

came the first “*residencia*” operator when he accepted Kenneth Emory and Yoshi Sinoto for lodging, as paying guests. From that beginning, the ‘Otai Hotel emerged. Nico remarked that Emory and Sinoto did not wish to stay in the Lindblad tents so far from town and that is why he took them into a “spare (not really)” room in his house. Nico is survived by his wife, Rosa Cardinali (married 1951), 7 children and 7 grandchildren.

– Grant McCall

In Memory of the Life of Niko Haoa: An Outsider’s Perspective

AS AN OUTSIDER TO THE CULTURE of Rapa Nui and a fleeting visitor in the life of Nico Haoa, I can only comment on the intermittent but influential experiences we shared over the last 23 years. My first connection with Nico and his wife Rosita came in 1980. Nico was low-key, and really I must say with some embarrassment that I have a hard time formulating a memory of him at that time. My interaction mainly was with Rosita, who insisted that the noisy motorcycle be left out on the street. That irritated me no end. During that year, there was an invasion of elderly (30+ years) graduate students and faculty that included Georgia Lee, Joan Seaver Kurze, Jo Anne Van Tilburg, George Gill, myself, and a few others, all who gravitated toward Rosita’s *residencia*, as it was then known. It was a pioneering business; a little bit of (slightly western) heaven that permitted an escape from a cultural setting we were unprepared to deal with. The tourist trade was just beginning in those years, and Nico gradually built room after room and catered to the foreigners who were fascinated with the myths of Rapa Nui. In retrospect, it was clearly the right choice, as Hotel ‘Otai is the premier place to stay on Rapa Nui.

Those eight months on Rapa Nui in 1980 are now mostly a graduate student blur. But in 1992, my connection with the Haoa family intensified when I enlisted his second eldest daughter, Sonia, to work as a partner in my archaeological research program. To be frank, I needed Rapa Nui involvement as an entry into the fringes of the culture. Selfish it was, but in the long run it has mostly cured me of my colonial bias, stubbornness, and haughty gringo attitude. Starting then, and over the next 10 years, I began to learn more about Nico.

In retrospect, I admired three things about Nico. First, he was – in part – a cultural preservationist. In addition to being a business entrepreneur and confronted with the demands of that enterprise, he had deep concern for the integrity of Rapa Nui culture. He had been around enough to see the long-term trends of cultural loss that was associated with accelerated Western influence; the detrimental effects of non-traditional values, and alcohol. Perhaps he was sensitive to these processes as the owner of a successful hotel. But in the last few years he intensified efforts to preserve a bit of the past. He was concerned about encroaching modern influences, and took action: he and his colleagues worked hard on documenting and refining the meaning of traditional Rapa Nui language before it was lost.

Secondly, Nico had ambitious plans and a vision. We never had really long conversations about what these were, because my Castellano is pathetic, but his actions over the long-term revealed those aspirations. His hotel grew from two small buildings to a 40-room hotel with a wonderful garden, all with the help of Rosita, Nikko Jr., Kihi and Sonia. But more, he

turned his 5-hectare *parcela* on the edge of town into a productive landscape. On Rapa Nui, where agriculture is a marginal enterprise, the appearance of orange, lime, corn, bananas, pineapple, taro, and macadamia was a true achievement.

Lastly, he supported friends. I think this is well reflected in how we got along. Long after we no longer stayed at the Hotel ‘Otai, our get-togethers persisted. We would visit and chat over an instant coffee and discuss the current political upheaval on the island or speculate about traditional agriculture and the way to make plants thrive. On occasion he would invite my Earthwatch research team up to the *parcela* and play chef to a gaggle of Americans who knew little about Rapanui family and culture. He took great pleasure in lurking in the background and watching the events take place. At this moment, a recollection of these times and his friendship is immensely rewarding.

The problem with memories of an outsider is that they only skim the surface of Nico’s contribution to his family and the Rapa Nui community. He was a wonderful man of gentle demeanor who gave of himself. Nico was able to cross cultural barriers and make others feel welcome. This in itself is a remarkable attribute.

In honor of the life of Nico Haoa, Sr. the Easter Island Foundation has named the annual educational prize: The Don Nico Haoa, Sr. Student Scholarship Award. This award consists of two scholarships, in the amount of US \$2000 each, to assist in the college education of Rapa Nui students. Nico Haoa was a firm believer in education and intellectual development and the Foundation wishes to support this vision of the Rapa Nui community.

– Christopher M. Stevenson



ERRATA

In our last issue, RNJ 16(2), the identities of the two Rapanui artists was reversed in a photograph on page 78. Gustavo Borquez is on the right; Cristián Silva on the left. Thanks to Riet Delsing for sorting this out.

Also, on page 102, 8 lines from the end of the article by Ferren MacIntyre, the text should read “calendrical ‘blue moon’”, not “cylindrical”. We regret the errors.