

Tiare Richert Finney, the Newest Winged "O"

By Barbara Del Piano



Winged "O" wahine: Michele St. John and Tiare Finney.



The 1984 OCC Na Wahine O Ke Kai Champions: sitting: Sandra Haine, Kaiulu Downing, Traci Phillips, Kisi Haine, Tiare Finney. Standing: Coach Tom Connor, Mary Franco, Lesline Conner, Jeanne Jenkins, Muffer Scully, Mary Mason, Katy Bourne.

Tiare Richert Finney and I pulled into the Outrigger parking garage at the same time, coincidentally parking our vehicles directly across from each other. As I started toward the stairs, she called out to me.

I was startled because she was driving a big black Chevrolet Colorado truck. "Is that yours?" I inquired. And when she replied "Yes," we both appeared rather surprised: Tiare, because why would anyone question her driving such a vehicle, and I, because I really don't know any other wahine who drives a big, black truck.

"How come," I asked, and she casually replied, "To carry my motorcycles around." Well, from that moment on, I knew this was not going to be the usual member interview.

The occasion was the induction of Tiare into the prestigious Outrigger Winged "O," a committee formed in 1968 to honor Outrigger members who have made exceptional contributions to the Club's athletic programs.

One of only eight women to be so honored, she has been an outstanding surfer, paddler, coach, motorcyclist, and has also served on the Outrigger's Board of Directors. In her spare time, she travels to the North Shore to ride and care for her horses.

Although she had surfed for years at Tongg's, and at Punahou had participated in swimming, diving and gymnastics, and was state champion for low hurdles in track and field, Tiare had never paddled a canoe until joining the Outrigger at the age of 27. From then on, it was a major part of her life.

In 1979, her very first year of paddling, she was asked to join the crew of the inaugural women's Molokai race, Na Wahine O Ke Kai. At the start, Tiare recalls feeling terrified, with her heart beating in her face, but Outrigger won the race, and since then, she has paddled across the channel 14 times.

Other than Molokai, Tiare has lost track of the number of times she has paddled in the various regattas and long distance

races; but in addition to the Leeward Kai, Macfarlane, Kaupiko, Waimanalo, Paiaina, and Kamehameha Day regattas, she has participated in distance races such as the Dad Center Memorial and E La Hoe Na Wahine.

She's traveled to the other islands to compete in the Hanalei Bay Regatta, Duke Kahanamoku Iron Women's, and Queen Lili'uokalani races on the Big Island. Tiare was on the winning crew of both HCRA and OHCRA championships several times.

She traveled to New Zealand and Tahiti for the World Sprints, an international competition held at a different site each year, winning a gold and two silver medals. She also paddled from Newport Beach to Catalina Island, a distance of more than 32 miles.

Traci Phillips has paddled with Tiare many times and has always found her extremely motivating. An outstanding kayaker, Traci credits Tiare with facilitating her first appearance at the Olympics in the late 1980s.

Tiare asked Traci to accompany her and husband John to San Diego as a sitter for her young son, Thomas. John's business trip lasted only a week, but Tiare extended Traci's trip an additional seven days so she could visit Newport Beach, find a place to stay and arrange to train in the West Coast town.

For several years, Tiare accompanied the Club's all-male motorcycle team to the Big Island as a helper- hence her nickname, "Mamamoto." She and a small group of wahine supplied the men with everything from Band-Aids to champagne and caviar.

For three consecutive years, beginning in 2005, she actually participated in the grueling day-long race around the mountain and down over dirt, dust and lava. Tiare describes it as "like riding on the moon."

For her 40th birthday, while pregnant with daughter Elizabeth, her husband, John, presented her with a Harley Davidson motorcycle. Not the typical birthday present for a 40-year-old preg-



Tiare in full Mauna Kea motorcycle racing mode.



Tiare pours champagne for the winners of the Dad Center race in cup she donated for the race.

nant mom, but then, Tiare is certainly not “typical.”

Tiare’s flair for athletics obviously runs in her family; her mother, Loretta Turnbull Richert, was a noted speedboat and car racer in her day, not the usual sports for women. Since the Dad Center race had never had a trophy. On the death of her father Tiare’s mother donated a beautiful cup she had won in 1932 in a speed boat race at Lake Como in Italy. She was the only woman competing against dozens of men. It became a perpetual trophy for the Dad Center Race after Domie Gose constructed a koa base on which names of the winners are inscribed.

During her tenure on the Board of Directors, Tiare served as liaison for the Historical, Entertainment, Canoe Racing, and Motorcycle committees. She originated the idea of the Keiki Carnival, a great success for many years, which included dunking booths, arts and craft projects and games of all sorts.

She began coaching paddling for Boys 13, and Girls 13, and continued with each group through the ages of 18.

Through the years, Tiare has been an inspiration to many young paddlers, instilling in them her “Go for it!” attitude. Liz Perry tells a story that describes her determination and dedication to the sport she loves so well, as well as her willingness to help others.

“We were doing the Dad Center distance race, and I asked Tiare if she might help out by paddling with the beginners.” “On one condition,” she replied, explaining that a painful shoulder injury prevented her from making the open ocean changes usually required for a distance race, but she offered to go as far as she could-for as long as she could, if she could then go out and not return.

“We made the changes with the other paddlers and she kept on going for many, many, many miles, but eventually needed to come out. From the escort boat, Tiare cheered the crew on, but

without her the canoe began to lose ground and those we had been ahead of, suddenly began to pass us.

“Tiare couldn’t stand it, and her competitive spirit overcame her shoulder pain and she pleaded to return to the canoe. As soon as she got back in, we regained our position, and although we didn’t win, Tiare sure showed a lot of novice paddlers how to get fired up and paddle hard!”

One of Tiare’s not so well known talents is fishing, a sport she indulges in as often as she can, both in Hawaii and on the Mainland. She enjoys her annual trip to Alaska for salmon season and comes home every year with her limit.

Despite her exceptional accomplishments, she is very unassuming, modest and unpretentious. Tiare believes that her life has been blessed with many adventures, but her greatest achievement has been raising two beautiful children into adulthood, and being married to John Finney. They will be celebrating their 35th wedding anniversary in October.

And who can forget the Haunted Houses she created each Halloween in the Women’s Locker Rooms. They were scary enough for the kids, but even drew screams from adults. She held a hat contest each 4th of July among her girl paddlers that brought many smiles at the Club and Waikiki Beach.

Remember her old VW van that was loaded with whatever might be needed during an event? She helped many with pep talks, first aid, food or drink in their time of need. It was “Mama’s Van”.

Tiare Finney is indeed an exceptional athlete, a superb motivator and has been an inspiration to many young paddlers who have been influenced by her competitive “Go for it!” spirit.

Congratulations Tiare on your indomitable spirit and commitment to the Outrigger Canoe Club.