

EMERGING NAVIGATOR—MĀLAMA HONUA WORLDWIDE VOYAGE

Interview with Ka'iulani Murphy, July 2014

In this interview conducted in the early stages of the Mālama Honua Worldwide Voyage, navigator Ka'iulani Murphy speaks about her growth and philosophies, which were shaped by being raised in Waimea and Waipi'o on Hawai'i Island and by attending high school and university on O'ahu, and about her connection to *Hōkūle'a* and those who sail and care for her. These connections to 'āina and culture lay a foundation for our children to know their capacity for greatness. She speaks about the kuleana of being a part of the voyaging mo'okū'auhau of mentors like Mau Piailug and Nainoa Thompson and having to be ready to accept the role your mentors ask of you. She also focuses on the importance of looking to our traditions while moving toward solutions for the future and creating a more sustainable world.

For centuries, scientific inquiry has been central to the Native Hawaiian worldview. Through the generations, Hawaiians have embraced their kuleana as stewards of the land and sea. By cultivating the dynamic quest for knowledge steeped in ancestral wisdom, Hawaiians continue to deepen and share their knowledge with the world.

In 1973, the Polynesian Voyaging Society was founded for scientific inquiry into Hawaiian history and heritage. By 1975, a replica of an ancient double-hulled voyaging canoe was built to conduct an experimental voyage that would answer questions about how Hawaiians traditionally navigated without instruments, guiding their people on voyages as lengthy as 2,500 miles. Evidence shows that they travelled successfully across 10 million square miles of ocean. In rekindling this genealogy, the voyaging canoe, *Hōkūleʻa*, Star of Gladness, helped spur the Hawaiian Renaissance described by others in this journal. It has since traveled more than 140,000 nautical miles.

Through expeditionary voyaging, Hawaiians continue to make significant advancements in protecting our precious cultural and environmental resources by connecting with and learning from others. In 2013, the Polynesian voyaging canoes *Hōkūleʻa* and *Hikianalia* began a four-year Worldwide Voyage around the globe with the intent to catalyze a movement toward a more sustainable world. With a new generation of navigators at the helm, this voyage helps communicate that our natural world is a gift with limits and that we must carefully steward this gift in order to survive. The Worldwide Voyage is a means by which we now engage all of Island Earth—bridging traditional and new technologies to live sustainably by creating global relationships to share the wonders of this precious place we all call home. (See <http://www.hokulea.com>.)

In honor of our kūpuna and the voyagers who have pioneered new leadership in scientific inquiry for our lāhui, we offer this essay. Kaʻiulani Murphy, a member of a new generation of navigators, reflects on how Nainoa Thompson set out to answer how our kūpuna voyaged. She relates how a new generation of navigators in the 21st century is now challenged with answering tough sustainability questions, creating enhanced educational opportunities, and innovating based on the legacy of those who have come before.

TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF.

I'm blessed with a wonderful 'ohana who nurtured a solid foundation for my sisters, our cousins, and me. I am the second of four girls born to Sean and Denise Murphy. We were all born and raised with our cousins in Waimea on Hawai'i Island. Kupunakāne (my mom's father) comes from Waipi'o Valley. My mom and her siblings grew up in lo'i that her parents opened, and we continue to farm today. As far back as I can remember, we spent every weekend in Waipi'o. My kūpuna, parents, uncles, and aunties are incredibly hard workers. While they were maintaining the 'auwai, kuaauna, and lo'i, or pulling kalo and planting the huli, my sisters, cousins, and I would play in the mud, swim in the kahawai, or catch little frogs and crayfish until we were old enough to actually help. We were up ma uka for most of our childhood until we started paddling for the Kawaihae Canoe Club (where my parents first met). When I left home my freshman year to go to Kamehameha Schools on O'ahu, I started to really appreciate what we grew up with. I realized how much I loved and missed home. The city overwhelmed me. But I left home again to attend UH-Mānoa, and that's when I got involved with our voyaging canoes. For my first voyage, I had the privilege to sail *Hōkūle'a* from Tahiti back home to Hawai'i on her return from Rapa Nui. After landing on Moloka'i, we brought *Hōkūle'a* home to Hakipu'u, where she was first launched 25 years earlier. That's when I met my kāne, Kawaiolimaikamapuna, whose 'ohana is from Hakipu'u and cares for *Hōkūle'a* and welcomes her whenever she returns to her one hānau. We go home to see my growing 'ohana in Waimea, but home is also in Waiāhole and Hakipu'u, where I'm often reminded of my small kid days in Waipi'o.

