

Heart of the Sea -Transcript

RELL: A lot of grand-parents come up with the name before you're even in your mom. They have a dream and they tell your mother, well you're going to have another girl and her name's going to be: Kapolioka'ehukai, that means Heart of the Sea.

COMMENTATOR (WOMAN): Next up is a native of Hawaii: Rell Sunn

COMMENTATOR (MAN): She grew up at Makaha and really knows these waves well. Look at her maneuver here. Look right there, Andrea, that's a nose ride, you don't see many of them anymore, it's an extremely different maneuver to perform on these small boards. Looking at in slow motion, you'll notice she pulls herself up high in the wave, drops her weight back, stalls her board into the critical section and simply walks to the front of the board...plants herself on the nose and rides the wave; extremely difficult, it's going to score.

RELL: Before I could read, I could read the ocean. I knew the tides, I could read the wind on the ocean, I thought I knew everything I ever needed to know just from being on that beach every day, everything.

I started surfing when I was four. It's like you're four and you're having a revelation; you can't quite articulate it but you know the feeling.

And my dad was like a beach boy. And he used to surf all the time and so of course that was going to be a part of our lives. Especially when he chose to move out to the country with his Hawaiian wife and raise five wild kids you out here in Makaha and we just took off to surfing it was really easy.

Oh gosh I've-I've lived in this house it feels like a million years. Heaven forbid if I should ever have to move. I'm a collector of stuff. I love it, I love art, and I love carved wood so I started collecting tikis and it's kind of fun...I have like 316 I think. If you look out in the front yard, we have these huge Aluha heads, these travali heads. and they're like 180 pound fish, 160 pound fishes and their heads are cut off and stuffed on these spikes (laugh) and I love them and they're like a wind indicator and everyone says what do you mean? They turn with the wind and you know which way the wind is blowing? and it's like oh no, when it's trade, that smell comes right in the house!

We never had anything to be worried about, we never had to fear anything because all of our forefathers, all of our uncles and everyone who had passed away were in the ocean. So there was nothing to fear, they were there for us if we ever needed them. So I never thought I'd ever drown or get hit in the head, you know, or be injured or anything from surfing cause I believed in this.

First surfboard that I ever had that was truly my own, I won in a contest. So I get to sleep with it and just say--this is something that's mine; like someone would take a doll with him to bed--little girls-- we didn't have those things, but a surfboard, that was mine, that was special.

Makaha is wonderful, it's safe, it's got a channel. Everyone on the beach is watching out for you. People here are genuine. What they say is what they mean. They tell

you what they feel and how they are. No one here is very transient. I mean, they're here to stay, and it's wonderful, and no one moves out, they just move over.

As a child growing up in Hawaii, I had learned that surfing was unique to Hawaii where people stood up and rode waves on a surfboard. We had Duke Kahanamoku. We knew that he was everything to Hawaii. Aside from being an Olympian, he was the man that took surfing around the world. I just thought, I want to be like him. Everyone will always tell you a beautiful story about surfing where the kings and queens had surfed together and went in on the beach and made love.

When I was a kid, they had this contest called the Makaha International Surfing Championships. People from all over the world came out to Makaha. People would speak with different accents, a French accent, a Australian accent... Internationalism came to this little hometown in Makaha. There were men, telling these great stories, and I swore then that women could tell these same wonderful stories. And I would live that life that they lived and I just breathed it and knew that surfing was my life.

I got married and moved to Oklahoma and hated it, but I met a great Hawaiian community up there. They had Luas, they put the pig in the ground, I mean they did everything. And I met some wonderful people that taught me how to raise a daughter, because I didn't know – I didn't babysit or hold a child until I had Janie.

JAN: I was born in Oklahoma because my dad was in the army and they divorced when I was two. Sure, your perfect family is the dad and the mom but um she made it quite perfect without him. One day, we came back to Hawaii.

MOMI KEAULANA: Everybody's tootin the horn, hi Rell!, and what not. And she goes – oh god it's so good to come back and feel, you know, everybody makes you feel welcome.

VO LUANA FROISETH: From the first time she started competing, she wanted to win everything.

FRED HEMMINGS: As much as I admire the talent of the women surfers today, I probably admire as much or more Rell, Jericho, Margo, Lynne and the early women pro surfers because they were going someplace for the first time.

