



By Emme Tomimbang

Emme's island moments

“KA`ILILA`AU’S — A JOURNEY OF SPIRIT”



The Lindsey family sailing Ka'ilila'au, the canoe

My career in television has always brought me varied life experiences. Once in a while, a story comes along that truly tugs at the heart and becomes an incredible journey from the program's start to finish. This experience occurred in the past year.

Since last November 2009, Island Moments has taken me to the island of Maui for a TV special that reconnected me with the voyaging canoe community. This time, it was hotel workers building a four-man hull canoe. And most of the builders were either maintenance or housekeeping department employees – who were born in the Philippines. Filipino canoe builders constructing a

Hawaiian voyaging vessel?

Yes, that's just part of this story, “Ka'ilila'au's Canoe: A Journey of Spirit” is all about.

Let's start from the beginning. The Ka'anapali Beach Hotel which employs 300 workers; (90% are immigrants from the Philippines), have an ongoing cultural enrichment program called 'Po'okela.' Director of Training for the Pookela Program, Dee Coyle (whose parents are from Cebu) explains, “When I translate the word Pookela it means always, constantly improving – improving what you're doing, improving your service, improving your attitude as in what you do here at the hotel.” The

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Emme and the Lindsey ohana.

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employees take classes set up by the hotel in Hawaiian language, music, and arts. “We do it for the enhancement and the enrichment of our employees but we also do it because we want them to have that foundation about this place that they live in so that they are better able to provide information and service to our guests,” adds Coyle.

In the past, employees have displayed handmade Hawaiian artifacts in Ka’anapali Beach Hotel’s lobby for their guests to see. The crafts include feathered kahili, stone adz and other Hawaiian implements and tools. Back in November of 2009, hotel employees were challenged to build a sailing canoe.

The canoe project led the hotel to Honokahau Valley to an albegia tree on the property of Kimo and Leimale Lindsey. Seven years ago, their son Ka’ilila’au, then only 11, asked for this tree to be made into a canoe. His father, Kimo, not being a canoe builder, said, “Let’s wait till someone comes to ask for the tree.” Well, last November, the Ka’anapali Beach Hotel did come for the tree.

Unfortunately, Ka’ilila’au passed away from an accidental fall in the valley long before he could see this dream canoe come to life.

In the meantime, Ka’anapali Beach Hotel’s staff and employees went to work.

They not only cut the tree down and transported it to the hotel, they also peeled, shaved, carved and began molding the 100-foot log into a Hawaiian sailing vessel. Housekeeper Florita Sumibcay used a power tool to sand the canoe. She shares that she never knew anything of Hawaiiana until now. “Even though I lived here for so long, I didn’t know anything about Hawaii till we started Po’okela. I started going to the classes. Oh, I really look forward to it because it’s so many things I never knew existed and there were so many things that I learned. I was able to tell my kids who were born here about it, so now they are ‘Hawaiian,’ too.”



Ka’anapali Beach Hotel workers help carry Ka’ilila’au before his maiden launch.

For four months Sumibcay tediously hand-sanded using a power tool to finish the canoe. “I never sand before in my life. Oh, we just love it and I use the electric sanders. It’s good but the canoe is so hard to make. I’m looking forward to it be finished, so I want to try and ride it.”

After the canoe had its successful maiden voyage last March 2010, it also had a very special sail in July of this year. The Lindsey family with all their remaining seven children rode the canoe for a special farewell ceremony. They brought with them, the ashes of Ka’ilila’au which they kept for seven years. They were now ready to say “aloha” and spread his ashes to sea.

Looking back at the canoe’s journey from the hotel’s involvement, general Manager Mike White explains the vision for the cultural project, “When I look at what we’ve done here, the investment that we’ve made in our cultural programs is probably the most important

investment that we’ve made. To add to that investment – a focus on culture and the host culture and an investment that pays back not only to the employees because they learn values and they learn Hawaii’s history, but also to our visitors who get a dose of real Hawaii.”

Now the canoe bearing his name from his favorite tree, the journey of Ka’ilila’au is complete. The four-man canoe can be seen on the hotel grounds of Ka’anapali Beach Hotel not just as a testament to the hotel’s commitment to Hawaiiana but also to the memory of one special boy and his spirit, which made for an incredible journey for all.

EDITOR’S NOTE:

Watch “Ka’ilila’au’s Canoe: A Journey of Spirit” on KGMB Thanksgiving Day, November 25 at 7 p.m. and again on Saturday, November 27th at 6 p.m.



Ka’anapali Beach Hotel, General Manager Mike White and the Lindsey Ohana during Ka’ilila’au’s launching ceremony (July 24, 2010).



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