

CONTEMPORARY



KAHUNA

BY PAT PITZER

In a Hawaii vastly different from that of their forebears, they perpetuate knowledge and arts from the past



Black-and-white photo. Boone Morrison

Momi Mo'okini Lum is kahuna nui (high priestess) of Mo'okini Luakini, a heiau built by one of her ancestors 15 centuries ago, which she now shares with the public. Impressive when viewed from the air or the ground, the heiau in North Kohala is the largest of its kind in the Islands.

IN THE TRADITIONAL HAWAIIAN CULTURE, WHERE RELIGION pervaded all aspects of life, the kahuna of various classes were the powerful priests, the medical doctors and the expert specialists in each field of endeavor. They were the intelligentsia of Hawaiian society and the repositories of its accumulated knowledge.

Following the overthrow of the ancient Hawaiian religion after the death of King Kamehameha I in 1819 and the arrival in the Islands of American Protestant missionaries the following year, the kahuna went underground. Of their treasure of unwritten lore, transmitted orally from generation to generation over the centuries, it is impossible to know how much was lost, how much was altered, how much saved.

It is equally impossible to estimate how many practicing kahuna there are in the Islands today, since many are very private about it and will not talk about it. The word *kahuna*, in addition to meaning priest or expert in any field, also may be interpreted as a combination of *kahu*, meaning guardian or



keeper, and *huna*, meaning secret; hence, they are the guardians of the secret.

Those who will talk at all about being kahuna make it explicitly clear that there are many things they cannot reveal. Though they sometimes receive criticism from various quarters of the Hawaiian community for "going public," they are still the guardians of the secret.

There is no lack of controversy surrounding kahuna. Even within the kahuna community itself there is some disagreement as to who really is or is not one and who is or is not "doing it right." Kahuna who have updated traditional practices or teach them to others catch flak from the Hawaiian purists.

Is a kahuna an anachronism? Or are there still for the kahuna valuable roles that may, as they did historically, take many forms? How, indeed, does a contemporary kahuna function in a dramatically changed society?

A sample of four modern kahuna reveals a diversity of backgrounds and directions. Leimomi Mo'okini Lum, who devoted 32 years to a career as a policewoman active in juvenile crime prevention, is *kahuna nui* (high priestess) of Mo'okini Luakini, an ancient heiau in North Kohala on the Big Island. Morrnah Simeona, a *kahuna lapa'au* (medical kahuna), is an herbalist and former health spa operator, whose specialty now is applying traditional Hawaiian concepts to help individuals relieve stresses and live more harmonious lives. Thomas (Kamaki) Kanahele, descended from long lines of kahuna of Niihau and Maui, now lives in Washington, D.C., where he is deputy director of the Education Program for the National Endowment for the Arts. Lanakila Brandt, a former Wai-kiki entertainer, heads the Kahana-hou Hawaiian Foundation in Kona, where he is kumu of a hula halau, teaches Hawaiian philosophy, and is training a small group to become future kahuna.

MOMI MO'OKINI LUM, A WOMAN of regal bearing and luminous eyes, is directly descended from a line of kahuna nui of the Mo'okini Luakini that goes back 15 centuries. According to her genealogical chant, passed down orally from generation to generation of kahuna nui in her family, the heiau was built in the year 480 by her ancestor, Kuamo'o Mo'o-

Continued on page 128

A most extraordinary photograph has fallen into our hands.

The setting is 'Ahu'ena Heiau at Kailua-Kona, where King Kamehameha I made his last home. The photo was taken on Kamehameha Day, June 11, 1977.

Calvin Kelekolio of Kona, who is one of the men in the group at the right in the picture, had participated in the reconstruction of the heiau, which had recently been completed when the photo was taken. He is coach of the Keoua Canoe Club of Honaunau, and was at the heiau site on that particular day for the Kamehameha Day canoe races.

In front of the temple was a canoe that was on loan from the county to Keoua Canoe Club, and the canoe had been given the name Kaahumanu, in honor of the queen who was Kamehameha's favorite wife. Kelekolio had just finished attaching the 'iako, the outrigger boom, to it in preparation for the races.

As was their custom, before the races began the members of the canoe club had joined hands in a circle and made pule (prayed, in Hawaiian). As the group dispersed after the prayer, a friend of one of the paddlers took a Polaroid snapshot. As he peeled off the print, he looked at it, gasped and called the others to gather round and look.

The reaction went like this: "Here's Joe and here's Calvin, and here's you and here's me—but who are these people?"—pointing to the group of figures at the left, seated in front of the heiau.

There was, in actuality, no one sitting there at the time.

Yet here were these images—four people, who appeared to be dressed in traditional Hawaiian garb, with a kahili in the background.

The races went on as planned, and the Keoua Canoe Club did very well that day, but the mysterious photo lingered in everyone's minds and was a subject of conversation and speculation for a long time.

ENIGMATIC IMAGES



Leonard K. Paculan, Honolulu Publishing's print production director, is from Kona and is a lifelong friend of Kelekolio. Not long after the photo was taken, Paculan was visiting relatives on the Big Island, and his niece asked him, "Did you hear what happened in Kailua-Kona?" She told him about the remarkable photo everyone was talking about. Paculan, who is keenly attuned to his Hawaiian heritage, but who is also a down-to-earth, seeing-is-believing sort of person, asked his niece if she had been there or had seen the photo. She said, "No," and he said, "Don't believe what you hear."