RELL: When we were pioneer surfers, starting off the world tour, there was just two handfuls of women. We only had one another. I needed sponsors, I mean I was a single parent, I had no money, and so my sponsors were the Wai'anae Veterinarian, Higuchi Farm Supplies, and the service station down the street, Watanabe service station, it was so funny.

FRED HEMMINGS: Rell was at a decided disadvantage as far as sponsorship goes. And she had obligations with a child so it was very difficult for her to pack up.

RELLSUNN: When we went to South Africa, we just pawned everything, we sold our cars—everything—just to go to South Africa. And when we got there, they said oh no, there's no money in the women's contest. We said – it's a pro event, right? They said oh well about 300 \$, and we just fell apart, you know, cause it costs us 1700 \$ to get there.

Women were looked at by companies and they saw the marketability, and I always tease Fred Hemmings cause he marketed us in another way to TV and said – there's big surf at Sunset, we'll send them out with the same size surf as the men, 15-20 feet, and one of them might die, who knows, a whole heat might die. And TV said –We'll buy it!

COMMENTATOR (WOMAN): Off shore, let's get our first look at Rell Sunn. She's been surfing since she was five years old.

RELL: And they bought it, I mean that's what they wanted, they wanted carnage, and they were gonna get it. Some women couldn't even make it off the shore break and it was terrible and it was demeaning. I didn't like that.

FRED HEMMING: It had to be done, there's no reason in the world why women can't ride 20 foot waves physically. Many of the women are strong or stronger than a lot of the men.

MARGO OBERG: You see that white water come, come down and your heart's pounding and the adrenalin's going because you can fear for your life. If that white water hits you, you can get held under for so long that you really don't think you're coming up.

COMMENTATOR (WOMAN): At the women's master surfing championship two surfers up on a good wave.

COMMENTATOR(MAN): And Lynne Boyer, behind there, kicks off, seeing that she doesn't have the opportunity to make the wave and Rell continues on it, playing it by herself.

FRED HEMMING: Them surfing that day and the footage and the coverage made them for real. It was probably one of the more pivotal days in woman's pro surfing.

RELL SUNN: Everyone thought you had to catch giant waves. But professionalism is an attitude, you know, how you feel good about yourself, how you represent your country. How you present yourself to other people and how you represent your sport. You know, the honor of being a surfer.

VO RELL SUNN: I wanted a job that would help me watch my kid on the beach and she was safe and I knew where she was. And that's why I life guarded. It's funny cause I'd be life guarding on the beach and all these kids would be saying "Aunty Rell, watch me. Watch me, Aunty Rell" "Oh yeah that's a good wave". And then they'd turn around and say "See, Aunty Rell said I caught the best wave" And I, you know, they'd say these things and so I'd pretend I was having this little contest and they'd all be winning, you

know, and uh I decided you know what, I'm gonna have a contest for kids– they're called Menehune here in Hawaii.

SONJA EVENSON: The Menehune event started because her daughter, Jan, had a birthday party and she goes – oh let's make a little contest– and it was like five kids or something and she took her old trophies and then she gave them out to the kids. And that was so popular that all the kids wanted her to do it again so it turned into an annual event. And it just got bigger and bigger and bigger and then now it's just huge.

KEONI WATSON: I walked down to the beach that morning, I won a surfboard, a body board, two trophies, each about this tall. I think that might've been one of the best days of my life.

RELL SUNN: I remember when I was a kid, we wanted everyone to watch us and there was no one to watch us, no one to show off to and to give these kids great self-esteem because you can get last in your...your heat when your competing and you feel like a champion anyway and that's what surfing does and that's to remind them just to have fun.

I guess I became Queen of Makaha after 10,000 people call you Aunty Rell. You become Queen of Makaha.

VO RELL SUNN: You know, everyone thinks I'm this surfer, but I credit myself with being a better diver. That is what I love to do.

BRIAN KEAULANA: Some of the guys would hit one fish and their spear would go over the side of the ledge, deep to the point where the guys can't dive. And everybody would look at Rell and... and – Rell, can you get my spear– (laugh) so she would dive down, grab the spear, bring them up with the fish on top.

KEONI WATSON: That first time I went diving with her, she got an octopus, just brought it up, like it was nothing. It was sticking to the surfboard, and trying to pull it up and she just real casually –this is a pretty good size, it'll be good tonight– and while the while, she's turning the head inside out and then she bites the brain and I'm looking at her going That was so cool.