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WHAT LED YOU TO BECOME A VOYAGER?

When I was a freshman at UH, I heard Nainoa give a talk about *Hōkūle'a* at Kamakakūokalani. I was intrigued and inspired by the stories he shared, and I wanted to learn more. Nainoa was listed in the catalog as the instructor of a Hawaiian Studies class, Ho'okele Holoikahiki. I knew I wanted to learn whatever he was teaching, and I had just declared Hawaiian Studies as my major. Lilikalā Kame'eleihiwa actually taught the class, and I am eternally grateful to her for providing a foundation for this path I am now on. One semester we learned the basic concepts of navigation and studied the stars in a weekly night lab. We were given the opportunity to help with *Hōkūle'a* while she was in dry dock at

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Pier 60. I went every Saturday that I could. The following semester I took the second class, which introduced us to sailing. We learned to sail *E Ala*, a smaller voyaging canoe that was being used in education programs. I continued to go to dry dock on the weekends. *Hōkūle'a* was relaunched before our semester ended, and our class got to do a sea trial to Moloka'i. The Kaiwi channel was rough that day, and Nainoa towed the wa'a with his small Radon. I was one of the few students who didn't get seasick; I was too excited and steered most of the way.

I'm pretty sure that's why they asked me to come back and work as an intern for a summer education program. I've been working and volunteering with the Polynesian Voyaging Society ever since. And I have had the privilege to participate in *Hōkūle'a's* voyages to Rapa Nui, Papahānaumokuākea, Micronesia, and Japan and now her voyage around the world. I even get to teach voyaging courses at Honolulu Community College. I encourage my students and anyone interested in getting involved to help with dry dock. You get to know the wa'a and the people taking care of her, you get to put your aloha into the wa'a, and you get to feel the mana of all the people who have come before us, those in the stories that Nainoa continues to tell.

NAINOA HAS TOLD MANY STORIES ABOUT HIS NAVIGATOR KUMU AND HAS SHARED MUCH ABOUT MAU'S LEADERSHIP. WHAT INSPIRES YOU ABOUT NAINOA'S LEADERSHIP, AND HOW WILL YOU CARRY ON THE TRADITIONS HE'S PASSED ON TO YOU?

To me, a good leader is a good servant to his or her community and lāhui. As long as I have known him, Nainoa has worked tirelessly to improve the health and well-being of our people and our special island home. He is a humble and compassionate leader, always recognizing his great teachers and honoring them by sharing what they taught him. Over the years he inspired a generation of young voyagers and mentored a number of students in navigation. As one of those students, I have kuleana to share what I have learned from him and other extraordinary teachers. The wa'a are great tools to help remind us how to better live on islands and stay grounded in our values. I hope to continue to use these tools to serve our lāhui and ensure that we thrive in our pae'āina. I appreciate that our leaders have kept the wa'a open and accessible to all who are willing to learn, regardless of gender or background. In Mau's islands, the ocean is the men's domain and the land the women's. Only men were navigators. But Mau didn't impose that limitation on our wa'a and let his students decide whom they would teach. You really need to have both kāne and wāhine on the wa'a for balance.

WHY DO YOU THINK WĀHINE HAVE BECOME SO INTERESTED IN VOYAGING?

I think most people who are interested in voyaging are inspired by the mana of *Hōkūle'a*, what she stands for, and what she has done for Hawai'i and Oceania. For wāhine it helps that we have these strong role models like Paige Barber, Penny Martin, Keani Reiner, and Joanne Sterling, who were crew with *Hōkūle'a* in the early days. They are my heroes, and I get to call them "Aunty." Being able to spend time with them and listen to their stories is special and reminds us of the importance of that balance that wāhine bring to the wa'a.

WHAT DO YOU ENVISION FOR OUR LĀHUI, SPECIFICALLY IN REGARD TO NAVIGATION, IN THE 21ST CENTURY?

