

Add Water

*A teenager learns about spearfishing—along
with friendship, courage and growing up—in the waters
off Waikiki during the 1950s*

By MICHAEL BAUGHMAN

The purest joy of all is the joy of nature.

—LEO TOLSTOY, in a letter to his wife

I suppose I grew up one of the luckiest boys alive. My parents moved to Honolulu in 1949 when I was 11 years old and we stayed until I graduated from Punahou School at 17. At Punahou I studied hard enough to qualify as a better than average student and, more important to me then, I made something of a name for myself in athletics: as an end in football, a center in basketball, and a broad jumper and occasional sprinter in track.

But what mattered more than anything to me through all those years was the time I spent in local waters with my diving mask, spear and sling. As time passed it seemed increasingly obvious that classes, sports and the shifting social feuds and alliances at school were diversions from what really mattered: the limitless ocean, and its elemental and mysterious life.

Most of my beach time was spent at Waikiki near the Outrigger Canoe Club, located in those days between the

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Royal Hawaiian and Moana hotels. Incredible as it may seem to anyone who has visited Hawai'i since about 1960—which is to say since statehood and jet travel—the Royal and Moana were then the only hotels of any size in Waikiki. Even on summer weekends, it was, if not a lonely beach, a rather quiet, peaceful one. Palm fronds clattered in trade winds, and waves hissed up and down the gently sloping white sand beach. On a particularly crowded afternoon a dozen surfers might be out, along with three or four eight-man canoes of tourists from the two hotels.

I had three distinctly different sets of friends—student friends, athlete friends and beach friends. With students I competed for grades and sometimes shared or argued ideas, so we were never really very close. My teammates and I worked hard together physically and experienced the powerful, short-lived joys and sorrows of athletic competition. Without doubt I was closest of all to my beach friends, and that fact taught me at an early age that the natural world exerts powerful and nearly always positive influences on human relationships. Outdoors we became closer, because we felt more genuinely alive than we ever did in classrooms, or on basketball courts or football fields.

My beach friends were a varied group. Among them
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