

0. MATT KING and HIS FAMILY - Story Preface

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This image, by noted Hawaiian artist Herb Kawainui Kāne (pronounced KAH-ney), depicts "A Wa'a Kaulua (double canoe) of Hawaiian Nobility of the 18th Century." Elected a "Living Treasure of Hawaii," in 1984, Kāne (1928-2011) helped people to understand Hawaiian culture. Copyright, Herb Kawainui Kāne, all rights reserved. Image provided here as fair use for educational purposes and to acquaint new viewers with his body of work. Online via Polynesian Voyaging Society.

In the acknowledgment section of her book, *The Descendants*, Kauai Hart Hemmings tells us that part of her story is based on historical facts while the rest is fiction:

I was inspired by historical facts and current events, yet this book is a marriage of reality and fiction, and fiction wears the pants in this family. (Hemmings, *The Descendants*, page 284.)

It is therefore up to us to decipher which is which, and that investigation begins with Matt King and his family.

We learn that Matt (played by George Clooney in the film) is descended from Hawaiian royalty. His great-grandmother - the last survivor of the Kamehameha dynasty - was a Princess who married an American (against her parents' wishes). Hemmings tells us that Matt's royal ancestor was Princess Kekipi. This part of the story is part of the fiction.

The last surviving member of the Kamehameha dynasty was Princess Bernice Pauahi Pahi Bishop. Born in 1831, she was educated by American Protestant missionaries in Hawaii. Against her parents' wishes, she married an American - Charles Reed Bishop - with whom she had no biological children. The pair adopted a son who died when he was six months old.

When the Princess was born, there were about 124,000 native Hawaiians living on the various islands. Fifty-two years later - when she signed her Last Will and Testament - there were about 44,000 native Hawaiians left.

Appalled by this fact, the Princess believed such a major decline was caused, in part, by various issues. Chief among them were:

- foreign-carried diseases (leading to fatal epidemics since native Hawaiians had no built-up immunity to fight things like measles);
- foreign influences (which diminished native culture and traditional Hawaiian life); and
- a lack of education (for native children).

Charles Bishop, the Princess' husband, later said how much this decline bothered his wife:

Her heart was heavy when she saw the rapid diminution of the Hawaiian people going on decade after decade.

Matt King and his daughters - Scottie and Alex - may have been descended from Hawaiian royalty and white missionaries, but it wasn't from the last survivor of the Kamehameha dynasty. Matt may have inherited a great deal of prime Hawaiian real estate, but it wasn't as a descendant of the biggest landowner in Hawaii - Princess Bernice Pauahi Pahi Bishop.

Even so ... as a hardworking lawyer who paid little attention to the needs of his daughters and his wife - until Elizabeth ("Joanie") King was in a brain-damaged condition - Matt King now tries to make the best of a drastic turn of events.

At the split-second of a boat ejection, he alone is responsible for his children. At the moment his wife ceased to function as his life partner, he alone must make decisions for his family.

One of those decisions is a unique way of notifying people that Elizabeth is about to die. Thinking a phone call isn't the way to break such news, Matt wants to tell everyone face-to-face.

Brian Speer - someone who was important to Matt's wife - is on vacation, off-island, so Matt and his daughters undertake a journey to find him.

Let's follow their path.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/MATT-KING-and-HIS-FAMILY-The-Descendants)

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See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/MATT-KING-and-HIS-FAMILY-The-Descendants)

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Questions 2 Ponder

Why Do the Fortunes of Native-Dwellers Change When Foreigners Arrive?

During the 19th century, Hawaii allowed foreigners into the islands. With these individuals came foreign-carried diseases and foreign influences on Hawaiian culture.

When Princess Bernice Pauahi Paki was born in 1831, there were about 124,000 native Hawaiians living on the various islands. Fifty-two years later, when the Princess signed her Will (in 1883), there were only 44,000 natives living in the Hawaiian Islands.

Was the arrival of foreign visitors and settlers a good thing, or a bad thing, for native Hawaiians? Explain your answer.

Was it a good thing, or a bad thing, for the visiting or settling foreigners? Explain your answer.

How Do We Cope with Sudden and Unexpected Life Changes?

In the novel and film "The Descendants," Elizabeth ("Joanie") King has a sudden accident which causes brain damage. She will die when her life-support is disconnected. Her husband and daughters know they are about to lose her.

A person's life can fundamentally change, at the snap of a finger, when unexpected events occur. What would it be like to cope with such a situation?

How do people have the strength to go on when a loved one suddenly and unexpectedly dies?

The King family had time to say their "goodbyes," even if their wife and mother did not hear them. Do you think having time, to say goodbye, provides emotional help to those left behind when a loved one dies? Why, or why not?

Media Stream



Matt King - The Descendants

Image of George Clooney and Shailene Woodley - in character from the film, *The Descendants* - copyright Fox Searchlight, all rights reserved. Image provided here as fair use for educational purposes.

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The Descendants - Matt King and His Daughters

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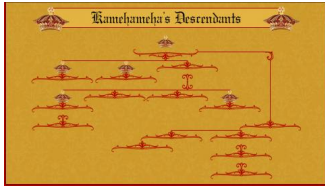
<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/The-Descendants-Matt-King-and-His-Daughters>



Princess Bernice Pauahi Paki - Youth

Portrait, by Joseph Feher, maintained at the Kamehameha Schools Archives.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Princess-Bernice-Pauahi-Paki-Youth>



Royal Dynasty of Hawaii - Kamehameha

Family-tree image, for the Kamehameha Dynasty, online courtesy Kamehameha Dynasty website.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Royal-Dynasty-of-Hawaii-Kamehameha>

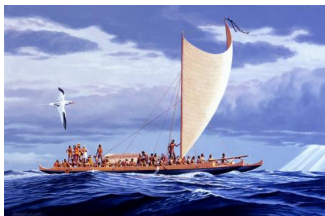


Wedding Photo - Princess Bernice Pauahi and Charles Bishop

Image of Princess Bernice Pauahi Paki and Charles Reed Bishop, on their wedding day, online courtesy Bishop Museum.

View this asset at:

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MATT KING and HIS FAMILY

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The Descendants - Trailer

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The Descendants - On the Set

Video clip, from Fox Searchlight, featuring interviews with members of *The Descendants*' cast and crew. Copyright, Fox Searchlight, all rights reserved. Clip provided here as fair use for educational purposes.

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