

KULEANA: WHAT KIND OF ANCESTOR WILL YOU BE?

Brook Kapūkuniahi Parker

Our life stories are connected to our ancestors. They teach us about kuleana (right; privilege; responsibility). In this essay, I share my stories and vivid memories of the special people in my life, who taught me kuleana, respect, and unwavering faith. These special people taught me that every person is a part of a whole—a family, a community, and the cosmos. These tales are about the goodness, strength, generosity, and wisdom of my ancestors and other revered kūpuna (elders) who inspired and taught me in words, and mostly in deeds. Life comes full circle, as I—a great-grandson, a grandson, a son, and now a father—will one day be a grandfather and great-grandfather. To honor my ancestors, I ask myself, “What kind of ancestor will I be?”

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I hope that what I have to share today* will help you in realizing our kuleana (right; privilege; responsibility). I was taught that kuleana is never about me, because I really haven't done anything yet. The ancestors show that their accomplishments belong to them. Their stories inspire and help me. I learn kuleana from them. Kuleana doesn't happen when you go to school. It first begins when you're really small, at home. That's where it all started for me.

I was very fortunate to grow up in a stable, loving home. My mom and dad have six sons. I'm the second oldest. My mom was a stay-at-home mom, and dad worked. And at the time, I didn't really appreciate or notice that when I came home, I always had clean clothes, somebody to help me do my homework, and great meals. I regret to say I took that for granted.

My brothers and I also learned really fast where the line was. Cross the line, pay the consequences. Some of you know my dad. He's a big guy. My dad was strict. We learned right from wrong. We learned about kuleana. We learned that we were part of the community, as well as citizens of the United States. And we learned that we were part of the cosmos—that we had a place. We were taught where we came from, why we were here, what our purpose was, and the different talents we all had.

When I was little, I began drawing. I enjoyed it. My father was an artist. As an artist and painter, my dad painted some really heavy duty Hawaiian stuff, and that left a deep impression on me. He used to do a lot of trading with his art, which meant he brought Hawaiian implements home all the time.



David and Pat Parker family

*This article is based on a speech delivered at the 2010 Research Conference on Native Hawaiian Well-Being in Kāne'ohe, Hawai'i.

One of my favorite paintings by my dad is the one of Maui's famous ali'i (chief) Kahekilinuiahumanu.

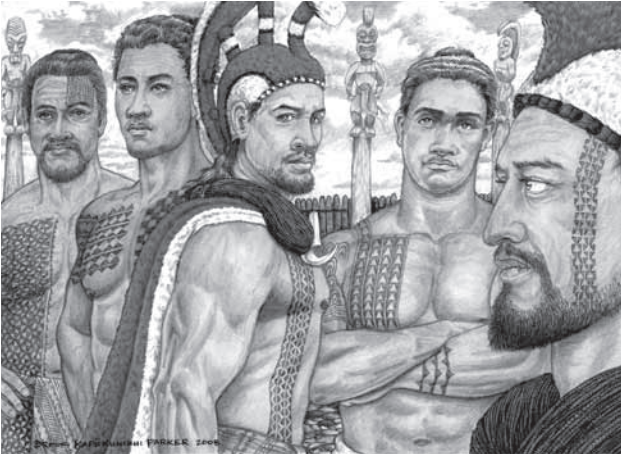


Kahekilinuiahumanu
1979, DAVID PARKER

My father tells me that when I was little, I used to grab the color crayons from my stash and the paper grocery bags to draw on. I watched him do his art. I tried not to bother him. Hawaiian style. You watch, you're quiet, and you learn. Practice, practice; that's what I did. Conan comic books were a wonderful learning tool for me! I loved the stories and the artwork. I still do. I learned how to draw anatomy from those comics!

My father was also a Hawaiian historian and talked about the kūpuna (ancestors; elders) a lot. Dad had a vast library, all types of books about art, world history, and Hawaiian. I became an early fan of Samuel Kamakau's *Ruling Chiefs of Hawaii* (1961/1992). I loved to read about the different battle stories it contained. In fact, I was recently blessed and honored to do 24 new illustrations for Kamehameha Publishing's revised edition of *Ruling Chiefs* (forthcoming). Here is one of the illustrations, a picture of Liloa and 'Umi and his hānai (adopted) sons Pi'imaiwa'a, Oma'okamau, and Ko'i.

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Liloa and 'Umi
2008, BROOK KAPŪKUNIAHI PARKER

Now, when I finished this one, I wept. It was late at night. I was at home in Wailupe valley. These kūpuna were happy with their portraits. And it was like they were telling me, “Brook, don’t let the little ones forget about our stories, now. Don’t let ’em forget.”

