

## Kapena's Day

Today was going to be the most exciting and wonderful day. Labor Day weekend was finally here, and Kapena was scrambling to wash his face and finish getting dressed so he could leave for Mo'omomi Beach. He threw on a wrinkled old T-shirt and quickly jammed his feet into his slippers as the screen door slammed loudly behind him.

"You pau brush your teeth?" Mom called from in the house. "And you get all your stuff? I told you Uncle Frankie not going wait." She appeared on the doorstep as a truck honked loudly in the driveway. "You know when you folks go holoholo you gotta be ready. An' no talk about what you going do. Dey get ears, you know."

Kapena knew all about the rule. That whenever anyone went fishing, one was never to speak out loud about it or mention the fish name, or the fish would hear and run away. Hawaiians knew to be careful for a long, long time now.

"I know, Mom! We nevah say nottin, kay? I gotta go! Bye!" And, hauling his backpack and fins, he threw his leg over the back of the old Ford pickup. Uncle Frankie grinned at him from the window.

"What, you went forget how fo' comb yo' hair, braddah?" Chuckling, he drove off.

Kapena sat in the back of the pickup with three of his cousins- Dane, Small Man and Ekolu, while Uncle Frankie's neighbor, Uncle Eddie, shared the front seat. The wind blasted against the tailgate of the truck so the boys moved to sit against the rear window. A pile of bright red-orange nets lay in a heap against a spare tire, and a cooler that was covered in duct tape was marked, 'NO Sit On ME'. Kapena inhaled a gulp of air and let out a big, happy sigh.

The boys were playing Junk-an-a-po when Uncle Frankie's truck pulled into a driveway where a beautiful new boat on a trailer was being readied to go.

"Eh! What, ready?" Uncle Frankie called.

"What... you tink I going sit around wait fo' you slow bug' gahs? I gotta get my behbeh ready, we get one appointment wit' da kai!! Yee-hah!!"

Uncle Manu had just gotten his new boat from Honolulu the week before, and he was anxious to get it into the water with his buddies. The boys jumped off the back of the pickup and began circling the beautiful white Boston whaler. Kapena and Small Man were laughing and punching each other, arguing over who was going to sit in the captain's seat first, when Uncle Frankie said, "Let's go, gang! Manu! I meet you down da beach!" The boys lifted themselves back onto the truck, shaka signs sliced coolly through the air, and the truck crunched on gravel loudly before speeding off.

Mo'omomi Beach was on the coast of the ahupua'a of Pala'au, Moloka'i. It had long been the place where all of the families from the community went to camp and swim and picnic. Most of the time Kapena would see a classmate from school or a neighbor down at the beach with the 'ohana. Kapena loved the long, bumpy, dusty road that led to a large pavilion sitting welcomingly on a well tended lawn overlooking the shoreline. A crescent of sand wrapped around the bay below as the waves gently unrolled up the sandy incline and slid back down into the bay. Deeply inhaling the pungent limu and oceansalt, Kapena felt the familiar thrill of being at his special place again.

The men backed the boat carefully down a small makeshift cement ramp, then they hauled themselves on as Uncle Manu steered away from jutting rocks and reef. Uncle Frankie parked the truck and joined the crew waiting happily for him to get on board. A blast of motor oil smell and white puffs of smoke were swallowed when the motor was started up and its blades lowered into the water. Uncle Manu swung the boat around, steered it evenly through the reef passage and roared away into the surf and deep water beyond.

"I know just the spot. I go there every year. My father showed me and his father showed him," Uncle Manu said. "We gotta to be careful fo' no show too many people where fo' go. Sometimes, if you do, when you go back, no more nottin' left."

"Yeah, look da adda islands, no moa planny fish like use to have," added Uncle Frankie. "Dey take everyting get, not goin' get babies for next time." He shook his head as he unfolded the red-orange nets. These were lobster nets for laying. Uncle Frankie had 6 nets altogether.

"We only take nuff fo' eat. If get nuff at home fo' kaukau, das all we need. Sometimes need some moa fo' pahties, but den everybody going eat, feed all the families one time. Das all right." Uncle Frankie laid the lead neatly on one side, and the floaters on the other.