KATHY TERADA: I remember her talking about chasing a fish, wanting to catch it, and running out of air and how she would distract herself and think about something completely different just so she could not think about her running out of air, so she could keep going. Um...and while she's telling the story, I remember feeling like I couldn't breathe.

JEFF DIVINE: Rell's fishing skills were incredible. I think it all goes back to her survival skills, as a single mom and literally putting the 8 \$ fish on the plate.

JAN SUNN-CARREIRA: She was actually trying to teach me to survive without a grocery store, basically just to survive.

KATHY TERADA: I remember the marks from her mask always on her face. I remember her telling me how she had to sleep with Vaseline on her hands and feet and socks on because her hands and feet were so cracked from all those hours in the water.

SONJA EVENSON: Rell really personified the Aloha spirit. Really personified what was just beautiful about Hawaii. She learned about chants and she learned a lot of hula, but she could never make all the classes cause she was traveling.

RELL: My car would never go in reverse, my Volkswagen. And these fishermen that were there would just pick it up and turn it around for me, and then I was always late for hula.

KATHY TERADA: Sometimes, we would have rehearsals like before competition or something and so we would practice along the beaches. We'd have a fifteen minute break and Rell would go—Ok, I'm going to surf, I'll be right back. And in the beginning, we'd go— don't surf, we only have fifteen minutes. And she'd go— oh no, I can—and she'd grab her board, run out, catch about five waves in fifteen minutes and be back. And we'd watch and go -Wow! (laugh).

VO KATHY TERADA: Each individual, as you enter, had to do a chant and the chant let the Kumu know if you were ready, if your mind was ready for hula.

JAN SUNN-CARREIRA: And I would go and just sit and watch and I just soaked it in, I was a sponge.

VI JONES: I don't know how she found the time to dance hula, but my god, she can dance the hula so beautifully.

VO JAN SUNN-CARREIRA: It's just so graceful to see my mom on a wave, that's what it is, it's grace. Then she danced hula and I just think it all came together.

VO RELL SUNN: In 1982, I was at Huntington Beach on pro tour, out of my heat, toweling off and I felt a lump. And it was the weirdest feeling because you go in and you get your mammogram and they're testing you and then you see one doctor come in and reread it then take more pictures and then three more doctors come in and other people reading it and you know something's wrong already and they start to treat you like you have cancer. They've ignored you, they've put you to the side, it's getting dark, you want to go home. I call my doctor at home and he says—Oh yeah, they just told me you have cancer.

KATHY TERADA: She called me at work and she told me she had breast cancer. I remember crying at work and I feel bad in a lot of ways because when Rell got her cancer, we were all so young. And I had never had my friend my age go through something like that.

VO RELL SUNN: I was young. I was thirty-two. You usually don't get breast cancer at

that time you know. The doctor kept saying, knowing everything and how it loves young bodies and your hormones and everything, maybe a year.

VO JAN SUUN CARREIRA: She was in the top of her shape. She was in the top of her life, I mean, and I got real resentful and I was just being, I might've just been selfish cause it was just my mom and that's all I had.

VO RELL SUNN: At that time, I was so involved with getting well and doing what I had to do that I didn't go out and talk to other people that had it or anything or know much more and I realize I didn't want to talk about it cause you know, in the islands, you're real superstitious, you grow up being real superstitious and people tell you don't talk about it, it gives it strength.

JEANIE CHESSER: She told me when she first got diagnosed or whatever and I didn't believe her. So I was like— no, it's not real, that's not real; she doesn't have cancer—no, I didn't believe her.

LUANA FROISETH: Rell kinda pulled away from a lot of people because Rell was going to die within a year. And a lot of people that were around Rell, even myself, I pulled away from Rell.

RON MITZUTANI: For young local boys, she was like everybody's dream girl, you know, she'd surf, she was beautiful,...and then, you think... there's no way she could be sick.

VO LUANA FROISETH: Rell was still surfing professionally when she was diagnosed with cancer. As the years went by, she really started to push more and more and just do as much as she could as good as she could before her time was up.

RELL SUNN: And I just went no way, not me. And there's two kinds of people that survive cancer: and people in denial or people who always fight it and I think I was always in denial. So I just kinda went on and things happened and every two years, it would come back.

