

Captain Kalepa Interview St. John, US Virgin Islands, 2016

Kalepa: It's Chad Kalepa Baybayan. (spells it out). I'm from – I grew up in Lahaina Maui. I currently reside in Kona on the Big Island. I work for the University of Hawaii at the Imi Loa Astronomy Center – I'm their navigator in residence. I've been reassigned by the University to help with the Malama Honua Project for the next at least another year and a half.

Stephanie: Fantastic. How long does your relationship with the Hokule'a go, how long-

K: Oh, I've been – I first sailed on her in 1975, when she made her first maiden voyage to Maui. Sailed up to my island and I got on board. So, what's that 1975 to 2016. What's that... 10, 20, 30, 40, 41 years.

S: That's a long time to be sailing this canoe.

K: Lucky. Very fortunate.

S: You must feel you must have done a lot - have you done a lot in terms of construction?

K: Well I worked on, not the building of this canoe, I've worked on other canoes. The building of it. I've done a lot of dry docking episodes, and from the grunt level, pulling on the ropes, sanding, and just working my way up the ladder. I'm not a natural builder, but I know how to build canoes, I know who I need, I know who has the skill sets in the state of Hawaii. I know how to ask people, I know how to build partnership with all the different individuals so they feel that they're contributing to something worthwhile, and that's probably what I do best is making people want to collaborate.

S: That's the job of a captain, huh?

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K: Yeah, it's kind of one of the skill sets you need to do is to give people a mission and get them to rally around the mission and get them to deliver on executing and delivering on that mission.

S: So, tell me what the name of this voyage is - what's the mission of this voyage?

K: Well *Malama Honua* means caring for the planet. Honua meaning planet and malama in the very broad sense means to take care of, to share, to collaborate, so the project is about collecting stories of different groups doing good work at stewarding the planet and posting it on our website. That's one thing around their effort at education. Raising awareness about the state of the world's oceans. The world's oceans is the largest incubator for oxygen and the largest regulator for climate. And we are not as a human population, not pointing fingers at any one nation, we are not doing that good a job of taking care for the world's oceans. The world's oceans takes up two thirds of the planet's global mass, so it's so critical to regulating climate change and processing oxygen. If you take a deep breath today fifty years from now if we keep on going on this path we're not going to be taking in the same amount of oxygen.

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K: But our state isn't hopeless. It's about raising a campaign of awareness, it's about going around and looking at groups organizations, we're not about telling people what they need to be doing, rather we're about learning from communities, about what their efforts. And in the very end with this collection of stories, we'll have a network of like-minded organizations that we can feature on our website. And third thing is learning about indigenous cultures, people of the place, and celebrating their heritage and collecting those stories as well. And the fourth thing again is that traditional canoe. We could be sailing on a monohull sailboat but we're not. We're sailing on a double hull voyaging canoe. And we practice our non-instrument navigation whenever it's practical. We always are looking to build capacity by training new people. Sharing the legacy of

non-instrument navigation and the whole legacy of voyaging exploration that embodies the spirit of the oceanic people that settled the Pacific. And just our commitment to keep on getting people to be inspired by the fact that they're descended from the world's greatest voyagers and navigators.

S: So how do you feel about arriving in the Virgin Islands - is there anything in particular that you want to share with the Virgin Islands?

K: Well we'd like to share our story.

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K: But we'd also like to learn about the St John's community. Things they value, things they cherish, and just get to learn this community like I said, this community is new to voyaging canoe, hopefully by the time we leave next Friday we'll feel a kinship with the people here on St John.

S: And so, tell me about the voyage you just did?

K: From Natale Brazil to St John, it was pretty much a textbook sail. The first 48 hours the winds were light, so we had to motor. We kept egging to cut the tow rope, we did a few times and then the wind speeded up and then we were reminded that we needed to maintain six knots. And when we got into the wind we started to sail. And this canoe's fast, superfast. She just outruns the escort boat so we were constantly having to close our sails and wait for them to catch up.

S: How fast do you go?

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K: Oh shucks, we were doing 10 knots, we were doing 10 knots on a cruise, on a dime, and that's without all our sails open. But we like to cruise at about 8 knots - yeah superfast. But it was a textbook sail. I say textbook because the winds were off our starboard quarter, our stern quarter. And you know although we practiced navigation we knew the land was all around us. The South American continent was off our port side and the Caribbean was on our bow, basically just sailed northwest. We didn't have good celestial clues to guide us because it was overcast, but the wind was consistent and the ocean swell was from the same direction as the wind so we could steer off of that. And then home in pretty accurately where the islands were. We attempted to find Barbados, and we did find it, found it at night. And then once we found Barbados the rest was pretty basic - we knew where all the islands were. In turned from ocean navigation to piloting between islands.

S: And so how is it doing navigation you're in an ocean you've never been in before?

