

Zack's Search for the Manta Ray

by Kawai Balancio

Art by Maluhia Sanchez



Hawaiian Cat Tales

Book Z (Ages 8 and Up)
Learning to Read with ALOHA



Zack's Search for the Manta Ray

by Kawai Balancio, Art by Maluhia Sanchez

Edited by Julia Rowe

Curriculum by Kristen Gagnon
and Rex Dubiel Shanahan

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Kristen Gagnon
541-254-0542
LearningIsFunInKona@Gmail.com

"This book is dedicated to Malu's grandfather, Joseph Sanchez Sr., who always takes care of her."

Kristen Gagnon

Educator, Publisher, and Editor



Kristen Gagnon was raised in central Florida. She started teaching high school math in Pompano Beach Florida when she was 27, and instantly knew it would be her life's work. Without teaching she is like a fish

out of water.

Kristen earned her Master's in Education in instructional design at Florida Atlantic University and continued to work on her Doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction. She was honored with the opportunity to work on multi-million dollar grants to integrate science into reading curriculums all over Florida and on the development of Geogebra, a free interactive math software used all over the world. Kristen taught college for 10 years and then returned to the classroom in Kailua Kona.

Presently, Kristen has an education consulting company where she and her team teach kids, one-on-one, as she develops a new curriculum. The Hawaiian Cat Tales book series was inspired by her students' stories and has been a key link in a reading curriculum that has helped her students make leaps in their learning. She has loved working with the team of 28 students, and professionals collaborating on this book series.

She plans to design, publish, and teach curricula that her students need to learn in this evolving world. Kristen dedicates these books to her son, Goose, and daughter, Layla, who are the loves of her life.

Rex Dubiel Shanahan

Educator, Writer, and Editor.



For the past 37 years, Rex Dubiel Shanahan, an Army Brat, has taken her third graders at Sunset Beach Elementary, on the North Shore of Oahu, on a yearlong journey. "Around the World We Go" is an across the curriculum, continent by continent, experience. Each year all the Common Core Standards are woven into this learning adventure. Writing is an integral component of this exploit. Rex loves to write, and she also loves to edit her students' work. As she says, "Every word in any piece of writing is a puzzle piece. Each piece is vital to the reader's ability to visualize the writer's intention."

Rex also has a literacy blog: rexthesurfdog.com. Her dog, Rex, was born in 2007. He travels the world with her making new friends and discovering exciting places. Then he writes about his experiences on his blog. National Geographic and the NEA national teachers' magazine, as well as newspapers across the country, have written articles about Rex the Surf Dog. Rex and Rex visit libraries during the summers and introduce children to the world of quality literature and global travel. Sometimes, they are interviewed on TV.

For 15 years, Rex has worked for Jack and Kim Johnson's Kokua Hawaii Foundation as the Garden Club Advisor at Sunset Beach Elementary. Lastly, Rex has served part-time in the Hawaii State Legislature as the Liaison from Sunset Beach to Rep. Michael Magaoay, District 47.

Rex is happily married to her high school heart throb, Ed Shanahan.

Kawailani Balancio - Author



Kawailani (Heavenly Water) Balancio loves animals. She is 14 years old and wrote this book when she was 11. She was born and raised in Honalo, Kona on the Big Island. Kawailani decided to homeschool when she had difficulty learning in regular school. She had a hard time understanding the way teachers taught her.

Now, she looks at things from a different angle. By thinking about important words of a lesson, and slowly breaking it down, she can process the meaning more easily. She takes five times more notes than her classmates. She studies extra hard and dives more into a subject because of her new learning style.

Like JoJo, the main character in her story, Kawai was bullied in school. With her mom's guidance, she stayed home for 5th and 6th grade and was tutored by Kristen Gagnon. During those two years the *Hawaiian Cat Tales* were written. Kawai wrote Book J and Book K in the alphabet series.

Now, Kawai is in ninth grade and attends to Konawaena High School. She loves school! She feels connected with everyone there. Kawai is successful in high school because she changed her study habits to fit her learning style.

Jiu-Jitsu is Kawai's passion. Kawai won Nationals in Jiu-Jitsu. In 2024, she went on to take Worlds in her division in Las Vegas. She loves wrestling and deep-water diving, too. Being on the water makes her feel at home. She feels embraced by the ocean.

Kawai hopes that her experiences and lessons in her stories about JoJo and Zack will inspire others. She wants her readers to believe in themselves, to become braver, grow stronger, and be successful in school, like she did.

Maluhia Sanchez - Illustrator



Malu Sanchez is a 13-year-old artist who lives in Hawai'i. Her favorite mediums to work with are watercolor and pencil. She is learning a new computer software for these pictures called [kleki.com](https://www.kleki.com). This year she sold a drawing of the northern lights to her sister's employer, making a sale for the first time! Some interesting pieces of artwork that she does are decorating pig skulls. Her family in Honoka'a are boar hunters and she has painted the skulls of the animals that her dad and sister killed for food. Being hunters of honor, they use all of the parts of the animal out of respect.

Malu also enjoys gardening, playing her cello, and of course drawing. Malu lives with her sister's tortoise cat, Thistle. There is a legend that the tortoiseshell cat brings wealth to the owner.

She was inspired to do the illustrations for these books and hopes Thistle brings her abundance too. Because she knows how much her friends love cats, Malu wanted to be the illustrator for the *Hawaiian Cat Tales* series. She also knew she would get better at illustrating while working on these pictures. Malu can't wait to show her friends the pictures of these cat characters. She was brought closer to her grandpa during this project. When she was reading Book B she talked about the story with her grandpa and he smiled because he shared his stories of reminiscing about surfing.

By doing this project, Malu hopes that people will see that art has value.