When I did the illustrations for Kamehameha Schools, they sent me to Kona to talk to Kamehameha Publishing’s editorial board at their retreat. I was excited about going to Kona, because I thought maybe I had a slim chance to meet one of my art idols, Mr. Herb Kane of Hōnaunau. He was my dad’s long-time friend. So I called my dad, “Dad, Kamehameha Schools is sending me Kona. You think maybe I can go meet Mr. Kane?” My father said, “I dunno brah, you don’t nīele [keep questioning] him, he don’t give interviews anymore, doesn’t let anybody to his house. But since you my son, I’ll call.” So he called. Dad called back a few days later, “Brah, you in luck. He’s agreed to see you.” “Wow, right on!” “But remember ah? Shut your mouth, let him do the talking, listen when you get up there, don’t take any pictures without asking first.” “Yeah, okay, Dad, okay. I won’t.” I went and was on my best behavior.



Herb Kane
and Brook Parker
2008

So I went, and it was awesome. My wife and I drove to his house, and when he came around the corner, I was like, “Wow, Mr. Kane, you tall yeah?” He goes, “Yeah, 6’4”. What about you, Brook? 6’5” ah?” I go, “yeah.” He goes, “Yeah, but I’m 80.” I go, “What? 80 years old?” He goes, “Yeah.” And he talked to us for three hours, and it was wonderful. I wasn’t finished with the *Ruling Chiefs* project yet. We had 24 illustrations to do, and three weren’t picked yet. I told Mr. Kane we stayed away from all the stuff he already painted, because it couldn’t get any better than his work. Then I asked, “Of all the stories in *Ruling Chiefs*, from Liloa all the way to Kamehameha III, what stories would you illustrate?” That’s what I wanted to know. And he told me this, “All of them, Brook. They’re all important.” Not what I wanted to hear, but very profound.

I was also fascinated with the war stories. I’m a guy. My testosterone level is very high. I’m trying to balance my Kū (masculine) side with the Hina (feminine). But if I could, I’d draw battle scenes all day. It has to do with my middle name. I should tell you, be careful what you name your children. When I was a little boy, I had no say, I was a baby, right? My dad wanted the name Kapūkuniahi. You don’t hear that one too often. I was named after my Uncle Johnny, who was my grandpa’s brother. He was named in remembrance of an event, the Hawaiian revolution when Robert Wilcox came and stormed the palace. My great-grandfather was captain of the royal household guard under King David Kalākaua and was given charge by the king to hold the palace at all cost. At the time of the insurrection he was told that his wife gave birth to another son, so they named the boy Kapūkuniahi, or the firing

cannon. My great-grandfather and his sharpshooters were successful in thwarting the attempt by Wilcox. When my dad told grandma he was going to give me that name, grandma said, “No, don’t give him that name. Why you going give him that name for? It’s like starting three steps backward for the kid. He will have trouble with his temper.”

My father was adamant. He said, “Oh no, no, mama. I’ll give him the name Brook so the cool water of the brook will cool the cannon.” I grew up thinking the name Brook was a girl’s name. Unfortunately, the “cool water of the brook” was mostly boiling water my whole life. In fact, I only realized recently that getting mad was a choice. I didn’t know that. I really didn’t know that. But it’s a choice. So, when the time came for us to have kids, I told my wife, “No way I going curse my son by giving him my name.” So we made a deal. She named the boys, I named the girls. She was unwavering about having another “Brook,” so I gave my son an extra middle name of Waipā, which means “a formal petition as in prayer.” And thank goodness—he only looks like me, he’s totally nothing like me, personality wise.

Getting back to the artwork, I started doing projects. And I started painting recently. Before I did the *Ruling Chiefs*, I was just doing colored pencil. I never really painted before. I took a painting class 20 years ago when I first got married. We didn’t have any children yet, so I started taking night classes at the University of Hawai‘i–Mānoa to try and get better. I remember my first class. I got there, and this lady starts taking off all her clothes. I didn’t know it was that kind class! I was embarrassed, so I ended up only painting from her neck up. It was a four-week class! Other models came, and I made sure to sit behind the models and draw from the back. After the class was pau (finished), I put away my brushes for 20 years. I thought, I ain’t painting anymore, forget it! I decided I’d just do my colored pencils. And so I did that for 20 years.

Then, I saw the movie *The Bucket List* with Jack Nicholson. I said to myself, “Ho brah, you getting old, too, you know. You better paint something.” So I decided to bring out my paint brushes and I started painting. Kame’eiamoku and Kamanawa was the first painting I ever did, other than the lady from the neck up and the other lady from the back. So, actually, it’s the third painting I ever did. I liked how it came out, so I started painting Kamehameha and all his uncles. I’ve been going crazy ever since.



