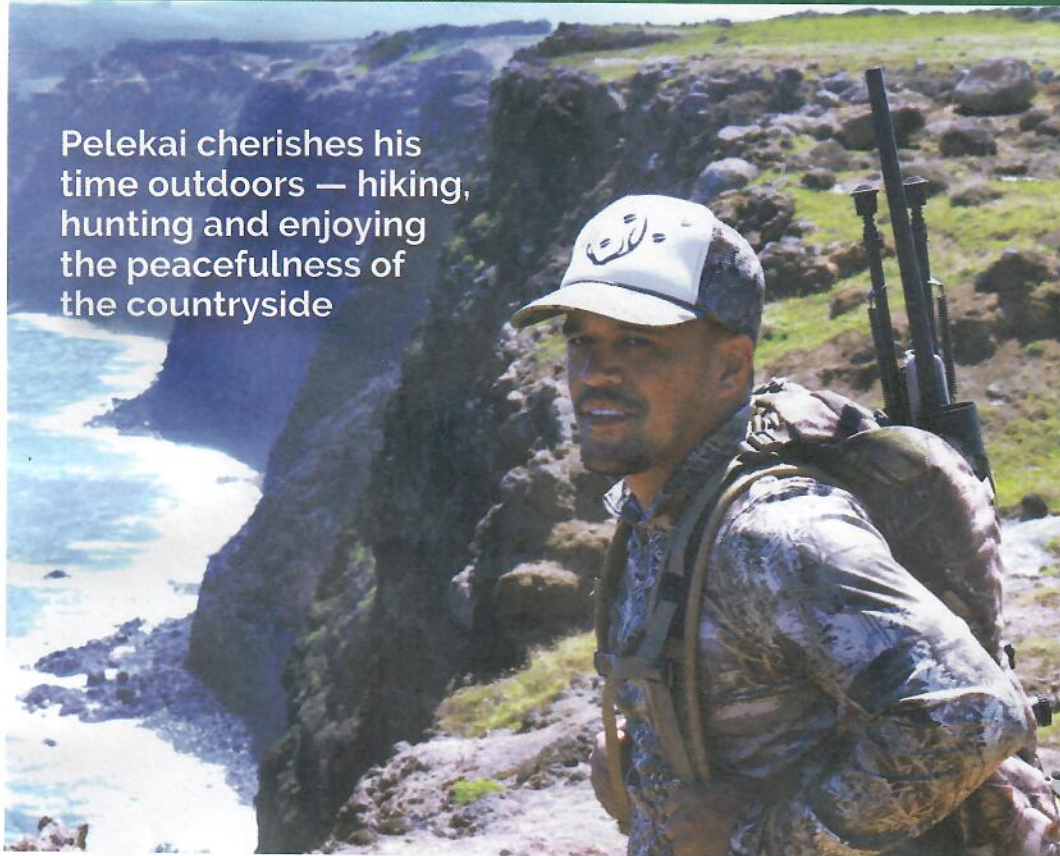


Pelekai cherishes his time outdoors — hiking, hunting and enjoying the peacefulness of the countryside



ROBERT PELEKAI

for Hele Mai *by P.J. O'Reilly*





"Knowing every customer is a blessing," says Pelekai.

“My life’s pretty simple,” explains Robert Pelekai, Makani Kai’s station manager for Moloka’i. “I go to work, I come home to my family,” he says modestly. As always, the truth is a bit more complex. Pelekai, the youngest of five children, has always been looked up to by his siblings, the one in the family they turn to whenever there’s a dispute. Whether it’s his maturity, easy going nature or innate calm, Pelekai is a man others respect.

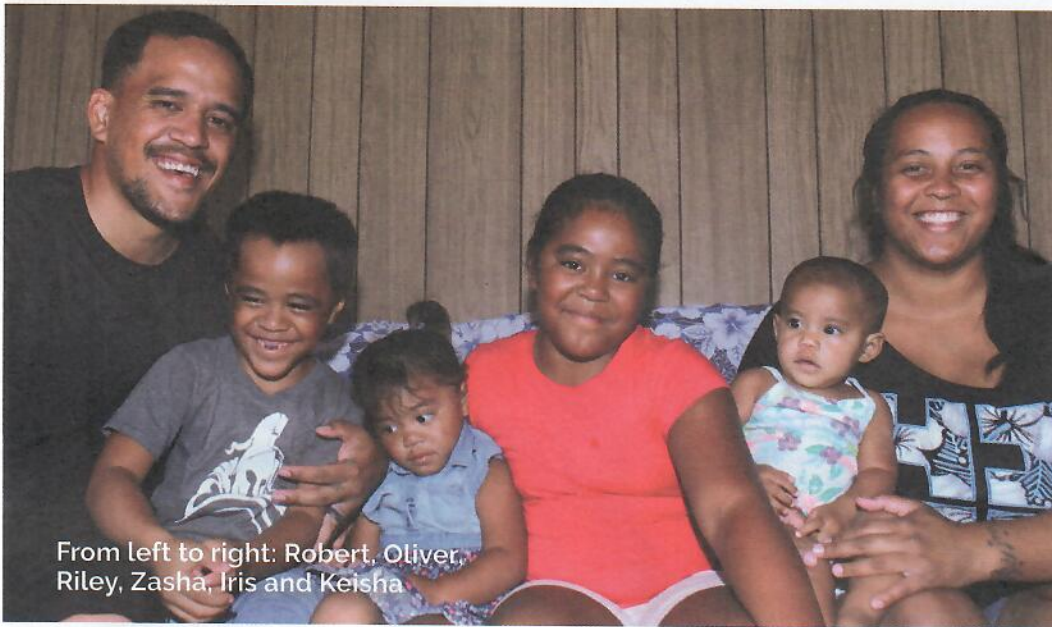
We drive to his homestead lot, 40 acres of small trees and brush, where Pelekai envisions one day building a family home. As we walk makai through the tall grass towards the cliffs along the north shore, he points to a distant hillside and says it’s one of his favorite hunting grounds. “I love to hunt. I love getting out where it’s quiet.” And he hunts alone. How does he haul the kill back to his vehicle? “I bone the deer right on the spot. I once shot three bucks and a doe, and