I lost a sponsor, I used to surf for them and they found out I was going to have a mastectomy, and said : we can't sponsor you any more. And that was back when I didn't know to fight and say—who do you think you are?—you know, and I was embarrassed too, I thought: oh I'm sorry I let you down. It was so bad that I was devastated. In Hawaii, you live in a swimsuit, You mow your lawn in a swimsuit, you go shopping in a swimsuit, you do everything in a swimsuit. And so, they looked at it and just thought, you're different and we just can't have you.

MARILYN LINK: When Rell had her mastectomy, there weren't a lot of sources in Hawaii for prosthetic breasts. What she could find were foam implant sort of almost falsy sort of things and foam would absorb water and it would become like a big heavy sponge and it just wasn't appropriate for her lifestyle. I happened to be in Phoenix and there's a store called Lady Grace, the back room was filled with prosthetic breasts and it turned out

that it was perfect and Rell was so happy. She called me her bosom buddy.

SONJA EVENSON: She had this prosthesis that was sewn into her bathing suit and she lost it in the water and she's out combing the beach looking for her boob! you know, and these like Auntie, Auntie, what are you looking for, and it's like obviously well I'm looking for my boob. And she jokes later, she goes—I need a boob leash.

KATHY TERADA: And I guess, Rell being a real public figure, that must've been really really hard for her to deal with.

TV NARRATION: For most fans, the name Rell Sunn is one of those local names synonymous with surfing. Diagnosed with breast cancer five years ago, Rell's life has taken a new twist. While fighting the most insidious disease known to women with conventional drugs, Rell is also putting her incredible attitude to work. With radiation therapy five days a week, Rell still hits the beach for a more refreshing type of therapy. The only thing she's thinking about is having fun.

RELL SUNN: I feel that when you have cancer, it teaches you to be humble. You go bald so many times, I mean I've been bald twice in one year, and my Auntie Eileen always says —yeah, your a humble one when your bald, and I don't think that I was any more humble...I was just kinda miserable.

SONJA EVENSEN: She told me about the time she'd wake up and she'd just find like a ton of hair on a pillow. Then how can you face dealing with that day?

RELL SUNN: But you learn about the outpouring of love like when I was bald and I lost my cap and I'm so embarrassed out in the water I came home, left my board on the beach and just drove home immediately and I was just crying just miserable. And then when I went back the next day, all the guys had caps in the water.

SONJA EVENSEN: The medical expenses that weren't being covered by insurance was some exorbitant amount and, you know, Rell never had that much money and so just everybody pulled together.

RELL SUNN: I could only say: thank you very much for being here. And that cancer is something that you do not go through by yourself. And I want to say thank you to everyone...bye...thank you.

JEANIE CHESSER: And I'm telling Rell and I'm going: God, look at this, you have so many people that love you, this is unbelievable. You know, this is great just the bodies that were there and the support and the love. "Can you feel the love, yes I can!". It was great.

ISRAEL KAMAKAWIWO'OLE: For the lady who we are payin tribute to, this song's for her, this song's for Rella.

RELL SUNN: Love you all.

MARILYN LINK: When Rell would go into the hospital for chemotherapy treatment, she would get cravings for food and because I lived in town, I was close enough that I could go and get some contraband and take it to her in the hospital. There are places where you can purchase cooked turkey tails; you know that thing that was always left on the plate at Thanksgiving or maybe your grandmother ate it, Rell loved them, and if you showed up with a bag like this, had a big grease stain on the bag, so she knew that there was something good inside, and she would be happy. And I think the nurses would turn a blind eye.

RELL SUNN: It's like rust, it never sleeps. You know it's back, it's just always coming back, and you realize ugh, god, I've got to deal with this again. And you realize that the life that was once yours, The life you lived, just saying you were free spirited, no longer yours, it belongs to the pain in your back or your chest or in your throat or in your lung or the medication that makes you feel ill. It's not your life anymore, and you're just going--no. But then when you get in the ocean, it is your life. And when you can leave and get up in the morning and say I have enough energy to get in that water and catch a wave, you own your life again, it's so wonderful.

MARK RENNEKER: When she went to MD Anderson hospital in Houston, which is probably the best cancer center in the world, and had high dose chemotherapy, bone marrow transplant rescue. Basically it means to give drugs so powerful that they wipe out your bone marrow and so during that time when you've had the high dose chemotherapy, before the bone marrow grows back in, you are really at risk and there are fatalities during that time.