Kamehameha's 'aha 'ula (council of chiefs)

2009, BROOK KAPŪKUNIAHI PARKER

I painted King Kakuhihewa and his family, and this 5-foot painting will hang in the VIP suite at the new Disney Aulani Resort opening soon at Ko 'Olina. I was lucky one day to meet Maile Meyer of Native Books/Nā Mea Hawai'i. She was kind enough to start moving some of my ali'i art prints, which has all the biography 'ōlelo (statement) on the back. She showed the prints to people from Disney, and they liked it. They were looking for an art piece for the VIP suite and some other areas. They were going to put a sculpture in there with an 'ahu 'ula (feather cloak or cape) made by Joann Sterling Kahanamoku of Maui, but she passed away unexpectedly. They were able to get feather worker Natalie Mahina Jensen of Hilo to make the 'ahu 'ula, but they still wanted something to match. I suggested a painting and said, "Why don't we honor King Kakuhihewa?" They asked, "Who's that?" I gave a short presentation on who he was and why he's special, and they really liked it, so King Kakuhihewa and his family are going to be honored at the new Aulani Resort. King Kakuhihewa was the 15th ali'i 'ai moku (chief who rules a district) of the island of O'ahu, who was celebrated throughout the eight islands because of his noble qualities. Legends speak in glowing terms of the peace, prosperity, and glory of his long reign.

My dad also taught me and all my brothers about our European ancestors. He shared about John Palmer Parker, who started the Parker Ranch. John Palmer's father was Samuel, and his grandfather was Ebenezer of Newton, Massachusetts. They fought at Lexington Green against the British on April 19, 1775, the very first battle that launched the American Revolutionary War.



Parker ancestors (L–R, top: Samuel and Ann Palmer Parker, John Palmer Parker; bottom: Robert Parker Waipā, Sarah Koa Waialeale Spencer, Arthur Kapewaokeao, Eva Margaret Vieira Parker)

See, the fighting in the Parkers? See? John started the ranch and married Kamehameha's great-granddaughter, Keli'ikipikānekaolohaka. They had three children. The oldest daughter, Mary Ann, married Moses Fuller. They had one daughter, Martha. Martha married John Low, and they were parents of the famous Parker Ranch cowboys, Eben and Jack. Eben Low is also the great-grandfather of Hōkūle'a navigator, Nainoa Thompson. Mary Ann divorced Moses Fuller and then married Kame'eiamoku Waipā. He was the grandson of Kuakahela. Kuakahela was Keoua ku ahu ula's kahuna nui (high priest; councilor) from Ka'ū on the Big Island. Kamehameha had recently completed the temple of Pu'ukoholā, and Keoua was invited to Kawaihae by Kamehameha to parlay their differences. After a scuffle, Kuakahela was the only one on Keoua's canoe who survived at Kawaihae that day. He chose to live. He hid at his sister's house. His sister was Keku'iapoiwa II,

Kamehameha's mama. Strange as it might seem, Kuakahela's son Waipā, who was a first cousin to Kamehameha, was with Kamehameha on the beach that day in Kawaihae! His son Waipā may have helped save him. We do not know. I would have. Some of my Ka'ū cousins think that Kuakahela should have died that day, too. You can look at it in different ways. I'm glad he chose to live; it was his choice to make. But, it was from his point of view that we get the Ka'ū side. He ended up writing a very poignant oli (chant) about that event. I was taught that most history is written from the point of the victors. Why? The losers aren't around to tell their story. They're dead.

I was taught that most history is written from the point of the victors.

Robert Parker Waipā was one of Kame'eiamoku and Mary Ann's sons. I learned how he came to O'ahu.



Robert Parker Waipā,
Senior Captain,
Honolulu Police Department
1894

The royal family loved visiting the Parker Ranch at Waimea. It was sort of like their little Las Vegas to party, play music, and 'inu (drink). They went up there all the time, and that's how Robert Parker Waipā became good buddies with Prince Leleiohōkū, Kalākaua's kid brother. They were about the same age. The prince was fascinated with Robert's horseback riding skills, so he begged my grandma, Mary Ann, to have Robert come back with him and be a member of his staff. She was very hesitant at first, but finally relinquished. Robert Parker came to Honolulu and lived with Princess Ruth—Leleiohōkū's hānai mom. A short time later, while at San Mateo College, California, Leleiohōkū got sick and died. Robert stayed in Honolulu and became a household guard under the king and was eventually promoted to captain of the guard at 'Iolani Palace. Robert married

my great-grandmother Sarah Koa Waialeale Spencer. Robert's older sister Anna married William Purdy. The famous Waimea cowboy Ikua Purdy was their son. All you Kohala guys out there—Spencers, Purdys, Bells, Lincolns—that's the connection. They had 18 children.



Sarah Koa Waialeale Spencer
with her ali'i cousins in Mānā, Hawai'i
1889

This is a picture of my father David (third from the left and inset) with his family. His father Arthur was one of Robert and Sarah's sons.



