

# Na Wahine O Ke Kai

By Ron Haworth

If experience is the best teacher, waterman Mike Holmes earned his Ka'iwi Channel Survival Ph.D. while steering *Leilani* in the 1966 Molokai to Oahu Canoe Race. Fifteen to twenty foot swells and wind gusting to 30 knots was the norm and only six of the 12 canoes finished.

Waikiki Surf Club's *Malia* went ama over three times climbing the face of waves. Lanikai finished with five seat empty as four crew members were too sick to paddle. Hawaiian Civic Club had their koa canoe *Uwila* break up under tow. (*Outrigger*, The Koa Log June 2015).

So it was with good reason he was asked by the Na Wahine O Ke Kai Race Committee for his opinion whether the race should be run or be cancelled due to snarly seas. Holmes was also scheduled to escort a crew made up of marathon paddlers from across the U.S. and Canada. But none had made an open ocean change. He related his '66 memories and cautioned against racing.

"I have made poor decisions in my own ocean career and fortunately I'm still here to steer those further down the learning curve and to impress on them the dangers of not respecting the life threatening awesome power of the sea," Holmes said. He is still the teacher.

Mike DeRego, chairman of the Na Wahine Safety Committee and skipper of the official race boat *Maggie Joe*, and a charter captain for 40 years, told the committee he had come to Molokai that Thursday and had never seen the Kaiwi Channel so rough.

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Kamoa Kalama, the coach of three crews, estimated only 10 of the canoes would finish the race and the balance were just not qualified for the extreme conditions.

DeRego, after all consideration, sadly announced the race was cancelled. Understandable, many crews second guessed this decision. They had trained for months and the dollars spent toward the race were not retrievable.

Skin and bone and equipment are no match for a wild ocean which gives no quarter at baptism and would be a severe challenge for the tested paddler.