

***"Paddling also taught me respect in a way nothing else could have." ~Ayden***

I've only been paddling for just over one year now, but even in that short time I've learned so much about the sport and the culture and all of its incredible aspects. I have so much respect for the values that paddling an outrigger canoe with a team you love instills, I've always played and enjoyed team sports, but to me outrigger is something on a completely different level. It's one thing to learn about the values that outrigger is so integral to, but actually being there, in the boat, with your team, working together and as one gives you an entirely different understanding of what they are and mean to paddlers.

Being a new paddler, I was amazed at how important Ohana was on the team, calling it a team isn't as true as calling it another family. Everyone is so kind and open to beginners like myself in the sport, and it's had an immense impact on how I live my life and see the people around me. Very soon after beginning to paddle I understood how significant Ha'aha'a is as when you paddle. It's easy to feel like you haven't got anything to improve and see others and judge them for their skill, but it's so important to understand that there is always something to improve in your stroke and always someone close to you can learn from, even if they're ten years younger than you or seventy years your senior.

With those values came Laulima, being surrounded in the boat by your chosen family and understanding there is so much to learn from them makes it easy and so rewarding to work together both in the boat and outside it. Knowing that the boat needs everyone working together and in time to be the best it can is such incredible motivation to work your hardest to follow your stroke and strain every square inch of your body to help your team. The exhilaration of feeling like there is one body in the boat, one head, one heart, is incomparable to any other.

Kuleana and Kokua became so clearly important to me when I saw people learning to paddle with me, and I saw that I could help them and we could grow as paddlers together, not independently. It didn't matter if they were my team or my opposition, we are all paddlers and we all paddle together, working together in this amazing sport to be the best we can be.

Paddling also taught me respect in a way nothing else could have, respect for my team, other teams, my teachers, my coaches, my elders, and my world. I work hard and push myself to the limit very time I get in the boat and knowing that my team does the same fills me with such pride and respect for them, and that same respect goes to every team I see on the water, working just as hard as we are and for the same goal. Paddling also taught me respect for the ocean we paddle in. Crashing through waves and feeling the sea spray against my face reminds me to never underestimate it's power, and I am humbled by it every time I feel the surging force of a wave pushing our boat forward.

Paddling has not only taught me some of the most significant values I hold dear, it has also shown me how important it is to find something you love and stick to it. I love paddling and I can't imagine my life without it anymore, and I am forever grateful to my coaches for guiding me in my journey as a paddler, and to my chosen family in the boat for being there for me to learn with and experience the joy of paddling.