

E HO‘I MAU: HONORING THE PAST, CARING FOR THE PRESENT, JOURNEYING TO THE FUTURE

Nainoa Thompson

Every journey begins with a dream, a vision that can unite others. When people come together around a set of shared values, they can achieve extraordinary things. It is true that every voyage has its share of hardships. Sometimes the challenges come from outside the community, and other times they come from within. Most often they come from inside ourselves, stemming from feelings of fear and inadequacy. We rely on our teachers and leaders to guide us through times of crisis, to inspire hope, and to point us toward new horizons. This essay pays tribute to the visionaries, teachers, and leaders of the Hawaiian voyaging movement. For me, these powerful teachers are Mau Piailug, Herb Kane, Eddie Aikau, and my greatest teacher, my father, Myron Thompson.

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Aloha mai kākou. I am very honored to be here, and I would like to thank Pacific Resources for Education and Learning, the Hawai'i Department of Education, and the University of Hawai'i–Mānoa College of Education for creating this opportunity to bring so many people from Pacific Island nations together.* I am deeply honored to be here to bring to you a glimpse and an eye blink of our voyaging community, primarily through the voyages of *Hōkūle'a*.

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I am also very honored to bring you a story of stories.¹ I need to warn you that this presentation, even though I don't like public speaking, is not going to be short, because if someone asks me to speak about *Hōkūle'a*, I need to speak about a time when we were guided by extraordinary leaders. We were guided, my generation, by extraordinary teachers, and we were nurtured by extraordinary mentors.

So I'm bringing to you not so much this year's voyage to Micronesia and Japan but back to the 1970s, when learning was essential, when learning was intense. And in learning, we paid the price, a deep price, and we understood the importance of education and what happens when you are less than committed. It was a time of achievement, and it was a time of failure. It was a time of struggle, and without the teachers that I bring forward to you, we—my generation—would have never found Tahiti. We would have never gone to Micronesia.

And so, to give any sense of respect and honor to *Hōkūle'a*, permit me to share the learning experiences from extraordinary leaders. Allow me to take you back into history, because *Hōkūle'a* is a canoe of change. Even though we didn't know it, it became the change—not that we were necessarily seeking it—but it became the change anyway. And it had a profound effect, in Hawai'i, on many things, primarily in education.

If you go back 2,000 years—maybe our best guess—that was the arrival of the first canoe and the genesis of human kind on these special islands we call Hawai'i. The canoe, navigator, and crew may have arguably completed the greatest feat of exploration and navigation in that time, and yet today, we don't know the name of the canoe, we don't know the captain, and we don't know the navigator. We know nothing about that history, and there's a reason for that.

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Two hundred years ago came other navigators, agents of change. These changes did not enhance the well-being of native people. I'm not going to spend a lot of time on that. Many of you in this room have that common history. But it's important to at least mention that at the time of Captain Cook, 1778, (the population estimates are varied, but even at the median) our population of Native Hawaiians was approximately 800,000. One of the impacts of newcomers to Hawai'i, by way of introduced Western diseases, is that the Native Hawaiian population diminished to about 24,000 people, meaning that approximately 1 out of 34 survived. That had a huge impact.

Eighty years ago was a significant time in my family as well as in the public schools. Eighty years ago, Hawaiian language and hula were outlawed. In the public schools, it was forbidden, by law, to exercise who we were as a distinct and proud people. My grandmother, my father's mother, who was pure Hawaiian, who danced hula beautifully, and whose first language was Hawaiian, was beaten in schools by teachers with sticks for speaking Hawaiian. She went to the school called Kamehameha, which was established for the advancement and the well-being of Native Hawaiians. Then my father was born. That was when there was a shift in my family. My grandmother was the native speaker, but she chose not to teach her children the language. That was the extinction of the orations and the stories in many ways. Maybe it was not really extinction, but the Hawaiian language was put to sleep. My father grew up without the language, never knowing who he was or knowing where he came from, and that was profound because I ended up being the second generation of that end point.

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My grandmother was a powerful storyteller. She would talk about the great stories of her grandfather who was an extraordinary fisherman. And she had this ability to change the stories. She would lie on this large couch in her living room, talk to my older brother, my older sister, and me when we were very young, and she would talk about her grandfather, this great fisherman. When she talked about him, she would look you in the eye; she would sit up, and she talked through her eyes. What came through her eyes was love, was strength, was pride. But then she had this extraordinary ability to change those stories and talk about being beaten in schools. And if the schools didn't embrace those values of love, strength, and pride in the Hawaiian culture, then they would become extinct.

In many ways I never understood why my grandmother told me these two sides of her at civil war. But I guess—and I was not mature enough to ask her before she passed away—she was preparing me, my sister, and my brother for a world where we ought to be proud of who we are even if society did not agree. I didn't understand it, couldn't do anything about it, but I tell you, those stories set this course in my life of being sensitive to issues of inequality, the absence of one's own sense of identity. And I encountered this primarily in school.

“We’re going to sail it to Tahiti. We’re going to go home to our ancestors.”

Upon graduating from high school, I had only half a semester of Hawaiian history beginning with Kamehameha I and ending at the present. I had no idea where my ancestors came from. I had no idea how they got here. I had no idea what a voyaging canoe was. And in many ways, I was wandering around, because spiritually, I had a need to be connected. If you cannot connect to your ancestors, what can you connect to? We become Hawaiians because we come from the land and the oceans, and I believe there is a need to be connected to our land and the oceans. So when we are disconnected from that, that part of us, we are wandering. At least I was. But I was lucky, I was really, really lucky.

There was change in the 1970s by extraordinary vision. I'm not a visionary, but I've hung around many visionaries, and I would like to introduce you to one of them. His name is Herb Kawainui Kane, who was born in Waipi'o. He is a great historian and arguably one of the greatest artists of our time. He had *Hōkūle'a* in his mind before anybody understood anything about it. He had this dream. He painted that oil painting, “Discovery of Hawai'i,” of that first canoe.

