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Looking at the future of Lahaina, what do you feel are some of the challenges we in West Maui are facing in order to preserve the culture and history of our community for generations to come? What are possible solutions?

I have lived in Lahaina my whole life and have witnessed Lahaina's transformation from lush sugarcane fields to barren landscapes with malihini (foreigners) invading housing opportunities, unaffordable by kama`aina (native-born). The old mill that I passed by daily on my way to King Kamehameha III Elementary School has been torn down and now holds a swap meet for tourists and a recycling center. I've watched homeless people lounge on the grass at Malu`uluolele Park (once the home of Prince Kauikeauoli, King Kamehameha III, and Princess Nahienaena) on weekday afternoons when playing tennis at the Shigesh Wakida Tennis Courts. As each year passes by, a part of Lahaina's history and culture is being lost or forgotten in our daily lives. We need to look for new ways to educate the public and preserve these sacred sites that are so vital to our Hawaiian culture and the history of Lahaina.

Key to Lahaina's future: The education of our youth will help to preserve the history of Lahaina. Imagine students learning history and geography by providing walking tours around Lahaina Town's historical sites, mastering language arts skills in communication. Imagine students performing chant and dance, sharing our culture and aloha spirit with visitors on holidays honoring our ali`i as well as Boat Days. Imagine students sailing our double-hulled canoes Mo`olele and Mo`okihi to learn about wayfinding, navigation by the stars. Imagine the Lahainaluna High School Boarders and Hawaiiana Club sharing David Malo Day under the Banyan Tree on Front Street.

Imagine students learning to prepare cultural foods with nutrition and health in mind. Imagine the Art students being commissioned to use their creativity to design educational flyers for visitors. Imagine the potential of involving not only students from Lahainaluna, but Lahaina Intermediate School, King Kamehameha III and Princess Nahi'ena'ena Elementary Schools as well. Imagine the restoration of Moku'ula, with students providing live performances similar to the Polynesian Cultural Center. Imagine Hui o Wa'a Kaulua's educational mission becoming an outreach learning site for Hawaiian Studies. Not only would this provide hands-on, authentic learning in what once was the Capitol of the Kingdom of Hawai'i, but it would provide an unforgettable life experience that students can take with them to share with the world.

Although I am now an ocean away from home at Linfield College in Oregon, I am able to share my culture with my new friends from the Netherlands, Nigeria, and Japan, thanks to one of my most beneficial learning experiences: Lahainaluna High School's Academy of Hospitality and Tourism (AOHT). From an early age, the AOHT's founder took me on annual treks to Kaho'olawe to help restore the island. In addition, I learned about native plants and reforestation at Auwahi Preserve. Furthermore, I learned to work cooperatively with others in Kahakuloa Valley by cleaning taro patches and preparing food in an imu. Lastly, I shall never forget my opportunity to meet master navigator Mau Pi'ailug of Satawal, Micronesia, while training on the Makali'i double-hulled sailing canoe in Kona. These are just a few highlights of what I experienced about my culture through education, and it has instilled in me a sense of pride for my culture.

It is through the education of students that our culture will be able to live on. I believe this investment to be the key to Lahaina's future. Just imagine!