

# HONU, A FAMILY 'AUMAKUA

As Told by Cheryl Wilson

The 'aumakua, or guardian angels can appear in many forms to their 'ohana or family. These protective spirits can show themselves in the rainbow, mist or breeze. Depending upon the ancestral line of the family, they can appear as a shark, dog, chicken, lizard, owl, or even insects. Recently, one young Hawaiian man learned on three separate occasions that he and his family were protected by honu, the turtle.

As a child growing up in the 1960's, he had been told on several occasions by his grandfather that the 'aumakua of his family was the turtle. He had been warned that he must never harm this animal when he was diving in the sea. If he was ever in trouble, the turtle would be his protector.

The words of an old man speaking superstitious beliefs had little meaning to this hard-headed young man until the time he met a turtle face to face. He was diving one evening in the strong currents off of Sea Life Park at Makapu'u. Night diving was an exhilarating experience that he often enjoyed—everything in the water taking on a kind of surreal effect. The water was dark and cold and he noticed a very large rock nearby. All of a sudden, the rock drifted upwards, shaking him visibly. Since when did rocks move? he thought to himself. Upon closer inspection, he saw that the rock was actually a sea turtle. He had never seen

one so large or so close before. The turtle brushed past him, catching his attention once more because of its sheer size. He thought about the advice of his grandfather and felt comforted that the creature had swum with him that night so peacefully.

The second meeting with the turtle took place a couple of months later. This time he was night diving in the waters of Wai'anae. Out of the corner of his eye, he observed a large shark enter the vicinity, a shark much larger than he was accustomed to seeing. He watched the animal warily, as the shark began circling him, round and round, although keeping its distance. From out of nowhere, a large shadow moved swiftly through the water, heading toward the diver. The shadow turned into a sea turtle that hovered within arm's length of the young man. The shark, which had shown great interest in this human, abruptly turned and left, disappearing into the ocean's depths. The turtle, keeping the young man company for a few minutes as if to ensure his safety, then submerged into the darkness of the surrounding waters.

The third and final encounter between turtle and man took place a few years later. It was a beautiful morning and the young man and a friend had gone diving in Maunaloa Bay at Hawai'i Kai. He had become distracted, searching for salt water fish and had obviously stayed under too long, for he noticed apprehensively that the air in his tanks was running low. He moved quickly through the water, but when he cleared the surface, his friend and the boat were nowhere to be seen. Had he been under that long, that his friend had possibly left him alone, to get help?

There was nothing to do but to swim for the shore, which was now miles away. The current was incredibly strong as was the weight of the air tanks, which he would not drop, and he found himself fighting them both. He began to panic and in his despair, he began to pray, calling out to his family members who had passed on, and to his ancestors, to anyone who would heed his cry for help.

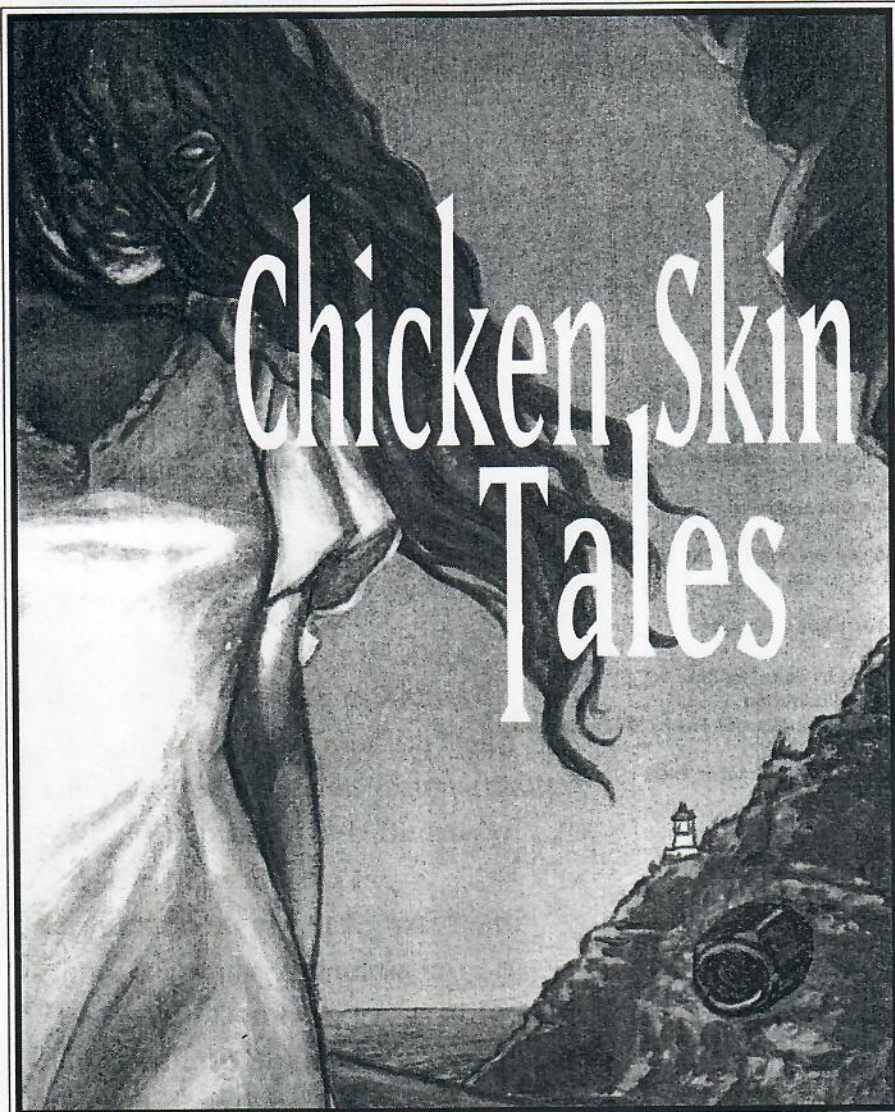
Just as he was about to give up his exhausted struggle and succumb to the inviting waters, a large sea turtle appeared from beneath the water's surface and came close to him. He looked at this creature and immediately felt an overwhelming sense of

complete peace. The turtle turned in the direction of the shore and the young man followed, knowing that he would lead him back to the safety of the land. The current, which had been noticeably strong, seemed to change suddenly. The water felt smooth and calm as he swam easily in the turtle's path, focusing on this creature that had become his lifeline, his savior.

They had covered some distance and the land was close now. The turtle veered off, heading back toward the ocean, leaving an extremely tired young man to swim the final few yards to the shore alone. The ocean seemed warm and inviting, a place where he now knew his family ancestors offered their love and very grateful protection.



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