

WELLNESS (CONTINUED)

The Bowl of Light

Story and photo by Hank Wesselman

My wife Jill and I stand on the edge of Pele's home, high above the volcanic crater of Halema'uma'u, the "house of mists and ferns." It is Christmas time in 1996; several days before we happened to meet a revered Hawaiian kahuna named Hale Kealohalani Makua. Now, clad in a flashy aloha shirt, he leads us slowly along the rim with the aid of his carved walking stick. He's half a head taller than me and considerably more robust; with his long, bushy hair and white beard spilling down his chest, he certainly looks the part of a kahuna.

Makua, as he was generally known, had read my book, *Spiritwalker*, an account of my spiritual experiences while living on my farm in Honaunau in the 1980s. I'm a scientist — an anthropologist who has spent much of his life in Africa, first in the Peace Corps and then as a researcher seeking answers to the mystery of human origins. So it was unusual, to say the least, to be sought out by a Hawaiian spiritual leader let alone to be drawn into an enduring friendship with him.

Makua kept a low profile in his native Hawai'i, but he was known throughout Polynesia for his mana and his 'ike — his personal power and his spiritual wisdom. He had an exceptional warrior-chief pedigree as a direct descendent of Kamehameha I and of high chief Keoua Kuahu'ula. In his later life Makua gained international standing as an indigenous elder, traveling extensively to speak among Native American nations and even to the United Nations in New York, where he shared the stage with H.H. the Dalai Lama.

Makua invited us to meet him at the crater— his "office" —and talk story. I sensed that he wanted to look me over. Over the course of that day, I became aware of the depth of Makua's knowledge, knowledge that extended across many thousands of years. After a long afternoon of conversation peppered with humor and good will, Makua presented us with a gift— a beautiful kamani wood bowl.

"This is your bowl of light," he said. "Each of us comes into the world from the great beyond with our bowl of light— a gift from our 'aumakua— our higher self. We Hawaiians know this light is conveyed into us with our first breath, what we call the ha — the divine breath of life. This light then resides within us, nourishing and sustaining us as we pass through life until it returns to its source at life's end."

Makua considered the bowl thoughtfully. "Whenever we step into the negative polarity, however, whenever we injure others through our deeds, our words or our thoughts, it is as though we put a stone in our bowl and some of our light goes out. Slowly, as our bowl fills with stones, our light dims until it is nearly gone. Hopefully we discover this before it turns dark ... and you know what do we do then?"

He turned the bowl over. "We dump it out!" He exploded into laughter, and we joined him. "We start over then, but from that time forward things are different. It is then that we begin to live our lives with greater awareness, and it is then that we begin to walk our path toward the luminous horizon of our destiny."

This was the beginning of an extraordinary friendship during which Makua's wisdom enriched my life. About a year after his passing in 2004 at 65 years of age, a curious impulse rose in me — a desire to write something about my unlikely and almost decade-long relationship with this extraordinary man and to share his teaching.

And to this day whenever I step into the "negative polarity," I sit with his bowl. When I'm ready, I turn the bowl over and hear him laughing.

*Hank Wesselman's book about Hale Makua, *The Bowl of Light*, was published in April 2011. ☺*



Hank Wesselman and Hale Makua at Pu'uhonua o Honaunau on the Big Island, March 2000.