

## **Hāna Kū at Ala Kukui**

by Kara Fuijta Jovic

**Hāna Kū** for me was coming home. Coming home to the land and life in Hawai'i. It was a transformational experience because many of us didn't even know each other when we arrived, but from the very beginning we were all connected as one single family. In the warmth and graciousness of Ala Kukui, we all felt as if we could come home to ourselves too, away from the pressures of the daily grind, just being who we are as people, beyond titles or jobs; responsibilities or deadlines.

### **Arriving**

Riding with Kuha'o across the crazy, winding road to Hāna, I was grateful for every single bend in the road, every twist and turn that made us car sick, because it was worth it! It was worth it not only because Hāna's so beautiful, but also because I realized it's the geological complexity of getting to Hāna that has helped to preserve it.

I came home to Hawai'i after living 11 years abroad, traveling everywhere from Istanbul and London to Singapore, because of family, and because of the land. Born and raised here it was like I was called home. Because I wanted to swim in the ocean and feel the rich damp earth in my dad's backyard in Mānoa. Because no matter where you go in the world, there is no place like Hawai'i.

We live in a time where everyone is working so hard to pay the bills or succeed at their dreams, or raise their families. Many of us are far removed from the land in which we live because we drive to work them home, to the movies or the mall. But it used to be really simple. You used to have to hunt, catch and gather your food in order to eat, so people would rise with the sun and sleep under the moon focused on nourishing the land so it could, in turn, nourish their bodies.

But we have forgotten all that. As tourists line up at waterfalls to take pictures, I'm reminded how strange this is. That we have to take photos of places like this simply because we no longer *live* in places like this. We take pictures because nature is something we visit from time to time, like some kind of novelty or living museum. Rarely do we catch our own fish or spend time with loved ones simply *being* and enjoying each others company. No cell phones. No timelines. No agendas.

We are taught so much how to *go* and to *do*, we are wrapped up in ourselves so of course, it's often hard to feel a part of the bigger whole.

But at Hāna Kū we were a part of the bigger whole, of all the life that was buzzing and growing all around us. From Naihe casting his line with grace and ease into the ocean while we sat on the cliffs illuminated by Hina's beauty, the moonlight casting a spotlight into the ocean from the dark night sky. The ulua were silently gliding beneath the surface of the ocean, searching for food just as we were. To Gooch's daughter Ellee picking papaya at Hāna Farms, carried up by her mother into the sunlight, everyone smiling, anticipating the sweet, juicy fruit, still invisibly pulsating from photosynthesis.

We took time to talk story and get to know each other, to hear Uncle's stories of a time when there were so many sharks in the ocean that no one was afraid, because sharks in the ocean used to be normal because there were so many fish. Now, as he said, no more fish, so no more sharks - and now if we see a shark, we get scared.

I watched as Naihe deftly and expertly cut bait then saw the same skill and talent in Mark when he used his Nobu knife to thinly slice our ahi for dinner.

From the hunters and fishermen of Hāna whose agile skills run through their veins, using ancient knowledge passed down through generations like treasures - to the exceptional chefs who have worked in some of the top restaurants in the world - Hāna reminded us all of how it used to be, and how it still is. How important it is to nourish and grow our connection to the land that is giving us so much.

### **Departing**

On our last day, I noticed that there was a kukui nut tree right outside our cabin. I picked up a kukui nut and held it in my hand, feeling the deep, weathered ridges like wrinkles on a face, and the white overcast layer they usually polish off to make necklaces.

I kept holding it in my hands as we walked to see Kau'i and was thinking of a Mana card I had pulled recently called Lamakū and how it talked about the balance between the physical and spiritual worlds. How finding this balance allows your inner light or *kukui* to flow through your *pu'uwai*, your heart, which transforms your personal, biological, emotional and mental energies into a universal love energy that manifests in a life of service which is guided by true, strong vision, speech and healing.

Thinking about this, I held the kukui nut in my hand as I listened to Kau'i chant beneath the tree in the front lawn of Ala Kukui, her voice rising up through the branches of the tree.

And I noticed how each tree branch intertwined so intricately together, reaching up towards the light.

I sat on the roots of the tree tracing their lines as they stretched out, steadfastly, across the ground - a network of life tapped deep inside the earth. And I noticed how the roots mirrored the branches rising up towards the sky in perfect harmony.

I felt one of the deepest swells of gratitude rise up inside my heart. The journey home had been one of the hardest of my entire life but here I was, in a place I always wanted to see, blessed in the presence of these amazing people, in a place where ancient arts and practices I believe in and cherish are being kept alive.

And I knew that just like the glow emanating from a kukui nut tree planted in the rear of a house in ancient Hawai'i was said to allow travellers to get a glimpse of the homeowner's spirit, that Kau'i and what she is doing at Ala Kukui will help to remind the world that we are made up of the same minerals and networks that surround us in nature and that life and happiness can be more simple. That we are all interconnected together like roots of a tree, firmly in the ground, just trying to reach up and grow towards the light.