As we celebrate our company’s 65th year in the hotel industry, I have received a number of inquiries about some of the details of our early history. Recently, Robert McConnell, General Manager of Outrigger Waikiki on the Beach, asked me, “Would you be able to provide some history as to who, what, where and when our Outrigger logo came about?” Here’s what I remember.

After our first hotel, the Islander, opened in 1947, Roy and Estelle Kelley concentrated on developing hotels in Waikīkī’s Lewers Street area, next to Fort DeRussy. The Edgewater, Reef, Reef Towers, Reef Lanais and Coral Seas hotels were built as quickly as possible and, because of increasing demand, some rooms were often occupied before construction was 100 percent completed. That group of hotels was marketed under the Waikiki Hotels brand, but there was little coordination of advertising materials, font, style, etc. among the properties.

That changed in 1963 when Roy agreed to build four properties on land owned by the Queen Emma Estate – one on Waikīkī’s Beach and three on Kāhīō Avenue. The Outrigger Canoe Club had occupied the beachfront lot since 1908, so Roy decided to call this new group Outrigger Hotels – Outrigger Waikiki, Outrigger East, Outrigger West and Outrigger Surf.

At that point, many companies would turn to a specialized firm to research and design an appropriate logo. In those pre-Internet days, there were just a few national companies of that nature. Between them they were responsible for most of the major corporate work including the iconic logos of AT&T, IBM, Chase Bank, NBC, etc. Their fees were exorbitant. Even local designers charged dearly for their work.

Money was tight in our company, so on December 20, 1965, while construction on the Outrigger Waikiki hotel was under way, Roy, a trained architect and excellent watercolor artist, took out a piece of paper and sketched his concept of a logo for the Outrigger Waikiki Hotel. It featured the word Outrigger in a distinctive script, which was superimposed on a sketch of an outrigger canoe.

From the notations on that sketch, it looks as though he then sent it to a gentleman named Don Allison for refinement and finished versions in color and black and white.

When the Outrigger Waikiki Hotel opened in 1967, the logo used on the letterhead mirrored the wording in Roy’s sketch, and the canoe had been slimmed down to a modern shape that would fit neatly beneath the script.
The Outrigger Logo

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About 1979, my wife, Linda V.G. Kelley, a talented artist, sketched a new version of a logo for the Outrigger Hotel group. It incorporated an outrigger canoe, Diamond Head, a palm tree and Waikiki Beach.

This concept went through several iterations and the next version simplified the canoe and added the waves of the Pacific and a sail that evoked the spirit of the Polynesian voyaging canoe Hōkūle'a.

The sketch below with my handwriting on it, suggests I was involved in the fine details of the artwork.

Those who design logos for a living understand that a great logo works at the emotional level. In a well-done logo, the deepest parts of the brain react to the colors, shapes, lines, fonts and other symbolic elements.

We thought the movement of the waves, the feeling of exploration and the Pacific-Polynesian symbolism all conveyed the qualities of the company the logo embodied.

The artwork was accepted as the "official" Outrigger Hotels logo, although we still had to decide whether to call the group "The Outrigger Hotels" or "Outrigger Hotels." So we produced the two versions below and tried to decide which we would use. It was not an easy call.

The movie The Social Network suggests that Facebook founders Mark Zuckerberg and Eduardo Saverin went through a similar process. In a memorable scene, they are shown meeting in a restaurant with Napster co-founder Sean Parker. The meeting becomes acrimonious but, as Parker is leaving the room, he turns and suggests they drop the word "The" from the company's name, The Facebook. They did and the value of that advice will be reflected in the pricing of the stock when Facebook makes an initial public offering this spring.

Like Zuckerberg and Saverin, we dropped the "The" and became Outrigger Hotels, but rest assured, we are not currently considering an IPO!

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In September 1982, we faced a new problem when we brought The Prince Kuhio Hotel under the Outrigger Hotels umbrella. Again, money was tight and the photo top right shows me in front of the hotel thinking about an economical way to modify the entrance sign to include the word Outrigger. We finally settled on this logo, which we used for many years.

Could we just add Outrigger at the bottom like this?

As our company grew, the Outrigger script was given a sleeker, more modern look. The image of the canoe, sail and waves was also revised but the basic concept was retained. It still stirs my emotions; hopefully it does that for others too.

What about the other Outrigger hotels? Here are some of the concepts we thought of.

As we have grown into a firm that now has 47 hotel, condominium and timeshare properties with over 11,000 rooms open or under development in seven countries, the name of the corporate umbrella has been changed to Outrigger Enterprises Group.

I want to thank everyone who helped develop this ever-evolving logo, including my father, Roy C. Kelley, for the initial concept; my wife, Linda V.G. Kelley, for initiating change; my daughter, Kathy Carey, Jane Martin and Fran Kirk for collecting many of the historical documents and sketches included in this article; architect Dave Stringer who added his thoughts; and many, many others who took part in the process and brought us to where we are today.