



# FISHING WITH DADDY BEN

BY NICOLE & TONI WONG

To me, there is no place on earth that Ben Wong belongs more to than Kaneohe Bay. Although he grew up in Kaimuki, he spent most of his weekends, since the age of 4, at the He'eia fishing pond and in Kaneohe Bay. There, his love and respect of the ocean was nurtured by his father, who eventually moved to Kaneohe to stay.

In the bay, my dad grew up doing just about every kind of salt water fishing there is. However, one of his favorites has to be throw netting. My dad learned the art at a very young age and taught us, his three daughters, the same way. But, he grew up doing it the old fashioned way and tells us all the time, "how nice it is now that the nets are made with suji instead of linen."

Today, we are afforded the luxury of riding a boat around the bay, but my father spent his youth walking the many reefs. Because of this, the reefs of Kaneohe bay are like the back of my father's hand and the road maps of his life. Here there are glimpses of my grandmother sewing nets, my father and grandfather throwing nets, and us, his children, torching late into the night. Torching at night was one activity that was always fun for the whole family. My dad would always plan the best night for this when the tides were low, the ocean was calm, and the skies were moonless. The ocean was my giant aquarium on those nights. Walking along the reefs in Kaneohe we enjoyed looking at the baby squid, balloon fish, opihi, o'ama, and white eels in the ocean.

As his daughters, we were very lucky. My father taught us to love and respect the ocean and the way of the bay. Some of my best childhood memories are fishing with my dad.



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Living on Kaneohe Bay we got to experience all kinds of fishing activities. Spinning, throw netting, and spearing are some of the many types of fishing my dad would take the family out to do on his days and nights off. And let's not forget all the fish we could eat! With my dad's background in cooking, he knows how to cook all kinds of seafood. Fresh ahi, steamed moi, and fried papio are just some of the delicacies he would prepare for the family. But most of all, he taught us where we come from and that this will always be our home.

Fishing was always a passion

of my father's so it was great when KHON approached him about doing Let's Go Fishing in 1998. Through Let's Go Fishing my father has been able to share old and new Hawaiian fishing traditions with the public. His long fishing history has given him the experience to inform and entertain on the show. My dad is the writer, producer, and director of Let's Go Fishing and it has always been important to him that the show imparts concern for conservation. He works hard to make sure that our future generations will be able to enjoy the same ocean resources we have today.



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## BEN SPEAKS

There is a t-shirt that I've seen with these words printed on it: Fishing is Life. For many of my family and friends, those 3 words say it all.

I grew up in a family full of fishermen. On my dad's side, his family was once the owners of the He'eia fishpond, located on O'ahu, near the landmark Hygenic Store. On my mom's side, no less than three uncles encouraged me weekly to provide them with oama as bait for their weekend fishing trips in exchange for loose change and snacks. One of my grand uncles, Uncle James, prepared and placed in his dry boxes every fish I ever gave to him, not for bait, but for his daily fish and poi meal.

And of course, all 3 generations of us spent our Sunday afternoons in front of the television to watch Bruce Carter, Hari Kojima, and later Stan Wright embark on fishing adventures on our favorite local program, Let's Go Fishing!

My fishing adventures with my father included trips to Wailupe for that sweet shrimp delicacy, opae lolo. We did overnights with our extended fishing ohana at Castle Point in Kailua for ulua and oio. In Kaneohe Bay, white crab, samoan crab, omaka, and sweet butter clams are part of the treasured memories. My Auntie Eva showed me how to hook mongoose fish and not to be afraid of night tako, even though they could bite the heck out of you. And I still remember the first mullet I caught with my linen throw net, long since retired. Back in some shoe box in my closet is a picture of me with my first rod and reel and my first fish caught spinning: barracuda!

Certainly life throws at you much

more than the challenge of catching a fish. Like most of us in Hawai'i, I've worked at more than one job at the same time to make ends meet. I spent 30 years in the restaurant business, did television stuff, radio stuff, real estate stuff, etc... I enjoyed working double time, it paid the mortgage and got my 3 kids through college. But when the pressure of work got to me, fishing saved the day!

