

## Choosing Your Battles

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***Imua e na poki'i, A inu i ka wai 'awa 'awa, 'A'ohe hope e ho'i mai ai!***  
*Go forward young warriors and drink of the bitter waters. There is no turning back!*

### ***Kamehameha I***

***In high school, we were trained  
to be warriors ->->->->***



***Marching in formation – Konia Field***

In the late 1960's, Kamehameha Schools in Kapalama on Oahu was a military institute. The *Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC)* is a high school- and college-based program to develop commissioned officers for the United States armed forces.

Volunteer ROTC program were common in many Hawaii high schools, but ours was the only mandatory, full-time ROTC program in Hawaii. We attended classes in military science, learned to read maps and plot out quadrants, and were proficient in handling and maintaining weapons. We were taught many survival skills, and used U.S. military manuals as classroom textbooks.

We competed with other ROTC schools on Oahu, and my platoon was the best in the state, winning awards in every category, from grenade throwing, rifle disassembling and assembling, and precision marching. Just to think that early on we were considered the misfits.

Important traits we learned at Kamehameha were discipline, focus, and stamina. We had an armory where rifles were stored for every high school male student. We honed our eagle eye



***This your a rifle, and this your a gun; one is for shooting and the other is for fun”***

marksmanship skills on a rifle range just below the old football and track field shooting our .22 rifles at targets, and even an occasional mongoose.

We became proficient in jumping to attention and marching up and down the hills of Kapalama campus with a rifle on our shoulder. It taught us physical and mental stamina and cadence, and built unity when yelling in one voice.



*Kamehameha Schools Rifle Range*

The high school year started in August with a five-day orientation for freshmen males and new high schools attendees. Through this orientation, all our ideas on independent thinking and individuality were quashed. When everyone went right, we were demanded to do the same thing, or else.

Upper classmen, especially seniors, were officers in charge, from Colonel down to Corporal, and they made sure everyone knew that. First, we were required to cut off unwieldy hair we collected over the summer so we all looked generic, losing our individuality and any semblance of uniqueness. We were all skinheads, and were yelled at,

humiliated, and physically and mentally broken down.

We learned how to accept extreme criticism, and were strengthened in the process. Through this process, we learned where the edges of our ability lay, and in the process responded in ways we didn't think we could do. If we rebelled, the officers demanded push-ups.

I still remember playing 'Simon Says'. This was mental testing involving critical listening skills and also seeing how much abuse we could handle. If the officer yelled out a command without first saying, "Simon Says", we had to do 10 push-ups.

The breaker was when the officer said, "Simon says jump up!" We all jumped up, but when we landed, the officer would say, "I didn't tell you to come down, give me 20 push-ups!" The drill sergeant even made some guys climb the baseball field chain link fence and left them there for a while.

The dog days of August were extremely hot and dusty at Kapalama Heights, and it was not uncommon to see a dozen freshmen faint from heat exhaustion and water loss, and also from the fact that some were overweight or out of shape.

Our 'week in hell' broke us down into compliant, respectful, and scared underclassmen, and now we were ready for high school, but it didn't stop there. We were constantly reminded and badgered. Some students didn't take lightly to ROTC, and were easily profiled

and 'weeded out'. This hazing and fearing authority went on throughout the class year.

Neighbor island students lived in dormitories on campus and were referred to as '*boarders*', and military protocol was extended to dinner and breakfast.

Cleanliness was next to godliness, so officers would pull inspections any time between classes, and if we were found to be non-compliant, such as having our hair touching our ears, dirty brass or shoes, or a wrinkled uniform, and if we answered back, we received demerits. For every demerit over 12, we had to march for one hour with a rifle on your shoulder after school or even on weekends.

One student from Molokai held the record with 128 demerits and spent the summer marching it off or doing odd jobs such as cleaning walls and sweeping halls. He was defiant and constantly rebelled against authority, but what really did him in was getting caught in the girl's dormitory, resulting in his expulsion.

At the end of the orientation, freshmen attained a rank of private first class and started at the bottom of the food chain. As we moved up a grade, we received a higher rank, and were harassed less.

Freshmen also were expected to perform waiter duty during lunch in a family-type setting. They would set the table, bring food from the cafeteria in large bowls, and also clean up and

return all dishes to the cafeteria kitchen after lunch.

