

**The Rice Tree Chronicles**

# **Maui No Ka Oi**

## **When All My Heroes Were Cowboys**

Saturdays were the best day of the week for me. I grew up on Market Street in Wailuku remembering Saturday mornings with great anticipation of adventure, of doing good and of putting away the bad guys with Western justice. In the 1950's. I knew who was despicable and who was to be





revered. The movies taught me that. It was part and parcel for every boy growing up at the time.

The center of the universe, as I saw it, revolved around the Iao Theater, in the center of Market Street, which was not only the Mecca of all that was holy and good, but also the source of justice and the cowboy way.

It was, after all, where all my heroes lived on the big screen in screaming black and white, but stored in my mind as vivid living color. I was highly influenced by the King of Cowboys, Roy Rogers who himself was greater than life. He once came to Puunene on his way to Hana, Maui and brought along his horse Trigger. There was no mention of Dale Evans, but then again, who cared. I was ten years old.

My dad drove us down to the old Hawaiian Airlines terminal soon after it was converted from the Naval Air Station/U.S. Army Air Corps strip into the commercial airports of Hawaiian and Trans Pacific Airlines. There, my hero was driven back and forth before a hysterical posse of cap pistol toting, hat waving mini cowboys. It was the best day of my life.

But it was the Saturdays that had the greatest impact on my life. Iao Theater always had a kiddie show at 9:00 in the morning...rain or shine. It was my sacred duty not to miss the show. After all, it featured, three cartoons, an occasional travelogue which I and my friends booed soundly while tossing boiled peanut shells at the screen.

The absolute worst thing to show before the main feature would have been a sing along flick with a bouncing white ball to the tune of Moonlight Bay. It was worst than having to drag your kid sister to the movies with you.

Seasonally, a Yoyo contest would be held with World Champion Barney Akers on stage performing his double handed loop the loop trick as we counted out aloud while we sat at the edges of our seats grasping our Duncan Yoyos. Of course, everything prior to the main feature were mere appetizers. They were all part of the kaleidoscope of treats leading up to a western. All two hours of this holy endeavor for only nine cents.



It was during those early Saturday mornings at the Lao Theater that I was introduced to Whip Wilson, Gene Autry, Lash LaRue, Hop Along Cassidy, one of my all time favorites, and of course Roy.

To anyone else, they were just Hollywood actors. But to me, they were anything but, they were my moral compass. They taught me to be polite as in taking off your hat in front of a lady and saying, "yes, ma'am or thank you ma'am."

Of course, a lasting lesson that I learned was that you only used your pistol to shoot the gun out of the bad guys hand. You never shot a guy in the back. It was the rule of the West and every wanna be buckaroo this side of Wailuku knew that. Roy would have been proud had he known that.

Even in fighting, I learned a lot through the movies. You had to chase down the bad guy first and only then lasso him off his horse which of course was never white like Topper or a Palomino like Trigger. It was only then that you engaged the bad guy in a "mano a mano" brawl, subdued him and brought him to justice. I loved every bit of "pow" and "thump" that my heroes meted out. There could be only one conclusion, the good guy always won fair and square. Best part though was that his white hat, somehow, never fell off his head.

Yes, Saturdays at the Lao Theater were the best days of the week. It was a good time in my life when all my heroes were cowboys and on the way home, you could get a manapua from Hashimoto's Okazuya.

That's Earle, brother  
Wailuku, Maui, Hawaii