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K: The nighttime sky is the same. Basically, St John is the same latitude as the south point on the big island of Hawaii. So we're basically sailing in familiar waters, the tropics, it's the same night sky, it's the same wind from the same direction. It's the same it's just a new environment, a new ocean. But basically, all the ocean is one, all ocean is one, so like I said we left Hawaii in May of 2014, and we've been sailing we're heading back to US territory now this is US territory now, and it feels very comfortable and very feel like you're at home again.

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S: So, tell me what legs other than the leg to here that you've been the captain for?

K: I sailed from Hawaii to Tahiti, Tahiti to the Cook Islands, to Samoa, I sailed around Samoa and I think there were like three months of sea time and I got off for a month. And they took the canoe for some wood to the north town of Waitangi and I got back on the canoe. I took the canoe down to Auckland and sailed all the way down to south-island and back up. Then I got on our second canoe, Hikianalia and brought her back up to Papeete. Then I flew to Brisbane, and Bruce

got off, and I got on and I sailed the canoe from Brisbane to Darwin. And then I rested for two legs. I rested for the Bali leg and the Mauritius leg. And I got back on in Mauritius and I sailed to Mozambique and Richards Bay in South Africa and sailed all the way to Cape Town. Then I flew home and got back on in Brazil. I sailed from Brazil to St John, and St John to BVI and Cuba and Florida.

S: Out of all that time, that is a lot of— that is months and months we're talking about, of voyaging. Was there any particular moment that stands out for you as the most extraordinary moment of the voyage that you've done so far?

K: Every trip has its own personality got its own issues. Basically, I really look forward to the crew that I'm tasked to lead, the new individuals. I really aspire to build collaboration and cohesiveness I tell them that you know when we come together we have the beginnings to make a good team but we're not a team. We're just a collection of individuals coming together to focus on being successful at one endeavor. Throughout the process of the voyage we become a team. And if you just look out for each other and you keep working tirelessly and unselfishly towards that end in a very end of the voyage you should be rewarded. So not one leg stands out in my mind. It's just been an accumulation of voyages and it's been a continuity of one trip one leg and one crew and another crew and yeah.

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S: Do you ever wake up in the morning and go wow I would never have imagined that we would be in the Hokulea in the Caribbean? In Brazil. Does it ever kind of hit you?

K: Not at all. The world, as unique as communities are we're so much alike. We're so much alike. Every place we've been to the people have been very, very, welcoming. The entire trip has been pretty good. We've had one or two bumps along the road but considering how long this trip is, that's awesome if the most you can do is complain about one place out of the many places you've been that's good. It's all good. And every place has been fantastic for us.

S: How was it going - did you do the sail around Cape of Good Hope then?

K: Yeah.

S: And how did that go? It sounded like it was not what you guys expected.

K: It was everything we had expected. We had done years of research on that trip so we knew it was going to be the most challenging of all the legs. It was a challenge - it was more an issue of meteorology than it was of navigation. It wasn't a navigational challenge because the coastline of South Africa is very off your starboard side as you're going around. So, it's just a matter of understanding the weather systems and timing so that you're only sailing in good weather from port to port. It doesn't matter if you arrive in port in good weather, you don't push on to the next port. You have to have the discipline to say, I need to stop and wait. Because the weather's going to change. You don't want to be caught out there with bad weather.

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K: In fact, when we were arriving in Africa there was a boating accident. Fishing boat went down twenty one crew members - 12 of the crew members were lost. In fact, when we arrived in Cape town, they had a welcoming ceremony on Saturday and they had all these tents set up on the dock, on the next day they had the services for the crew members who perished in their fishing boat. South Africa is not a place to take boating without a high degree of seriousness. It's a very dangerous community for boaters.

S: I guess the thing that sounded surprising was, or maybe I assumed, you would hit weather. I just had it in my head that there's always weather there. And it sounds like the weather wasn't bad .

K: Oh, the weather was bad. It's just that we were in port when the weather was bad. We're just very disciplined about - not being out in bad. Because the canoe cannot take bad weather. Those winds and raging seas we cannot, we would not, survive. So, it's just a matter of understand - this is where technology comes in right? The assistance of weather satellites and super good forecasting, we had forecasting coming from NOAA, from South African sources, we had local knowledge and it's understanding all these different resources and pulling them all together, in an understandable way to interpret information and the best knowledge is local knowledge. The guys who boat up and down the community and talking with them we learned a lot. And it kind of changed our idea of how to get around South Africa.

S: And speaking of that, how often are you able to tap into local knowledge - have you found outside of the Polynesians that are very many voyaging cultures with much intact knowledge?

K: You know, relatively speaking, like when we pulled into Mozambique there was hundreds of *dhow*s, traditional fishing vessels. These guys - although we didn't have a conversation with them - these guys have been doing the same thing for hundreds of years in the same vessels. So, it's kind of a kindred spirit to see a native vessel sailing on the water, but South Africa it was basically local mariners, a local guys who go up and down the coast. That we tapped into and that was very, very, critical these old salty guys that understood who's been up and down the coast, and knew what weather to wait for us guys to leave.