And I was lucky, I met Herb Kane when I was paddling for the canoe club Hui Nalu. He had these two four-man surfing canoes that were lashed together, and he had a Hobie Cat sail on it. I loved the ocean, and I wanted to go out. He'd come to the canoe club to ask for volunteers, and I would always go because I just wanted to go play. He needed people to paddle the canoe outside this canal to get it outside the reef to sail, and that's when he pulled me in. It was a late spring day in 1974, he came over to the canoe club, and he invited the two head coaches, Kala Kukea and Billy Mitchell, top watermen in Hawai'i, and me to his home. He was recruiting people into his dream. We went into his old wooden house where he lived across the canal, and on the wall he had these oil paintings of extraordinary voyaging canoes. I counted 19 of them. And at dinner he says, “We're going to build one. We're going to sail it to Tahiti. We're going to go home to our ancestors.”

And then what was most powerful, what I understand from firsthand experience as the power of mentors, was when he took us three into the yard. He took our eyes and our imagination up to the stars. There is a map up there in the minds of our ancestors; it was just chaos to me, but he organized that map from the North Star, went along the eastern horizon all the way to the Southern Cross, and he said, “These are the stars that we will use to find Tahiti.” That single sentence changed everything in my life. It pulled together this deep instinctual, almost innate need to be who I am, by knowing who I was. It allowed me to know that I’m going to be within the domain of powerful learning. I’m going to be in the domain of rich learning. And he got me connected to that place that I love—the ocean; my great-great-grandfather was a great ocean man. And I instinctually knew, stay with him, stay with his dream, because there’s something very special here.

Herb started to tell us his research. The Pacific Ocean is the largest single feature we have on the planet. The Polynesian Triangle—at that time I had no idea what this meant—is the region anchored by Hawai’i in the north, Aotearoa in the southwest, and Rapa Nui in the east. It is 10 million square miles, bigger than Russia, and three times the size of the continental United States. If you do not include the land mass of Aotearoa, all the other islands in Polynesia have a land area equal to one third the state of New York. There is 600 times more water than there is land—and these lands were colonized, explored, 2,000 years ago.

What Herb was advancing was the idea that we ought to be proud of who we are because our ancestors were arguably the greatest explorers of the time. We ought to be proud. And the stories go on with research. We know there are Polynesian artifacts in Australia, and there are Polynesian outliers in Micronesia. We know that both the sweet potato and the chicken got to South America probably from the Polynesians. And now from genetics, we know that there are Polynesian connections even to Southeast Alaska. The Malagasy people of Madagascar, who are halfway around the earth from us, speak the same root language. Polynesians are global. These are some of the extraordinary transformational stories about how we see ourselves.

And then we know from oral traditions, as well as from other research and modern science, where Hawaiians came from and when they made their voyages. What we didn’t know was how they did it. Herb’s fundamental question was to figure

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out the how. How do you build deep-sea voyaging canoes from limited resources on small islands? How do you sail in open-ocean passages of 2,500 miles? How do you navigate? How do you find your way across the open ocean without modern instruments?

Hōkūleʻa, from the very beginning, challenged us in ways that we did not understand. How were we going to answer those questions when so much of it was lost in language? We didn't know the blueprints. We didn't know the way they made the sails. We had no way of knowing the spiritual protocols. We didn't know the foods they had. Right from the very beginning, everything was challenged. In many ways, that's why Herb Kane and others set aside a day for Hawaiian protocol. It was the day before *Hōkūleʻa*, a big canoe at 60 feet long, 20 feet wide, 25,000 pounds fully loaded, was launched from the sacred beach of Kualoa on the northern side of Kāneʻohe Bay on this island of Oʻahu. I remember that day, being there; it's the first day that I was ever at a so-called Hawaiian protocol—the first time. And I was confused. Everybody was confused. What you had on the beach was this extraordinary, extraordinary symbol of power. And that canoe would have no lasting power unless it found Tahiti.

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Challenge: Who would navigate *Hōkūleʻa*? Leadership knew of a man named Tevake from the Santa Cruz Islands (Polynesian outliers in Melanesia), who at the time was known as the last deep-sea Polynesian navigator. Leadership made some effort to contact him, but the story I was told was that Tevake's granddaughter sent a letter. Apparently, Tevake had an old sailing canoe in this old canoe house. He said goodbye to his whole family, went on the canoe by himself, and never came back. In many ways, you could have drawn a line of extinction right there—3,000 years—gone, never to come back.

Tevake, even though I never met him, inspired the definition, to me, of what it is to be an ocean man, to be someone of the sea, to become the sea. His whole life, as well as his passing and taking his own voyage, was on the ocean, and I'm very, very respectful and honored to have known this story.

We had no navigator, but we got lucky again. I wasn't in a leadership role, and I wasn't in the meeting, but this is what I was told. A Peace Corps worker from Micronesia, Mike McCoy, worked on an island called Satawal, and he came to one of our Polynesian Voyaging Society's leadership meetings in Honolulu. It was the kind of meeting where we didn't know how much we didn't know, because in

that meeting we considered navigating the canoe ourselves. We didn't know how sacred the knowledge is, how deep it is. Mike McCoy navigated us in the right direction. He said, you want a navigator? He's about five miles down the road. He's living on the *Townsend Cromwell* research ship for the University of Hawai'i teaching scientists how to catch *aku* (tuna) with traditional lures. His name is Mau Pailug, considered one of the six great master navigators, and the youngest. Our leadership talked to Mau, and Mau said yes. I always wondered what drove him to make that kind of decision, that kind of commitment. In some ways, Mau is a fierce man because, as the navigator, you must be. He's a strong man, and he certainly was competent; he certainly was experienced. He certainly had the knowledge, but I think that Mau, in his genius, beyond all his capabilities, knew that when he was asked the question, "Will you help us find Tahiti?" it wasn't just about getting *Hōkūle'a* there, it was about helping save the Hawaiian people by bringing back our traditions, our heritage, and our culture. I think Mau knew he had to be there.

It wasn't just about getting *Hōkūle'a* there, it was about... bringing back our traditions, our heritage, and our culture.

The challenge (and it's significant): Hawai'i's up in the north, and Tahiti's way down in the south, the bottom of the map. The path is 2,500 miles long, and it takes one month to sail. We had to sail across the world's two biggest wind systems; we had to sail through the doldrums by the equator, which is considered the cloudiest place on earth; we were going to do this as the first voyage in 600 years; and we knew so little.

