

EDDIE AIKAU & THE HAWAIIAN RENAISSANCE

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Eddie Aikau, Hawaiian Hero



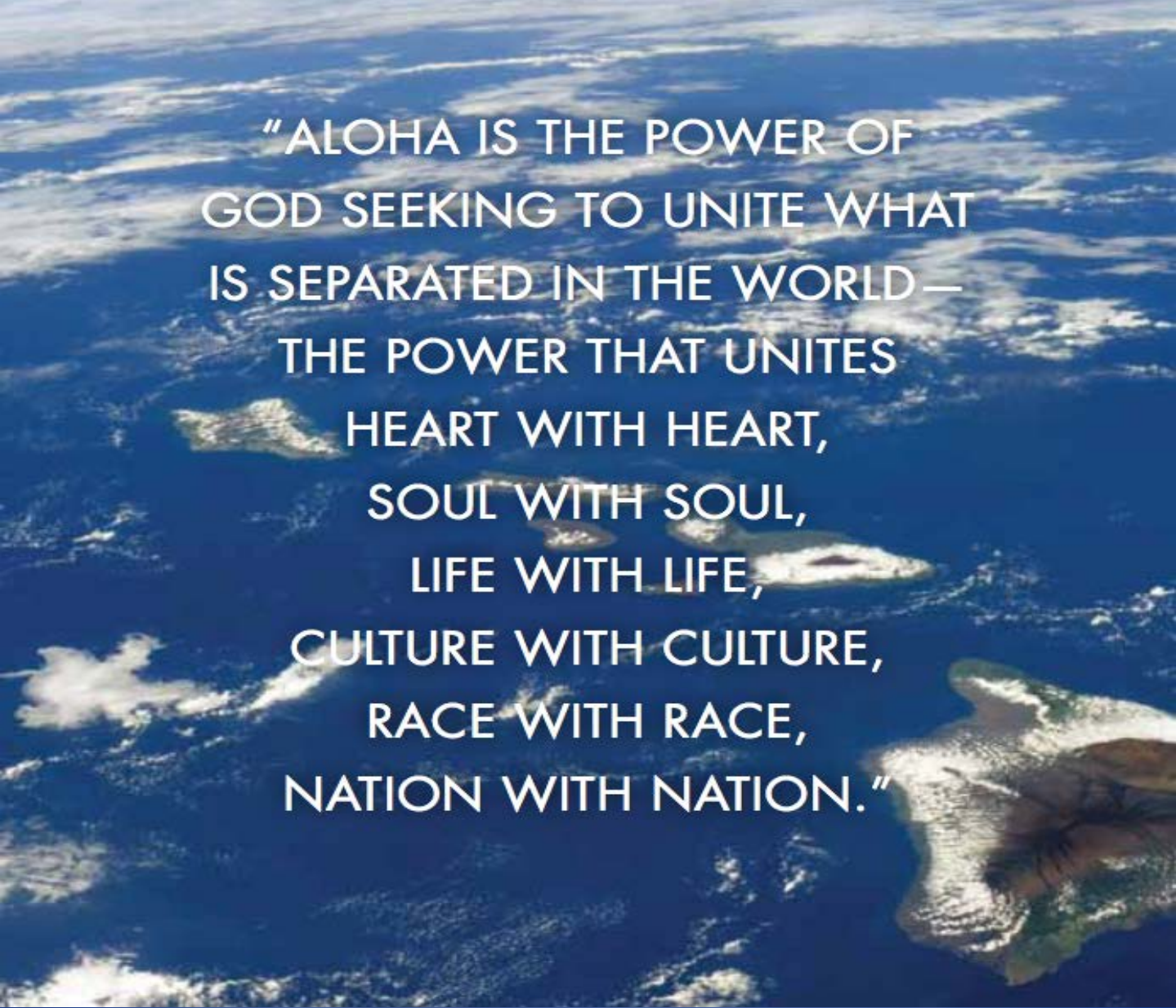
Before exploring Eddie Aikau's epic life, I want to share a story about how I came to write about this man and the Hawaiian icons who changed my life.



This is my Middle School Principal “Maje” Ted Richardson, who taught a course called “Cultures of the Pacific” at my school in Charleston, SC. And we both ended up in Hawaii.



Eddie Would Go: a local saying in Hawaii that's on bumper stickers & t-shirts. It soon became my mantra.

An aerial photograph of the Hawaiian Islands, showing the deep blue ocean and the white, snow-capped peaks of the islands. The text is overlaid on the image in a white, serif font.