When *Hōkūle'a* was built in the '70s, we needed a navigator to find Tahiti for us. Here in Hawai'i that 'ike was either lost or sleeping for centuries. When Papa Mau agreed to navigate to Tahiti and then later agreed to come back and teach us how, he allowed us to reconnect to the 'ike of our kūpuna. We honor Mau when we perpetuate what he shared. Although he isn't physically with us, he lives in his students. Before he passed, Mau recognized five men from Hawai'i and another five men from Aotearoa and Rarotonga as pwo navigators. When he gave them pwo, he gave them the kuleana not only to teach but to be the light in their community. Navigation is much more than being able to get from one island to another. On Mau's island, the navigators could do everything from building the canoe and going out to sea for days at a time to bringing food back to their people. Their mana was in their ability to feed their community. Here in Hawai'i, *Hōkūle'a* and her navigators have fed the spirit and pride of our people. In this next century, I hope we continue to feed our people spiritually but also physically, using our wa'a to live in a more healthy way on our islands. Employing our knowledge of navigation to design, build, and use wa'a of all sizes for gathering food and getting around could be useful in this next century when we strive to be more self-sufficient.

Going forward requires knowing your history.

FROM YOUR PERSPECTIVE, WHAT KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS ARE MOST CRITICAL AT SEA? HOW MIGHT THESE RELATE TO “EVERYDAY HAWAIIANS” WHO ARE NAVIGATING THROUGH A LIFE FULL OF CHANGE, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES?

One of the really important “skills” at sea is being a good observer. As a navigator, you rely on all of your senses to make confident decisions that will safely get you to where you need to go. Our kūpuna were incredible kilo, maka’ala to the signs in nature because their lives depended on it. This is one of the beauties about navigation—it brings us closer to nature again, you really have to pay attention. And the more we observe, the more we learn about the beauty around us, how precious life is, and how important it is to take care of it. Other skills that apply to survival on the ocean and are just as important in our everyday lives include building trust in leadership and being able to work together toward a common vision and goals. Before we go to sea, we train and prepare for the rough weather and worst-case scenarios. Once we go to sea, we must trust in our captain and navigator to make decisions that will keep us safe. We trust that everyone on the wa’a will take care of each other and fulfill his or her kuleana. As a unified crew and ‘ohana, we can handle any challenges along the journey.

WHAT ARE THE ULTIMATE GOALS OF THE MĀLAMA HONUA VOYAGE? AND WHAT DO YOU, PERSONALLY, WANT TO SEE TAKE SHAPE AS A RESULT OF THIS EFFORT?

Mālama Honua, caring for Island Earth, is a voyage to ultimately connect people in Hawai’i, the Pacific, and around the world to each other and to the collective wisdom of our ancestors to find a way to use our modern tools in order to take better care of our islands, oceans, and entire planet—the only home we have. The voyage provides a platform for education, and we hope it will serve as a catalyst for positive change at all levels. Our voyage began here in our pae’āina, where we visited communities, learned about what each was doing to take care of their place, and brought schoolchildren on board who shared their aloha with the wa’a. *Hōkūle’a* and *Hikianalia* will continue to gather and carry these stories of hope and aloha as we sail around the world. There are wonderful opportunities for positive growth here at home that I’d like to see as a result of this enormous effort. I hope this voyage helps to reaffirm the importance of perpetuating wa’a knowledge as part of and to ensure support for ‘āina-based learning in our schools. I have hope that our next generations of leaders will be solution-oriented, innovative thinkers grounded in the values of our culture. I hope our ‘ohana wa’a is strengthened and remains unified moving forward. I’d like to see our voyaging canoes have a place

in our harbors and have more hālau wa'a where they can be cared for and safe and where the love of lifelong learning will be nurtured. The possibilities are endless, and that's really exciting.

WHY IS NAVIGATION IMPORTANT TO HAWAIIAN WELL-BEING?