Arthur Parker family
1947

My father grew up in Kalihi. I remember a story he shared, which left a big impression on me. Dad got accepted to Kamehameha Schools in seventh grade. My grandparents weren't well off. They were living on a tight budget, but it came time to buy daddy new shoes because his old pair was in real bad shape. On his very first day of school, his new pair of leather shoes was stolen. In those days they had to wear uniforms, but when they went to P.E., they had to change. When he came back from P.E., he saw that someone had broken into his locker and stole his new shoes. He had to walk home bare feet, all the way down to Ola Lane and King Street from Kapālama Heights. He got home, and grandma and grandpa were very disappointed. Grandpa said, "Son, we don't have any money to buy new ones. You gotta wear your old ones. But, I'll tell you what we're gonna do. Before we go to sleep tonight, we're gonna pule [pray] and ask Akua [God] to help us." So Grandpa did. He took daddy into the room, they got down on their knees, and Grandpa offered the prayer. My grandfather was a spiritual giant and had the faith to match. As they finished, Grandpa got up and kissed my daddy good night and said, "Everything's going to be okay." Daddy went to his first class the next morning and, lo and behold, his leather shoes were right in front of the door. He was shocked. He put them on, and when he got home, he told my grandma, "Mama, I have my shoes back." They were really happy. My grandpa taught us about kuleana through faith and prayer.

**My grandpa
taught us about
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Later on, in their golden years, Grandpa and Grandma were called upon to run the labor mission for our church down at Kakela in Hau'ula. One hundred and fifty young men from all over Polynesia and Hawai'i were called upon to serve as labor missionaries. They lived in a dormitory at Kakela and built Church College of Hawai'i. They contributed over 280 thousand hours. But, my grandpa said there was stealing going on at the dorm. One night, before evening pule, he gathered all the young men and said, "You know, this stealing has to stop. We're going to give the person who is stealing a chance to repent tonight. When I go to sleep, whoever you are, just bring all the stuff back. Put them in front of my door. When I wake up in the morning and I see the stuff, everything will be fine."

The next morning, Grandpa woke up, looked out his door—nothing. So before the young men went to work, he told the group, "Whoever you are, today you're going to get hurt, we're going to know who the thief is." My grandpa was blessed with gifts. The boys left. Grandpa stayed, tidied up the place. Then, at about 11:00, a jeep comes speeding into Kakela. Someone yelled, "Brother Parker! Brother

Parker! Johnny's hurt!" Grandpa said, "What happened to Johnny?" The student replied, "He fell off the roof." Grandpa asked, "Where is Johnny now?" The student responded, "Kahuku Hospital. He broke his arm. But Johnny's going to be okay." Grandpa then said, "Get the bolt cutters. Johnny's the thief." They went to Johnny's locker. Sure enough, radios, shoes, all the stolen stuff was in the locker. Johnny was sent home, hopefully a little wiser.

As time goes on, we are blessed with special people in our lives. My grandfather was one of those special people in my life. He died when I was only 4 years old. He died standing at church, testifying. He was 71. I learned kuleana from him and the stories he told. The stories about my dad's leather shoes and Johnny at the dorm taught me about stealing. But, I learned so much more. My grandpa taught me how important it was to pray and trust God. By his example, I learned to confront what was wrong. The special people in our lives teach us about kuleana and show us how to do the right thing.

The special people in our lives teach us about kuleana and show us how to do the right thing.

Years later, another grandfather-type figure came into my life. I got a call at work from my dad. He said his good friend needed help with sandpaper and lacquer. At the time, I was working at Sinclair

Paints. I went to meet the man. He was Wright Elemakule Bowman Sr. Our first meeting was the beginning of a very neat and special relationship.



Wright Elemakule Bowman Sr.
and Brook Parker
1998

I was fascinated with the stories he shared while I hung around his workshop. He told me about when he was small, growing up in Ka‘ū on the Big Island. He told me his mama died when he was 4 years old and how he was sent to Kamehameha Schools to board when he was 7 years old. He remembered his first night. There were 30 boys at the dorm, where Bishop Museum is now. Everybody was crying. They missed their mothers. He was trying to sleep. He said, “I got up. I told everybody, ‘Shut up! Go sleep! I lost my mother when I was 4. You still get your mother.’” He said at that time, he was already hard-boiled at 7 years old. He told me another story about meeting the queen when he was 10. I said, “Queen Lili‘uokalani?” He said, “Yeah.” I go, “Wow!” He said, “Yup, she died, so we had to go to her funeral.” I asked, “How was that?” “Oh, spooky, you know. They dressed us up, we had to catch the street car and go down to Kawaiaha‘o Church. Everybody was dressed in black. All the ladies were wailing and crying. Reminded me of my mama’s funeral in Hilo. It was my time to go in front of the coffin. I held the guy’s shirt in front of me. When he bow, I bow. I closed my eyes. I never looked inside that coffin, but I know I met her.” I go, “Ah.” And on and on he went.

