

JOHNNY'S GIRLS

By Barbara Del Piano



FAR LEFT: Front: Yvonne "Blondie" Boyd, Lorraine "Brownie" Williams. Back: Loretta Carter, Johnny Hollinger, Lois Gilman.

LEFT: Johnny Hollinger, Blondie Boyd, May Freeth, Barbara Borthwick, Alva Janssen.

Everybody knows about "Duke's Boys." They were the group of young men from the Outrigger that Duke Kahanamoku gathered together to form a crew and trained them to paddle in the first Walter J. Macfarlane Regatta in 1943. Over the years the crew changed, but whoever paddled on that six-man senior crew coached by Duke became part of that famous group.

But there was another group of paddlers assembled by a great coach for the first Macfarlane, although they have never received the recognition they deserve. So, 70 years later, let's give a round of applause to "Johnny's Girls."

Johnny Hollinger, like Duke, was an outstanding waterman and a true gentleman. He inspired many teenage wahine in the early 1940s to take up the sport in which few women participated at the time. Actually, it was Bob Fischer and Tommy Kiakona who formed the Outrigger's first female paddling crew in 1935, but it was the only female Outrigger crew and there were few other wahine crews to compete against at the time.

In 1943, Walter Macfarlane, the Club's popular president, died unexpectedly on the mainland and it was decided to honor him by naming an Independence Day regatta for him. While male coaches like Duke, Tommy Kiakona, John D. Kaupiko, Charley Amalu and others were assembling men's crews, Johnny Hollinger decided to round up four wahine to paddle in the race.

That first crew that Johnny put together consisted of Lorraine "Brownie" Brown, Loretta "Laurie" Carter, and Lois Gilman, with Yvonne "Blondie" Boyd as stroke. None of the girls had paddled much before and he really worked them hard, but at the same time built up a strong sense of both teamwork and team spirit.

The girls couldn't wait for the Fourth of July to make their debut on the waves. When they didn't make the cut for the first OCC crew, they were terribly disappointed, but Johnny came through for them. He entered them under the name of the Queen's Surf Team and they won the race.

Johnny did more than coach *wahine* paddling crews. When he was inducted into the Outrigger Winged "O" in 1964, he was commended as someone who was a true friend of the young people of the Club. "He was always volunteering his time, talents, and equipment to youngsters who were eager to learn to surf, swim, paddle, or steer a canoe."

In his oral history, the late Paul Dolan remembers "bumming beat-up boards from Johnny Hollinger when learning to surf."

Anita Berg also recalls borrowing long wooden boards from Johnny when she was learning to surf.

Johnny was born on July 25, 1894, one of 11 sons and three daughters of Thomas Hollinger, who was born in Canada, and a mother who came from Portugal. Thomas was a blacksmith, and as horses were the major means of transportation in those days, he had a flourishing business. He was also the Royal Ferrier to King Kalakaua. Their home was located on property which ran between Paki Avenue and Leahi Street, where a park is now located behind the Waikiki/Kapahulu Fire Station. Johnny learned his father's trade but ended up as a machinist at Pearl Harbor. He spent most of his free time on the beach, along with his brother Bill and many of his other siblings.

Johnny joined the Outrigger Canoe Club in 1923, at the age of 29, and from then on, devoted himself to helping others, especially young members, in learning water sports.

In 1948, Johnny took on a new group of paddlers consisting of sisters Anita and Doris Berg, Ivanelle Mountcastle, Pat Honl and Pam Anderson. At other times, May Freeth, Helen Haxton, Barbara Borthwick, Joan Kaaua, Carol Muirhead, Alva Janssen and Pat Barker joined that special group. His paddlers won practically every race they entered.

All of Johnny's Girls considered him not only an excellent coach, but a mentor and a true gentleman. He inspired them to become physically fit by surfing and exercising and personally helped them in both.

There are only a few of Johnny's Girls still around today, but those that are still hold his memory in the highest esteem, and even after more than half a century, remember him as a strong motivator and some one who had a lasting influence on their lives.

In those days, the Macfarlane Regatta and the Kamehameha Day Races were the only major paddling events until an Aloha Week event was added; the competition consisted of Outrigger, Hui Nalu, and the newly formed Waikiki Surf Club, although occasionally a team like "Queen's Surf" would enter at the last minute.

Today, there are more than 8,000 paddlers registered in the state; 18 clubs in the Oahu Canoe Racing Association and 77 in the Hawaii Canoe Racing Association. Without the inspiration and dedication of early coaches and mentors like Duke and Johnny, canoe paddling may not have become the island-wide, popular sport it is today.