Navigation is one reminder of and connection to the wisdom of our kūpuna. *Hōkūle'a* helped to bring back dignity to maoli people. I was born after *Hōkūle'a*'s first voyage, and I am lucky to have grown up in a time when we learned about and could be proud of the achievements of our kūpuna—from making purposeful two-way voyages between distant islands to sustaining a population of nearly a million people here in Hawai'i with only the resources from these islands. We can celebrate everything maoli. Our keiki can grow up with a sense of self-worth because they are a continuation of this mo'okū'auhau, connected to this 'āina and culture, and with this foundation they know they too are capable of greatness.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED OVER THE PAST DECADE OF BUILDING OUR NAVIGATIONAL SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES IN A MODERN WORLD?

We have learned the importance of applying traditional knowledge to developing solutions for our future. When we voyage, our navigators only know where we are by knowing where we've come from. Going forward requires knowing your history. Our kūpuna perfected their skills in every aspect of life, achieving great feats in engineering (e.g., lo'i and loko i'a) to sustain healthy communities. They knew that the wai needed to flow from uka to kai; it was essential for all the living things along the way. With the wealth of knowledge retained from our kūpuna and modern tools and technologies available to us today, we should be able to restore those elements that nurture a healthy lifestyle so our communities may thrive.

WHAT DO WE SEE AHEAD AS SOME OF THE IMPORTANT POSSIBILITIES AND KEY CHALLENGES TO HAWAIIAN WELL-BEING, BASED ON WHAT WE'VE LEARNED THROUGH VOYAGING?

With the wa'a we expect our leadership—captains, navigators, watch captains—will ensure a safe environment for us to grow, learn, and work in. In our everyday lives we expect our leadership—policy makers, local and national government—will provide the same, conditions in which we may achieve well-being. The 'ohana wa'a is looking ahead at opportunities for the next generation of leadership to carry voyaging into the future. Similar possibilities exist within our Ali'i trusts as well as

in other hui founded with the purpose to better conditions for maoli people. We have the opportunity and challenge to build trust in emerging leadership and in policy makers who are willing to take risks and make positive changes to protect and promote maoli well-being.

IN HŪLILI VOL. 4, NAINOA SAYS, “HŌKŪLE’A, FROM THE BEGINNING, CHALLENGED US IN WAYS THAT WE DID NOT UNDERSTAND.” IN WHAT WAYS HAVE YOU BEEN CHALLENGED IN WAYS THAT YOU DID NOT UNDERSTAND?

Many of the challenges Nainoa spoke of centered on answering how our kūpuna carried out their voyages. It took someone like Mau to show us, and he was really like a living ancestor. These days we are challenged with how to sustain the wa’a we have, nurture the wa’a lifestyle and growth of wa’a throughout our islands, make wa’a more accessible to students in our schools, and continue this legacy once our teachers and leaders “pass the torch.”

FINALLY, IN THE SAME ARTICLE, NAINOA STATES THAT “LEADERSHIP NEEDS TO STAND UP WHEN IT’S HARD, NOT EASY.” YOU HAVE OBVIOUSLY BEEN HA’AHA’A WHEN IT COMES TO CLAIMING YOURSELF AS A LEADER, BUT REALLY, YOU ARE. SO ALTHOUGH YOU MIGHT NOT CALL YOURSELF A LEADER, FOR THE SAKE OF REFLECTING ON NAINOA’S STATEMENT, IN WHAT WAYS HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED LEADERSHIP AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO STAND UP WHEN IT’S HARD, NOT EASY?

When I started to sail, I just wanted to learn as much as I could from good people who were willing to teach. I feel kuleana to my mentors to continue sharing what they taught me. And at some point you have to be ready to accept the role they ask of you. When I was first asked to serve as captain of *Hōkūle’a*, I was incredibly nervous about leading people who were older and more experienced than I was. But when uncles I admire and respect offered encouragement, like Uncle Mel Paoa, who told me he would go [sail] with me anywhere, that made all the difference. It’s never easy for me to lead a crew, but when I am surrounded by people I trust and love, who are piko, I know we will get through any challenges together.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ka'iulani Murphy of Waimea, Hawai'i, is a graduate of Kamehameha Schools and the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, where she first got involved with the 'ohana of *Hōkūle'a* and began her learning as a student of navigation. Ka'iulani serves as a Hawaiian Studies faculty member at Honolulu Community College, where she is able to share and grow her voyaging experiences.