RELL SUNN: When I went into this coma at MD Anderson, they didn't think I was going to make it. It was like I was dreaming. I was paddling for a wave and it would never develop. The water was powder blue as if the surf should be bigger. I kept paddling and I could never catch a wave and it was just really frustrating and then finally I caught a wave, and it actually crested and broke. When I woke up, I looked at my sister and I said did you see it, I finally caught a wave. And she said: Oh my god, you've been in a coma, I didn't think you were going to make it. I really believe that surfing saved my life.

RELL SUNN: Well it looks like my show's come to an end and Rick was waiting on the sidelines here, I'm Rell Sunn, the Queen of Makaha, it's great to be home. Once again, I wanna thank all of you for all that aloha you sent me while I was in Texas, it's good to be back here in the airwaves; and... uh... god I enjoyed everything thanks for the leis, the flowers, the hugs, the kisses, and the embraces, and god I love all of you and I wanna thank you and we're ending here with Otisson with Simon and keep it tuned in to KCCN, your Hawaiian radio station. Bye you guys, see you at the beach.

SONJA EVENSEN: Every time I'd go out there, I'd see this beach, alive with families and kids and all the kids were all involved in the Menehune contest. Oh, man, the kids just loved Rell. "Aunty Rell, Aunty Rell, did you see the barrel I got, did you see me?" And Rell would just watch every kid and be able to tell them how good they were, I mean, she

just paid attention to everything and just you could just see these kids light up.

DALANI KAUIHOU: You know, out here, we have a real high drop out rate, a lot of drug problems, a lot of things happening that make it just difficult to survive. You know so many of them have low self esteem, when they could do well in surfing, when they heard Aunty Rell say “great wave!” You did so good, you know, and she was never facetious about it, she meant it and these kids fed off of that.

RELL SUNN: (whistles) Oh, I’m sorry, did you hear that? (laugh)...sorry.

JEANIE CHESSER: I think she wanted the surfers to get better by competing with each other. You have to time yourself, you have to follow certain rules. And it’s a good thing, you keep the kids interested in something besides smoking crack behind the schoolyard and stuff.

VO RELL SUNN: And the purpose of the competition was not to see who was the strongest or the best but to see what they were doing, the strategies they used, the whole flow, their whole repertoire and so I’d teach all those kids in that Menehune meet of mine to go for the sportsmanship.

I think it’s important for a girl growing up to have sport. Surfing is wonderful because the self-esteem you get from surfing. You can get last in your heat but you feel like a winner all the time. And that’s what the ocean does for you and that’s a nice addiction, surfing, and to always say “but one more.”

DALANI KAUIHOU: We ought to just encourage the young girls to stay in surfing cause, by the time they’re 14-15, they’re all gettin pregnant or whatever they’re doin so, keep them in the water and out of the back seats of the cars.

She would have all of the kids at the end of the meet; all the kids who picked up a piece of rubbish, brought it up, they would get a sticker for it so...had that whole beach clean in like 10 minutes, she told them: you gonna use this beach, you gotta take care of it too. One of the Hawaiian values is **Malama a hina** is to care for the land, **malama o kekai**, take care of the ocean. Take care of these things.

VO RELL SUNN: We don’t want plastic in the ocean because of the turtles. That turtle that may die was someone’s ancestor and was protecting us and we’re perfect litmus for what’s happening out in the ocean, we really are.

RELL SUNN: When I was a kid growing up in Makaha, we had a mosquito truck that used to come out here and spray DDT. Whoa, it was good fun, it was just this big cloudy mist. And we loved it, my mother and dad did not know to say “ don’t chase that truck down, it’s got DDT which specifically causes breast cancer–Rell, stop it.” I was the fastest kid in the block, got my skateboard, chased it, caught it, went home with just slicked back hair and everything, and you know...that might be one of the reasons why...

RELL SUNN: You know, when I first had cancer, I didn't know anyone with cancer and they did radiation from 10 till 3, now, there's so many people with cancer they start at 6 in the morning, they do it till 10.30 at night.

