

Notes on Interviews with Kuulei Pavao, held in 1987 and 1994

A. Notes concerning lauhala work

from Interview 1 by Mary Finley (Oct. 21, 1987)

1. Ku`ulei went with her mother to Poupou to pick lauhala. Her mother went during the summer, June to September, because it's dry then. They went once to "clean the tree" of the old, rotten leaves. Then every time they went after that all the leaves that had fallen down would be good.

Her mother taught her to take only as much lauhala as you can use, only as much as you have energy to clean, not so much that it just stays in a pile and rots. Her mother told her, "You take what you can use. Don't do like some people, they so greedy they take home and stay pile and pile. By the time they use is all rotten."

Usually they cleaned the lauhala at the beach--took off the thorns, cut off the head and tail end of the leaf. They took the lauhala home and her mother left it out overnight to get damp so it would be flexible. The next morning before sunup they would make it into rolls. Afterward they would soften it by pounding. (Her mother didn't get a machine for softening until she married Kini Aki in the 50s.)

While her mother would be picking lauhala and making a mat, she'd have Kuulei pick enough lauhala to make a hat or a handbag.

Her mother stayed up late in the night when she was weaving mats, and then got up again early in the morning. 4:00.

from Interview 3 by Keola Awong and Rita Pregana (August 30, 1994)

2. When Ku`ulei was about 8 years old, she went with her mom to pick lauhala all the time, but at that age she didn't want to work with the lauhala. It was too much hard work and getting stuck by the thorns. Then when she got to be 10 or 11 she started to get interested. The first thing Ku`ulei wove was a hat. Her mother made her burn it, because of the belief of her mom and her family that you have to burn the first thing you make so that you don't forget how to do it. She tried to hide that hat, but her mother found it and told her to go outside and burn it. In fact, her mother stood over her while she burned it to make sure she did it.

And she never did forget how, even though she went away to Honolulu for years before she came back and started weaving again.

The lauhala was plentiful in the Kapa`ahu area, so people could be choosy about what they wanted to pick--the tree with the soft leaf, or the wide leaf, with the white leaf or the dark leaf.

A lady would have her favorite trees where she always picked, and the others would know those were her trees and not pick from them.

3. Across the road from their house there were a couple of caves

(two side-by-side chambers) that the ladies used to weave lauhala--her mom had one cave and her aunty Luika had another. It was cooler in the cave, so you could still weave in the middle of the day when it was hot and dry.

from Interview 4 by Keola Awong and Rita Pregana (Sept. 7, 1994)

4. Ku`ulei still has one of her mom's strippers (koe, used to make lauhala strips for weaving). It is a wood block with four teeth made from horseshoe nails, 3/4 inch apart for 3/4 inch wide strips. Her mother used an iron-tooth stripper for making hats too. The hats that weavers make today, they apparently use a stripper with razor blades. The razor blade makes a clean cut, whereas the iron makes a fuzzy cut. (The edge has heu, fuzz.)

If you look at Samoan mats, you see they're not really tight. Because they make the strips with a single blade (a pin or a knife) and don't use a block-stripper. [So they don't get strips that are perfectly even.]

from Interview 5 by Keola Awong and Rita Pregana (Sept. 7, 1994)

5. Ku`ulei's mother taught her not to burn the leaves on the ground underneath the tree. If you do that, then every leaf you use after that will be brittle. Instead she piled the old leaves against the tree when she cleaned it.

They used to walk down to what is now the park to pick lauhala, to Poupou and Waha`ula area. (They never went as far as Kamoamo, and she doesn't remember lauhala down there.)

She wasn't really taught how to do lauhala. She learned by watching her mother, and then by doing the work of cleaning the leaves and rolling them. She didn't ask questions, except occasionally about how to do the weaving.

6. After the Poupou/Waha`ula area was made part of the park, her mother never went there to pick lauhala. She went to gather from the hala trees across the road from the house at Kapa`ahu, and later on she went to Kupahu`a to gather.

7. Her mother softened the lauhala leaves with a hohoa--a round-section pounder made of milo wood. She pounded a bundle of 5 to 10 leaves on a certain smooth rock in the houseyard, with a piece of cloth placed on top to cushion the rock. After the lauhala was pounded, it was rolled up into a big roll (k_ka`a) to be stored.