In 1999, I became involved with the Let's Go Fishing show on KHON-TV. The amazing circumstances that

have brought me to this point of producing and hosting this nearly 40 year television tradition in Hawaii has been fun.

My friend, Sterling Kaya, whose father Fred was also very kind to me, is, as they say, cut from the same cloth. He shares the same DNA that many of us have with regards to our love of the ocean that surrounds Hawai'i. Most of you know Sterling through his fishing and tackle store Hanapa'a, his magazine Hawai'i Skin Diver, and this magazine Lawai'a.

Sterling has asked me to share a fishing story or two with you...

I was with my video camera in this "secret" fishing spot of mine when an old timer who was diving for tako (octopus) in the area came by to talk story and see what I was up to. We got to chatting about the bait fish we call "jumping jacks," the gobi that lives in the tidal pools formed by lava scoops. I told him that I always struggled when





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trying to catch these guys to use for ulua bait. So the old timer says to me, "Shut your camera, off. I don't mind you telling people about this, but I don't want this on camera." So, needless to say, my curiosity was spiking, and the camera went off. Then this old timer showed me something I'll never forget. In this tide pool, where 2 six-inch jumping jacks were hiding from me in the submerged cracks in the lava, the old timer placed his spear into the water. At the end of his spear he had placed one of the tako he had caught earlier. In his other hand he held a scoop net. It took only a few seconds and these jumping jacks were so frightened of the tako, they leapt out of the tidal pool, went air borne almost 2 feet, and were captured in mid-air with the scoop net in the old timer's other hand. He caught almost 20 of these prized bait fish in the next 15 minutes. Right there and then, I realized how much I still had yet to learn.

On another occasion, another memorable moment...

My brother-in-law, Harrison Lai, was one of the parents at Kahala Elementary School, who organized the school's Keiki Fishing Club. We were with the kids on the Kualoa Ranch property catching catfish. The usual environment of chaos and kids was taking place. Much of our time was spent untangling lines, unhooking fish, calming kids down, and looking at our watches to see how much longer this was going to go on. Then this young girl started shouting for assistance. She had a decent 10 to 12 inch channel catfish at the end of her line. One of the dad's scooped it out of the water and had placed it on the bank. In this fish's mouth was another smaller catfish, still wiggling! We pulled it out of the larger catfish's mouth and could see that the hook, with the shrimp used as bait on it still attached, was in the smaller catfish's mouth. This was right out of a cartoon. The kids and the parents were cracking up. I

was thinking: They're going to remember this for a long time!

The fact that many of us in Hawai'i have generations of history with our fishing lifestyle gives us both the privilege and the responsibility of participating in ocean resource management. What we love most in life, the ocean, deserves our full attention when it comes to policy making. In the parlance of government regulation, we, the "stakeholders" of our ocean environment need to be engaged with the policy making process. If we do not, well-funded organizations, some from out of state, some without the input from those of families who have lived for generations in these islands, will have the political muscle to impose their ideologies upon us.

It is a complicated issue. Most of us would rather go fishing than have to deal with this issue, as discussions regarding fishing regulations often add another level of stress to our daily concerns. But if we don't take on this thankless challenge, fishing as we know it, may become just a fishing tale.

Let's Go Fishing is broadcast on local FOX affiliate KHON-TV, Sundays at 5:30 pm. LGF is also cablecast on TIME WARNER cable service, Oceanic, on the CW 93 channel, Saturdays at 5:30 pm. Nearly 30 episodes are available for viewing on line at [www.benwongtv.com](http://www.benwongtv.com). Adventures include visits to O'ahu's neighbor islands of Moloka'i, Lana'i, Kaua'i, Maui, and the Big Island. Fishing destinations beyond the islands include Alaska, Guatemala, Tahiti, Micronesia, Washington State, Oregon, Nevada, Arizona, and more. Email Ben: [lgh@hawaii.rr.com](mailto:lgh@hawaii.rr.com)!