RELL SUNN: "This is what's happening with Hawaiian health, Rell, you wanna see, breast cancer, here's a chart", he says. Look at this, ok, Caucasians, that means the Portuguese, English, Irish, you name it, ok, this is a lomesome group of Caucasians, they may have the highest incidence but the mortality rate is lower than the Hawaiian mortality rate, meaning the Hawaiians die of it more than any other ethnic group. This is breast cancer. and this is what we want to do, we wanna talk stories, share these stories, but what else could it be...? Anna, maybe you could tell us?

ANNA: Oh, I think about the number one consumption per capita in the country of two things; and one thing is beer and one thing is Spam.

RELL SUNN: I'm shocked! (laugh)

ANNA: To look at some of the things that I had been eating all of my life and think ugh...poison.

DALANI KAUIHOU: Instead of going to a Tupperware party or an Avon party, you'd get a bunch of your friends together and Rell would come in and tell people how to do self examinations.

RELL SUNN:...that lump you felt, but remember, when feeling the breast, I was watching you go around, remember to use this flat part, not your fingertips, your not going to feel that much, but use the flat part, all right. And there's several ways: up and down and then circular and if you've got cleavage up to here well start from up here.

DALANI KAUIHOU: You know, it was a sensitive issue, yeah, not everyone out there talking about breast cancer and stuff. And so to be able to do it with a group of your friends in somebody's home where it's comfortable and where you can all share and talk about it. That and just the development of the program and then Rell because she had been through it.

RELL SUNN: I always tell women, if you don't get the services you want, you have the right to change that. And if you're in the midst of something and you're really distraught and you want to know why you've been sitting there for two and a half hours and no one came up to you and said, you know, you're waiting in the wrong room, say "where's the form to complain?"

RELL SUNN: Being a navigator at Wai'anae Cancer Research enabled me to share stories with women, people were able to call and say "I have a really good friend and she has cancer, maybe you could talk to her". You just say: I just want you to know you are really

loved and someone asked me to call you and if there's anything you want to know, I know quite a bit.

KATHY TERADA: She was a pioneer in surfing, but she was a pioneer in medicine for breast cancer for young women.

RELL SUNN: Ok, pretend you're climbing up a rope, climbing, hold on to your rope now, grab for...

KEONI WATSON: I just admire how she went through the whole thing. Most people would've been in a deep depressed funk, you know.

RELL SUNN: If you're headed for work, you might wanna call in and say something came up...How's it surfers right now, the country's up, yeah, Sunset's about six to ten feet, Pipeline six to eight, Makaha out West, there's a six foot backwash and it's basically three to five feet. Out on the East side, it's about...

VO RELL SUNN: I was surfing in a contest at Makaha and I couldn't breath. Then I thought gosh...I'm not having a stroke or anything, am I? The cancer was back big time so I had to do radiation again.

RELL SUNN: I've had these sunglasses on all morning, I was crying. I mean it's so emotional, people are walking...

TV NARRATION: ... thirteen year cancer survivor Rell Sunn flew back from San Diego just for the race. She's there undergoing experimental treatment for breast cancer.

RELL SUNN: I didn't lose my hair, I lost an eyebrow but it grew back already. There's so much treatment out there, that it's already shrunk my tumor by more than half.

JENNIFER LEE: She looked fine, totally fine, like nothing was wrong with her. She could be throwing up before you come, and when you show up, she'll act like she's fine and she'll put on her best face, you know, and make you think everything is fine and right when you walk out that door, she's back in the bathroom throwing up again.

RON MITZUTANI: Aloha and welcome to the west shores here on the island of Molokai. I'm Ron Mitzutani and joining me once again is the Queen of Makaha, Rell Sunn, and once again, we have gathered here on the friendly isle of Molokai for the seventeenth annual Banco Na Wahine o ke kai, world championship of long distance outrigger canoe racing.

RELL: All 48 crews are feeling like superstars in a sport that's full of super heroes. We know who the alpha females are, but there's a super hero in each and everyone of us and everyone can say that they have fulfilled their max potential. And the end result is always the same: I did a crossing. That's one under my bikini belt. Ron, we have come an absolutely long way from 1929 in delivering newspapers in a canoe in Kae Luha Kona to

letting this be a vessel for the soul. Each and every one of us watching this race can...can live our lives vicariously through these canoe paddlers.

