

// From behind designer sunglasses, the owner of Hawai'i's largest hotel chain peered out to sea. He is an addict, so time alone can be uncomfortable. His next chance to feel alright was hours away. In the interim, he would meet and greet and wait patiently, as always.

When the time came, he took off his clothes. Fifteen minutes later, he was where he needed to be, with others like himself. He was at Tongg's.

*My utter absorption in surfing had no rational content. It simply compelled me; there was a deep mine of beauty and wonder in it. Beyond that, I could not have explained why I did it.* – William Finnegan, *Barbarian Days: A Surfing Life*, 2015

To many, surfing calls with an urgency that tugs harder than career, fortune and even family. It is one reason that island graduates forego Creighton and Ohio State for UH and Windward Community College. Now, thanks to Ian 'Akahi Masterson, they can have their haupia and eat it, too.

Dubbed the "Surf Professor" by Jaime Lee Curtis, Masterson has been attached to his board since 1980. "When we moved to Kailua, I lived on a phenomenal street with about 20 other kids who were into surfing," he says. "I had lived in the mainland for four years of my life, and as a fourth-grader, I felt like I was way behind. I borrowed an old, purple single-fin, and my friend Ryan Churchill pushed me into a wave off Mōkapu. That was the start of my adventure. At that time, Castle Point was a pretty special place for me."

Surfing dates back thousands of years. Integral to Polynesian cultures, it is taken very, very seriously — and not so seriously. Sport, meditation, tribal ranking, relaxation, joy, life force, addiction.

*Throwing themselves upon their boards, tranquilly they wait for a billow that suits. Snatching them up, it hurries them landward, volume and speed both increasing till it races along a watery wall like the smooth, awful verge of Niagara.* – Herman Melville, 1849, two years before publication of *Moby-Dick*

At the age of 12, Masterson had a revelation after surfing North Beach on Marine Corps Base Hawai'i. "It was a defining moment for me," he says. "I went out and got barreled and then wrote a poem about it for English class. At that moment, I made a very conscious commitment to be a surfer and go on this massive voyage through my life."

Forty years later, the voyage continues. Masterson has held positions as a lifeguard, ocean recreation and safety specialist, archeologist and Hawaiian cultural practitioner. Eventually, he became an educator.

"My work in archeology and body surfing led Kalani Meinecke to ask me to develop a program at Windward Community College. I had to go home and really think about what it means to look at life through the eyes of a surfer," Masterson remembers. "In the last ten years, we've seen this huge shift in the language and technology behind surfboard design that comes from a western athletic viewpoint, and that's a rather narrow perspective."

» A good college education continues to be a path to success and happiness in life.





» The Professor uses a time-honored carrot-and-stick approach to inspire students to be their best.

Masterson's mission now is to dispel some harmful misconceptions and get surfing back to its roots. Beach bums we are not, he says, throwing (salt) water on stereotypes fostered over the years by commercialism. "It's really about 'ohana ... family."

Masterson has created curricula at both UH Mānoa and Windward Community College. His classes are more than just learning to surf. He leads a variety of programs at UH Mānoa, including Polynesian Surf Culture, Pacific Surf Science Culture and Technology, Mythology of Hawaiian Landscape, Environmental History of Hawai'i, and Ocean Safety. At WCC, he instructs students in Ocean Safety and in Recreation Thrill Craft Operators Safety. On his website, he offers surf lessons, retreats and academic workshops.



» Homework is assigned daily. "The honu ate my iPhone" is not an acceptable excuse for tardy submissions.

In olden times, as trees were felled and shaped into surfboards, prayers were made to the gods. The practice continues today among some devotees. "It's through ancient worship that we can come together and find understanding," says Masterson. "It comes through learning and practice, which provide the knowledge of what surfing is, as well as this way of life; and it continues to progress as we progress and become more in tune."

Through education, Masterson continues his mission to promote both culture and values through the spirit of surfing. His goal is to inspire future generations to become warriors to protect this way of life and the ocean.

"When we put together all of this Hawaiian innovation and get a better understanding that goes along with the values, then comes the responsibility and that privilege. We need to care for the sea and wear aloha as we project what a surfer is. It is our kuleana to be guardians — activated ocean warriors. Only surfers are going to save the sea."



SURF-BATHING—FAILURE.

» Mark Twain retired from surf-bathing at age 30. It is rumored that he took up writing. Illustration from *Roughing It*, 1872.

*In one place we came upon a large company of naked natives, of both sexes and all ages, amusing themselves with the national pastime of surf-bathing. Each heathen would paddle three or four hundred yards out to sea (taking a short board with him), then face the shore and wait for a particularly prodigious billow to come along; at the right moment he would fling his board upon its foamy crest and himself upon the board, and here he would come whizzing by like a bomb-shell! It did not seem that a lightning express train could shoot along at a more hair-lifting speed.*

*I tried surf-bathing once, subsequently, but made a failure of it. I got the board placed right, and at the right moment, too; but missed the connection myself. The board struck the shore in three-quarters of a second, without any cargo, and I struck the bottom about the same time, with a couple of barrels of water in me. None but natives ever master the art of surf-bathing thoroughly.*

Mark Twain, 1866 – ten years before publication of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* //