Hōkūle'a left Hawai'i on May 1, 1976, with 17 people on board. Mau was what everybody believed in and followed. He was the strength, he was everything. Thirty-one days later, *Hōkūle'a*, its crew, navigated by Mau, found the island of Tahiti. I was very, very lucky and honored to be selected for the return trip, so my crew and I, we flew down to Pape'ete, and we were there to greet *Hōkūle'a* at the beach along with an estimated 17,000 Tahitians. *Hōkūle'a* arrived, and clearly, that canoe wasn't ours; it was theirs. It was like this spontaneous, innate reaction to the reality and symbolism of *Hōkūle'a* entering Pape'ete Harbor. And I say that because the difference was the Tahitians maintain their language, they know the orations, they know the great stories of the great navigators, they know of the great canoes, but they no longer had them in our so-called modern times. So when *Hōkūle'a* came there, it gave strength and truth to all those stories that over time had retreated into mythology. It was a powerful day. Everything was changing. That day we connected an old family—Hawai'i and Tahiti.

To tell the story, it was not always about success. To be asked to tell you the story, I'll tell you the truth. We made enormous mistakes. When *Hōkūle'a* arrived in Tahiti, it was extraordinarily celebrated, this huge achievement, this huge success. That crew on board *Hōkūle'a* had two very different values that were trying to be achieved. One was the value of Hawaiian community, bringing back our culture.

“We commit to the sea; everything about the land you leave on the soil.”

The other was scientific experiments, trying to prove or disprove people like Thor Hyerdahl, Andrew Sharpe, and others, who discounted the great stories of the navigators. So the crew did not have a set of common values.

As extraordinary as the first crew was, as powerful as they were as a crew—their achievements were enormous—Mau was not satisfied with their behavior. Mau is disciplined, and he respects the ocean first. Mau, in Maui, two hours before the canoe left had said, “We commit to the sea; everything about the land you leave on the soil. When you come on the ocean, you listen to me. I'm your father. You take care of the canoe, it's your mother. If you listen to my words, you'll see the island you seek. Be good brothers.” The crew was extraordinary as sailors in getting to that place, but Mau was dissatisfied. When *Hōkūle'a* arrived, I didn't see him. From the canoe, Mau was taken into hiding. He was secretly put on an Air New Zealand jet and flown to Fiji where he slowly worked his way home. The second crew and I were left with a cassette tape, you know those old eight-track things, on which Mau left us many messages. In one of the messages, he said to us, the second crew, “I'm going to go home. Send my clothes, don't come look for me, you'll never find me.”

I was young and I was scared. I needed leadership to take the risk of such a powerful dream and to deal with the fear I was holding in me. I needed leadership I could trust, and that leadership went back to Satawal. I started to speak that very dangerous language about quitting, about going home, to a few crew members, and it got around. One of our elders, one of our great, great sailors here, Wally Froiseth, was taking care of *Hōkūle'a* while it was in Pape'ete. He found me in the youth hostel, grabbed my shirt, and yanked me to his face. He was crying and said, “Boy don't you talk about quitting, it's your time. Take *Hōkūle'a* home.” He shoved me away.

Well, you don't have any choice at that point. On the way home, we brought on professional sailors and navigators with modern instruments; instead of a crew of 17 we had 13, instead of having all the media and all that stuff we had to prove, we had none of that. But we had this extraordinary opportunity to learn. We were all young. Instead of a 31-day voyage it was 22. We had no doldrums—instead of 7 days of doldrums like the first voyage, we had zero. We had perfect winds and—one of the key pieces—no storms. We were never tested.

Herb Kane's vision was powerful, but the vision carried us to the 1976 voyage, which was to go down to Tahiti and prove what we needed to and then the voyage would be over. As privileged crewmembers, in the wake of our ancestors, we had the path to the deep place inside of us. For us not to be able to sail again was like tearing that out. There's no connection. We needed to sail, but we didn't know how. We planned a second voyage in 1978. In hindsight, clearly, we made extraordinarily poor choices. But the worst of all choices, at least in my humble opinion, are choices that compromise your values. And one of the key values in voyaging that we compromised was safety.

We set off on a second voyage to Tahiti on March 16, 1978, from the Ala Wai canal down by Waikiki around sunset. The weather was stormy. We, in hindsight, did not prepare *Hōkūle'a* properly, did not train the crew properly, and we made extraordinarily poor and compromised choices. One of the choices was not to take an escort boat, and another of the choices was not to spend time testing radio equipment and gear. I remember before leaving, comments being made that if the radio equipment didn't work, don't worry, we'll call you from Tahiti. So there was no expectation from loved ones that they would hear from us. We went down that road I'll never ever go again.

We left in stormy weather at sunset, and just after midnight we capsized, in the Moloka'i channel, between O'ahu and Moloka'i. The canoe was upside down. The only thing above sea level was the keel of one hull. The winds blew to gale force—you know those channels out of the north, pushing us south, away from the islands. The seas grew 12 to 18 feet. And every time the big waves came, they knocked the crew off. You got to ask the question, how many times can you climb back up? Nobody knew where we were. We were in serious, serious trouble.

The worst of all choices... are choices that compromise your values.

There's a name, besides Mau, that should be remembered, if we hold anything about voyaging to have any value, then we ought to remember this man. The world renowned, at least in the surfing world, Eddie Aikau was considered the one who would surf the world's biggest waves. He was respected in Hawai'i as Hawai'i's top lifeguard who was stationed at Waimea Bay on the north side of O'ahu. Because of his skill, his commitment, he was there to make sure that those who find out how unforgiving the ocean is get a second chance. As I recall of my time with him, what was most powerful about Eddie was that across any spectrum of age, any social spectrum, he was loved by everybody here in Hawai'i. We were all honored that he was one of our crewmembers for that voyage.

There is a picture his family had given to me of Eddie sitting on a surfboard in the Ala Wai canal two hours before we left. Eddie took that surfboard and tied it to the rail of *Hōkūle'a*, because he was going to go surfing in Tahiti. But that surfboard created the choice, a leadership choice. When the canoe went over, we had all the crew on this one keel, choices had been made that you don't know about because you may be on one end of the canoe. But all of a sudden you see Eddie taking the surfboard off. He's going to go. We stopped him, then he waited. Then he had to go. You've seen the bumper sticker "Eddie would go"? In my humble opinion,

knowing him, Eddie had to go. Eddie, by every cell in his body as a trained lifeguard, knew that it was his duty, by his own measure of commitment to all of us, to save us. And so we sensed that's why Eddie went.