Mr. Bowman was very, very proficient in building canoes. He was a canoe master, kahuna kālai wa‘a. People from all over the state came to him when they needed help with their canoes, and he always helped them. I was curious how he learned, so I asked him one day. He said, “When I was small, we had a summer house in Hōnaunau, and there was an old Hawaiian man named Nahau who was a canoe builder. I used to watch him build canoes. My siblings and I used to help Nahau. We helped water the coconut plants, plant trees, and pick up rubbish.” Nahau used to let them take the canoes out to catch waves in appreciation for their help. He said there was a couple from New York who came after World War I. They slept in their old buss’up car and Nahau felt sorry for them, so he used to bring them papaya and fish and sweet potato. When they went back to New York, Nahau got a letter from their lawyer. The letter stated that Nahau would be receiving a \$200 check from these people every month thereafter for his kindness. Mr. Bowman never forgot that ‘cause he did a lot of the same things that Nahau did later on in his own life, always sharing his time, talents, and knowledge with others. You see, the story he told about learning how to build canoes was not just about building. Mr. Bowman, like the other special people in my life, always taught about kuleana in their stories.

Mr. Bowman, like the other special people in my life, always taught about kuleana in their stories.

He told me another story. He was a teacher at Kamehameha Schools, and it really irritated him when the boys and girls used to fight. He told me, "I solved it. I made a contest. Boys against girls. I had one big wood block, and I put a spike (nail) in a vise. The team to hammer and pound the nail in first was the winner. The girls do one, the boys do the other one; whoever wins would be the champions and the stronger ones in the school. So they started the contest. The girl hit her spike right in the wood, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, right in. The boys couldn't get it, kept on missing." He said, "You know what? I never tell anybody for 50 years, but I put grease on the boys' spike. They couldn't hit the head, the hammer would slide off!" But he said, "It worked! It shut 'em up." I said, "Wow, Mr. Bowman. You're amazing."

I remember another time when I went up to his shop, and his apprentice was arguing with him. The guy was arguing with Mr. Bowman about a lacquer technique he saw in a book. Mr. Bowman finally tells the guy, "Do 'em how you like. When you finish the varnish, you can just leave." I was thinking that Mr. Bowman was actually paying this guy? I felt bad, so after Mr. Bowman went in his house, I looked at the guy and said, "Brah, let me ask you one question. 'Are you an idiot?'" He said, "Ho, brah, why you talking to me like that?" I told him, "Just answer the question, yes or no. How long have you been doing woodwork?" He told me, "Twenty years." I said, "Oh, well, I've been doing woodwork now for maybe a month. So I am not like you. But I know enough to know Mr. Bowman been doing it for over 70 years. He could have written that dang book, brah. What you grumbling with him for? This is his house. This is his shop. And you're treating him like that. What's the matter with you?" Well, he didn't last long. Kaili Chun started coming over. She's Uncle Mike and Aunty Bina Chun's daughter. She became Mr. Bowman's haumana (student; apprentice). Sure enough, the guy who was grumbling with Mr. Bowman got jealous. I was no threat, because I didn't know what I was doing up there. I almost cut my hand off how many times with the machines. But, Kaili really caught on, and the guy ended up leaving in a huff.

Mr. Bowman would try to pay me, because I'd go up and help. I was more like a fly on the wall, though. I would just try to stay out of the way. When he needed grunt labor, I was there, especially to pick up the big stuff. When he'd try to pay me, I'd say, "Mr. Bowman, your money's not good in my house." So he used to give me stuff. I'd tell him, "I can't take that, Mr. Bowman," and he'd tell me that I was going to hurt his feelings. I didn't want to hurt him, so I would reluctantly accept

his gifts. He started giving me all kinds of wood. He had the most amazing wood pile, all the best cuts, different exotic Hawaiian woods. He taught me how to make ihe (spears). He gave me kauwila wood. Mr. Bowman was generous.



Wood crafts from Mr. Bowman

We never know in our lives how we can influence somebody. You always try to behave yourself. I know I do. I try, I try—it's my middle name. I remember one time when Mrs. Bowman got sick, people started coming to the house to help take care of her, and stuff started going missing. They never used to lock their doors. Then, one day, I heard some miniature model canoes that he made as prizes for the Transpacific Yacht Race were missing. They were worth thousands of dollars and they were beautiful. Somebody stole them. The seeds were already planted by my grandpa about stealing, so I was not happy to hear that someone stole Mr. Bowman's stuff.

We never know in our lives how we can influence somebody.

One day, I stopped at a pawn shop in Kalihi to look for tools, and I saw one of the canoes. I asked the guy, "May I see the canoe please?" First thing I do, I looked under the canoe 'cause Mr. Bowman used to burn his initials, W.B., on the bottom.

Someone had sanded it all off. So I said, “How much for the canoe?” “Awww, you can’t afford it,” the owner told me. I said, “Throw a number at me.” He said, “Thousand dollars.” So I asked, “Is it for sale?” He told me, “No, no. I haven’t decided if I want to sell it, yet.” Then, I asked him, “Who made the canoe?” He said, “I did.” I looked at him and said, “Oh, you made the canoe?” He said, “Yeah.” So I questioned him, “You a woodworker?” He told me, “Of course. How you think I got this big scar on my arm?” I told him, “Ah, you do beautiful work, sir.”

