

NEIGHBORS OF *Wailea & Makena*

An exclusive magazine serving the residents of the Wailea, Makena, Maui Meadows and Keonekai Heights Neighborhoods



Sing You Home: Keonekai Heights' Elizabeth Wood and Kevin Keane

Photography by Christopher Douglass Photography

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Keonekai Heights’ Elizabeth Wood and Kevin Keane

By Robyn Russell
Photography by Christopher Douglass Photography

One of the first things I ask the residents profiled here—people who originally hail from places as distant as Germany and Russia—is what compelled them to make Maui their home. Anyone who has spent more than twenty minutes on our island might consider this a ludicrous question. The beauty, the warmth, the affability of Valley Isle residents—there’s no why behind it.

But living on Maui, as we all know, isn’t quite the same as vacationing on Maui. For this, transients abound. The mainland calls. Rock fever prevails, love affairs end, boredom—for some—ensues. To set down roots here requires a certain caprice, resourcefulness, and verve—especially thirty-plus decades ago, when Maui was a radically different, much more rustic place.

To Massachusetts native Kevin Keane, its ruggedness was part of the allure—and moxie is undoubtedly part of his character. He arrived on Maui on something of a whim and says, now, in a completely self-effacing tone, “Thirty-six years later...”

The ellipsis is where the story rests, of course; and though I’ve known of Kevin for over twenty years—in 1997, he was named the landscape manager of Makena Surf (where I absolutely did not sneak into the pool), and has attended more than one poker party at my family’s house—that tale officially starts on the eastern seaboard, where he studied science at the University of Maine. Three years after completing his Bachelor’s, he landed a position as a research associate with the University of Hawai‘i—a gig that had him picking nodules and simulating remote ecosystems as part of a government-funded project that aimed to assist farmers in developing countries by reducing their reliance on pricy nitrogen fertilizers.

In other words—although not in so many words—Kevin came to the island for the soil, which may be one of the rarer explanations I’ve received.

One of Maui’s many merits, Kevin is quick to point out, is that it claims ten of the world’s fourteen climate zones, from jungles and cloud-forests to the alpine desert that reigns at our summit. Translation? Farming practices





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Elizabeth had never set foot on Maui, she applied the following day. By Monday, she had the job.

For four months, Elizabeth resided in the Brick Quarters on Haleakalā's slopes, getting to know the soil of our sacred mountain in an entirely different way than the man who would become her partner. She hiked, worked, socialized, healed. And while Haleakalā—moody and temperamental; that enormous province of the gods—proved to have a weather system that can be far from tropical, Elizabeth had fallen in love; she'd found her home.

In the years following the end of her contract at Haleakalā, she assumed varied roles, all of which appealed to the lifelong student inside her. She taught at Maui Hui Malama, a learning center that caters to our island's at-risk youth. She was named a Training Coordinator at Maui Electric Company, where she instructed its staff on computer systems—surpassing records set by her supervisors—before working on the company's conflict resolution team (one of her fondest accomplishments was assisting two employees reconcile their relationship after fifteen years of silence). When her friend, Madge Walls, insisted she would love her real estate class at UHMC, Elizabeth signed up. (Moxie? She's got it in spades.)

Her friend was spot-on, and, in 1999, Elizabeth launched a new career as a realtor, ultimately going on to work with Coldwell Banker Island Properties; just last year, she received a ringing endorsement when she was awarded the REALTORS Association of Maui's Realtor Salesperson of the Year.

Elizabeth's affinity for teaching, however, endured, and it was through a child she once tutored in Keonekai Heights that she found her real home—at least the one with the roof. She and her father—who held a Ph.D. in Organic Chemistry and spent most of his life in Vermont's "cold country"—shared the home for the last eight years of her father's life. ("Couldn't we have moved here when I was a child?" she teased her dad.) Somber it was not, though—her dad enjoyed the hell out of his life on the island, and it wasn't uncommon for Elizabeth to come home from work to find him hosting a cocktail party with Maui men who, by location, choice, and more, were separated from their own fathers.

established here—specifically legumes, in Kevin's case—can be replicated in countries ranging from India and Africa to Indonesia. For fourteen years, Kevin navigated those ecosystems, working alongside graduate students from across the globe, serving as an ambassador on outings to Hana and Haleakalā, and traveling around the world, soil samples in hand.

Maui's predominant climate—at least on our perennially-sunny side—drew his partner of ten years, Elizabeth Wood, to the island. She, too—Montreal-born, Princeton, New Jersey-raised—arrived from New England, where for years she taught biology, geology, chemistry (all science, really, but physics, she notes) at a 90-acre public school in New Hampshire. When her pipes burst one particularly frigid winter, she resolved to move somewhere warm. Her marriage had recently come to an end. She'd had success as a school teacher and mentor, prompting students to participate in recycling programs and serving as a facilitator for Drug Free Schools. Incidentally, news of an opening for a curriculum writer at Haleakalā National Park arrived that Thursday, and though



It was through one such man—a close friend named David—that Elizabeth and Kevin met. At that point, funding on the project of which Kevin was a part had come to an end, and the father of two girls—both now in Colorado Springs—took a job as the Landscape Manager and On-Call Resident Manager at Makena Surf. Friends at first, their romance formally began when Elizabeth asked Kevin to see Chicago with her at the MACC.

It should go without saying they had a stellar time (and didn't allow it to slip away). Kevin retired from Makena Surf in 2015 and now assists Elizabeth in selling houses around the island, from putting up Open House signs ("the worst part of being a realtor," Elizabeth jokes) to consulting on landscaping. From the Humane Society they adopted a dog they dubbed Missy Porkchop—a sleek Italian greyhound who was so traumatized she spent the first 48 hours of her Keonekai Heights' life cowering in a corner. (Now she's known as the "Dog on the Roof"—and something of a street waif—for spending most of her time watching over the neighborhood.)

Kevin and Elizabeth travel and hike, counting Haleakalā as one of their favorite treks; they play ping-pong and cheer on the Patriots and cook; and, during Humpback season, they take a whale watch



once per week.

But one of their greatest passions as a couple is volunteering. On behalf of Wishing Well... for Maui Students, a nonprofit run entirely by members of Maui's Realtor Association that provides supplies to improve Maui County public schools, they've packed Moloka'i-bound containers with carpeting, furniture, and paint. Last Christmas, they were part of a team that collected over 200 gifts for disenfranchised Maui keiki. They've "adopted" Lokelani Intermediate as one of

their beneficiaries. And they regularly donate their culinary skills, charm, and compassion at Ka Hale A Ke Ola in Kahului.

"I love helping people," Elizabeth says. "It makes my heart sing." *Hana hou.* ✨

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