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I also knew Eddie's deeper side, his spiritual side. I remember being at the Honolulu Medical Group two weeks before we left. We had to go do our medical screening to see if we were healthy enough to go. We were on the fourth floor, we got on the elevator, and we went down the elevator. You know how the doors close

and they have those stainless panels that butt up against each other? He was in the elevator tapping the stainless steel with his hand, and I was looking at him but he wasn't with me. He was very, very far away, thinking about something very deep. When we got into the lobby, Eddie turned to me and said, "Nainoa, I need to sail *Hōkūle'a*, I got to go down the path, and I need to help pull Tahiti out of the sea, bring back honor and dignity to our ancestors, give it to our children."

Maybe more clearly than anybody else, Eddie understood that *Hōkūle'a* was not just a canoe, it was not just trying to find Tahiti, it was finding a better future for our children. *Hōkūle'a* was about hope to him, and it was about healing to him. And I don't think he could stand it that *Hōkūle'a* was upside down, lost, broken. Some of you know the story. Eddie went. We were lucky, us guys were lucky. We were sighted by a Hawaiian Airlines jet by chance. We were rescued the following midnight. We got home but Eddie wasn't home. We searched and searched. You know the story. Eddie's passing and his loss to this community at that particular time, it was like lightning. It hit the community and broke it in half. Everything was in trauma. And you start to understand how much someone is loved when you lose them. It rocked this whole society, certainly the voyaging community, broke it in half. Half the community was saying, well you know, voyaging ain't safe anymore. Take the canoe out of the water, put it in the Bishop Museum, leave it there so nobody can get hurt. And others were saying, well, if you do that, then what have we accomplished?

You need to be committed to the whole journey.

What is the legacy of *Hōkūle'a*? Is it only its tragedy? Is that all we were to remember? How many generations would it take to forget that, ultimately, Hawaiians fulfilled what they were expected to fulfill—failure. How far back would that take us? That was the crossroads. That was the crisis. That was the time when leadership either succeeds or fails. Us young guys, we failed. We were done. We couldn't talk to each other. I went into hiding. All the kinds of stuff that goes with loss, denial, and the worst thing for me was shame because I was part of it—something so deeply painful that I could never understand it. I would go in the ocean by myself in the daytime, I would look at the stars at night having no sense or dreams of these stars meaning anything anymore. I was hiding.

We needed new leadership. We needed leadership that had way more courage than we did, that understood the power of vision more than we did, that understood that when you do something as extraordinarily difficult as this, you need to be committed to the whole journey, not just the sail. We were lucky. It was ten days, two weeks, I don't know, after we gave up looking for Eddie. I was hiding in my yard, and this leader that stepped up came to find me. It was my father. He came to talk to me.

Permit me to tell you about my father, bring him into this room because he's everything to me. My father, you can understand how he had the vision and the courage and the commitment when you look at his background. He grew up here in Kālia and in Alewa Heights. He did not come from a wealthy family, he came from a poor one. Back in those days, there were no homeless in Hawai'i. No child went hungry. When there was a child who didn't have a home, some family would take him in; that's the Hawaiian way. So my father's parents would always take in orphaned children and children who came out of youth correctional facilities—the children who really needed it the most and who society typically ignored the most. And my father would come home from school and have all these children, these *hānai* (adopted) children, his new family, whose names he didn't even know. I think that hugely impacted him. And he wouldn't talk about those times, but his older brother, my Uncle Sonny, would talk about it. "Yeah, Nainoa, you know back then, sometimes so many kids come we no more food so we'd watch mom and dad drink water for dinner." My dad, I think from that very young age, was impacted by the many different faces of poverty, the neglected children.

My father...had the vision and the courage and the commitment.

But another event happened. It was 1941, December 7. Pearl Harbor was bombed. Dad was a junior in high school. Back then, Hawai'i's population was less than half of what it is now. Everybody knew everybody as one community. My father knew that he needed to fight for the basic value of freedom for people in Hawai'i, because it was at risk. He tried to enlist in the army but because they knew he was too young they wouldn't let him in. So the story goes, he falsified his birth certificate, went to Washington state, and enlisted in the army. This is what I was told. They thought he was Native American, so they made him first scout. First scouts are those who are in the front lines that seek to find the enemy. On average, they last two minutes in battle.

My father landed in Normandy, the invasion of Europe, on D-Day. He fought 400 miles across French soil, one mile inside of the German border. It was snowing, he was in green fatigues, a sniper in the tree shot him in the head. And the bullet went through the left side of his head, came out, took out his left eye, went out through his nose. An Oklahoma man, a friend of his, told us this story. "Your father was put into these different piles. One pile was for those who had the best chance to survive, and one pile was for those who were most likely not going to make it." My dad was put on the second pile. They gave the medication at the front lines to

the other ones, the ones that had the best chance. But this guy from Oklahoma, my father's best friend, put him in a cot, and this other man carried him out behind the lines. Apparently what happened was the other man stepped on a land mine and was killed. Shrapnel went through my dad's body but was never removed, because it was too close to his internal organs. And the Oklahoma man said, we took him out because this man was of courage, this man deserved more.

My father was taken to a New York hospital. For two years they bandaged both eyes, trying to repair and fix that left eye. And that's when my dad started to talk. That's when he talked about vision. He'd go, "You know Nainoa, they put those bandages on me, I couldn't see anything. Everything was black. But in that blackness, I had the time to think about my future, to think about my life, to think about what can I do, but more importantly, what I care about." And my father's vision boiled down to two things: come home, here, to these islands and take care of poor kids. He came home to take care of us poor kids, those who lost their dreams, those who had no belief, had no hope.

And so he came to me, put his hand on my shoulder while I was hiding in the yard after we had lost Eddie. He didn't look me in the eye because he knew how I felt about myself. He said, "Nainoa, me and mom have been talking. We know you need to go, you need to find Tahiti." He said, "We'll be there when you let go the lines, and we'll be there when you arrive." And he said, "But you don't know how to do this." Until then, my father had stepped in the back of voyaging and never got involved, but when he saw the crisis, when he saw the dilemma of the failure of *Hōkūle'a*, he knew he was compelled to step in. He said, "You go get your leadership group. I want to talk to all of them tomorrow." So we got together in the biomedical building at the University of Hawai'i, some place that my memory chooses not to remember. We all in the room couldn't talk to each other. And my father then became our navigator. In 45 minutes he changed the course from depression, from weakness, to believing, to strength.