RON MITZUTANI: She made me care about learning the sport. During one of the shows, she made a comment about challenging, challenging yourself, challenging. And she was referring to the women, pushing yourself. These women are pushing themselves out there. They're challenging themselves. It was like she was talking to me. It wasn't the men who inspired me to try and take on that channel...it was Rell.

FRED HEMMING: One of the greatest stories of Rell being who she was was her taking the Menehune to France. You're dying of cancer and you're sick and you take twenty some odd kids on a trip halfway around the world...my god!

JENNIFER LEE: When she told us we were going to France, like when I found out that's where I was going, I'm like— ok, France,...France, where is that? I'm thinking like if it's for kids, she's taking kids, it must be like Disneyland or something like California. I asked my mom and she's like ok, France is like two days away.

When I went up to Biarritz, I was thirteen years old. Oh...it was like a dream come true, you know, to spend all that time with Aunty Rell in a total different country. She wanted us to learn hula because when we got up to Biarritz, they were going to have like a party for us, this big **Luhau**.

MOMI KEAULANA: And she expressed Aloha with the kids singing and dancing and showing the French people: this is what we do where we come from. And then they learned from the French people and all too.

RON MIZUTANI: Ten years ago, she was trying to get stickers for these kids...as prizes. Now she's taking them to France. Are you kidding me?! Talk about a woman who's had incredible vision.

VI JONES: A couple times, she said, "Vi, can you just make sure that everything is ok, cause I'm not feeling well." ...but other than that, She never told anyone else. I don't think she told...the kids cause they never knew. She just continued on with her life.

VO DALANI KAUIHOU: You see people are looking at you, what are you gonna show them, you know, what side are you gonna show them.

JENNIFER LEE: Towards the ending of our trip, she got sick. and everyone's parents were telling the kids: you guys have to behave now because Aunty Rell isn't feeling so well. So when we came back is when I realized how sick she was cause she started her treatment again.

DR. KEITH BLOCK: When she walked in our door, I would suggest that most physicians wouldn't have given her but a couple of months to survive. Rell had not only been heavily pre treated, having gone now through three chemotherapies and a bone marrow transplant, but she was also suffering from skin involvement, bone metastasis, and liver metastasis at

the time, really quite extraordinary amount of disease. In the midst of all that, believe it or not, she was still surfing almost every day. So, recognizing that, we placed her portacath, which is how we introduce chemotherapy, in a different location where she'd be able to paddle and really maintain her life passion at the same time.

She pointed it out numerous times "that if I'm ever getting sick where you're worried about me, you have to promise that you'll get me home, you know, in order that I can be in Makaha at the time that I die.

BROOKE HOLT-FROISETH: We were just finished setting up the scaffolding, the sun was about to set, Rell pulled up, just came back from the mainland after having chemotherapy and I remember asking her if she was going to be ok to be in the contest and she told us yeah yeah, no problem, she can do the contest, if she gets too tired, she'll just rest and relax in the shade.

DALANI KAUIHOU: She came back, her face was all puffy, all the steroids, you know, you're not supposed to be out in the sun. You're supposed to be resting, right, normal people would be resting and just taking it easy because this is, that's bad voodoo medicine...not Rell! She's out there and so people are just endeared to her even more.

VO BROOKE HOLT-FROISETH: We had created this iron woman award which was going to be for the woman who competed in all three events and had had the highest total placings. Well, that ended up being Rell.

KATHY TERADA: A lot of times, we thought ok, this doesn't look good. She looks real thin, she looks real ill, she's going for these heavy duty treatments, she might not make it. And then she'd bounce back and she'd have more energy than all of us put together, you know, so she fooled us enough times that we thought, ok, she's going to outlive us all...we all thought she was going to outlive us all.

RELL: The...it has a way of spreading, you know, it has gone from, and it's different for other people, but it usually goes to an area near your vena cava and where it kind of occluded that vein for a while, and I had the hardest time breathing, and my face kept getting big and I couldn't figure out what it was, and it just wasn't getting enough blood exchange and oxygen. And then it spread to... my lung you know, and then it spread to my ribs and then it will spread again and I've gotten it in my brain.

VO DR. MARK RENNEKER: The really devastating event for Rell was when she developed brain metastasis. That's such a core part of self. A gamma knife unit means you don't have to just blast the whole brain with radiation and suffer all the consequences, but literally, it's like surgery. One treatment and psit, these things are gone.