I left and went outside to the parking lot and called Mr. Bowman, “Howzit Mr. Bowman! Guess what? I found one of your canoes.” “Really, Brook?” I said, “You like me come pick you up or what?” He said, “No, Kaili bring me.” Twenty minutes

**My mother taught
me when I was small,
always tell the truth.**

later, three of us are walking back into the pawn shop. The guy sees me. I said, “We’re interested in your canoe.” So Mr. Bowman looks at it. He nods his head. I go, “Who made this canoe again? You said you did, right?” The pawn shop guy said, “Ho, brah, I was just joking. You don’t know one joke when you hear one?”

I said, “Brah, jokes supposed to be funny, yeah? You not funny. My mother taught me when I was small, always tell the truth. So if that was a joke, brah, the joke’s on you. You going give him back the canoe or what?” The guy and his wife started to rip me, saying I was a trouble maker and smart mouth. Kaili saw I was getting upset. She jumped right in, “Brook, Brook, go outside already, it’s okay. We’ll take care of it.” I said, “Ah, no problem, I get my cell phone. Kalihi police substation right around the corner, they’ll take care of it.” Before I could call, out comes Mr. Bowman with his canoe. I don’t care for dishonest people, especially when they affect those who are dear to me, like Mr. Bowman. Needless to say, I never went back to that pawn shop and was thankful Kaili was there to remind me to behave myself.

In July 2001 I got a call from my friend Kent Ka’ahanui from Brigham Young University (BYU)—Hawai’i about needing help with the canoe ‘Iosepa. I said, “I can help you with some of the coatings, but I know a guy who can answer most of your questions.” He asked, “Who is it, Brook?” So I told him the person was Wright Bowman Sr. He was surprised, “Ho, brah, how you know him?” I said, “That’s my friend. I’ll ask him if he’s available. I’ll bring him down tomorrow morning if he can come.” This was around the time when Mrs. Bowman had passed away, so Mr. Bowman was pretty much by himself most of the time. I asked him, “Did you hear about the big canoe they’re building in Lā’ie?” He says, “No, how big?” I told

him, “Almost 60 feet. Big ah? I take you. You wanna go?” He said, “Yeah, we go. Can Kaili come?” I said, “Of course.” So I picked them up early in the morning and drove down to Lā’ie. He was really happy to go.

We were met at the canoe place by a film crew from BYU. The great carvers Tuione Pulotu and Kawika Eskaran were there. Amazing wood carvers in their own right there, they stood ready to greet us. And I remember the scene captured in the photo below.



‘Iosepa canoe greeting,
L–R: Tuione Pulotu, Kaili
Chun, Kawika Eskaran,
Mr. Bowman
2001

Mr. Bowman put out his hand and Tuione Pulotu said, “Can I give you a hug?” This surprised Mr. Bowman, but he gave Tuione a hug. These two woodworking masters had always heard stories about each other, but this was the first time they met. It was really neat. Mr. Bowman was really happy. Kawika already knew Mr. Bowman, who was his teacher in shop class at Kamehameha. Mr. Bowman loved the canoe! Tuione Pulotu had recently made a 104-foot double-hull canoe for the King of Tonga, so the king could be the first person to see the new millennium sunrise in the year 2000. The canoe was called the Meleuma, or the millennium in Tongan. The hulls of this massive canoe were over 9 feet deep! Tuione had a picture of this vessel at sea with over 100 people standing on its deck! It was a huge canoe.

For the 'Iosepa, Tuione shared with Mr. Bowman that he didn't know how to make a Hawaiian canoe with the raised pola (platform) and 'iako or crossbeam. He never made a canoe like that before. The 'iako was one of the most important parts of a double-hull canoe; it needed to be very strong to be able to hold up to the rigors of open-sea travel. Tuione asked, "Would you know anything about that, Mr. Bowman?" Mr. Bowman replied, "Uh, a little bit. I made the one for Hōkūle'a. I show you guys." He grabbed a pencil and started drawing on the wooden work table—the jig. You could see the motors turning in the minds of the two master carvers. Then Mr. Bowman told them, "Ah, I do one better. I go make one mini-jig at my house."

After we completed our visit, I headed back to the van, and Kawika who was walking with me asked, "Brook, how did you know to bring Mr. Bowman today? We have a looming deadline and really need to finish the canoe in two months. We were stuck in trying to find information on building the crossbeams. I was up all night on my computer looking for any information. We prayed and fasted for help. How did you know?" I got emotional and answered, "I didn't know, but Akua knew—He's the one who brought Mr. Bowman to you! I just provided the ride!" That was a special moment. Two days later, Mr. Bowman called me. "Brook, tell your friends come. I ready."

He welcomed them at his shop in Nu'uaniu and showed them all these little tricks and things he made. They were just chuckling.



Tuione Pulotu and
Kawika Eskaran at
Mr. Bowman's house
2001

And then he showed them the jig. They were amazed. They were able to build a double jig back in Lā‘ie and completed the canoe in record time. He gave them an original blueprint of the Hōkūle‘a. They finished the ‘iako in record time.