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My father talked about the power of vision. See your destination. Know your future. Know the path, know where you're going, and most importantly, know whom you serve along the way. My father was constantly saying, "This voyage is not about

you.” My father talked about leadership being broken and it having no chance at being successful at anything unless it gets together. He told us to look to our core, to the common values that are so precious and so meaningful that you’ll never let them go for anything. He said this community will challenge you. There will be, yes, those who’ll be there to support you, there will be those who will give you their prayers. And he said, there will be those who don’t understand, who are confused, who don’t understand the value of what you’re trying to do, and there will be part of the community that wants to see you fail, because sometimes they’re scared of the commitment. He told us to stay together. Stay united. If you fracture, you give everything away.

The journey begins with the commitment to the vision. The voyage is just a piece of that.

My father said, this community that you need to rebuild, make sure the rebuilding process is simple. Give them your vision. Articulate your values. Let them come. Never allow your community to be defined and split off by geography or by race. Hold them together by common vision and shared values. They will come. Define them as people who want to learn, people who want to work, and people who want to give back. Go build your community.

Then he said the hard part. He said 95% of your voyage is before you leave. It’s in the training, it’s in the preparation. That’s where you guarantee success. He said give me your plan for success. Give me every single step. That’s where I will hold you to your steps. He said, do not talk to me about departure. Talk to me about getting ready. Talk to me about competence. Talk to me about unity. Talk to me about strength. Do the whole journey. The journey begins with the commitment to the vision. The voyage is just a piece of that.

My dad was extraordinary. He held us to that training. Training was everything. I remember an earlier time, being about 12 years old, coming home from school, doing my homework, and looking through the window into the kitchen when my father came home. He was crying and my mother grabbed him. He was a social worker for the Salvation Army, and he said his case, this boy named Sam, killed himself today. Sam was a deeply disturbed boy. He had taken two younger boys, opened a manhole, put the two boys inside, locked it, and didn’t tell anybody. They

almost lost those two boys. My father was dealing with all this inherent hurt in this young boy. He said, "Sam died today, he took his life today, and I couldn't do anything about it." Today, millions of dollars are thrown at welfare. I'm not diminishing the importance of welfare, all I'm saying is that it is not the final solution. And my father knew that. My father said there's something deeper, it's more than money, it's about the spirit.

My father said carry your culture on your canoe. He said your people need it. They're going to need that sense of your direction and your commitment to your heritage and your ancestors. They're going to need to know that it counts and it's important. My father said, make sure when you carry that identity and dignity of who you were and who you're going to become, make sure you do it in a way that doesn't compromise anyone of a different culture. He said, we need everyone.

Your ultimate role as voyagers will be to become teachers.

My father said, this voyage is not about you. It's about children not born. It's about the voyage helping to change the way we look at ourselves and look at the world. He said your ultimate role as voyagers will be to become teachers. If it only stays with you, you have done nothing over time. Make sure you keep in mind, along the path of the vision that you see children all the way.

When the meeting was over, we were together, we were strong, we were solid. In 45 minutes, my father laid out the sail plan. We were powerful. We were getting ready, except, we were missing a piece. My father waited for everybody to leave, took me outside the room, and said, "Okay Nainoa, you like navigate? Where's your teacher?" He knew, if Mau don't come, we don't go.

Mau had said, do not come to look for him and that we would not be able to find him. But I did. I didn't find him, he let me find him, on an atoll. We sat on a beach, on a log. His head was low and down. He knew about Eddie. He was sad. I told Mau, we need you more than ever. We don't need you to find Tahiti for us, we need you to help us find it for ourselves. Can you come be our teacher? Mau was not sure of the commitment and said, "We'll see." I went home knowing, he don't come, we don't go.

Two months later, I was thrown back into trauma again. I got a phone call from Mau's son Henry from Saipan, who said, "Mau will be at your house tomorrow." If you know, I lived in this little house in Kuli'ou'ou. I was a commercial fisherman, no food, never washed my clothes, the place was a mess. Mau came, lasted about three days at my house, then moved in with my mom and dad. And then he took us through this window of time, to a place way back in our heritage, our history books, that dwells in our soul. It's us. It's who we are. Through this window of time—he was the only one that could do it—and he took all of us on this journey. My father was correct. Our voyage began with the vision. And you need your teachers. You need your teachers.

The core value on the canoe is caring for each other.

And another point, we had so much to learn, so fast. Mau once made the comment, if you want to know everything, send your son, you're too old. Mau was selected by his grandfather to become navigator at age one. He played in the ocean tide pools. Playing is connected to the wind, to the ocean, to everything. Playing means developing the senses that I think we start to discount as we get older and more confused by things like technology. Mau was sailing at age five. When he would get seasick, they would tie his hands and throw him overboard and drag him at the back of the canoe. Now, if we did that today, you would be in jail in 10 minutes. But back then, it wasn't child abuse. It was the way he learned to overcome seasickness. Mau would say, "I become the wave because I'm in the wave. I become the wave, therefore I become navigator." Extraordinary. For us, we were in our 20s and were too old, so we had to accelerate.

Part of the Hawaiian community held onto *Hōkūle'a* so much that they said only Hawaiian eyes, only Hawaiian hands could touch her. And that's fair. That's fair from a community that's afraid somebody's going to take it away, because everything else was taken away. But my father heard about this conflict and he said, "Your job is not to deal with those issues. That's my job. You just got to go learn. Stay with your teachers. Who are they?" He kept asking the question. Will Kyselka of the Bishop Museum Planetarium spent 300 to 400 hours teaching us the stars. We would go into the planetarium to look at those stars. We'd bribe the security guards with plate lunches. They'd lock us in there at night. We'd sleep in there. Will's friendship is as precious as any. My father said you go learn, and Will Kyselka was there, one of my greatest friends.

And we trained. We trained over two years. And what happens in the process is that you don't become crew anymore. In the commitment, you become family. And the understanding is, we succeed when everybody comes home. The core value on the canoe is caring for each other.

And to make a long story short, we did sail in 1980 to Tahiti and back. It was navigated by those from Hawai'i, it was captained by those from Hawai'i, crewed by those from Hawai'i. Mau was on board. He sailed with us, made sure we didn't make any big mistakes, let us grow. We got back home, and my mom had this nagging question for Mau. Remember that Mau had said, "Don't look for me, you won't find me"? Mau stayed with us for over two years, never went home once. My mom's nagging question was why did you come back to teach Nainoa when you said you wouldn't? When Mom asked Mau, he just turned to her and said, "When I saw Nainoa come to Micronesia, I look in his eyes, I know he's going to go. If I don't come teach him, maybe he dies."