RELL SUNN: I'm at a stage of my cancer where I just look at it as a really bad stage cause I really can't dive and I'm really dying to go diving and my lungs have cancer and it's really hard to breath and I get real emotional because of all the pills I'm on and it's like really hard. You start looking at it in—not by years but what kind of medication you're on and what—how it affected you and you're like a basket case, you're crying all the time or

you're so emotional, or if you had a gun, you'd kill somebody, or something. You just think, god, this is not me.

JENNIFER LEE: She would make goals for herself but it was towards the ending. Like the expiration date on the milk carton, she would just make it a goal. You know what, every little thing meant something to her.

SONJA EVENSEN: And when she couldn't even surf anymore, she couldn't even paddle, she didn't have her strength, I mean they would just pull her out there on a board and push her onto a wave, so she could get on a wave.

VO RELL SUNN: When we go in that tide pool, we go out there in the reef. That's one of the first things that to me should catch your child's attention. I just flip that rock over and look at that life that's under it. That's the life that's in the ocean. That's where we surf.

RELL SUNN: And the beauty of surfing or being a kayaker or a canoer is the magic that Isak Dinesen, you know, Out of Africa and she says "wherever I am in the world, I'll always wonder if it's raining, you know, in the Nyong hills. It's like I'll always wonder if there's a trade wind or how big the swells are in the **Ka'eve** channel or what it's like in New Zealand right now at Piha beach. We'll always have that in our hearts, we'll always wonder.

MALIA JONES: You don't really ever remember her as being sick. You always just remember how beautiful she looked the last time you saw her. And that's why, even though she had the sickness for so long, it was kind of sudden when she did pass away because she still has that smile, she's still like so beautiful.

JEANIE CHESSER: Just that image, I can just picture it now, you know, I can picture her surfing now. Just perfect, fluid, great movements. Just her surfing.

JAN SUNN-CARREIRA: If anything, everyone is stoked about her succeeding or being good as a pro surfer or a great hula dancer or anything and mine's just too simple...I'm just proud of her for being my mom.

Film Credits

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EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

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HAWAIIAN SLACK KEY LEGEND

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John "J.T." Torrijos
Fred Van Dyke
Betty Winstedt
Celeste and Gemma

LOCATIONS

Makaha, Oahu Hawaii
Block Medical Center, Evanston, IL
MD Anderson, Houston, TX
UCSF Medical Center, San Francisco, CA

"Aloha Ka Manini"
Performed by Israel Kamakawiwo'ole
Courtesy of Mountain Apple Company

“Moani Ke’Ala”
Performed by Ledward Kaapana
Public Domain

“Radio Hula”
Performed by Ledward Kaapana
Public Domain

"Hano Hano Hawaii"
Performed by Sol Hoopii
Courtesy of Rounder Records

“Searching for Da Cat”
Performed by The Blue Hawaiians
Courtesy of Pascal records

"Waltz of the Wind"
Performed by Ledward Kaapana
Written by Fred Rose
Courtesy of Milene Music c/o Acuff Rose

“For Your Needs Away From Home”
Written and Performed by Double Naught Spy Car
Courtesy of 11-ft Pole Record Co.

“He Mele No Kapolioka 'Ehukai”- Rell Song
Performed by Shawna Ngum and Ledward Kaapana
Written by Shawna Ngum

“Luau Hula”
Performed by Ledward Kaapana
Public Domain

“He Mele No Kapolioka 'Ehukai “- Rell Chant
Performed by Shawna Ngum, Malia King, Makani Da Silva, Julie Mau, Del Medina,
Marie-Therese Rigaud, Leigh Yafa
Written by Shawna Ngum

"The Beauty of Mauna Kea"
Performed by Keola Beamer & George Winston
From the album Kolonahe -- From the Gentle Wind
Courtesy of Dancing Cat Productions

"Ku'u Kika Kahiko"
Performed by Ozzie Kotani
From the album Kani Ki Ho'alu
Courtesy of Dancing Cat Productions

"Hawaii 78"
Performed by Israel Kamakawiwo'ole
Courtesy of Mountain Apple Company

“Aloha Hale O Ho'oponopono”
Performed by Sonny Chillingworth
Written by Diana Aki
Courtesy of Dancing Cat Records

“Heart of the Sea” was created by Lisa Denker and Charlotte Lagarde.

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