Lesson 3

A Canoe Is an Island

In 2007,

the Hawaiian canoe *Hōkūle‘a*

and another boat *Kama Hele*

sailed from Hawaii

all the way to Japan.

Uchino Kanako was a crew member.

Here’s her story.

1

I have always loved the sea.

When I was in college,

I visited Miyake-jima

with a friend of mine.

I explored the ocean

and fell in love with its beauty.

Ever since this visit,

I have really been interested in the sea.

I knew I had to learn more about the sea,

but I didn’t know where I could study.

And then I found a book

about Nainoa Thompson and the *Hōkūle‘a*.

I read about how this native Hawaiian learned traditional navigation skills

from his master Mau Piailug of Satawal.

I also learned

that the *Hōkūle‘a* successfully sailed

from Hawaii to Tahiti in 1976

by using traditional navigation.

I became very interested in the ancient skills

needed to navigate across the ocean.

I made up my mind to go to Hawaii,

and to take a look at the *Hōkūle‘a*

with my own eyes.

2

After I finished college,

I went to Hawaii to study ocean ecology

at the University of Hawaii.

I went to see the *Hōkūle‘a*.

She was back from a long voyage.

I began to participate in repairing the *Hōkūle‘a*

for the next voyage.

I trained to be part of the crew.

I learned about traditional navigation and Hawaiian culture.

In 2007,

the *Hōkūle‘a* was planning a five-month voyage

from Hawaii to Micronesia,

and then to Japan.

I felt honored

when I was asked to be a crew member on the canoe

from Micronesia to Japan.

In January 2007,

the *Hōkūle‘a* started out.

On the 56th day,

we arrived at Satawal in Micronesia.

People welcomed us warmly.

They carried a sign saying,

“Welcome to Satawal.”

Then we headed for Okinawa.

We were able to see the Big Dipper.

We could also see the Southern Cross.

Being familiar with the movement of about 220 stars

was just one of the skills which we needed.

We also learned to read the movement of the waves

and changes in wind direction.

We were on our way to Okinawa,

slowly but steadily.

3

The crew members

who were on the *Hōkūle‘a*

were busy.

The most important job

was steering the canoe.

Three teams took turns.

My team worked from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.,

and then from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m.

The team steering the canoe

had to stay alert all the time.

One night,

the ocean was exceptionally calm.

The sea was so quiet

that you could even see the reflection of the stars.

I was the only one on deck,

and I felt very peaceful.

I also felt very much connected

to the great universe.

I was one tiny person on a tiny canoe.

But the fact is

that I was part of the whole.

After leaving Micronesia,

we traveled a distance of almost 2,000 kilometers.

The stars and the sun and the waves guided us.

As we got near Okinawa,

I felt that we were one big family.

It was morning.

“Look!

I can see something,”

cried one of the crew members.

It was an island—Okinawa.

But to me at that moment,

it was much more than an island.

Land, water, people and other life

in the middle of this vast ocean.

It was truly a miracle.

4

On June 9, 2007,

we reached Yokohama,

the end of our trip.

As I think about the voyage,

I have a deeper appreciation

for our relationship with nature.

Traditional navigation teaches us

how to see nature.

It also teaches us

that nature is providing everything we need.

We have to learn

how nature works

in order to receive its gifts.

The Hawaiians say:

“A canoe is an island,

and an island is a canoe.”

We can also think of our planet Earth as a canoe

in the vast universe.

What are we doing with “our canoe”?

What do we value?

Where do we want to go?

What is our role

as crew members on our canoe?

After the voyage to Japan,

the *Hōkūle‘a* set sail to go around the world in 2014

to raise these questions.

We are all part of nature.

We can learn to work together with nature

to make our canoe,

our earth,

a more beautiful and harmonious place for all life.