

Journal of Momi Kawelo

Our Ahupua`a

(Week Three)

Day 1 - Today we have been at sea for seven days and we ran out of most of our fresh food! We still have some *'uala* (sweet potato). But our *poi*—even though it's still edible — has turned sour. The *kalo*, *mai'a* (banana) *'ulu* (breadfruit) and *limu* (seaweed) are all gone. I better catch some fish so we have something good for dinner.

Day 2 - I was taking a break, eating dried fish and sour *poi* with Kia, and thinking about Auntie Rachel—she loves sour *poi*. That auntie is good fun! Auntie Rachel knew I was going on a long voyage so she asked if I needed *kalo* for the journey. “Shoots,” I said. “A bunch of us can help you *huki* (pull) *kalo* then we can help you make *poi*.”

When we got there, she was already in the *lo'i* (taro patch). And what a sight she was. She had her wispy gray hair pulled back into a bun. Her red *mu'umu'u* was hiked up around her muddy thighs. She greeted us with a toothless grin as she motioned for us to hop in the *lo'i* with her. The whole time we were there she had us laughing until our sides ached. What a character!

She told us about the farmer upstream who she thought was doing something to clog her *'auwai* (irrigation ditch). One night, she went to his



**"This sour poi
is some `ono."**

house with her *nī'au* (midrib of the coconut leaf) broom to give him scoldings. (Aunty Rachel is not afraid of anyone!) But when she got there, the farmer told her that he was wondering where all the dirt came from because it was affecting his *lo'i* as well.

So, the next day the two of them walked up the stream — Aunty Rachel is still carrying her *nī'au* broom — to find out who's dumping dirt. Well, they discover a man on his bulldozer clearing land. Aunty Rachel recognizes the bulldozer operator. It's Jimmy Boy. She goes right up to him and yanks him off the bulldozer. Then, as her story goes, she whacks him with her *nī'au* broom and tells him to cut it out or she's going to give him real lickins'. Gutsy old lady, yeah?

Come to find out, Jimmy Boy had been hired by the owner of the land to level the area so he could build a few vacation cottages. The problem is that all the dirt he had moved ended up in the stream. I never heard what happened, but I know that Aunty Rachel was really upset. And I can understand why. Whatever gets dumped into the upper part of a stream will end up somewhere downstream or even be carried right out to the *kai* (ocean). The mountains and the ocean are both connected. And the more land we lose to development means fewer places to build *lo'i*. And fewer *lo'i* mean less food grown in Hawai'i and more importation of food from elsewhere. Can you imagine having no choice but to buy *kalo* (taro) grown elsewhere in the world? It doesn't make sense. Plus I can't imagine eating *kalo* from anywhere else when Aunty Rachel's *kalo* is so 'ono.

Day 3 - Today I caught a *mahimahi*! It was so good with the last of our *uala* for dinner tonight. Since I've been eating mostly traditional Hawaiian foods, I really enjoy fresh fish, fruits and vegetables. And I've

been thinking about growing some of my own food when I get home. I'll use a natural compost, the way the 'uala was grown in the old days — no chemicals, no pesticides. Some health specialists say it's better to eat organic foods that haven't been treated with chemicals that ward off bugs and make crops grow bigger. And I need to stay healthy, especially when I'm on a journey like this.

Day 4 - I was telling some of the guys about the "Aunty Rachel" story, and they were "cracking up" laughing. But as Kekai put it, Aunty Rachel was right in becoming *huhū* (angry). She knew that whatever happens upstream will affect those who live downstream.

In ancient Hawai'i, Hawaiians were very familiar with that concept. The *ahupua`a* system was set up so that everyone worked together to maintain a healthy environment. No one owned the land in ancient times. There was no such thing as "rights." It was expected that each farmer would care for his water as well as his neighbors' water. This was done without greed or selfishness.

Hawaiians also believed that the land belonged to the gods. Since the *ali'i nui* (high chief) were descendants of the gods, they were the ones designated to rule the island. It was up to the common people (*maka`āinana*) who lived under the *ali'i nui's* rule to care for the *ahupua`a*. By being stewards of the land, their *'āina* (land) would take care of them by providing enough food to eat.

This all made sense to me. It's unfortunate that we can't live like that today. But we certainly can learn to manage our resources better by making wise choices in how we use our land. How you figgah?

Day 5 - Wow! It's a bright, sunny day. We are experiencing westerly winds, which is making our canoe move more quickly through the water.

Before we left Hawai'i, we had spent a couple of months drying many of our foods. That was one way our ancestors were able to preserve their foods as well. Nowadays, we have our freezers and refrigerators to keep things fresh. And we have chemicals that are put into some of our foods to maintain that freshness. I watch out for those "processed" foods like chips, cookies and candies. I eat plenty of green vegetables and fruits to stay healthy.

I wonder what Aunty Rachel eats. It must be a lot of *kalo*. Can you believe it? She's 88 years old and still working in her *lo'i*!

Day 6 - Today I'm feeling a little homesick. I really miss my family. I can see Ma right now bent over the stove making Portuguese bean soup and scolding everyone that tries to sample it before it's done. Uncle Bully is outside on his *lauhala* mat mending his fishing net and "talking story" with the bruddahs. And all of the cousins are running around the yard playing "chase master." Just thinking about them makes me feel a little sad.

I think Sau knew I was feeling that way 'cause he kinda whacked me on my arm and said, "What's up, *tita* (sister)?" I told him I was thinking about my *'ohana* (family). He laughed and said to me, "Eh *sistah*, we're your family now." And you know what? He's right. Since we've been on the canoe for the last two weeks, the crew and I have become like family. We've eaten together, worked together, and played together. And although they're not my blood relatives, they are still my extended *'ohana*.

I saw Sau give Moke "the eye." I think he was trying to tell him that we have to cheer this wahine up. They were so cute. Moke grabbed his ukulele and started strumming the music to Teve Teve. You should have seen the crew. Sau leaped up to dance and dragged me up with him. I cannot dance, but I tried. And we had good fun!

I tell you, these bruddahs were awesome! I forgot why I was feeling so gloomy in the first place!

Day 7 - I was thinking back on what Kekai said about the ahupua`a and how important the land was and still is to the Hawaiian people. And he's right. In fact, Aunty Rachel knows that her lo'i kalo (taro patch) was very important because it provides her with the food she needs.

To show her respect, she oli (chants) before entering the lo'i. Then, she chants softly as she harvests the kalo (taro). It doesn't matter whether the kalo is big or small; each one is considered special. It is as if the kalo are her children. In fact, I can understand why Aunty Rachel treats her kalo as children. As legend goes, a child was born to Papa (Earth Mother) and Wākea (Sky Father). But the child named Hāloa was deformed and died shortly after birth. They planted Hāloa and from him grew the new taro shoots. That's why Hawaiians feel so connected to kalo. It's part of them. It's their ancestors.

Sometimes I see Aunty Rachel scolding one of the kalo stalks if it had not grown much. But she did this in a caring way. It is amazing to see her out there in the lo'i especially at her age. Some of the young folks think she's "looney tunes." But those of us familiar with Aunty Rachel and Hawaiian culture know she's as real as it gets.