A senior 'alpha' male would serve as 'father' of the meal at a round table holding a 'family' of eight. If he didn't like you, he had the option of serving you less. Although it was a military institute, the girls would attend classes with us, and also joined us for lunch. At that time, the schools were known as Kamehameha Schools for Boys, and Kamehameha Schools for Girls.

During the school year, we were expected to attend quarterly Sunday parades and would stand in formation with thick wool uniforms called dress blues, and high ranking officers from Schofield Barracks would arrive to inspect our army in what is referred to as 'pass in review'.



*Standing in formation at Konia Field*

Over 1000 of us would stand at attention in perfect lines, and when it was really hot, a bunch of guys fainted and would drop like flies. I still remember when a very large freshman, James Alana, fainted and he took six guys down with him, just like dominoes.

Life would improve as we moved to the next school year until we attained senior status with all its benefits and privileges, such as harassing the lower classmen.

It was part of the refiner's fire to mold you into an honest, law abiding citizen in this hierarchy of Kamehameha life.

The Vietnam War was in full swing and many questioned the rationale behind the war, and it rippled throughout the school with some students actively opposing the war by wearing black arm bands, including 'distinguished' upper classmen such as Malama Solomon, Haunani Trask, Keola Beamer, and Jon Osorio.



*An unruly Class of 1970 winning the Song Contest*

Our sophomore class was known as the defiant ones, the rebels. We defeated the Junior class in the Song Contest, which didn't go over well with them, and basically humiliated them. We rebelled against the system, and it was more than just the war; it was society as a whole and the changes that were taking place at that time in history with protests of all kinds. It was a time to question everything we stood for in this experimental Hippie generation of 'Make Love, Not War!'

Before breakfast each morning, boarders would fall into formation in anticipation of the firing of the cannon near the Kalama Dining Hall. Someone also blew taps at night signaling 'lights

out' for boarders. Luckily, I didn't board at Kamehameha and I kinda felt sorry for them.

One night, as a symbol of rebellion to this indoctrination and the 'army stuff', guys in our class painted the cannon pink and filled it with nails. They also spray painted obscenities in large letters on the wall of the ROTC building such as F--- ROTC! All hell was about to break loose.

The next morning, it just happened that the military brass from Schofield Barracks and also Washington D.C. were visiting the school to review the ROTC program, and certify it as a military institute. The now-pink cannon still had to be fired in the morning, and the icing on the cake was when nails flew out of the muzzle and shot into the coconut trees like machine gun bullets.

That seemed to be the start of a very long day for many and was about to get longer for the sophomores as they were doing push-ups in the hallway between classes for every type of perceived insubordination because the seniors and the ROTC staff attributed this act of defiance to us!

When life got difficult, I had to do some real soul searching to find the silver lining in all of these antics we were expected to endure. I think what made it easy for me to 'run the gauntlet' were the great lunches; stew and poi, or sliced corned beef with poi, apple cobbles, and ice cream, all you could eat and only the best. These great meals made up for all the stress, fear,

and humiliation, and gave you the energy to endure and take on more hazing. Food strengthened your character, and sustained your ability to take on more challenges.

I came to the realization that if we could endure a lot of verbal harassment and abuse, what other challenges could I take on in life? This was a way of adding some hardness to our soft shell, and basic training was intended to prepare you for the real challenges yet to come later. No one else in any school across this state had to go through this kind of 'education' to build character, and increase your ability to handle stress.

Our class council proposed Aloha Friday so we wouldn't have to wear ROTC uniforms on Friday, and it passed! I believe this was one step that ultimately led to its dismantling.



After 114 years of ROTC military training at Kamehameha, it was all over in 2002. This is what Michael Chun, Kamehameha Schools President and Headmaster, himself a former Kamehameha ROTC Brigade Commander and West Point graduate, said about this program on its last day:

*"For 114 years, the hills and valleys of Kalihi have echoed the cadence of cadets*

*marching to the drumbeat of honor, duty and country. First to the Kingdom of Hawai'i, and later to the United States of America, we pledged our allegiance and commitment to serve.*

*Whenever the call was made, Kamehameha graduates answered with valor, chivalry and patriotism. For all eyes and for all time, they courageously stood guard over this beloved land of ancient descent.*

*It is with deep sadness then, that we now bid farewell to a tradition that has been a hallmark at Kamehameha since our beginning. The strength of this program lies in the ideals and values that have been taught to our students, showing them what they should be, what they can be, what they will be. They have learned a strength of character, woven with kupono, koa and na'auao, that can be traced to Kamehameha the First."*

In retrospect, the jury is still out whether this kind of education was good or bad for Princess Bernice Pauahi Bishop's children in the long run. One reason is we don't have anything to compare it to.

