

Celebrating the Foundation's Benefactor, Helga

Aloha kākou,

The 100th anniversary of the birth of the Foundation's benefactor, [Helga Glaesel-Hollenback](#), was on March 20, 2021. To celebrate her life and the course that she set for the Foundation, our Board and Staff, together with Wayne Pitluck, founding board director who completed his tenure in 2019, and Jutta Bertram-Nothnagel, Hans' wife and a dear friend to Helga, gathered together virtually. Stories were told; questions were asked; and there was plenty of laughter sprinkled with tears.

In helping those of us on the staff and board who never met Helga understand her and ensure that we demonstrate the values and practices that were important to her, Hans (and Wayne) often share stories with us. This is one of the many stories Hans has shared.



"When Hurricane 'Iniki was threatening the Hawaiian Islands in September of 1992, Helga was on her yacht cruising in the Mediterranean with her husband and some friends from Honolulu. Naturally, they were all anxiously watching the developing hurricane as it appeared to head straight toward Honolulu, fearful of the grave risks, including to their homes. Of course, you will recall how 'Iniki, in the last hours before making landfall, veered westward, with Kaua'i taking the brunt of the storm and being devastated as a result.

Before Kaua'i had even woken up on the day after 'Iniki struck, Helga, called me in New York, from her boat, obviously relieved that her home had been spared, but more deeply focused on the need to support the people of Kaua'i, to which Helga felt a special bond. She instructed me to find a suitable project on the island for the Foundation to support. And she explained what she meant by "suitable": a project that would not merely rebuild or repair something that had been damaged or destroyed – necessary as that was – but a project that would lift the spirits of the people; would show that good can come out of bad, and; would send a message of hope.



Above: The exterior of the Kōke'e Discovery Center.
Below: Inside the Kōke'e Discovery Center with Billy De Costa sharing stories with visiting keiki. Photo credits: Kōke'e Discovery Center Association Inc. (2017)

So, one of my colleagues and I started working the phones, and it was my colleague Ron who, a couple of days after 'Iniki, connected with the then Superintendent of Schools for Kaua'i, Shirley Akita. We learned only later that Shirley was then sitting in her office building in downtown Līhu'e, with the windows of her office having been blown out by the storm and her papers strewn over the grass below her in front of the building.

When Ron explained to her the kind of project we were looking for, Shirley told him about the long-held dream of many in the community to build an environmental education center on top of the Kōke'e range. Yes, some volunteers had built a storage shack up there from corrugated metal, but not only was it utterly insufficient as a classroom, it had also most certainly been



blown to smithereens by the storm. And, Shirley assured us, bringing this long-held dream into reality in the face of the havoc that 'Iniki had wreaked on Kaua'i, would for sure help to lift the spirits of the island's people.

The rest is history: Helga immediately committed the Foundation to the project, an architect was hired, and still today, nearly 30 years later, the [Kōke'e Discovery Center](#), as it became known, continues to serve the keiki of Hawai'i."

Me ka ha'aha'a,

Janis Reischmann
Executive Director

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