

The Koa Log

By Ron Haworth, Graphic by Bart Potter

Outrigger Koa Log is an endeavor to sift for snippets in the sand of our century glass, so that we might rediscover the misplaced and forgotten as well as pumice our modern image and achievements.

Kimo Wilder McVay luckily didn't require a drum roll to announce his entry into the Outrigger Canoe Club. The bagpipe crescendo of rainbow colors, which made up his wardrobe, would have surely muted any such fanfare.

Eyes glazed in awe and astonishment, even envy, on beholding Kimo's attire of the day which might have been lime green shoes and bright yellow socks beneath royal blue pants all topped with a silky flamboyant Aloha shirt.

When he was dressed to the nines he wore an Aloha Jacket of his design. Kimo was a riot of color with a personality just as flamboyant. He was neon in motion with a never waning searchlight smile.

But hidden beneath his colorful wardrobe was a very generous man as well as talented promoter. And what he did to enrich the final years of Duke Paoa Kahanamoku's life has generally been dimmed by the on/off switch of time, unheralded, an unselfish deed never headlined for public consumption.

Kimo McVay bestowed his love upon Duke in a quiet and personal way.

Freddie Hemmings, because of his close relationship with Kimo and Duke as a member of the Duke Surfing Team, is highly qualified to shine a light on Kimo's kindness for Duke in those final years.

He recently reminisced, "I was fortunate to have been closely associated with the Duke contest from 1964 to 1966 when I was executive assistant. I worked closely with Kimo, helping format the event even to selecting the invited surfers to the first contest in 1965.

"So I knew the extent of their friendship and Kimo's generosity with Duke. Duke loved to watch the greatest surfers of that time compete in a contest bearing his name. Had he been able he would have paddled out and joined them."

Instead, Duke wistfully watched those surfers spin rooster tails at Sunset Beach and across his crystal memory. What fantasies did he entertain? Which memories did he cherish?

History might time date this endearing Kimo/Duke relationship to the day they went to Honey's in Kanehoe to listen to a local and unknown barefoot guy playing the piano and maybe singing "one paddle, two paddle, three paddle, four to take me home."

Kimo knew talent when he heard it and it wasn't long till Don Ho and The Aliis were a runaway hit at Duke's in Waikiki's International Market Place.

The name Duke Kahanamoku, always golden in memory, was again *Tiny Bubbles* effervescent in the public's eyes.

"I don't know all the details but I believe in exchange for the use of Duke's name, Kimo saw to it Duke wanted for nothing in the last



Kimo Wilder McVay

few years of his life. He bought a Rolls Royce Silver Cloud for Duke's 77th birthday and furnished a driver and always flew him first class when they visited the Mainland."

Poki'i Vaughan was Duke's driver and fondly remembers driving Duke from 1966 till his death, first in a white Rolls-Royce limousine with DK lettering on the doors and then the birthday Silver Cloud.

"Duke always treated me like a grandson and I was honored to drive his widow Nadine and Arthur Godfrey to Duke's beach boy aloha."

"Kimo was not one of those who'd slap Duke on the back and say 'Aloha to you, blah, blah, blah,' in passing, reflexes not truly felt. Kimo took Duke to his heart and was guardian of his welfare and legacy while making sure he lived his final days as the Alii he unquestionable was," Freddie said.

Forty-six years ago Kimo shared a story with me: "While in Las Vegas at the one night Herb Alpert & The Tijuana Brass concert, there were more show biz celebrities in attendance than casino slot machines have cherries, but the only person in the audience Herb Alpert acknowledged was Duke.

"Aka Hemmings and Brant Ackerman who were traveling with us after a safari to the Huntington Beach Surfing Contest were in awe. I'm sure their lives were enriched having experienced and been a part of Duke's magnetism."

Duke was never anything but Duke the waterman; he broke bread with royalty and celebrities but never lost contact with his beach boy heritage. In his own country he had been refused service in Mainland restaurants while foreign kings felt humble in his presence.

But he was always a gentleman champion in any language...of any color.

Smiling, Fred reminisced: "At mainland banquets Duke could "moe moe" and be dreaming of big Castles behind his sunglasses before the speaker on the podium got past saying 'and distinguished guests'. He wasn't one impressed with Hollywood names or places. And when he was with surfers he was just Duke and not Duke Kahanamoku."

Kimo once told me a story which typified Duke's nonchalant shoulder rubbing with society's elite.

"I was trying to change a light bulb in a dark hallway in Duke's. The darn thing just wouldn't thread and I was getting fit to be tied when Duke ambles by and commented he knew Tommy."

"Tommy! Who the blazes is Tommy?" I asked exasperated.

"Tom Edison," he replied.

Kimo McVay took an aging Duke under his wing, an Olympian in deed and a man who had in his youth spread modern day surfing around the world. He gave the 'boy' in spirit, now adorned with a crown of silver, a winning finish line so well deserved.