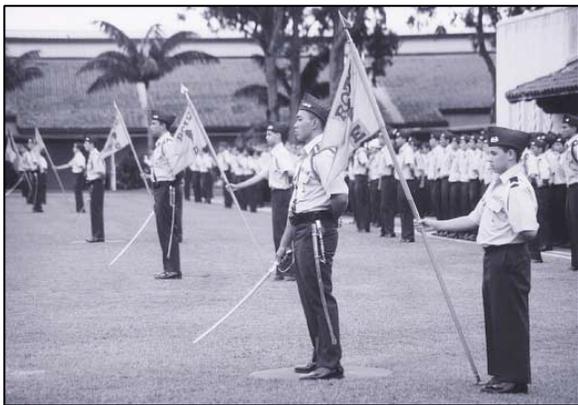
The fruits of Kamehameha's labors can be seen in many of its' graduates, who were sought after by the Navy, Marines, Army, and Air Force academies because they had already received advanced military training by the time they graduated from high school. Many received scholarships to military service academies, including West Point, Annapolis and the Air Force Academy.

The most important life skill many took away from high school, if you paid attention at school and in class, was that of a disciplined warrior. Using these skills would help us make critical decisions in life. In the process, we had

hopefully learned to choose our battles well.

Today, I see many Kamehameha graduates are generals and admirals, and I even went to school with one of the key commanders in Iraq. A few years ago, I met the NOAA chief of weather predictions in Washington D.C. and he was a Kamehameha graduate.

Anecdotal evidence is that respect and discipline has slipped a bit. There was a shift to an increased understanding of Hawaiian culture and being a Hawaiian, but I don't know if it improved on building character and creating a resilient graduate.



*The Kamehameha Brigade in formation – Konia Field*

On Molokai, I look back on many of the battles I was involved in, and came to realize that there are just too many battles to fight out there, so I had to constantly prioritize and redirect my energies to only the most important ones that really made a difference, and were of socially-redeeming value. I also realized that winning is predicated upon how much energy you put into it.

So is life, and so it is in farming, constantly readjusting your compass,

reprioritizing, and setting your direction, your offensive and defensive posture, covering your back, and making sure you have access to the right weapons for the battle. It's a dirty world out there, and you may have to form alliances to strengthen your position. But in the end, you have to win the battle, and you don't go into something with the intent of losing.

*So the battle continues in preserving and protecting what's important to you and your family. If you carried the attributes you learned in these formative years into your adult life, you might be able to succeed in in life, and in farming.*

## Planning A Head

The sign of a good entrepreneur and farmer is planning ahead, anticipating what marketing conditions will look like, what are the emerging trends, what the weather will look like, what are the products that form the backbone of your business, and what are your future products.

Conducting reconnaissance may not involve flying a drone over a neighboring farmer's field to see what's growing, but scanning the marketplace to see what's going on and what direction everyone is moving in, then trying to move in a totally different direction.

One important business concept is the *benefit-to-cost ratio*. Recently, I tried to explain this concept to a reckless driver I happen to be riding with. He was late for a doctor's appointment, and was driving at 90 miles an hour, changing

lanes at breakneck speed in an attempt to get there on time.

When we finally arrived at the doctor's office, I asked him, "What is the benefit of getting here 5 minutes earlier, and what was the cost, such as potentially losing your life or my life riding in your car? He responded that he liked that concept and the analogy, but I don't think I was able to influence his future conduct. The greater the risks, the greater the potential gains, but is it really worth it?

This is what you have to do in farming. What are the possible scenarios at the end of each season or increment? Now is the time to plan, not only for the fall season, but also spring, and possibly summer, and this means getting all your ducks in line. If you're only growing one crop, then it's more cut and dry, but if you're a market gardener growing a dozen crops, it's a totally different ball game and harder to analyze.

Like the stock market, it may be a good strategy to diversify your business and products not only in farming, but in other areas that generate income and add resilience to your business model.