S: So, then I guess this fishing boat wasn't a local fishing boat.

K: It was a local fishing boat. But it's not the - the fishermen they're just deckhands. Right? They get told by the owner of the boat "you're fishing." The weather changes it's up to the captain to pull the plug and get in. If the captain wants to wait out, hoping he can get more fish on, and he waits just a little bit too long then that's what happens. It's not the fishermen's fault. It's somebody bigger than them that are telling them that.

S: And so, if you had one big dream for this whole voyage other than the overall goal, the overall mission of the voyage which it sounds like you've really well kept in hand. But do you feel like there's something that you're hoping for the Hokule'a out of all of this?

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K: I think it's about - it's about generational learning. It's my hope that at the very end of the voyage we'll have built the capacity of people who are ready to accept the mantel of leadership and take the organization forward. That's all we're doing - we're just placeholders - Bruce, myself, Nainoa Thompson. We're just placeholders we're just setting up the table for the next group of people to come and make their own way. And if we're successful at what we're doing, our future will be secure. There's always the chance that things won't go as planned but I think we're laying a good foundation. I think this voyage is helping to build capacity. It's taken on a number of bodies and I'm pretty impressed with this crew.

They're *ele'u* - *ele'u*, in Hawaiian means quick learners, very energetic, very responsive, they get the job done real quickly. You don't have to tell people twice to do things. I basically just kind of manage but I also let my watch captains and apprentice navigators run the canoe. And I only step in when I think I need to step in. And if I'm not I'm down below sleeping because I expect my officers to lead. And they want to lead. They don't want to be told. They want to make decisions on their own. In leadership you've gotta to be in front but also most of the time you've got to be behind. Urging, supporting their growth as people.

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S: Yeah. And so what do you think is going to happen when you get to the US? What are you anticipating? Anything?

K: Chaos.

S: What do you mean?

K: I think east coast is going to be extremely busy. They're going to be demands on those guys I hope doesn't compromise the voyage. I just think it's so much "the Hokule'a is coming to town" and all the fanfare, and stuff like that. I think we need to maintain an even keel and understand the voyage and maintain the mission and communicate the mission well. And we just need to be- we need to be true to the intent of the voyage. Because New York City, I mean come on, can be wild.

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K: A lot of people want the attention of connecting with the canoe, so we just need to be, we need to protect our side of the - we need to embrace the communities we're going to meet but we also need to manage the voyage and be true to our mission.

S: And so, this is an important question that's kind of an irritating one - why bother? Why bother taking the Hawaiian canoe, spending all the money spending all the time, why bother doing this?

K: You know why? A couple of us Chad Payson - were in Japan and on the dock and we were talking about we sailed around the Pacific and the Pacific rim and what's the next challenge, and we just said we should just take the canoe around the world. And other people said the same thing: We should just take the canoe around the world. I don't think that it's - we have an agenda, a program that we need to fulfill, but really I think it's about whatever the next big challenge is that you want to accept, and we are a people who are constantly challenging ourselves to learn more to be better to elevate the bar. So why spend all that money? It's only money. In fact, I don't know if we have the money to finish the voyage. But I told Nainoa they kept postponing the voyage. And Bruce and I were - you're never going to be a hundred percent ready you need this you need that. We just go and we just do it and the money will come, but let's just get the - get it cranked up, and start sailing this canoe around the world. It's a leap of faith that this organization has to have. Nainoa is the front face of this organization - he's the person that has to be selling the voyage to all the big sponsors and donors. Me and Bruce, we got the gravy train job we just get on the canoe, we have a crew, they provide us with all the food. All we do is tell the boys what to do - when to open the sails when to close the sails, how to come in to a dock, how to get off the dock. I've got it good in this. Don't feel sorry for me. I got the plush job, I being paid by the University of Hawaii, I get to stay on the canoe. Only thing that's pretty tough for me, is that I'm away from my family quite a bit. My wife just asked me "when the hell you coming home?"

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S: So, when are you going home?

K: End of March - I'll be home end of March?

S: And so, what do you want people to know about Hawaii? Like when you're going around the world I'm assuming you're kind of like ambassadors right?

K: I would hope that they learn about Hawaii by learning about who I am. Kind of unique individual who has a great perspective on life, that likes to share a little bit about himself. I don't know what kind of word to use. Maybe aloha describes that general feeling that we're trying to portray. But yeah, just learn about the uniqueness of the people of Hawaii. We're listeners, a shoulder you can lean on, tell us your story more than we tell you our story.

S: So, do you feel like you're able to set much of an example when you go to places like Mozambique and South Africa?

K: Just by being generally humble. Not being standoffish. Not being arrogant. Being respectful of people. I think that's the most important thing.

S: That's great. And do you think you've inspired other people to try.

K: I'm not sure. I'm not sure. Hopefully. Hopefully they've been inspired?

S: Well is there anything else I haven't asked you that you wanted.

K: Well you can always come back and ask me before Tuesday.

S: Well likewise if you think there's anything else.

K: We're all good.

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