I used geometry and analytic mathematics to help me in my quest to navigate the ancient way. However as my ‘ocean time’ and my time with Mau have grown, I have internalized this knowledge, and my need for mathematics has become less. I come closer and closer to navigating the way the ancients did.

Wow! What a fantastic story. It sure does make me appreciate our ancestors’ seafaring tradition of navigating without instrumentation. And I certainly respect Nainoa and the great navigator Mau for continuing that tradition.

Day 7- Early this morning I cast the two fishing lines and secured them to the *palekana* (safety railing) of the canoe. After a morning breakfast of fish soup, I pulled down the strips of *ono* I had drying on the rigging. It’s just like beef jerky. The crew will snack on this if they get hungry. (The dried fish is one of my favorite snacks.)

Kia and I were off duty so we decided to play *payut* — a local card game that's played like trumps. It was fun playing cards and “talking story” with Kia. As I was shuffling, he told me that his grandfather used to be a canoe maker. His *tūtū kāne* (grandfather) would tell him that the way he could tell if a *koa* tree was good for canoe building would be to watch the *'elepaio* bird. If the *'elepaio* pecked at the *koa* tree, that meant the tree had plenty bugs inside of it. Needless to say, Kia's *tūtū kāne* never selected a junk tree. Thanks to the *'elepaio* bird.

P.S. I beat Kia at *payut*. He was sour for a while, but he got over it! The deal was the loser had to give the winner a *lomilomi* (backrub). Boy did that feel good...



Kimo loves to steer the canoe.