"ALOHA IS THE POWER OF
GOD SEEKING TO UNITE WHAT
IS SEPARATED IN THE WORLD —
THE POWER THAT UNITES
HEART WITH HEART,
SOUL WITH SOUL,
LIFE WITH LIFE,
CULTURE WITH CULTURE,
RACE WITH RACE,
NATION WITH NATION."

Rev. Abraham Akaka, on Hawaii's statehood, 1959



EDDIE AIKAU was one of the first lifeguards on the North Shore. During his career, he saved hundreds of lives and no one was lost under his watch. When the waves were too big, the Captain would tell the lifeguards not to risk their lives and to call a rescue helicopter. But Eddie would still go whenever someone's life was at risk.



Eddie surfed some of the largest waves in the world at Waimea Bay. When even the best big-wave riders would back off from the monstrous waves, Eddie would go where no others had gone before.



In 1978, Eddie was offered the once in a lifetime chance to sail from Hawaii to Tahiti on the voyaging canoe Hokule'a. He hoped to retrace the ancient voyages of his ancestors, who sailed across the Pacific centuries before just using the stars as guides.



A photo of Eddie on the day he and a crew of 15 other crew members set sail from Honolulu to Tahiti aboard Hokule'a. They were just using the stars as guides on their epic voyage.



But the voyaging canoe capsized in a storm, and the crew was stranded at sea. Knowing they needed help, Eddie paddled his surfboard toward the nearest island to save them. It was almost 15 miles away, but Eddie knew he had to go. He was never seen again.



Though Eddie was lost at sea, his spirit lives on in Hawaii and throughout the surfing world. Along with a big-wave contest bearing his name, Eddie was honored during the recent Worldwide Voyage of the Hokule'a.



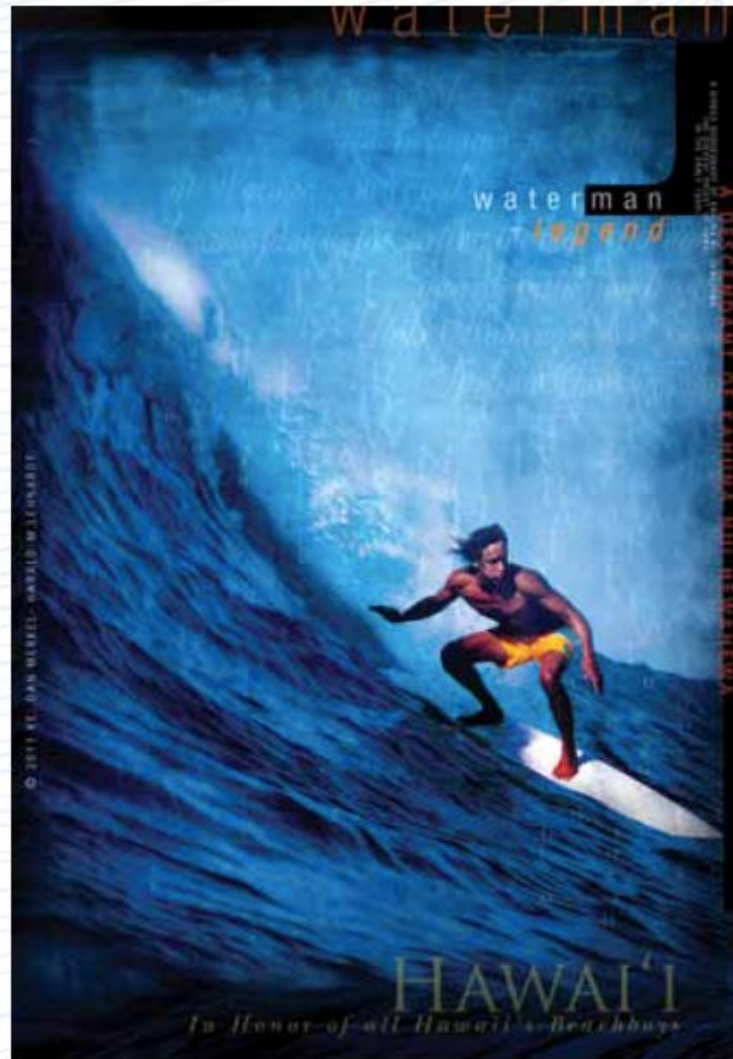
On his memorial at Waimea Bay and the plaque on Hokule'a, these words pay tribute to Eddie's memory: "Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).



Each year, the best big-wave riders in the world gather together at Waimea Bay for the Big Wave Contest in Memory of Eddie Aikau. At the opening ceremony, they pay homage to his leadership and legacy.