And you can understand why I yank you back to the 1970s where it wasn't easy, where it was hard, a time when you are under the most strain, a time when you experience the strongest crisis. It's the time when you need leadership. That's when leadership needs to stand up—when it's hard, not when it's easy. And we in the voyaging community recognize that every generation we teach, it comes from our teachers, from Mau, from Herb Kane, from Eddie Aikau, and from my greatest teacher, my father.

Then we sailed all over the place. From 1985 to 1987, many Pacific Islanders, especially those in Aotearoa were saying, bring *Hōkūle'a*, we want to see it, we want to touch it. They knew the traditions way better than I do but didn't have the canoe. So we had this extraordinary voyage, 16,000 miles, two years, all the way down to Aotearoa. The Māori came out to sea to greet us, and there was a meeting of the two canoes, *Nga Toki Matawhaorua*, twice the length of *Hōkūle'a*, with 88 paddlers. We heard them chanting in the surf before we could see them, but it was a symbolic marriage of the canoes, the symbolic marriage of family, of *'ohana*. It's immeasurable, the impact that Aotearoa has had on our growing, not just learning and growing, but also believing in a better world for our native people. Aotearoa has had a profound influence on all of us in Hawai'i. You've seen it in the children. They're dancing with extraordinary pride and skill. I was so happy to see that.

Leadership needs to stand up when it's hard, not when it's easy.

We built a second canoe, *Hawai'i Loa*, out of things native to the forest, trees from Alaska that were given to us. We shipped *Hawai'i Loa* to Alaska. In 1995 we sailed from Seattle, Washington, to Juneau, Alaska. We went through Icy Strait, past glacier-covered mountains, and us Hawaiians, boy, we find any place to hide from the wind. Alaska was extraordinary. Every single place we go, it makes us come home looking at our home differently. Alaska has a hundred times the land mass of Hawai'i with a thousand times more natural resources by metric tonnage. It has half the population, but as a former fisherman, I was intrigued by all this enormous wealth and so little relative human pressure. They fiercely protect their natural resources as if it were something of wealth, not just to exploit, but to be who they are as a form of kinship. Back in Hawai'i, I am sick and tired

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of this chronic decline of our natural resources, our forests to the oceans. And we know the problems and we know the solutions, but we don't have the will. Well, if we ain't got the will, then we're going to have to depend on our children. And their values will be shaped by what we teach them.

In 1999 to 2000, we sailed to Rapa Nui—the last corner of the Polynesian Triangle. Another long story, but it was driven by extraordinary vision and extraordinary mana.

In 2004, we sailed about 2,500 miles right in our own backyard, to a place called the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. There are 10 islands that are to the northwest of us. Everybody typically knows the main 8 Hawaiian Islands, but few know about the other 10. The problem with the 21st century is that if we don't know about these islands and we don't understand their value, somebody from the outside will. The pressures of fishing are enormous—90% of the big fish are gone. We know that so many of the species we used to depend on for so-called survival are below sustainable yields. And yet, where are we going to draw the line and make the change? Well, we took a voyage northwest of the Hawaiian Islands to say that we value these islands for their cultural and ecological wealth.

Nihoa, the first island we sailed to, is an extraordinary place. No one lives there now, but there once were Native Hawaiians there. There are 101 different rock platforms, beautifully made. Let's pay respect to those islands.

We went diving at every island, including one of the reefs called Maro Reef. We wanted to go below, we wanted to touch, and feel, to understand these islands that we have responsibility for. Maro Reef is probably one of the most poorly charted places I've ever seen and probably the most extraordinary. My friend and I thought we had a great idea: Let's go dive down (we had scuba tanks) and let's get a really good picture by taking the *uluu*, or big trevallies, because they're very aggressive fish. He was a photographer, so we went down in this sand hole, and we took a pint-sized water bottle and filled it up with water so it wouldn't crush under pressure. We get down to 60 feet, open the cap, fill the bottle with air, and then we started rubbing it to make a sound these fish probably never ever heard. So the curiosity of the fish started to draw them, and they started going around and around me. And in my head, I was saying, "Take the photo!" because all these fish were going around and around, and then my partner grabbed my backpack. He made me look up, and where there had been a few sharks, all of a sudden there were hundreds of them. So we put the bottle away and stopped rubbing that thing! We started crawling on the coral trying to find the anchor chain, and the sharks just kept coming. We were going, oh man, when are they going to stop? We have a photo with 42 sharks in the frame that my friend took on the way up the anchor chain. There must have been 300.

You know, that was one of my most powerful moments in voyaging ever. On that day, I was next to the potential and the beauty of nature. I was next to the best of what our oceans have. I was next to the way it's supposed to be. It is the graphic image of what we used to be, and it's the measurement between what it's supposed to be and where we are now in Hawai'i. Why is that important? Because if we're really going to stop the decline, if we're really going to renew, then at least we know what it is supposed to look like. Going up the anchor chain, there was this moment of being in the wealth of nature, in the domain of the sacredness of nature. And those kinds of moments are extraordinarily important to me.

To summarize, it's been 32 years and we've been growing in voyaging. We sailed *Hōkūle'a* over 125,000 miles now, and there's not just *Hōkūle'a*, there are 17 or 18 deep-sea voyaging canoes. Before *Hōkūle'a* there was zero. There are navigators in Aotearoa, there are navigators in the Cook Islands, in Tahiti, and in Hawai'i, and we are all children of Micronesia. There's been this enormous sense of growth.

Over the last three decades, Mau would come to Hawai'i to teach, and he'd come to my house. The first night we would talk, and hours later would come a time when he'd go to this place of anger and frustration about what's happening—the trends in Micronesia. Yes, there was growth, but on Satawal, it was going the other way. Mau kept saying, "We have less and less canoes, our children aren't learning navigation." He'd say, "If no more navigators, we'll be people no more." And he was frustrated with the notion of change and the values of heritage and culture not being a part of the change. And it was a sad story. We didn't know what to do with it.

