



**THE SUN SETS** as thousands take their turns to release personalized messages on candlelit lanterns into the waters off Ala Moana Beach.





# Day of Enlightenment

Thousands will be remembered this Memorial Day weekend during the 15th annual Lantern Floating Hawaii ceremony.

BY KRISTEN NEMOTO

ON MEMORIAL DAY 2008, Kalama-Valley resident Danielle Moskowitz made her way to Ala Moana Beach Park for the 10th annual Lantern Floating Hawaii ceremony. After a neighbor suggested she attend to pay tribute to her late father who had passed the year before, Moskowitz decided to see what it was all about. When she arrived, she was surprised how “different” the crowd vibe seemed to be.

“There were thousands of people there,” says Moskowitz recalling her first trip to the ceremony. “Yet the energy was not your typical event, everyone was so at ease and respectful. It was just amazing.”

First in line to grab a lantern, provided by Buddhist organization Shinnyo-en, Moskowitz waited for hours to ensure a good spot on the beach. The tide was calm and quiet. To her left and right, people stood shoulder to shoulder patiently waiting their turn to release their personalized candlelit lanterns. Moskowitz held her lantern close, the message to her late father illuminated through the side. Next to her, she noticed a man holding a lantern with a picture of himself with a woman.

“I looked at his lantern, he looked at mine,” says Moskowitz who vividly remembers his face. “We didn’t say a word to each other but we knew of course why each of us were there.”

“We all, in the end, are one person... That’s what makes this ceremony so special.”

When it came time to release both their lanterns, tears ran down Moskowitz face as she watched each of their loved ones drift off into the sunset along with thousands of other lanterns floating smoothly with the tide. Without saying a word, Moskowitz and the man turned to each other and embraced.

“We cried and just held each other,” says Moskowitz. “We both didn’t say a word, just hugged and cried. And imagine that times a thousand. The amount of love... it was all around us. It was just the most beautiful thing.”

This Memorial Day, thousands of loved ones will be honored as Shinnyo-en Hawaii will host it’s 15th annual Lantern Floating ceremony. Unlike any other state celebrating this national holiday, people from all walks of life will commemorate with this sacred time-honored tradition of Lantern Floating.

“Hawaii is so special for this ceremony because of its connection with the rest of the world,” says Roy Ho the executive director of Nā Lei Aloha Foundation, a social services organization founded by Shinnyo-en that has helped organize the event. “We have a unique mix of cultures and people, and Lantern Floating just naturally grew from there.”

Since 1999, after a successful turnout of 7,000 people for the first event in Keehi Lagoon, Shinnyo-en has conducted the Lantern Floating ceremony at Ala Moana Beach Park. The only place held outside of Japan, the ceremony has

evolved into a 40,000 attendee event, filled with performances from Shinnyo-en Taiko, local musical guests, and a traditional oli chant and hula kahiko. Blessings from various religious sects in Hawaii complete the ceremony with a dedicatory prayer led by the leader of Shinnyo-en, Her Holiness Shinso Ito.

Endemic to Japan, Lantern Floating is generally observed in the late summer of July or August to coincide with obon, the season when ancestors are honored. So as to attract and welcome people from all backgrounds, Memorial Day was chosen as the date to observe the Lantern Floating ceremony in Hawaii. The Rev. Craig Yamamoto of Shinnyo-en Hawaii believes the ceremony has become successful because it shares a common humanistic need for a spiritual connection.

“People from all different backgrounds, cultures, religions, ethnicities and beliefs... We all, in the end, are one person,” says Yamamoto. “That’s what makes this ceremony so special. We can all use that time to reflect.”

Due to the success in Hawaii, Yamamoto says Shinnyo-en has decided to do their first Lantern Floating ceremony in New York City’s Central Park this September.

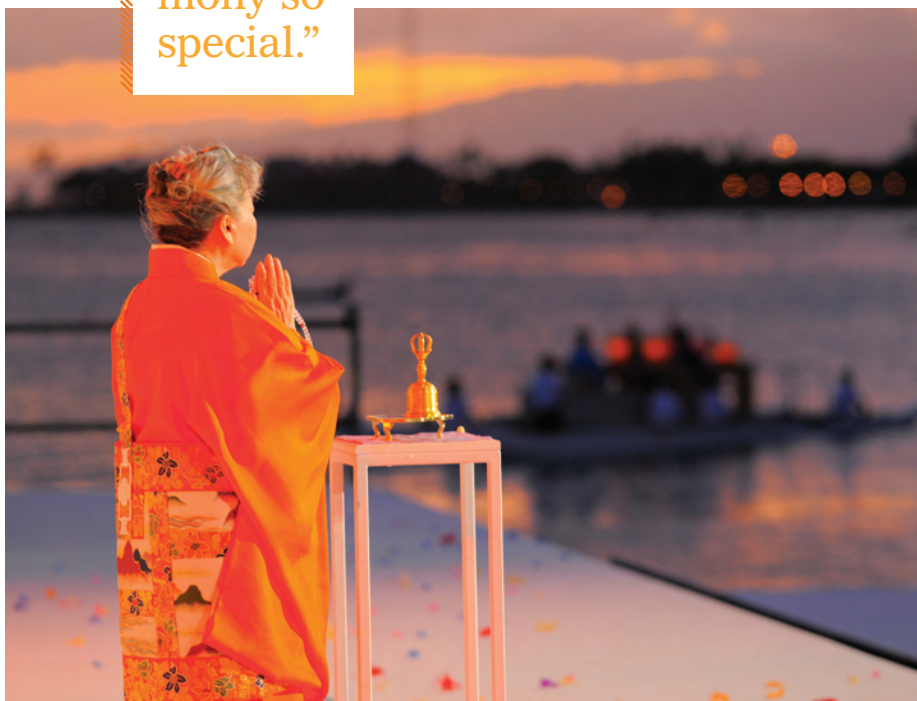
“We hope to use Lantern Floating as a way to bring people together all over world,” affirms Yamamoto. “It’s our wish to bring peace and compassion to one another.”

Since 2008, Moskowitz has attended and volunteered her time to help with the annual Memorial Day Lantern Floating ceremony. Along with hundreds of other volunteers, Moskowitz helps to ensure that each lantern is treated with the utmost care and respect.

“After the lanterns are sent out, they’re collected and refurbished for next year,” informs Moskowitz. “We also carefully take off the messages and save them for a special burning ceremony that Shinnyo-en conducts privately after Memorial Day.”

As for the ambitious crowd mass that Lantern Floating attracts each year, Moskowitz insists every person attend at least once to experience the energy that she can barely justify in words.

“You look around and it’s so comforting to see that you’re not alone in this world,” gleamed Moskowitz. “We need more of that today in every way possible.” 10







#### PEACEFUL SILENCE

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