They launched the ‘Iosepa on November 3, 2001. I took my kids to see the canoe when it was pau. Most of Lā‘ie came out for the launching. Mr. Bowman was given a place of honor, which was very well deserved. He was such a wonderful man. I miss him a lot. We all do. I have mementos from him at my home—‘ō‘ō (digging) sticks, canoe paddles, and so forth. But what I really have are the stories and the relationship with this beautiful man. Some of Mr. Bowman’s favorite sayings were: “Measure *twice*, cut once,” “When doing a project, if I start to sweat, I must be doing something wrong,” and “The secret to long life is let the other guy do the worrying.” Mr. Bowman’s middle name, Elemakule, means “old man” in Hawaiian. His first name, Wright, means worker, especially a constructive worker as in woodwork, and so forth. He went to join his ancestors and his beloved Betty at age 96! He helped me learn kuleana.

So, getting back to how others can influence our lives, we never know. Part of my duties as a paint salesman was to go out to different job sites and collect paint samples. I remember a big job I had once with eight buildings at the old naval air station at Kalaeloa. One day, I went down there with a map from my contractor. The air traffic control tower was the easiest building to find, so I started there. When I went to the tower, this security guy started with me right away. He was very upset, saying, “Ho brah, what you doing over here? Who you?” I told him, “Brook Parker. This is my card.” “Where’s your ID?” “This is my license, Hawai‘i license.” Then he said, “You in a restricted area. You supposed to check in. Nobody told you?” I told him, “Sorry man. You can call my contractor. Here’s the number.” I know he was having a bad day and I was bothering him, so I said, “You know, I’ll make it as painless for you as possible. I need to go to these certain buildings, collect the paint, then I’m out of here.” He looked at my map and said, “Brah, you cannot go to those four buildings.” I said, “Well, I’ll do the best I can.” So he followed me around and I finally finished the air traffic control tower after about two hours. I came back, and he was right. I couldn’t go to all the buildings. When I saw him, he said, “You got all your samples?” I told him, “No, not all of them.” He said, “You see, I told you. You never like listen.” By this time, I was really getting tired of him. Plus, besides being tired, I was hungry. Bad combination for Hawaiians, yeah? Tired and hungry. Not good. Not good.

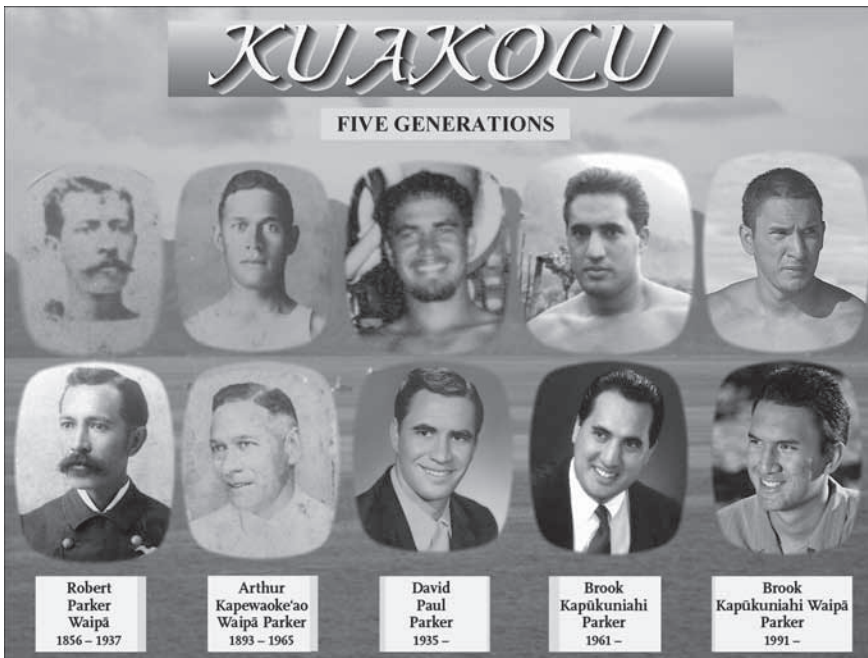
So I'm at the security office, trying to get my license back so I could get out of there. I'm signing the papers, and I hear a voice from behind the counter say, "You're a Parker. I saw your name on the list. Any relationship to the Waimea Parkers?" I just mumbled, "Yeah, my great-great grandfather started the ranch, but the Honolulu Parkers got cut out of the ranch long time ago. I have nothing to do with that." I was still looking down and signing papers and she said, "That's funny, 'cause most of the Parkers I know sure have a lot more hair on their head than you do." I looked up and the thought crossed my mind, most of the Parkers I know, when given a statement like that will make sure the person finds him- or herself meditating in a horizontal position. But, I behaved myself. I politely smiled, looked her right in the eye, and replied, "I come from a family of six boys. My oldest and younger brothers have been blessed with a full head of hair, but those of us in between will have to wait until the resurrection to see our lauoho [hair] again."

