Huakaʻi ma Punaluʻu

By Kamehameha Schools alumna Frances Dinnan

Filled with both anticipation and excitement, alumni and guests met at Kamehameha's Punaluʻu Ahupuaʻa Farms on an early November morning. We came together to renew, reenergize, and reconnect to our cultural roots.

To reconvene the group so as not to waste precious time Uncle K would call out "hui" and the group's reply would be the same. The moʻolelo (story) behind this was that when you heard travelers approaching your house you call out "hui" to welcome them and to share food with them. Hawaiian hospitality and sharing whatever you had was part of our culture.

Punaluʻu is an ahupuaʻa (land division) with natural streams, good soil, a nice reef, and so much potential for sustainability. After staff intros and a brief overview of the day's activities, we carpooled to the loʻi (irrigated taro patch). As we drove towards the loʻi my classmate's son shared a story about his uncle who managed catfish and tilapia fish ponds in the area.

At the loʻi we met up with another group, Ka Papa Loʻi ʻo Kānewai – students from the University of Hawaiʻi involved in outreach and cultural research. KS has several partners to help manage the land's natural resources. We harvested two varieties of kalo: moi and pololū. The moi kalo had light green leaves and was grey when cooked while the pololū kalo had polū- (blue) tinged leaves and was white when cooked.

After loʻi instructions were given, we all waded into the mud and started to huki (pull) the kalo up. A first cleaning involved stripping off stringy roots, bottom leaves, and rinsing it in the muddy water. A second cleaning involved rinsing it in running ditch water and cutting the kalo away from the stalk. Stalks were trimmed of their leaves and saved for replanting. Kalo is an amazing plant that grows easily in the proper environment. We returned with our harvested kalo to the hale (house) and placed them in pressure cookers.

Uncle K shared the following kalo moʻolelo: "According to the Kumulipo, the creation chant, kalo grew from the first-born son of Wakea (sky father) and Papa (earth mother), through Wakea's relationship with his and Papa's daughter, Hoʻohokulani. Haloa-naka lau kapalili, was stillborn and buried. Out of his body grew the kalo plant. The second son was called Haloa, which means everlasting breath. The kalo plant represents family relationships and life sustenance for Hawaiians."

Pololū kalo may have been grown originally in the ahupuaʻa of Pololū in Kohala, Hawaiʻi. A question was posed by Uncle K to the group: "What does the pololū kalo have in common with the pololū spear? Answer: the pololū huli (taro shoot) has a long stalk/stem and the pololū spear was also long."

Hawaiians used the same word to describe similar characteristics; very economical. As Uncle K and KS Sustainability Manager Amy Kalai Brinker talked, we ate our bento lunch. Amy shared with the group that paʻi ʻai (undiluted poi) was illegal in Hawaiʻi. She selected this as a topic for her UH Law School studies and adopted it as her mission to shape a better law.

Our next task was to prepare laulau! Several stations were set up: deboning ti leaves, sizing kalo leaves and breaking off stems, and cutting ʻuala (sweet potatoes). The pork and butterfish were prepped and bagged and Hawaiian salt bowls were placed at each station. An example was made and all hands were kept busy.

Every family has their own way of bundling laulau and as participants we learned another way. The lau stems that were broken off were cut into smaller pieces and placed inside the bundles. The ti leaf wrap took two leaves, one went completely around the bundle and the other the opposite way splitting the same leaf's stem then tied off. We completed this task working and cleaning up together in record time.

"Hui!" called Uncle K and we gathered for instructions to weave our plates out of coconut fronds and to make a papa kuʻi ʻai (poi-pounding board). Joey Char shared his knowledge of papa kuʻi ʻai after taking classes with Uncle K. Each stroke of the handmade adze has a name: kimo is a long stroke, kimo kimo is a slightly shorter stroke, and kahi is a side-scraping stroke as in the shaving of a beard for men. Shaping a papa kuʻi ʻai is similar to golf swing. It requires a good grip, a relaxed swing, and allowing the tool to connect to the wood where you place it. After weaving our frond plates to hold our hand-pounded paʻi ʻai, we set up for our next task.

Kalo was removed from the pressure cookers and kept warm in coolers. Now it was time for us to or hole (skin) the kalo. Uncle K said that in Maui they say "kohole ke kalo." The group was asked about the song "Hole Waimea" and what that song had in common with ohole. After singing the first line it was discovered that in Waimea there is an āhole (sharp wind) that would strip the bark off the trees. Uncle K was also reminded of the āhole fish and shared with us that the skin was as tough as leather and it had to be stripped away before eating. This was another example of the Hawaiian language being used to describe objects sharing similar characteristics. Together, we worked on cleaning the kalo in preparation for pounding.

Uncle K's nephew C.J. gave us a demo of how to pound poi. Each stage in this process has a name: Naha – where the steamed kalo was broken into large pieces, mokumoku – where the kalo became many pieces, paʻi paʻi – where the parts were slapped together, pili – as the kalo parts began to stick together, paʻi ʻai – a state where it would not fall out of a ti leaf when bundled, wali – adding more water, and linalina – a silk-like state with no lumps. We took turns pounding our kalo on the papa kuʻi ʻai and placed our paʻi ʻai on our braided coconut frond plates. C.J. and Uncle K pounded the remaining kalo and combined batches into one consistency.

A steaming hot laulau was placed next to our paʻi ʻai, a prayer was offered to bless our food, our day, and our lives. We ate the food that was prepared with our own hands on the biodegradable plates that we made. An amazing feeling of wonder and awe touched each of us as we marveled at the resiliency of our Hawaiian ancestors; how very economical, intelligent, resourceful, and versatile their skills and knowledge were to have lived in those times.

As an after dinner activity Uncle K had us all sit in a large circle to share what we got out of the huakaʻi. After everyone shared their manaʻo (thoughts), we all stayed to clean up and put away our supplies. "Move together and work together" was a theme that ran throughout the

event. Intentional or not; the lesson here is that you achieve more in less time when you work together as a group. Hawaiians are group-oriented and value team work.

Uncle K's last moʻolelo for the day was about gifting. As a child, he once picked a bag of oranges – ripe and over-ripe – and he wanted to divide them between three families. At first, he took all the good oranges and set them aside for his family then equally divided the over-ripe oranges in two piles. His mother corrected him and said put all the oranges back into one bag then randomly place each orange into three piles. In this way, the three families would receive both over-ripe and ripe oranges. No one family had the "best" oranges or stood out from the others.

The value of sharing was measured by thoughtfulness, equality, and because it was the best you had to give at the time. In my opinion, Hawaiians set themselves up for greater distress when equality cannot be achieved. In gifting, one of the best presents you can give to another person is your undivided attention.

Hauʻoli Makahiki Hou!