In the year 2000, Mau came up to my house, we sat down, and Mau went back to that same path of frustration and anger on Satawal. Then he finally said, "Nainoa, it's too late. I'm too old. My children have too much to learn. No more time." And all great navigators know the way out. Mau said, "But it's okay. In Hawai'i, I put the seed in the ground, and when my people want to learn, they have a place to go." You know, us guys looked at that and said you know, we will do what we can to give back to that extraordinary land. In my opinion, Micronesia has the greatest sailors, the greatest navigators ever. But we do what we can, and we didn't really know what to do. Mau was saying he wasn't going to be there when they want to learn. So we said, okay, we will be there. And time went by.

Vision brings people together.

Then a miracle happened. Mau was up on the Big Island at Kawaihae. He was talking to many of the students he's had, including Clayton Bertelmann. Mau talked about the stories: We have no canoes, no deep-sea voyaging canoes anymore. He went down that path of depression, chronic depression that never goes away. Clayton Bertelmann just said, "Okay Mau, I'll build you one." That single sentence changed everything. Five words create vision. Vision brings people together. When people come together as a solid community, around that vision of shared values, it's extraordinary what they can do. Clayton Bertelmann said "I'll build you a canoe" and that resonated across our community.

Na Kalai Wa'a Moku o Hawai'i lead the construction and building of the *Alingano Maisu* and created the opportunity for all of us in the voyaging community, Pacific-wide, to participate. The 2007 voyage would never have happened if it wasn't for Clayton Bertelmann making the commitment.

And *Hōkūle'a* would be the school, the platform, escorting *Alingano Maisu* over 4,500 miles back to Mau's homeland. We all train, we all come together. It's not about Micronesia and Hawai'i anymore. It's about Pacific Islanders now. It's not about Aotearoa. It's not about Tahiti anymore. It's about all of us coming together.

We had extraordinary voyages through Micronesia. I apologize to Kosrae, for not making a stop there. The leadership on the canoes made the decision based on safety because of the very difficult weather. We wanted to let you know that we wanted to go, but it became a safety issue, and we chose not to. The 4,500-mile voyage was extraordinary. It changed our lives in so many different ways.

Alingano Maisu and *Hōkūle'a* went on the journey to the island of Satawal to deliver the gift to honor our teacher. But in many ways, we went to honor the greatness of Micronesia—greatest sailors, greatest navigators—and to thank the people of Micronesia. We were taken to the beach, to the canoe house, and I asked a question of the chiefs on Satawal: "How old is the canoe house, the men's house?" And they said, "oh, we change the roof every five years." I said, "No, in this place, how long has it been a canoe house?" They got together and talk and said, "Maybe 3,000 years." I said, "How many navigators here?" They said "Maybe 3,000." So, Satawal may be the smallest inhabited island in the world, and yet it may be the most important one, at least for us.

And the gift was delivered, but Mau turned around and gifted us again. He pulled five people from the outside, for the first time, into the ceremony called *pwo*, which is equivalent to graduating from college to be a deep-sea navigator. He'd never done it before. Mau gave the gift of *pwo* to five of us from Hawai'i and to 11 from his island. It was the first *pwo* ceremony on Satawal in 50 years. And that makes me think, because Mau had been the last person to go through *pwo*. He was the last one on the island to remember. And here's what is so significant: Let's say he hadn't done it. There were 3,000 years and 3,000 navigators, can you lose all of that in one lifetime? Can you? I don't know. But it scares me.

**It's not about
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Hawai'i anymore.
It's about Pacific
Islanders now....
It's about all of us
coming together.**

So there was our new *hui* (group) of graduated navigators. It was a day of celebration, you could call it achievement. The next day I woke up and said, you know what? Gotta go to work. Because ultimately, my father and Mau understood that the privilege is only about the responsibility to teach and to pass on and that commitment is lifelong. One day in 1979, when I was training with Mau, I made the mistake of calling him a master navigator when we were looking at the stars. He angrily turned to me and said, “Do not call me master because you only become master at the time that you die and you have students to carry on your work.” So when we left Satawal, I was so sad. I was almost sick to leave him, but we had to, we needed to continue the journey, and I sat with Mau. I said, Mau, you know I can’t say goodbye, and he said, I know you cannot. I said, Mau, when we go on our long voyages and navigate in the old way, do we take you with us? And he looked at me and he said yes. I said Mau, when we teach voyaging and navigation are we teaching you? He said, yes. I said, okay Mau, I’m okay, because as long as we sail, as long as we teach, you’ll be with us forever.

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Going to Japan was an extraordinary voyage. From Yap, we went on to Okinawa, then Honshū, Kyūshū, and all these places and finally to the immigration ports for the Japanese who came to Hawai‘i. We went to sacred places like Miyajima where we slept in temples that were 1,300 years old. They were immaculate. That’s 600 to 700 generations of people who cared for and preserved these places, and we were honored to stay there. Japan is a beautiful country. It’s rich in heritage and sacred places. Its people are as kind as anywhere else, and what was common throughout the voyage was this notion that somehow, somehow we have got to get together—get us to peace, global peace, and somehow it’s going to take everyone. It was extraordinary.

What I saw in Japan is that even though we don’t speak the same language—we have a different history, we have a different culture—but there’s something core about humankind that gets touched, the nerve gets touched by something like a canoe or a temple. There’s something that’s beyond the boundaries that we typically divide ourselves with and sometimes kill each other over. It’s beyond that. It’s a set of humankind values that somehow we can all embrace and all be empowered by. It was in Japan, and it was in Micronesia.

I'll leave you with a powerful learning story. Back in 1978, Mau came when the voyage was still far away. The learning was powerful and exciting, but when it started getting closer to the departure date, that's when I started to crash. All of a sudden, it wasn't just about learning, it was about execution. Now you are going to have to put yourself on the line, Nainoa, and prove yourself a success or prove yourself a failure. Mau knew he wasn't going to help me, you gotta be on your own. And so, when we got closer to the voyage, about four months away, it was November of 1979, Mau took me to a place called Lāna'i Lookout. We looked at Moloka'i and Lāna'i. We went at sunrise and sunset and we watched the most important part of the day for navigators—the change from night to day—and we looked at the stars, the colors of the sky, the wind, and the waves. It was sunset and I was distraught from the pressure of having to now take the risk. Mau was watching me fall apart, and the closer we got to the voyage, even though I supposedly knew more, the more I hung onto him. Tell me the magic, I would say. Tell me how I'm going to guarantee success? I'm too afraid of the risk. And that's been chronic with me. Fear of failure. Chronic. And that, what boiled up in me, was making me be who I did not want to be. The fear of failure. And Mau understood that.