Haunted by his memory, Eddie's younger brother Clyde sailed on the Hokule'a years later to complete his brother's journey. When he reached Hawaii, he was overcome with emotion. "I feel like I brought Eddie home." Clyde went on to win the first Eddie Contest at Waimea Bay in honor of his brother's memory.

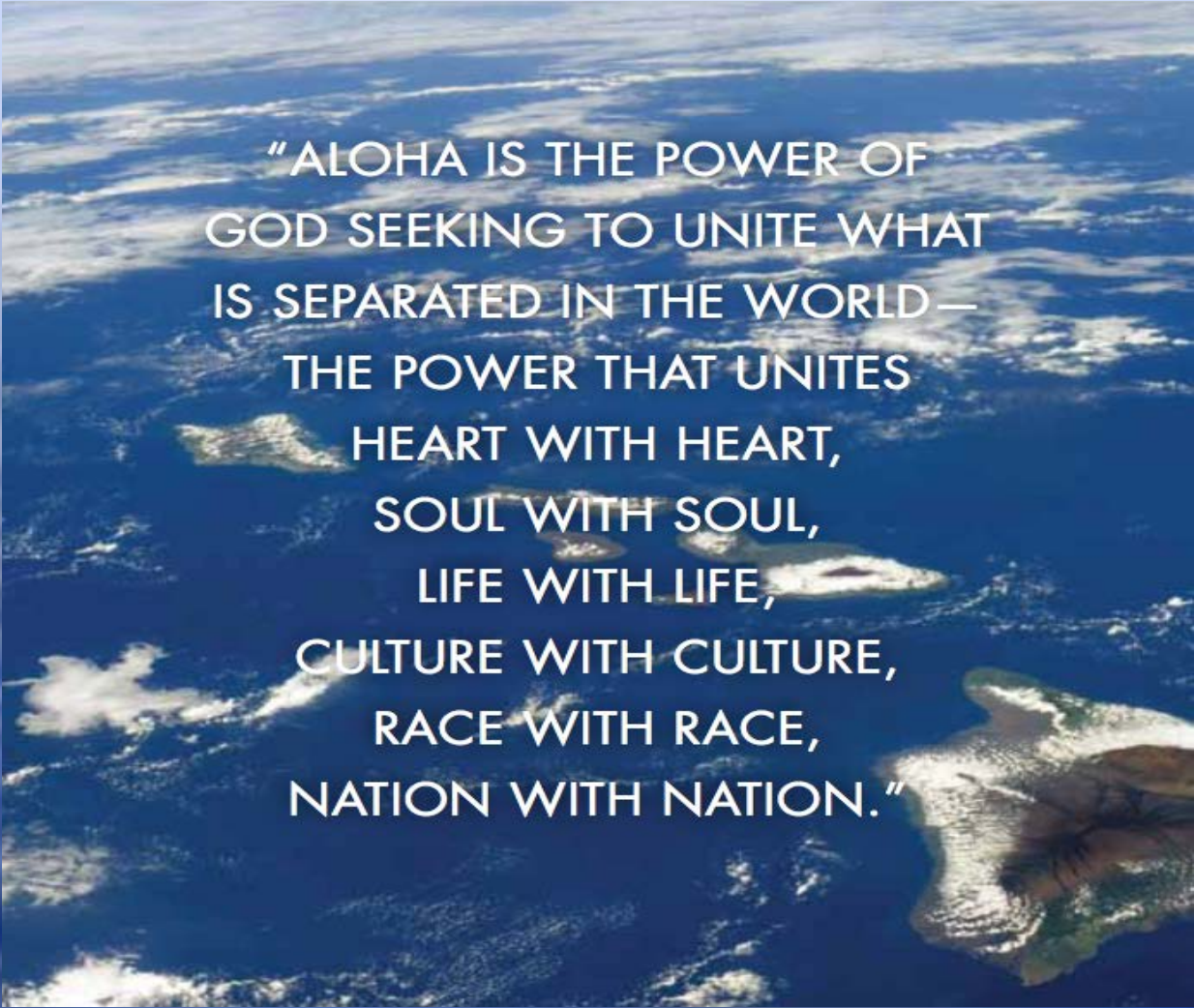


Artwork: Harald M. Lehnardt / Photo of Eddie: Dan Merkel

Though Eddie was lost at sea, his spirit still inspires people today. How does his story inspire you and what would you do?



From 2014-2017, Hokule'a crew members sailed around the world in this 60' canoe. Overcoming my fears, I joined them for one leg of the Worldwide Voyage in New Zealand. It was an amazing experience, inspired by Eddie's spirit of adventure.

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The word Hawaii literally means Breath, Water & Spirit like the story of creation in the Bible. I hope you were moved by that spirit today. ALOHA & MAHALO.