8. Ku`ulei showed a butterknife (not sharp) that her mother used to run over the lauhala after strips were made to help soften and clean them.

B. Other notes

from Interview 1

1. rules: Her mother told her not to sweep the dirt out of the house at night. When she asked why, her mother said it was bad luck, that the devil would come get her. So she was scared to do that. If they swept the house at night, her mother told her to leave the dirt behind the door until tomorrow morning.

Also she was taught that if she broke a glass, she should sprinkle salt on it so that it wouldn't cut her.

2. Her mom told her a story about her mothers' Uncle Kuokoa Kaheiki and Pele at the volcano. When people came to visit and they wanted to see an eruption, the uncle would go up to Kilauea and "do his things" up there to "bring her alive." He would go head first and do his prayers, then tell everyone to come sit down. Her mother told her she witnessed this. First they felt the earthquake rumbling and then they saw the lava erupting. When everyone had seen enough he would pray again and the lava would die down. Kuulei said she didn't see it herself, but she believes it's true because her mother told her.

Ku`ulei spoke also about another uncle of her mother, Kekaula. She saw him improve the trail from Kapa`ahu to Queen's Bath and make it into a road. He had made coverings of innertube rubber, like mittens and socks, to protect his hands and feet when he worked with the rock. (The "socks" went inside shoes he had made out of tire rubber.)

3. Her mother would tell her stories about the past, but not her dad. When her dad was talking with other adults, he told the children to get away because they "were making too much noise."

from Interview 2 by Mary Finley (Nov. 18, 1987)

4. When Kuulei's dad was alive, most of the men were working for the county (WPA), a few days a week--including Kaaukais, several of the Keliroomalus, Alama Kahilihiwa, Kini Aki. The men were also fishing and farming. The families grew taro, sweetpotato, leaf onion, banana. Taro, banana and sweetpotato were all grown in the Konanui family property up in the mountain in Royal Gardens. Before she was school age, she used to go up there with her dad and mom to stay and farm for the week. Her uncles would stay up there too.

By the time her dad passed away in 1944 most everyone had stopped farming. Only her aunt and uncle Quihano still kept on farming, at Kapa`ahu.

5. They had a small waterhole in back of the house that they used for dishes, for bathing and laundry. They used a big tub and filled it from the waterhole. Early on they used a brown bar soap for laundry. Later her mom bought Swan soap, and then Ivory soap.

When she was going to school she had only two dresses for school, another dress for church. They did laundry twice a week to keep the clothing clean.

6. During the war when the army was stationed at Kalapana, one of her aunt and her mother's stepmom did laundry for the army at Wai`opae, the pond with a little island in it with a coconut tree. She did the washing by hand and ironed the clothes with a charcoal iron.

[Q. Who were the aunt and grandmother?]

7. If you threw food away, her father and other people would say, "Food get eye." She asked her mother what that meant, and her mother told her that if you throw food away then you might not have luck next time you go fishing or go to pick opihi. You should never throw food away unless it's spoiled. If you can't eat it all because there's too much you give it away to someone else.

8. She and her mom always went to the Catholic church at 7:30 on Sunday. After her mom married Kini Aki, her mom went with him to the Protestant service too (held after the Catholic service). Usually Kuulei would go home while her mom went to the second service at the Protestant church and the hymn singing afterward.

from Interview 3

9. Ku`ulei was born on August 22, 1928 at Waipi`o while her mom was on a trip around the island. Her parents, Louis Mokuhalii Konanui and Julia Kekahuna Kahilihiwa, had six children. Two died young, leaving her and three older sisters. She also has an adopted brother who carries her father's name. This boy was originally adopted by her oldest sister Agnes (called Blackout) and her sister's husband from Kona. He was a nephew of the sister's husband. When her sister moved to Honolulu to work during World War Two, her parents took the boy in to hanai. Later they adopted him legally.