You may utilize a loss leader as a strategy to give you variety and muscle in the marketplace. Growing a crop to attract a lot of 'hits' at your tent is a good thing, but in and of itself may actually be a loss from the profit standpoint.

Marketing is about getting your name out there. Are there new markets to tap,

or new varieties to grow, or is more market analysis required?



*Hot sauce in a Bronx supermarket*

All of this is contingent upon quality standards you maintain for your products, and also creating markets for off-grade products to extract more income from them.

So much to know, so little time...

## Diagnostics: Who Done It?

Who came first, the chicken or the egg? Determining what's wrong with a sick plant or animal is both an art and a science. An auto mechanic will try to determine what's wrong with your car by going through a mental checklist of possible problems starting with the most basic, and possibly the cheapest to correct, while moving to the more complex.

Diagnostics are a system of problem solving used in many industries to identify and fix a problem. In many food processing industries, the use of Hazardous Analysis and Critical Control Points or **HACCP** is a protocol to identify production problems related to microbial contamination. In the event of

microbial contamination, manufacturers can identify a step in the process where the contamination occurred, and come up with steps to prevent future contamination.

The field of diagnostics was made popular by police investigative shows such as CSI and others. This show is based, in part, on a real person, Dr. Lee Goff, a former Forensic Entomologist at the UH College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources, and presently a professor at Chaminade College. He was a teaching assistant in one of my college classes.

When a death occurs, he can determine how long ago the person had died based on insect growth stages feeding on the body, and also if the person was poisoned based on what insects were not present. Today, this technology has expanded to include DNA analysis and other high-tech super sleuthing techniques utilizing high-powered microscopes and other tools.

Much of this methodology can be applied to the growing of plants, and it starts by determining if the most basic needs of the plant have been met, including water and nutrients. Too much or insufficient water is a good place to start in determining a problem, followed by pH and nutrients. If humans don't receive sufficient food or water, all kinds of health problems can crop up. Alternatively, too much food and water can also create problems for us as well, such as obesity, hypertension, and diabetes.

Plant stress can manifest itself in many ways and can also aggravate existing problems. There's a recurring theme to many problems, some of which are seasonal, including insect infestation and disease infection. Ongoing wet conditions can create their own set of problems later in the season, such as diseases and a flush of weeds, creating many niches for insects to inhabit.



*Interveinal chlorosis on grape, possibly caused by pH imbalance and/or a deficiency*

Hot, dry conditions impose heat stress on plants, and accelerate insect life cycles leading to higher populations of insects, some of which also transmit diseases. Wind damage and resulting stress is not always easy to see, but can include root and flower damage leading to lower yields, smaller fruit, and more damaged fruit. Having a total picture of the situation helps to get to the root of the problem, and going through a mental check list of possible problems can get to the solution.

Some problems can be caused by a combination of stressors that are not as easy to determine. Prevention is an important tool in stopping problems

before they occur. Practicing crop rotation is also an important step in keeping the soil balanced and minimizing soil-borne problems including nematodes and diseases.

Conservation practices, including contouring the land, developing capture basins, grassing waterways, and utilizing windbreaks can help to resolve wind-related problems, prevent soil erosion, and create a healthy growing environment.

Breeding and selecting crops adapted to our tropical growing conditions is vital to the success of farming in Hawaii.

There's little if any organized research in Hawaii in this area, but some farmers have been doing on-farm variety trials to improve their production system. We don't place enough emphasis in this area, and are comfortable growing seed varieties that are not well-adapted to our tropical climate.

A holistic approach to problem solving in crop production usually involves creating the best possible environment for plants to thrive in. It starts by knowing how to grow a healthy plant and applying that knowledge for success in your farm business. Knowing what a healthy plant looks like is an important prerequisite in growing a healthy plant, and you'd be amazed at how many farmers don't know this.

## **CHEAP FOOD**

I was able to spend a month in New York, of all places, and had a lot of time checking produce in the city and also in

the burroughs, especially the Bronx. What I found was a diversity of fresh food found nowhere else in the world, and what amazed me were the prices paid for these items. Many crops were imported from Mexico and South America. Example was 4 pounds of banana for \$1 and Chinese taro for 89 cents a pound! In addition, industrial crops grown in California such as lettuce and seasonal fruits were very affordable.



