



MĀLAMA KA'Ū FOUNDATION

NATIVE HAWAIIAN ORGANIZATION · PĀHALA, KA'Ū

Imua!

A PERSONAL MESSAGE · AUGUST 21, 2026

What our families are carrying

I have not stopped calling home since the night the storm came.

My mother is 78 years old and she is in Ka'ū. So are my uncles, my cousins, and the classmates I went through school with in Pāhala. Since Lala began I have been reaching them however I can, one bar of signal at a time, a text that finally goes through at two in the morning, a voice that cuts out mid sentence and then comes back. Every call I get through is a mercy, and every call I cannot get through I sit with until the next one.

I want people outside our district to understand what these families are actually living. Highway 11 is the only road in and out of Ka'ū, and when it closes we close with it. There is no power and no internet, and cell service comes and goes, which means a mother cannot tell her children on the mainland that she is safe, and a family cannot call for help when a kupuna takes a turn in the night. Kūpuna who need care are being driven the hour to Hilo in neighbors' trucks, by people who simply showed up and offered.

Then there are our graves. In Nā'ālehu the storm tore open our community gravesite and carried caskets and iwi kūpuna into the roadway. That stretch is being cleared slowly, by hand where it has to be, with prayer, because those are not obstacles in the road. Those are somebody's grandmother. Those are somebody's father.

A couple of days ago they found my grandfather's headstone in the debris. His remains are still down there, under piles of it, and we do not know when we will reach him. But the stone with his name on it came back to us, and I did not expect how much that would matter. My family has been holding on to it ever since.

I will end where Ka'ū always ends. Our families have been here for generations, and everybody knows everybody, which means nobody is a stranger and nobody eats alone. People are cooking on propane and camp stoves and sending plates down the road to whoever has less. They are feeding the county crews running the heavy equipment. They are feeding the National Guard troops patrolling our towns so that no one takes advantage of us while we are down. Nobody organized any of this. It is simply how Ka'ū has always taken care of Ka'ū.

We have lost a great deal these past weeks, and we are going to be a long time putting it back. But we have not lost each other, and in Ka'ū that has always been the thing that carries us through.

Imua,

Mel) Yokoyama, CAPT USN (retired)

Tenth generation Native Hawaiian from Ka'ū

Chairman, Mālama Ka'ū Foundation