"When I was same age like you guys, ho!" Uncle Manu gestured with his hands in the air. "Thousands of lobster, loaded fish, 'opihi, limu, anykine! Maui had plenty, O'ahu, Big Island... everyplace had plenty fo' catch. Now, no moa. Hahd fo' find."

"But whea everybody get fish an' 'opihi?" Kapena asked.

"An' lobsta?" added 'Ekolu.

"From da store. Planny times da store people buy from someplace else, like Fiji, Samoa, Micronesia. How come no moa nuff fish in Hawai'i? I nevah that I would see da day when only get little bit of everyting!" Uncle Manu looked out toward the ocean and said nothing more.

He slowed the boat down to a crawl when they reached the spot. The ocean was crystal clear and even in the deep water, the sandy bottom and occasional rock

outcropping could be seen from just below the surface. Everyone but Uncle Eddie got their diving gear on. He was staying back to watch the boat.

Kapena leaned back over the side of the boat and dropped into the water. A shocking rush of cold water hit his sunwarmed skin and he kicked his fins hard into the water, rising swiftly among the fizzy air bubbles to the surface. It felt great!

The boys followed the men, observing how they moved and what they looked at. This was a learning time, not a time for horsing around. Nearing the ocean floor, Uncle Manu made pointing motions, first to the sand, then out away from them. Then he gestured for them to follow him. Kapena didn't notice until he got right up to the sand, that there were nets there already! He turned and looked at the face masks of his cousins who nodded to him. They followed Uncle Manu and the trail of lobster nets that went on for what seemed like miles! Uncle Manu pointed his finger up and each of the divers broke through the surface, pushing up their face masks and gasping for air.

"Auwe! Gotta be 40-50 nets down hea!" he panted. "How my family spot going stand one chance?" He spat into the water. "We go back to da boat."

In the community, there was an understanding, a real awareness of the need to just take enough. More and more families had begun to be more careful about how they fished and how much they took. Even the local fishermen who sold their catch for a living were careful about how they fished, to insure that their businesses would thrive and be strong the next year, and the next.

"We go someplace else. I no can put my nets down hea. Too much," Uncle Manu sighed.

They laid down their nets and returned to shore. No one spoke as Uncle Manu steered the boat back to the beach. The men and boys had just finished putting the last of their supplies onto the truck when they heard the loud motor sound of another boat coming in to the launching area. A large Radin was idling near the shore and Kapena swung his head around to see a group of men laughing and talking loudly. The people of the camp and the beachgoers assembled to watch as the men started pulling lobster off the nets and putting them into large coolers. There were large and small lobsters, and even female lobsters with eggs! No one knew who these people were or where they came from.

"How come they taking so much?" said one of the onlookers.

"They going sell 'em in Honolulu, I tink," another said.

"How come dey taking the babies and the egg lobsta?" said a little girl to her father. "You not s'posed to keep dat kine."

Kapena and his cousins could take no more. They went up to the sandy area where the men were removing the lobsters from the nets.

"You not being pono. My family no take dat kine lobsta. And all us gotta share what get ova hea. Das too much you get!" Kapono was saying it softly because, although he was angry, he was kinda scared to speak up to these strangers. Still, he felt strongly enough to need to say something. His cousins moved in closer to him as a show of support.

"Eh, get outta hea, small boy!" one of the men called out. "Dis not your business. You guys no own da beach."

Kapena got red-faced with anger, but said no more. Then something amazing happened. Slowly, little by little, the community people start to materialize and stand quietly behind the boys. A long line of people began to form. Uncle Manu and Frankie came up to stand beside them as well.

"Why you guys no put the egg lobsta back for our keiki," Uncle Frankie said. "All us guys in dis place, we take care so going get enough foa our kids when they grow up."

The men started to grow uneasy, as though they were a little bit ashamed.

"We nevah know you guys feel like dat. Everyplace we go, nobody baddah us. Everybody take, 'cause if you no take 'em, somebody else going get 'em," one of the men said.

Uncle Manu said, "I know how you tinkin. But we like make sure we malama dis place. We decided as a community to take care, and da first person you gotta start with is yourself. Ahdah wise, not going work."

Kapena learned a great lesson that day, and he was proud of himself, his family and his community. He knew that when he got to be Uncle Frankie's and Uncle Manu's ages, there would still be fish, lobster, 'opihi and limu left for him!