*Big Island Purple Sweetpotato in Hartsdale, New York*

Although the diversity was great, the quality wasn't the best and this can be expected in poorer sections of the city. Market segmentation involves shrewd wholesaling and marketing strategies to sell lower quality and cheaper produce in the poorer sections of town while saving the higher quality, higher priced produce for the more affluent areas. A wide selection of processed food could be found in the poorer communities.

Ethnic foods originating from the Middle East, Africa, the Caribbean, Mexico, South America, Canada, and who knows where else could be found, and created a diversity seen nowhere else. There was turmeric, cooking banana,

tamarind, guava, papaya, sweetpotato, taro, spices, cassava, arrowroot, and many other products.

One of the first thoughts that hit me was “Where are the market niches for Hawaii farmers, and do we even have a chance in the global markets?” My answer was ‘maybe’ for a little while until someone else produces it cheaper. I saw purple sweetpotato and GMO papaya from the Big Island in New York markets.

Even coffee prices can get too high to the point where your market is limited to only the richest people in the world, and the rest will be happy with Kenya AAA or Jamaica Blue Mountain or some other well marketed coffee. I was talking to a friend the other day, and his father is setting up an 8,000 acre coffee farm in Laos. How will this scale of production affect the price of coffee on the world market?

*I believe an important niche will be in selling fresh products. The high cost of freight for imported products is giving island farmers some wiggle room for additional profit but they must also demand a higher price and sell the idea of freshness, higher quality, and longer shelf life.*



*Calavo Brand Papaya from Puna in a New York market*



*Imported Guava Paste in a Bronx market*

*Once you move into a processed or value-added market, anyone can import tropical products and sell it as a Hawaii product, and we’ve seen this phenomenon in many products with a Hawaii name affixed to it such as coconuts, coffee, guava, lilikoi, macadamia nuts, maile leis, taro. Value-added products that are limited-quantity have a great potential if you focus your market and exploit it to the fullest.*

*This trend will continue if we’re not vigilant about setting standards that give local farmers the advantage. Asking the right questions to flush out the truth, and also organizing as a united front are important strategies. Protecting the Hawaii name for those products that are truly ‘Hawaiian’ will continue to be an ongoing challenge for farmers, and must be a focal point protecting our markets because there are too many imposters out there.*

## **You Are What You Become**

I read an interesting book lately that’s still spinning around in my head. It’s called ‘Outliers’ by Malcolm Gladwell about reasons or more succinctly, data

on why some people act the way they do, and why some become successful and others don't. They are called *outliers*, ones that fall outside the data sets of a normal person. There were many reasons for this and also cultural differences in how we see the world, how we react to it, and how we apply this knowledge.

Gladwell detailed research conducted on a small community in Pennsylvania where all of its residents emigrated from a town in Italy and either were family or close friends who lived together for several generations. What was notable about this town were residents had no heart problems even in their late fifties, compared to other nearby communities of the same size.

It wasn't about diet or work or genetics. He concluded that the reasons were quite simple; *everyone was family and nurtured each other, took the time to talk story with each other, and shared each other's successes and challenges. They always ate meals with each other, in many instances three generations of them together.*

It was about family and caring for each other which helped them cope with struggles of life that kept their stress levels under control. Sounds a little like Molokai, except for the health problems.

Another question Gladwell tried to answer was, "Why are some people successful and others not?" He was able to provide data showing that for some, such as successful hockey

athletes, it had to do with what month you were born.

The most successful hockey players were born in the first three months of the year, and reasoning was you were older than everyone else born in that same year. You usually started hockey practice earlier than others, had more practice, and continued to have more practice. Practice makes perfect.



*Which one of these computer nerds would become a billionaire? The one on the bottom left, Bill Gates.*

Gladwell also showed data that a lot of practice or the 10,000 hour rule separated the successful musician or computer programmer, such as the Beatles or Bill Gates or Steve Jobs, from the could-have-been. For these individuals, it was a combination of special opportunities, being at the right place at the right time, and an intense commitment to perfecting their skill, 10,000 hours of it.

Sheer genius alone was not enough to ensure success. It's what you did with this genius that really mattered. Potential is not perfection. Data showed that upbringing and learning to be

empowered at an early age had more to do with success than sheer genius. Some people had lucky breaks in life or took advantage of a good situation, while others wallowed in the bad cards they were dealt, one game after another.

