

Live Like You Paddle

By Lola ten Berge

As the koa tree stands tall and silent in the forest and waits to be shaped into a canoe, I waited silently to be turned into a paddler.

When Leilani set eyes upon the koa tree, she knew it was the one. It was standing alone in the clearing, massive and glowing in the soft moonlight. She went up to the majestic tree and ran her fingers along the trunk. Even in its beginning state, she knew it would be amazing. As Leilani formed her masterpiece, my coaches formed me into the paddler I am today. When I began paddling, I didn't speak to anyone. Even though I had no experience and was admittedly pretty bad when I started, I believed that I could be great. I think that through observing my hard work, my coaches believed in me too.

Leilani began to create her wa'a. She laid out her supplies and began to sketch. She meticulously drew each detail, each curve of the boat, every panel of wood. With the amount of attention to detail, there was no way her wa'a wouldn't be perfect. My coaches started their journey and my to make me into a paddler. They continued to help me strive to make sure that every stroke was perfect. I worked hard to Kokua with them and be the person I wanted to be. As we continued to practice, I was shaped into a better paddler in the same way Leilani shaped the koa.

Leilani was trying her hardest to do everything perfectly. This had always been her dream, to build her own koa canoe. She hadn't realized it before, but now she saw that it was her responsibility, her Kuleana to complete the wa'a. She had to do it, not just for herself, but to prove that she could. After I had practiced paddling for a while, I began to realize that I too had a Kuleana to the others in my club. I had grown to love the sport, and I knew that I needed to work just as hard as everyone else and support them as they had supported me.

Race day was starting to creep up upon Leilani. She had finished creating her canoe and was taking great care in polishing it. All of the panels in the wood flowed together smoothly, one in unity. She named her canoe Lanakila Mau O Ka Lokahi, meaning positiveness in unity. Regatta day was nearing. My coaches were selecting the crews and working out every part so that we all worked together in Lokahi. We had gotten to know each other really well and we became an ohana.

Leilani woke up at the crack of dawn. She loaded her creation onto her truck and brought the canoe out to the beach. She couldn't wait to see it out on the water. On the morning of the race, I woke up before the sun to get ready. Down on the beach, I knew I was ready to go. All of the boats were lined up on the start line. The sun flashed in my eyes as I was seated in the Lanakila Mau O Ka Lokahi. Back on the beach, Leilani and my coaches nervously awaited our race to start. I had never felt more at home than I did that day on the water. Surrounded by an ohana with the same love of paddling, I felt united with them on a personal level. With the flags waving to signal the start, I got ready to pursue what I knew would be a lifelong love.