There's something core about humankind that gets touched, the nerve gets touched by something like a canoe or a temple.

So Mau took me to Lāna'i Lookout, at sunset, and we stood on the wall. We had been there 200 times already. I was looking for the magic. I didn't get it. We sat by the wall, and we waited for the first stars to come out after dusk. He said, "Okay, point to the steering stars." I point to them all, and he said, "Okay." That wasn't the magic. That's elementary, first day, two years ago. And then he said, "Show me the star compass and the 32 houses that all the steering stars lie in." I showed him the houses all the way around. That's kindergarten, day one—not the magic. And then he said, "Okay, show me the star house of Tahiti." So I pointed to the star house of where Tahiti lies. That is kindergarten, day two. This is not the magic. And then Mau said, "Can you see the island?" You know, Tahiti is smaller than Maui. You cannot see Tahiti from Hawai'i. But his question was not asking about what your eyes see as I understood it. He said, "Can you see the island?" And I didn't know the answer, so I had to wait. Finally I said, "You know Mau I can see the image of the island in my mind." And then he said, "Okay, good. Get

in the car, take me home.” We drove home. He locked himself into my parents’ spare bedroom. He would take a piece of paper and write in English over and over and over again, and he never came out. I never had a second lesson, and we were four months away from the voyage.

I was crashing. Instead of the magic, I got kindergarten. But I didn’t. What was interesting, was that the pressure of failure was my process to get ready, but I didn’t know it. You know fear is my good friend, I hold it close to me because it tells me a lot about understanding where I am within my task. I hold fear as a good, good friend, never to be afraid of the fear anymore. Fear has become my best friend. It’s not about being fearless, it’s about not being afraid of fear. It helps me get ready. It helps me train. But I didn’t know it then. But when we got out to sea,

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everything changed. We sailed down to Tahiti, we sailed back, we were successful. And when I look back at that defining moment, Mau knew that the journey needed to be mine. That day at Lāna’i Lookout, Mau said to me, “Nainoa, you keep the image in your mind because if you forget what it looks like, you’ll be lost.” And I always remember that second comment because he knew I was going to get tested more than I had ever been in life. He knew that the ocean would be unforgiving, and he knew

it was going to be harder than anything I ever did. The only way I would find Tahiti was if I believed in it enough, if I cared about it enough. That it was more than my sense of my inabilities, it was beyond my weaknesses, that it would draw on my strength. Mau knew that in the image of the island lived all your values, all your sense of purpose, all the things that are meaningful. Mau knew, keep the image of the island in your mind because that’s what you care about, that’s what is meaningful to you. That was an extraordinarily powerful learning experience for me.

Typically our voyaging communities commit to four years: two years to train, one year to sail, and one year of exhaustion. Don’t talk to me about voyaging, don’t talk to me about the ocean, I’ll see you in about a year. Because we have to go back to families, we’re all volunteers, we have to go back to our jobs. But something was happening to us in Micronesia and in Japan. The conversation around leadership was about where are we going from here? Something happened when we traveled and spent so much time in other parts of the world, when we had a chance to touch

and feel and be with other places and other people. It was about Fukuoka when navigators Chad Baybayan and Chadd Paishon said, you know what, we should go around the world. We should go and touch the earth. Let's go and understand and be with the earth, the only island we really have as humankind. We all know the nearest star to us is Alpha Centauri, and it would take 200,000 years for the space shuttle to get there and there are no livable planets. So the only place we have, that has this most precious thing in the universe called life, is right here. And somehow understanding that we are more than just a community in Hawai'i, or even the Pacific Islands, we are children of the island earth, with no other realistic island to go to, and that the great challenge of our time is for us to learn how to live well on the only precious island we really have.

If we think of that future that we deserve, we become that future that our children deserve.

I don't know if we'll go. In some ways, I fear the earth. In some ways, I don't understand humankind's anger and rage and violence toward each other. I can't comprehend that, but somehow I also understand that those are absolutely the reasons we should go. So we'll debate it. But I do know that that voyage cannot be about Hawai'i, it cannot be just about Micronesia. It's got to be about the Pacific Islanders, everybody pulling together and touching the earth, being with the earth, becoming the earth. We'll need you, your thoughts, your dreams, your hopes, your strengths, your youth. I think the measurable success in my head, if we do this, will be whether or not we can engage children talking to children around the planet and creating a new path.

I've been thinking about the notion of this little canoe going around the earth. What will it accomplish? And at the same time, at that micro-level, what can this extraordinary group of people coming together all dedicated and committed to the importance of education accomplish? My mind and imagination tend to wander, to just ask, what if the Pacific had a common vision and shared values? What if the Pacific said we will use education to shape the next generation to be ready for and successful in the issues of global warming and in finding new solutions for energy and ways to care for the earth together? Sustainability wasn't even a word when I was in high school. What if the educational agenda, through its reach, through its 3 Rs, through all of that, were aimed collectively by all of the Pacific to prepare and train our navigators, our leaders to get us there? I have the greatest hope that if we think of that future that we deserve, we become that future that our children deserve.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nainoa Thompson, captain and navigator of the Polynesian Voyaging Society's double-hulled canoe *Hōkūle'a*, has helped to inspire and lead a revival of traditional voyaging arts in Hawai'i and the Pacific. After studying wayfinding, or noninstrument navigation, under master navigator Mau Pīailug of Satawal, Micronesia, and practicing the art over the past 20 years, Thompson has developed a system of wayfinding synthesizing traditional principles of ancient Pacific navigation and modern scientific knowledge. Thompson is currently president of the Polynesian Voyaging Society and leads the organization in developing multidisciplinary, culturally relevant educational programs in partnership with other educational institutions, organizations, and agencies. In addition to being a navigator, he is a trustee of Kamehameha Schools, a special advisor to the president of the University of Hawai'i on Native Hawaiian affairs, and a regent emeritus of the University of Hawai'i Board of Regents.

NOTE

1 These stories are very deeply personal, and I'm only willing to put it in print because of the purpose and intent of this publication, *Hūlili*. These stories are about friends, teachers, and people for whom I have deep love and aloha.