



Joanne Pettigrew & Malama na Honu

by Anita De Leon, Vice-President, CTTC Foothill Chapter



Under contract by NOAA's Marine Turtle Research Project, Joanne Pettigrew checks the PIT tag of one of the North Shore Green Sea Turtles for identification.

Recently, I made a return trip to Laniakea Beach, Hawaii where I met with Joanne Pettigrew, Educational Outreach Coordinator for *Malama na Honu* (Care for the Turtles). Thanks to Joanne, I had the most exciting adventure of my life. Joanne has been an invaluable resource for information about Hawaiian Green Sea Turtles ("*Honu*") and has provided me with updates on the activities of the *Honu* that bask regularly at Laniakea. I knew from my first communication with her over a year ago that she was not only extraordinary and heartwarming but that I wanted

to know more about her.

Joanne Pettigrew was born and raised in Northern California, and after graduating from U.C. Berkeley and receiving a teaching credential, she moved to the North Shore of Oahu in 1971. She had originally gone to Hawaii on vacation and decided to stay. She taught German, English, Mathematics and even "Cosmopolitan Cooking." In the late 1970's she developed a little "island fever" (similar to cabin fever) and became a flight attendant. Despite the fact that she had traveled throughout the world and lived in Austria, Germany and England, she feels lucky to have lived most of her adult life in the old sugar plantation town of Hale'iwa, on the North Shore of Oahu in Hawaii.

In 1986 her father died. He had a tremendous influence on her and was an overwhelming inspiration to her, as he loved the outdoors. He had a great curiosity for all things in nature, especially the ocean, mountains, plants and wildlife. He had been a well-educated Eagle Scout and had worked for *Sunset Magazine* for 39 years. The day after he

died she paddled her kayak off of Laniakea to toss plumeria flowers into the ocean as a personal "Aloha" to her Dad. As she wept and gazed at the beauty that encompassed her, up popped a huge turtle among the scattered pink flowers floating in the waves. From that day on, she wanted to know everything about the *Honu*.

When the *Honu* first began hauling out onto the beach to bask in the sun in 1999, Joanne was living adjacent to Laniakea.

In 2001 an article appeared in the Honolulu daily newspaper about swimming with turtles at Laniakea Beach on the North Shore. Being able to be up close and personal with wildlife had never been so accessible. Overnight visitors and locals were coming to the beach. She and other residents were shocked to see people sitting on the turtles, pulling on their flippers and harassing their protected species.

Starting in 2003, she began logging the basking behavior of the resident turtles for the Marine Turtle Research Program. It was really "being at the right place at the right



Sea turtle biologist George Balazs and Joanne taking a break from satellite tagging on Laniakea, Oahu, Hawaii.



Joanne taking informative signs to the beach.



Founding Malama na Honu

Malama na Honu came about as a successor organization to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) "Show Turtles Aloha" campaign, started by the leader of the Marine Turtle Research Program, George Balazs, in 2005. *Malama na Honu* became a tax-exempt non-profit entity in 2007. With NOAA's encouragement, several volunteers formed the basis of *Malama na Honu*. George Balazs implemented the original idea of volunteering and brought signs and banners to educate the public.



Joanne (far right) and several other Honu Guardians.

As President and co-founder of *Malama na Honu*, Joanne was more or less the "Chief Cook and Bottle Washer," recruiting volunteers, monitoring turtles, coordinating efforts with state and federal agencies and looking for funding.

"Honu Guardian" was the name coined by George Balazs in the "Show Turtles Aloha" days for those on the beach volunteering. There are presently 65 active volunteers. Those interested in becoming Honu Guardians attend a mandatory one-hour training session at Laniakea Beach, followed by a minimum of two shadowing sessions with on-duty volunteers. This ensures that all volunteers know the same turtle facts, how to store beach equipment, log critical turtle basking data for the federal government, interact with visitors properly, and know who to call for turtle entanglements or strandings. The Honu Guardians continue to collect data every day of the year.

Currently, Joanne is the Educational Outreach and Volunteer Coordinator and the sole staff member of *Malama na Honu*. Her position is funded under a grant with the State's Hawaii Tourism Authority. Her responsibilities include making sure all volunteer shifts are covered, training packets are compiled for an upcoming new volunteer training session, all new volunteers have

badges and t-shirts and arranging upcoming outreach activities for school and community groups visiting the beach.

For Joanne, the rewards have come in many forms: *Malama na Honu* now has a volunteer base of 65; assisting and observing the scientists excavate a *Honu* nest and seeing 100 out of 102 eggs successfully hatched; being a part of rescuing one of their resident baskers from hooks and entanglements, sent on its way to the vet for care and rehab, then released again; and seeing two of their resident baskers successfully return home to Laniakea after migrating the perilous 1,000 mile roundtrip journey from Laniakea to the mating and nesting beaches of French Frigate Shoals in the Northwest Hawaiian Islands.

Her most trying experience was unearthing Honey Girl, Laniakea's largest resident *Honu* basker, after the turtle was brutally killed in July 2008. Patrick Doyle, the volunteer on duty that day, and a beach visitor found Honey Girl. Joanne scanned the mostly buried upside down turtle's flipper for its PIT tag and her heart sank because she recognized the last 3 scanned digits "703." It was inconceivable to her that someone could hurt one of their defenseless, trusting turtles.

Positives have come from this horrendous tragedy. They were touched by the public outcry from across the nation. Their email inbox has increased 10-fold, with people interested in volunteering to protect the turtles. Three exceptional Hawaiian artists have created paintings of Honey Girl and offered *Malama na Honu* rights to their beautiful artwork to use for their fundraising efforts. The compassion and sudden interest has been remarkable.

I asked Joanne what message she would like to emphasize to the public. She said, "To protect the Hawaiian Green Sea Turtles through education, public awareness and conservation in the 'Spirit of Aloha.' Our *Honu* are coming back – Enjoy them – Learn about them – We must *malama* and *pulama* (care for and cherish) them. It was a mere 30 years ago that they were bordering on extinction. How lucky we are to see such

an amazing comeback in such a short time! Let's care for them so they will be here for our children's children. There needs to be a greater awareness that fishing where *Honu* feed can be life threatening to the species."

As a *Honu* enthusiast, Joanne attributes most of her education on behavior, migration, nesting, diving and recovery of the species to George Balazs. Almost all of her learning has been experiential and she continues to read and learn all she can about the *Honu*.

Joanne plans to meet the California Turtle and Tortoise Club, Foothill Chapter, as we venture to Laniakea in June. □



Rest in Peace Honey Girl.

California Turtle & Tortoise Club FOOTHILL CHAPTER

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Please visit hiltonhawaiianvillage.com to check out this beautiful oceanfront resort in Waikiki set on 22 acres. There are more than 30 species of wildlife, including eight South African penguins, turtles, ducks, ibis, flamingoes, koi and macaws.

Please also visit malamanahonu.org to learn more about the spectacular Hawaiian Green Sea Turtles that come ashore to bask in Laniakea.

Members of all Chapters of the CTTC are welcome.

*No payment is required to reserve your room. Credit card information is required for reserving your room; however, no charges will be made to your account until actual checkout from the hotel.

More activities are being planned.

For additional information and to register for trip to Laniakea, as well as other planned activities, please send email to ruaturtlelover@aol.com