walked out with the meat. Eight miles. That was heavy.”

He says he hasn’t hunted in a while. Is that because he’s been busy? “No, my freezer’s full.”

He’s a good shot. An expert marksman, in fact, and he has the medals to prove it. Robert tore it up when he was in the Army, achieving the rank of Staff Sergeant and gathering service and achievement medals and ribbons like he was scooping up cashews from a bowl. “I enjoyed the training and education, getting certified and learning new skills.” An artillery specialist, Pelekai did two tours in Afghanistan and Iraq, where his artillery unit regularly came under mortar attack. “Once we were showering and the mortars started to fall. We scrambled to our duty stations wearing only towels.” The Army has also taken Pelekai to Korea, New Zealand, Japan and the Philippines.

A rising star, Pelekai’s talent was recognized by his superiors and he was invited to join



From left to right: Robert, Oliver, Riley, Zasha, Iris and Keisha

the prestigious Audie Murphy Club. Audie Murphy was one of the most decorated American combat soldiers of World War II, receiving every military combat award for valor available from the U.S. Army, and membership in the club is considered quite an honor.

He admits that he misses Army life, his career cut short by a growing family back on Moloka'i. "In the military, there are rules that you follow and they're simple, the Geneva Convention and the man on top. I never worried about being judged and there was strong camaraderie. In civilian life, you're trying to prove yourself. In the Army, you're already proven."

His military experience has helped in the outside world. "The Army taught me the value of teamwork. I trust my crew (at Makani Kai) and they trust me; we depend on each other."

A dedicated family man, Pelekai cherishes time he can spend with his wife and kids. He met his wife Keisha when he was a senior at Molokai High School. His oldest son, Oliver, is autistic and requires an extra helping of

love and attention, "It's on us because we get virtually no support from Maui. They tell us if we want special treatment, we need to commute to Maui five days a week. I work full time and my wife is a fulltime homemaker. How can we do that?"

But it's worked out just fine for his family. "Folks on Moloka'i are good with special needs children," he says. "The people here seem to have an inherent understanding, awareness and patience."

His own upbringing was less than ideal: Pelekai's father died when Robert was just 6. His mother moved the family to O'ahu and had her hands full working two jobs with five kids at home. "My mom lent me to my Uncle when I was about 11," he says. "But the situation was fluid and I spent several years living with kids my own age, just checking in with Uncle every now and then." Such a background no doubt led to Pelekai's self-reliance and independence.

Back on Moloka'i, working with Makani Kai Air has had its rewards, "Our customers are great, and they're committed to us. I think they love our station the best." As we talk, his

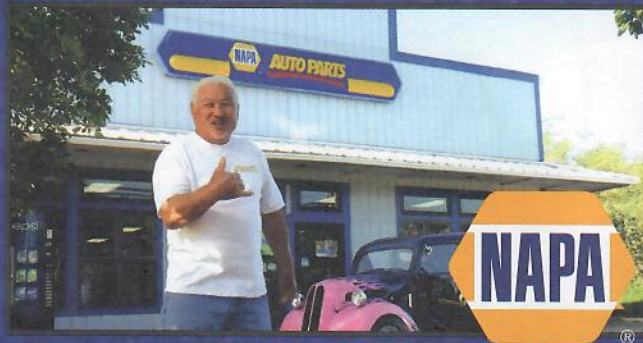


crew gathers behind the office, laughing and at ease as they wait for the next arriving plane, "We get along well with each other and with our customers because we've all grown up together."

A full-time job, a wife and kids, in-laws, social obligations, outings to the beach and hunting ... not what some would define as a simple life, and yet it works for Robert Pelekai, family man, soldier, leader.

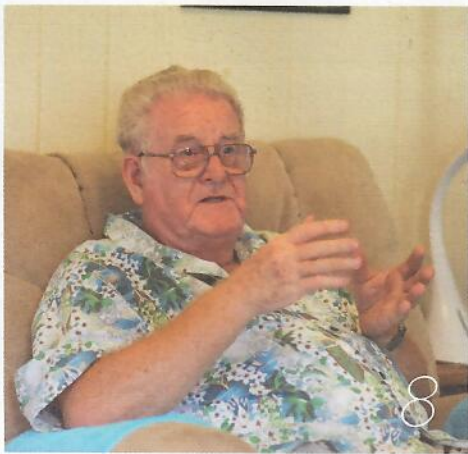
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