

LEAD STORY IN  
**HAWAII'S BEST SPOOKY TALES-3**

EDITORS INTRO:

On Kauai you still see old plantation houses, some of them restored and even clustered into new villages in Waimea on Kauai, 'Ewa on O'ahu and Lanai City on Lanai. The houses are simple yet compelling because of their honest architecture. I have always wanted to live in one like my friend Robert Tripp; he bought an old plantation home in the village of Kekaha on Kauai and settled down to enjoy the quiet life, never expecting to find...

Spirits in the Living Room

When I had the chance to buy the tiny, 400-square-foot plantation house I had been renting it was necessary to state its age for the appraiser and insurance company. The lady from whom I was buying it was strangely evasive. It was agreed that "pre-World War II" would satisfy the requirements, but we all knew it was older by far.

The town of Kekaha had been culturally and physically dominated by the sugar mill since it was built in 1878. By 1980, when I moved there, changes had of course taken place but plantation attitudes still prevailed and haoles made up only a small part of the population. It was what I was looking for. I enjoyed the cultural differences, and Kekaha provided a slow-paced haven from my schedule as an airline pilot on international routes. Of course, the year-round warm water and good surf was an added attraction to an old surf dog like me.

I made very few changes to the house when I moved in. The simplicity of the four small rooms-kitchen, living room, bedroom, bathroom-appealed to me. The furnishings, including the table, chairs, desk, dresser, and bed, were already there or purchased locally at moving or garage sales. Though most weren't as old as the house, they complemented its old-time style and feel.

Over the years, I have found that it is important for me to live in a place surrounded by physical beauty and tranquillity. Kauai certainly fills that need. Most of my flights were to the centers of commerce in the Orient-Tokyo, Seoul, Taipei, Bangkok. When the airline shut down the Honolulu base, I commuted back to Los Angeles twice a month rather than move. This made my time on Kauai even more precious.

Almost by osmosis I began to pick up the stories and legends of the islands. Those concerning Pele and the menehune I found particularly compelling. To this day I feel that the tales of the menehune have a core of truth that almost always lies behind the ethnic mythic lore of any cohesive society.

I knew of the night marchers and learned the importance of an

'aumakua to each family for guidance and protection. I could see the influence of these legends in the customs of the local people around me, but I did not see them intruding directly into my life. Then one night all that changed.

My partner and I were finishing a fairly typical day for us- a late afternoon swim, and surf extending into the sunset. We made it a point to experience the curtain closing on each day. This time of transition was the perfect point to allow quiet reflection and appreciation of the beauty that surrounded us.

Afterward, we watched the first stars come out as we used our outdoor shower to wash the salt from our bodies. During our simple wok dinner, we decided it was time to clean the bedroom. To do so, we moved the two wooden chairs from the bedroom to join those of the living room. Unconsciously, we left them all in a pattern of a rough circle.

Back in the bedroom, we resumed our chores. At some point I turned to go back through the door to the living room to retrieve a chair. As I looked into the room, I came to a shocked standstill. It was as though the air in the room had become liquid. It appeared as the ocean does when you are beneath the surface and a wave passes overhead. There seemed to be a shimmering presence in each chair. Intangible but undeniable was their presence. I felt as though I had intruded upon a meeting place of some secret society. The hairs raised on the back of my neck, and I could feel the icy flash of adrenaline course through my body.

I backed up from the doorway and at the same moment felt the light touch of my partner's body. The thought that I might somehow be hallucinating this was eliminated when she whispered, "Do you feel that? Can you sense them?"

I nodded my head in agreement, feeling validated- one definition of reality is anything on which two people can agree.

We both backed up slowly into the bedroom, and then quietly exited outside. I could feel her hand trembling in mine, or was it mine in hers? What was happening here?

We both decided that somehow the arrangement of chairs we had made precipitated the conditions that allowed the event to happen. Neither of us felt threatened in any way, but we also did not want to interfere with whatever was going on. We walked around the yard for a while, and then returned to the house that seemed normal except for a lingering sense of excitement and apprehension in our minds. With some hesitation, we took the chairs back in the bedroom and after some intense discussion went to bed.

This occurrence was never repeated even though we tried rearranging the chairs later in the same formation. So what really happened? Don't ask me. I'm not an expert on the occult. I just fly airplanes. I'm not even sure I should be writing this.

Has it changed me? Yes, in some ways. I am much more likely to listen intently to peoples' stories of weird events. Who is to say what lies underneath the surface of each day's ordinary events.

Though it isn't really an explanation, an amplification of this experience occurred when we were discussing the eradication of the old town of Mana on the AMFAC plantation with a local Hawaiian lady. Plantation houses occupied for generations were moved from there to the Waimea Plantation Resort, where they were reconditioned as units for tourists.

The effect is quite pleasant, giving the ambiance of being in an old plantation town. However, there apparently are stories coming from the maids and some of the guests of strange appearances and events.

Our friend laughed and said, "What do they expect? They provide a new home and familiar surroundings for the spirits of those that lived there."

Robert S. Tripp is a retired Delta Airline pilot who flew DC-10s on international routes to Asia and the Pacific for 30 years. A flight test pilot for the Federal Aviation Agency, he is a member of the Society of Experimental Test Pilots. For the past eighteen years he has lived in a small plantation town on an outer island of the Hawaiian chain. His articles on aviation and sports have appeared in Airways, Flying, Ocean Sports, Discover Africa, Road and Track, Invention and Technology and Science Digest. His first novel, Last Clear Chance, about a pilot who survives a disastrous crash on takeoff from Hong Kong's airport, is now making the rounds of publishers.