

Storytelling and Culture Learning Center

Handout E: Pu`ui`aiki and the `Opihi of Moa`ula (Na Wahi Pana o Kaho`olawe-The Sacred Stories of Kaho`olawe)

A certain man from the island of Hawai`i, named Pu`ui`aiki, left the shores of Kohala on his small canoe to fish. Midway through Alanuihaha Channel, his canoe was swamped then overturned by waves and he could not make it move as he wished. He even tried to upright it so it would float properly but he failed. So instead of heading for his shores of Kohala, he decided it best that he swim to the island of Kaho`olawe, since the wind blew him along in that direction, making it easy for him to land there.

As he swam towards the island, which he saw in the distance, an *opihimakai`auli* appeared before him. "What a strange sea limpet this is. It doesn't sink into the sea as all others would. What kind of thing is this, and what does it mean?" he said. Pu`ui`aiki then reached out and grasped the shelled sea animal in his hand while wondering over and over what it was all about and what its presence meant.

O readers, in truth this was an *opihimakai`auli* sent by the prophet Moa`ula. And that high mound, named after the prophet, standing on Kaho`olawe, is the only mountain of that island. Moa`ula was sorry for Pu`ui`aiki so he sent `opihimakai`auli to help him. And soon you will see how it helped Pu`ui`aiki.

But first let us look at Pu`ui`aiki swimming in the sea. Soon after he grabbed the `opihimakai`auli, a giant shark swam by with its mouth open wide. The shark was so large that its upper jaw stretched up to the surface of the waves while its lower jaw reached down, touching the depths of the sea. Pu`ui`aiki shouted, "If you bite me, my spirit will be released and I'll live. But if you swallow me whole, I'll be trapped in your stomach alive, until I die -- but I'll never escape, even as a spirit."

The shark swallowed Pu`ui`aiki without scratching any part of his body, as the fisherman had hoped.

Holding his `opihimakai`auli, Pu`ui`aiki slipped between the jaws of the shark into its stomach. There, the fisherman used the sharp-edged shell of the `opihimakai`auli to scrape the flesh of the shark for three nights and three days.

In great pain, the shark landed at the bay of Kanapou on Kaho`olawe and died.

You see now how `opihimakai`auli helped Pu`ui`aiki.

Out crawled Pu`ui`aiki, now having a shiny, hairless head because he had been in the darkness of the shark's stomach much too long -- thus, he became the first bald-headed man of Hawai`i. Tired, he crawled up from the beach to where

akulikuli plants and *pohuehue* vines grow over the sand. Picking the cool, soft leaves of the *pohuhue*, he put them on his bald head for protection from sunburn.

Pu`ui`aiki rested on the beach until other adventures happened to him.

This story is adapted from a legend written by A.D. Kaha`ulelio in the Hawaiian language newspaper, *Ka Nupepa Ku`oko`a.*, later translated by Hawaiian scholar Mary Kawena Pukui.

Edited by Thomas Cummings of the Bishop Museum Education Department, December 17, 2004