

The Sacramento Bee -- sacbee.com -- Anita Creamer: His hobby and his heart touched many
This story is taken from Lifestyle at sacbee.com.

Anita Creamer: His hobby and his heart touched many
By Anita Creamer -- Bee Staff Writer - (Published October 3, 2003)

The brightly painted new outrigger canoe rests on a patch of freshly mown acreage outside the Orangevale home that Marilyn Steele shared with her husband, Bob, for the 26 years they were married. Together, reflecting Marilyn's Tongan heritage and their love of the outdoors, the Steeles long ago joined Sacramento's Hui O' Hawaii cultural association as well as regional and international outrigger paddling organizations.

Hui O' Hawaii dedicated the canoe in September, a week before Bob Steele, a retired Aerojet engineer, died of cancer at age 70. "He was there for the blessing," says Marilyn. Uhane O Lopaka, the club named the new boat: "In the spirit of Robert." "He had no idea we were naming it for him," says Laura Aguon, Marilyn's daughter. "He was moved to tears." The women -- Marilyn, Laura and two of Marilyn's sisters, Lillian Jackson and Laura Paea, both from New Zealand, where the family moved after leaving Tonga at the start of World War II -- have gathered on the house's deck to remember the good times.

When they married in 1977, Marilyn and Bob each brought three children from previous marriages into the relationship. Together, they skied and camped and, of course, paddled. Over time, more kids came along, not only grandchildren but other young people finding their way in life.

With enduring generosity, the Steeles opened their home and their hearts. To a handful of Micronesian students, for example, who slept on their floor for a few days before renting an apartment together and going to local community colleges. One of the young men later moved back in with the Steeles and stayed for several years. And to numerous other young people who had no one else to turn to and so became unofficial offspring who never forgot the warmth and kindness that Marilyn and Bob Steele -- Nan and Pops -- extended to them. It was, Marilyn says, what she learned from her own mother -- to take care of the people around you. And doing so came just as naturally to Bob. "At the memorial service, a young man called out a long list of names, and 12 or 15 people stood up," says Laura Paea. "Bob and Marilyn had taken all of them into their home at one time or another." "To a lot of them, Bob took the place of the father who was absent from their lives," says Lillian Jackson.

After his death on Sept. 18, e-mails poured in from New Zealand, New Caledonia, Fiji, Tahiti, Hawaii and Samoa -- tributes from people who'd known Steele through his work as a board member for the International Va'a (Outrigger) Federation and its biannual world sprint championships. From the e-mails, it becomes clear: Like the dozens of unofficial family members here in Sacramento, people in the paddling community counted on Steele for his quiet humor, intelligence and steadiness. "He was a rock, a real rock," says Paea. "He never pushed himself forward or spoke loudly, but he was always there."

He quietly struggled with cancer for five years. "It's more of a loss than I can even think about," Marilyn says. "Sometimes, it's unbearable."

To honor Steele, the Hui O' Hawaii paddlers will gather this weekend at Lake Natoma. Together, they'll paddle out to the current, and they'll cast leis in the glassy water in his memory. But first, they'll open the leis into long strands of blossoms, breaking the circles and, according to traditional belief, releasing the spirit. And the flowers will slowly drift downstream toward the ocean and eternity.

About the Writer

The Bee's Anita Creamer can be reached at (916) 321-1136 or
acreamer@sacbee.com.

Go to : [Sacbee](#) / [Back to story](#)

[Contact Bee Customer Service](#)

[Advertise Online](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Help](#) | [Site Map](#)

[News](#) | [Sports](#) | [Business](#) | [Politics](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Lifestyle](#) |
[Travel](#) | [Women](#)

[Classifieds](#) | [Homes](#) | [Cars](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Shopping](#)

[GUIDE TO THE BEE:](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Contacts](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Bee Events](#) | [Community Involvement](#)

[[Sacramento Bee Web sites](#)]

[Sacbee.com](#) | [SacTicket.com](#) | [Sacramento.com](#)

[Contact sacbee.com](#)

This article is protected by copyright and should not be printed or distributed
for anything except personal use.

The Sacramento Bee, 2100 Q St., P.O. Box 15779, Sacramento, CA 95852

Phone: (916) 321-1000

Copyright © The Sacramento Bee