

## **ESSAY**

For the past nine years that I have been living in this stunning island of Maui, I have truly become part of the West Maui ohana. With a population of 9,118 people (US Census 2000), everyone seems to know one another from each corner of town. Our community is built upon the diversity of the people and the history of the community. Because Hawaii revolves around a strong tourism industry and many visitors come to our island, Lahaina is experiencing a cultural revitalization toward environmental preservation. We depend highly on tourists and many visitors in order for our island to operate. We receive numerous amounts of visitors because of our scenic views, historical sites, and for our extra-ordinary culture. It is highly important to preserve and perpetuate the history and culture of West Maui because they are the foundation of our community. West Maui, most especially, holds the greatest history throughout the whole island of Maui. Agriculture was highly important during the older days when people lived off sugarcane, pineapple, and coffee. Taro patches and fish ponds were also established in West Maui, but fields, roads, and buildings soon took over. Sadly at this generation, we are facing threats such as the Super Ferry bringing traffic to our island and endangering the Hawaiian species, as well as the construction of more condominiums and roads, which are destroying our island's beauty. Although many of West Maui's history have been wiped out as generations pass, one important historical site remains until today.

After 150 years of showing West Maui's history and culture, the Maria Lanakila Church continues to show every visitor and every local resident the true meaning of West Maui. Being the first Catholic Church in Maui and with over 2,000 families in the congregation, Maria Lanakila has formed a close-knit community. It has formed a variety of church groups, including Hispanics, Tongans, Filipinos, Hawaiians, Caucasians, and many more. The cultural mix is what

makes the whole community blend and work together. I personally chose this historical site in Maui because it was one part of the community that has welcomed me when I first arrived to Hawaii. I felt the aloha spirit prevailing throughout the whole community when I first came.

I have helped preserve this historical site by engaging in many community events. Being part of the Maria Lanakila Parish Youth Group for over four years, we have participated in various community activities to help preserve the site. We have refurnished and repainted the pews, cleaned the cemetery and the rest of the sacred grounds, and helped fundraise for the remodeling of the church roof. Since this year marks the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the church, our youth group are getting involved by dancing hula and sacred gestures, singing songs, and fundraising money to support our community. We are practicing for the main event on September 2009, which will mark the end of the anniversary. We will take part in the luau celebration by performing a hula and showing the community that everybody can take part in preserving West Maui's culture and history. It is important to perpetuate our community's history and culture because it is what brings together the people and it is the identity of our community.