10. (See #4.) Up in the mountain where her family farmed (at Wala`ohi`a and on their family land in Royal Gardens, maybe 5 or 6 miles from Kapa`ahu), each uncle had his own section that he worked with his family. Ku`ulei remembers going up there when she was about 8 years old. Her sisters helped her dad with planting the kalo, but she was too young. They stayed overnight in a shack (p_pa`i hale). The other families each had their own p_pa`i hale up there too.

11. None of the farm produce was sold. It was used by the family and shared with the other families. Those who went up from the beach side would share with those up at the mountain. For example, when they went up to farm, her mom would take along salt,

flour, rice if she had any, and fish from the ocean. Everything else was up at the mountain: the garden produce was there and her dad went hunting to catch pig.

All the Kapa`ahu people shared what they had. When someone was going to give a party, everyone helped to work for it. No money was spent. One group would make wood, another go out fishing, another go to get taro and cook and pound it. Everybody knew what to do already. (It's different today. Now you have to have money to give a party.)

The people who came to a party were mostly those from the three villages (Kaimu, Kalapana, Kapa`ahu). Or if some of the family had moved away to Hilo or somewhere else, they would come.

Those days, there was no need for invitations to a baby luau or other kind of party. Everybody worked for the party so everybody just came. For a baby luau you brought a gift, but it didn't matter what you gave--whatever you had you gave.

Whereas today it's different. You don't want to go if you aren't invited. You have to worry about what you're going to give for a gift if you're invited by people who are well-off, about what you're going to wear. Before you just went the way you were.

Back then "nobody's gonna size you up," because nobody was that rich.

12. As kids they used the hao (wire with a u-shape hook at one end and sharpened at the other end) for catching `a`ama crab. You could use it to get the crabs that hid in a crack--either poke the sharp end through the crab or use the hook bring the crab up.

13. When Ku`ulei was young, she could play all day Sunday once she had gone to church. In back of the Catholic church was a gym. Father Everest taught them how to skate and they skated there on Sundays. They went swimming in back of the church too. Until World War Two came and the army put up barbed wire on the beach to kept the enemy from coming ashore. (The barbed wire was only strung in the low areas, not on the Kapa`ahu side.)

14. Kids weren't allowed to touch the fishing gear. You couldn't step over the net or the fishing line or the bamboo fish pole. They said if you did it made the fishing gear k_pulu (dirty) and they'd have bad luck when they went fishing. There was a special place where the fishing gear was kept and the kids weren't supposed to go over there. When the men came back from fishing, they hung the nets to dry and put them away. Whereas today she notices people aren't careful, they leave their fishing gear around here and there.

15. Parents would observe their children and see what their interests were, what it was they would learn to do. The boy who follows his dad when he goes fishing is the one who will become a fisherman. There's no use trying to make a fisherman out of the one who only wants to play ball. The parents didn't teach their children how to do things like fishing. It was up to the children

to watch and pick up the skills. But if you showed interest, the parent would be happy and would show you more. Her son Morris was like that with fishing. He always followed the father to see what he did in fishing. When he was really young, he even followed the step-grandfather (Kini Aki).

16. As a child she was never told about Waha`ula, what kind of place it was. She only was told one thing about it. She used to go to that area with her dad to go fishing. When she had to use the bathroom--they went in the bushes in those days--he would tell her not to squat with her backside to Waha`ula. She thought it was a grave and was scared of the place.

17. All of the Kapa`ahu and Kalapana mothers wove lauhala. That was how they got their money. They also made money picking `opihi to sell. She and her sister and cousins would go pick the `opihi and then her mother would sell it at Kea`au, at the Filipino camp. They sold a 5-pound Crisco can full of `opihi in the shell for 50 cents. They sold them fresh, not salted, because they sold them the day they picked.

18. During the war, the army had a lookout post up at Panau to watch the ocean for Japanese invasion. Two soldiers would go up with two Kalapana men. (At that time there was just the trail to Panau, no road yet into the park.) There were four Kalapana men chosen as guides--her father, Tomas Quihano (father of Rebecca Pau), Oulu Konanui and Charles Kaina. Ku`ulei is not sure if they were paid a wage. They were given army rations and maybe that was all.

19. The main drink at parties was sweetpotato swipe. And the men would drink `okolehao. Her mom and the women of her mother's age would drink some swipe, but it was more the men who really drank.