Psychologist Robert Sternberg calls this *'practical intelligence'*, and includes things like *"knowing what to say to whom, knowing when to say it, and knowing how to say it for maximum effect."* It's about knowledge that helps you read situations correctly and get what you want. This is different from IQ; it's a combination of 'street smarts' and common sense.

I remember a story a friend shared with me about a classmate of his, the valedictorian of his class who was so much smarter than everyone, but lacked common sense to the point where he couldn't communicate with others, and couldn't hold a job.

General intelligence and practical intelligence are in opposition to each other; either you had lots of one and little of the other or vice versa. Part of it is in your genes, estimated at about



*Pull for Help!*

50%, and a large part is in upbringing. You can call it the environment, but it's more like how many learning experiences you've experienced to

prepare you for adulthood, and whether those experiences were relevant to the challenges you face today.

At a young age, we were taught by parents and teachers to be submissive, humble and meek, and to listen and not be heard. We didn't question authority; we were taught to watch and learn, and not to ask a lot of questions. But is this the best way to mold a child into a leader or a successful individual? And what is the definition of success?

Shouldn't we be challenged to make adult-like decisions at an early age so we have the experience needed to make real decisions? Or is it better for us to let our parents make our decisions so we can worry about things that kids worry about such as growing up slowly? Is being submissive the key to our future success?

I'm starting to wonder about this. Should we question everything being thrown at us or just take it at face value? Again, I believe we are prepared for the future when we have many relevant real-life experiences or challenges. Practice makes perfect, but our practice needs to be relevant to our future trials in life.

Families that struggle to survive have little time to help their children succeed because they're too busy trying to survive. They don't take their kids to baseball or piano practice, or even to parent-teacher meetings because they don't have the time.

Poor families also don't have time to assist their kids with homework or teach

them to be assertive and question everything. As a result, the child is left to grow up on their own, and be more independent. It's hard to put a label on which is better, it's just different.

The take home messages are many. One is it's what you do with what you have that can make or break you in life. It comes down to values you want your children to have. Do you want your kid to be an aggressive over-achiever focused only on money, or do you want a child to be a caring, compassionate person that relates with others and has a balanced focus in what is important in life? Success has many definitions, and one is how you help others and relate to the world around you, and still be able to survive.

With all this stuff about the connection between upbringing and success, your children can grow up to be totally different from you in ways you wouldn't have imagined, and you wonder how they got there. There are many dimensions to the puzzle of success including what is success.

The concept of hard work is different everywhere. To the Chinese rice farmer, it meant that the harder you worked, the more money you made. The land tenure system was set up where you paid a base rate to rent the land, and not a percentage of the profit. The harder you worked, the more money you made and this was the incentive to work as hard as you can every day. This has carried to the modern generations of Chinese who put a heavy emphasis on education and hard work.

Contrast that with temperate area farmers, who worked hard in the spring and summer, and hibernated in the winter. Many were sharecroppers who were taken advantage by the land owners, especially in the old country.

The concept of hard work has changed the world for many, and has allowed some to move ahead financially more than others. How hard do you work?

## *Water Break*

Every time I played with the water hose, my parents would scold me and demand that I turn the faucet OFF now! Some kids have an affinity for water; it feels exhilarating and really wakes you up, wanting more of it. Some of us were called 'water babies' when growing up because we didn't want to leave the water when we were swimming or surfing. It was a magnetism that drew us to the ocean.

As island people who evolved in liquid, we feel right at home in the ocean. I remember tourists as Kepuhi Beach on West Molokai in awe over the local kids diving and frolicking along the shore in the pounding surf. I even had to warn these newcomers not to try it themselves because 'these kids were raised in the ocean, and understand the currents and the waves' and someone not accustomed to the pulse of the ocean could easily drown.

Today, water is becoming the center of attention, and contention, because everyone wants it and in some areas of the world, there's not enough to go

around. You can see this happening in politically-motivated decisions by the State Commission on Water Resource Management, and the majority of their landmark decisions overturned by the State Supreme Court and even the Federal Court of Appeals.



*Molokai Irrigation System reservoir*

Global warming is also aggravating this problem to the point where water will probably be the reason for the next major war. Differences are differences, but water is life and something worth fighting for.

*More on WATER in upcoming editions.*

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***Well, that's it for this month. Enjoy the last of the Dog Days of Summer!***

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