She gave me a puzzled look. I said, "Then again, as the saying goes, I have my mother's side of the family to thank for that." And she goes, "Well, who's your mom?" I said, "She's from Kalihi." She goes, "I'm from Kalihi. What's your mom's name?" I said, "Her maiden name was Kauka." And before I could give her first name, she said, "Not Pat?" I said, "Yup. That's my mom." Her entire countenance changed. In a soft, quiet voice she replied, "When I was young, your mom took care of me while we attended Kalākaua School and continued to look after me while we were at Farrington High School. Your mom was always kind to me. Your mom is my friend." I said, "Yup, sounds like my mom." She asked how mom was doing and said that they fell out of touch with each other. She introduced herself as "Aunty Sarah" and told me that she was the head of security at the base. She asked me, "Where do you need to go, boy?" Pointing, I said, "Aunty, I cannot go to all these buildings." She replied, "I get the keys for all the buildings. You can go wherever you need to go!" Then she called to the guy who said I couldn't go into the buildings, "Hey you over there, you take him wherever he wants to go. You take him in your truck. I don't care if its high security, you take him. You understand me?" I smiled at him. Now he's my new friend. He looked at her and said, "Yes, Aunty Sarah." So we walked back to his truck and he said, "Ho brah, why you never tell me you knew Aunty Sarah?" I said, "Because I didn't, but my mom did." He was my best friend after that. When I left, they told me I could come back anytime to finish up my stuff.

I got back to my car and I said a prayer of thanks for the help I received that day. When I got home, I called my mom and said, "Thank you." She says, "For what?"

I said, “Oh, for everything you ever did for me. But, more specifically right now, for helping me today in my work.” She asked, “And how did I help you?” I said, “You know your friend, Sarah, from Kalākaua School? She’s younger than you. You used to take care of her.” She sighed, “Yes, that’s my friend.” I said, “Well, she never forgot you. She helped me today. One guy gave me a bad time, but I behaved myself and she helped me. Thank you, mom. I love you.” She said, “I love you, too, son.”

So we talk about the ancestors. We learn from their stories. We can learn our kuleana by listening to them and following their direction.



Kuakolu ancestors (five generations)

Today, I'm a son, a grandson, a great-grandson. I'm also a father. Someday, I will be a grandfather and great-grandfather. In my life, I've been able to meet a lot of neat people, and I'll close with a short story about one other person who influenced my life, Uncle Mel Kalahiki.

One day, he came to my house and saw my pictures. He asked to buy some. I told him, "Uncle Mel, your money is not good in my house. Whatever you want, I will give you." He's another one of my dad's old friends and in fact, Uncle Mel is 'ohana (family). That day, we talked about our ancestors and the great chiefs, and he said something very profound that I will never forget. He said, "You know, Brook, we talk about the ancestors, we talk about pedigree—wonderful, great, but those accomplishments belong to them. What have you done?" Yes, what have I done?

So I pose the same question to you, my fellow Kānaka Maoli (Native Hawaiians), "What kind of ancestor will you be?" I believe that someday we'll all have a stewardship interview with our kūpuna. I know I'm going to see my grandpa again, I know it. Without a shadow of a doubt, I know. He's going to ask me, putting his hand on my shoulder, "Brook, what have you done with my name?" I will tell him, "Grandpa, I did the best I could with the talents that I had, and I did my best giving respect and love to your name and memory."



Brook and Drena
Parker family
2009

I teach my children to do the same thing, to know where they came from, because then it becomes like an obligation and a responsibility to continue the good things in what they do. They'll be good people and will show the aloha spirit 'cause that's the beauty of where we live. Sure we have beautiful mountains and beautiful beaches. We all know that. But the beauty of this place is the people, it is the aloha, the love. When you travel and say you're from Hawai'i, doesn't that bring a smile to people's faces? Even if they have never been here? It's because of the aloha we've been blessed with. We need to remember this when it comes to our kuleana.

We all have different talents, and we have to continue to improve on our gifts and share them with others.

I've shared some stories about how I learned kuleana. I learn from our ancestors, always remembering the question, "What kind of ancestor will I be?" It is my hope and prayer that you might continue to do the same with the talents that you've all been blessed with. We all have different talents, and we have to continue to improve on our gifts and share them with others. When we do that, the kūpuna are happy, and we continue to be what they want us to be.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brook Kapūkuniahi Parker is an artist whose family roots run deep in the islands; he is a direct descendant of John Palmer Parker, founder of the Parker Ranch on the Big Island of Hawai'i. John Parker's wife, Rachael Keli'ikipikānekaolohaka 'Ohiakū, was a great-granddaughter of Kamehameha the Great and his wife Kanekapolei. The majority of Brook's art portrays the deep love and admiration he has for his ancestors, and his clients include many educational, environmental, and community organizations. Brook currently resides in Wailupe, O'ahu, with his wife, Drena-Jo Kauakoko'iopohaiapunināmoku Kalani, and five children.