

Na Wahine O Ke Kai

By Mary Franco

For three weeks before the race I was worried about the weather. I knew we had trained hard enough and were prepared, but I wanted that extra edge. The channel had always been rough for our race, giving clubs from Hawaii the advantage.

But somehow I could feel that this year would be different. As we flew over the channel on our way to Molokai, there wasn't one white cap in sight. But it was only Friday. The weather could still change.

The weather did change. On Saturday, it started raining. Then came the thunder and lightning. Not a good sign.

At the coaches meeting, we were told that the main road to Hale-O-Lono was washed out. The officials were looking into alternate routes to the race site and were optimistic that the race would start as scheduled.

At the crew meeting I could sense that the race the next day would be different from any of the previous races.

The hours before the race are always the worst. Every crew member deals with the anxiety in their own way. I tossed and turned all night, waking up every few hours to check the clock. By the time the alarm rang at 4:30 a.m., I was tired of tossing and turning and ready to get this race underway. We met at 5 a.m., tried to choke down some breakfast, and went to catch the bus to Hale-O-Lono.

With three teams to a bus, the caravan left the hotel and headed for the lower road to the race site. Half-way down the coral road the caravan stopped. Part of this road had also been washed away by the heavy rains; we waited over two hours for the road to be repaired.

As I sat in the bus watching the sun rise, the 7 a.m. starting time came and went. Three hours earlier, I was ready to race. But as we waited for the road to be fixed, I started wondering if there would really be an 8th annual women's Molokai to Oahu race.

The road was finally fixed, and the caravan made it down to the race site by 8 a.m. We were then told that the race would begin at 9 a.m. One more hour to wait.

We blessed the Leilani and ourselves with Auntie Eva's holy water. We joined hands and said a prayer. We listened to the race director give her last words of wisdom. We sang Hawaii Aloha. Then we finally carried the canoe down to the water and paddled out to the starting line.

Out on the line, I could see that the ocean wouldn't be helping us today. There was barely any breeze and no pronounced swell that we could take advantage of. The conditions would definitely benefit the mainland crews.

Off Shore, Hui Lanakila, and Tahiti jumped off the line. We were in fourth with Illinois Brigade right on our tail.

By La'au point, we had passed everyone but Off Shore.

We battled for second with the Brigade for the next two hours. Then, without warning, they started pulling away from us. The remainder of the race was just plain hard work.

As Off Shore and the Brigade slowly increased their lead, we had to keep motivated. Walter Guild kept telling us we still had a chance. We had the best course, the leaders would have to come up to our line. Keep pushing, never give up.

Well, we kept pushing, working hard, making the canoe move as fast as we could. We pushed ourselves hard for the last five hours and didn't give up till the canoe crossed the flags at Fort De Russy beach.

As we crossed the line, I thought to myself that this race was the first one we've done on our own. We paddled the whole 40.8 miles without help from the ocean or wind.

We made it in spite of poor visibility during rain squalls. We crossed the channel without the glory of the official boat, press boat or the helicopter following our every move.

Twelve paddlers, the Leilani, and a support crew of four entered the women's Molokai to Oahu race this year and finished a respectable third overall. Everyone involved had done their best; in my eyes, that's what paddling is all about. ☺



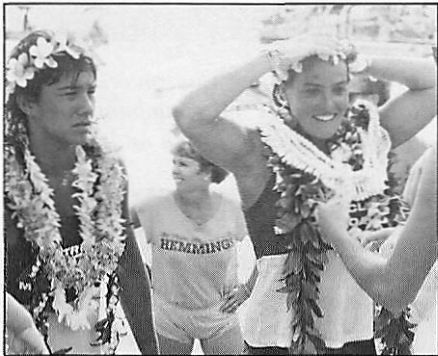
Outrigger's 1986 Na Wahine O Ke Kai crew included, Paula Carbone, Lisa Siggers and Mary Franco, front; Traci Phillips, Susan Barron, Pii Schneider, Muffer Scully, Tiare Finney, Donna Kahakui, Nina Williams, Jeanne Jenkins and Kaiulu Downing.



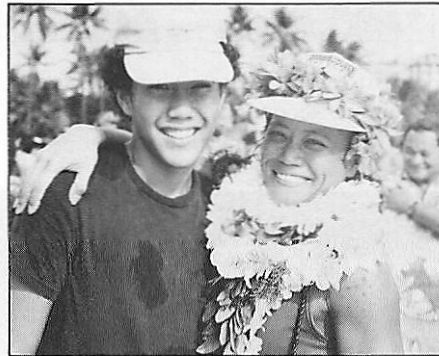
Welcoming committee is ready to greet the crew which won the koa division in 7:02:23 and was third overall.



Coach Mary Franco is interviewed by reporters.



Donna Kahakui and Nina Williams at the finish.



Jeanne Jenkins is greeted by son Mickey after the race.



Pii Schneider and Susan Barron paddled their first Molokai race.



Muffer Scully



Paula Carbone

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