

Eskaran had high praise for Pulotu, who served as headmaster for the canoe project. "He's the most amazing guy with the chainsaw," Eskaran said. "You just wouldn't believe what he's able to do with the saw.

"I'm so fortunate that my entire life, I've been able to meet masters from all over the Pacific and Europe. They've been 70, 80 or 90 years old, and I've just been lucky enough to meet them at the time when they wanted to teach to pass their knowledge on. And Tuione Pulotu is one of those people."

It was during the construction of the *Iosepa* that Eskaran was reunited with his former Kamehameha Schools shop teacher of nearly 30 years ago, master woodworker **Wright Bowman '28**.

"Tuione and I met Mr. Bowman at our canoe site through divine intervention," Eskaran said. "Every morning we would *pule* and ask for guidance and safety and that doors be opened on our behalf to ensure smooth sailing throughout the project."

Sure enough, a day after Eskaran had searched the Internet for photos showing how to configure jigs for the laminating of wooden pieces,

a visitor showed up at the canoe building site.

"Tuione and I wanted to construct curved *iako* (the long bent beams that pass under the deck of the canoe and join one hull to the other) and we had no experience in doing it," Eskaran said. "Most of the voyaging canoes in Hawai'i have straight *iako*, but one exception is the *Hōkūle'a*, and that's because Mr. Bowman created them."

Just when the two carvers were about to begin with a trial and error strategy, Bowman, who had been invited to visit the canoe site in Lā'ie by a friend who was supplying marine finishes for the project, arrived on the North Shore.

"He spent hours working on drawings and then went home to create a miniature version of the jigs he suggested we use," Eskaran said of Bowman. "He invited us to his home so he could share his jig design, showed us how to effectively use plywood to make wood clamps for laminating, and he loaned us about 20 of his own clamps made by his son for the building of the *Hawai'i Loa*."

Through the experience of working with Bowman, Eskaran said he's often reminded of the saying "*I maika'i ke kalo, i ka oha*," meaning "the goodness of the *kalo* is evidenced in the young it produces."

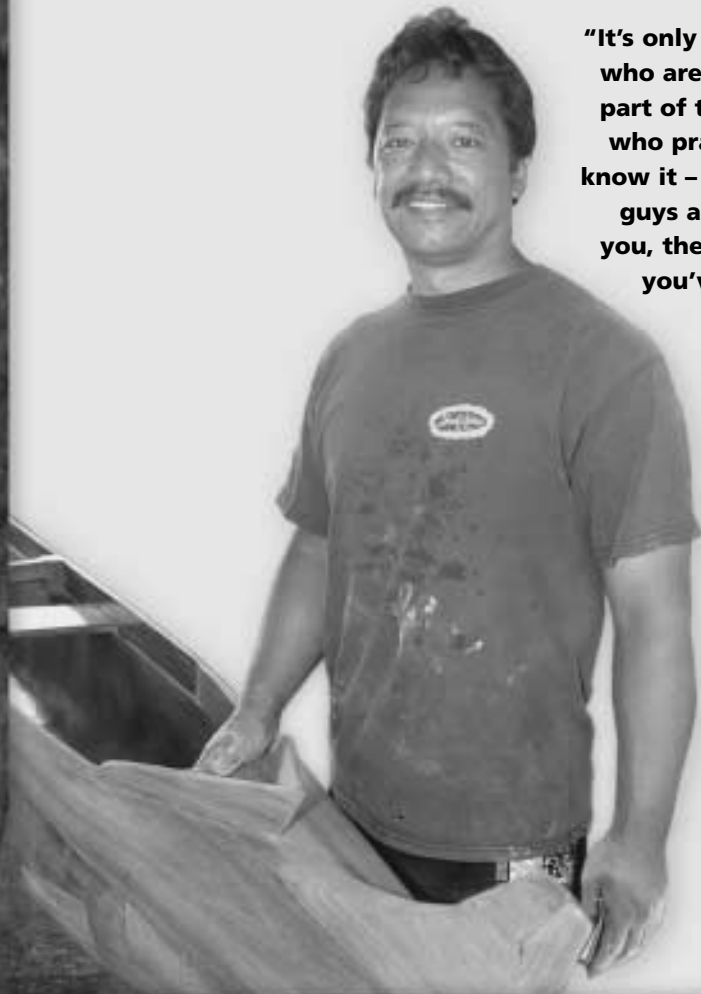
"I've come full circle with my Kamehameha Schools teacher, and at 94 years old, the master has become the teacher once again," Eskaran said. "I am so thankful for this wonderful man. He's been so willing to assist us and every time he returns to see our *wa'a* it's like watching a child in a toy store, he's so full of excitement and anticipation."

Like a true artist, Eskaran said he realizes that the canoe carries symbolic meaning as well. "Making this canoe for the Hawaiians has been a very special experience. We need things like this to help instill pride within us. I've worked with at-risk teens, and so many of them have lost their Hawaiian identity. They're into that Jawaian music, and they're almost acting like foreigners in their own land.

"So, to create things like this canoe – you should see the draw. We had an open house here one night, and more than a thousand people came. I've trained nearly 30 years in carving, and to be in this position now where I'm actually doing what I love to do and to see the work have meaning for so many people, that's very special."

Although he's studied under master carvers from Hawai'i, Tonga, Samoa and the Cook Islands, among others, Eskaran credits New Zealand's Epanaia Christy with having a major influence on him.

**"It's only when those who are within that part of the culture – who practice it and know it – when those guys acknowledge you, then you know you've made it."**



Eskaran and Christy worked together at the Polynesian Cultural Center for 13 years, carving everything imaginable from human figures and tikis to helping to restore a New Zealand war canoe, called a *wakataua*, originally made for King George V.

Much of their work is still displayed for visitors today.

"When I was with the cultural center, people would already call me a master carver, and I wouldn't accept that," Eskaran said. "Those people were unknowing. It's only when those who are within that part of the culture – who practice it and know it – when those guys acknowledge you, then you know you've made it."

Eskaran said patience and respect were the most important qualities he needed to learn from these master artists.

"Right away, you want to learn to do the most intricate things, and it's just not done that way. In fact, the Maoris are very culturally minded, they really guard the carving practices and what it entails. To teach an outsider is not really known. So, for me to come in and learn from a true master like Christy, who learned from the last two grandmasters in New Zealand (Pine and John Taiapa), was quite an honor for me."

For Eskaran, the significance of his life's work carries much meaning. "The meaning for me is deep-rooted and it touches the deepest heart-strings when I talk about it. So much sacrifice has been made in my life trying to attain the knowledge and technical skills that I now have.

"I sometimes look into my mind's eye and see all of the masters who have taught me and the backgrounds that they have – it's like a genealogy, a whole line of master carvers. It's like we're spanning ions of time, and I'm one of those links. Now, I look to teach, and I won't hide anything."

And though it's been many years since he's slept on his grandmother's *lauhala* mat, it's obvious that Eskaran's love of wooden sculptures has not faded.

"Some years ago, I realized that wood is a living thing," Eskaran said. "It has spirit. When you *mālama* that, and shape and polish it, the grain reveals itself, the colors come out – you end up creating something of excellence, and helped that object become something of value and permanence. The beauty of it will be seen by generations, and I know that after I pass away, the piece will live on and on."



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