Paculan thought nothing more about it. Then, six years later, he was together with Kelekolio and Joe Tassill, another member of the canoe club who had been on the scene that day, and the two started talking about it. Hearing it from two longtime friends who had been there, Paculan took notice. Tassill had the photo and showed it to him. With the passage of time, the Polaroid shot had faded, but the enigmatic figures in front of the heiau were there, all right.

Paculan borrowed the original to have an enlarged print made. He took it to a

professional photo processing lab and put a few questions to the expert technicians there. Yes, they said, the photo definitely was an original. They further told him that it is mechanically an impossibility to double-expose a photo using a Polaroid camera. Nor had the photo been tampered with, they said.

Still—there were those images, dressed from a bygone era in Hawaii and out of scale with the other people in the picture.

From Paculan, the print came into my hands. I decided to take it to two kahuna to get their interpretation of it.

Mornah Simeona, looking at the large woman who is prominent in the grouping, said, "That's Kaahumanu." (As a matter of fact, the pose does resemble a well-known portrait of the queen.) She said Kaahumanu's spirit was there, in the land, and wanted to be released. Simeona conducted ho'oponopono, with a special prayer, over the photograph to release the earthbound spirit, and pronounced that it was done.

When I took it to kahuna nui Momi Mo'okini Lum, even before I took the photo out of the envelope, she knew what was on it. As I was telling her

that it was taken at 'Ahu'ena Heiau, and that it was a Polaroid shot, which is impossible to double-expose, she said with firm assurance, "Ah, yes. You got the kupuna (ancestors)." When I showed her the photo, she said, "That's right. They are the kupuna. They are of the bloodline that belongs there, belongs to that heiau. It is a royal family, as indicated by the red they are wearing." I asked her why they were there, and she replied, "They came out to say thank you for a job well done on the heiau. They're pleased with the work, and they're at peace. I think it's a beautiful photo."

I do, too, but I still can't get over the habit, every time I pull it out of the envelope to look at it, of checking to see if the kupuna—or Kaahumanu—are still there. —P.P.



Kahuna

Continued from page 81

kini. The ancient chant reveals that her people came to Hawaii from the shores of Kapakapauaakane in the Persian Gulf. Wherever the migrating Mo'okini priests stopped, they built a temple to house their god, then continued on.

"We have two bloodlines in the family, the priestly line and the kingly line," she says. "The kingly line is secondary to the kahuna line. We belong to the highest order of the priesthood, the order of Ku. We have to be masters of everything."

Mo'okini Luakini, located near the northernmost tip of the Big Island, is the largest ancient temple of its type in Hawaii—a war heiau, dedicated to the god Ku. Here the kings and ruling chiefs fasted, prayed and offered human sacrifices.

The 30-foot-high stone walls form an irregular parallelogram, measuring roughly 250 by 125 feet. The stones are water-worn basalt, not found in this vicinity, and are said to have come from Pololu Valley, several miles away. According to the traditional chant, they were passed

from hand to hand along a human chain of thousands of men, and the temple was built in a single night, between sunset and sunrise.

The birth site of Kamehameha I is nearby, and the chant relates that his birth rituals were performed at Mo'okini Luakini and that as an adult he used this temple until he rebuilt Pu'ukohola Heiau in Kawaihae.

Mo'okini Luakini is the only heiau in the Islands to have as its kahu an unbroken line of succession in a single family—a rare link with ancient Hawaii.

In contradiction to those who claim that women traditionally were precluded from the post of kahuna nui, Momi Mo'okini Lum says she is the seventh female kahuna nui in her line, and none of the others were in this century. She was preceded by her father, uncle, grandfather and great-grandfather.

What was it like growing up in such an uncommon family? She recalls, "The heiau was always there, but as a child I just thought of it as part of the family background—the way others might think of grandma's house."

Born on the Big Island and raised

in Honolulu, she was brought up Catholic, in a religious atmosphere, and attended Sacred Hearts Academy. When asked how she balances her Catholicism with her traditional Hawaiian religious heritage, she replies, "Very easily. My uncle taught me to bridge them, and my father taught me to blend them. I can't tell you how I do it, but I have no conflicts with it. There is only one God."

As a youngster, she was her father's shadow and from him she learned to hunt and handle all kinds of firearms. She developed into an extraordinary marksman, and later would distinguish herself as Hawaii's women's champion sharpshooter for 23 years and earn several national championships.

Both as kahuna nui and in her police career, she followed in the footsteps of her father, the late Dewey Mo'okini, who retired as assistant chief of the Honolulu Police Department. "Father wanted one of us to enter police work," she says. "My four brothers weren't interested, and I was." After attending the University of Hawaii, she earned her degree in police administration from

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the University of Southern California.

It was her uncle, Heloke Mo'okini, who was kahuna nui of the temple when she was growing up, and it was he who chose her for the post, to succeed her father, who was chosen by her grandfather. According to the Mo'okini tradition, each kahuna nui selects the one who follows his or her immediate successor. The tradition continues. Momi Lum will be followed by her son, who was selected by her father. She will choose the one to succeed her son.

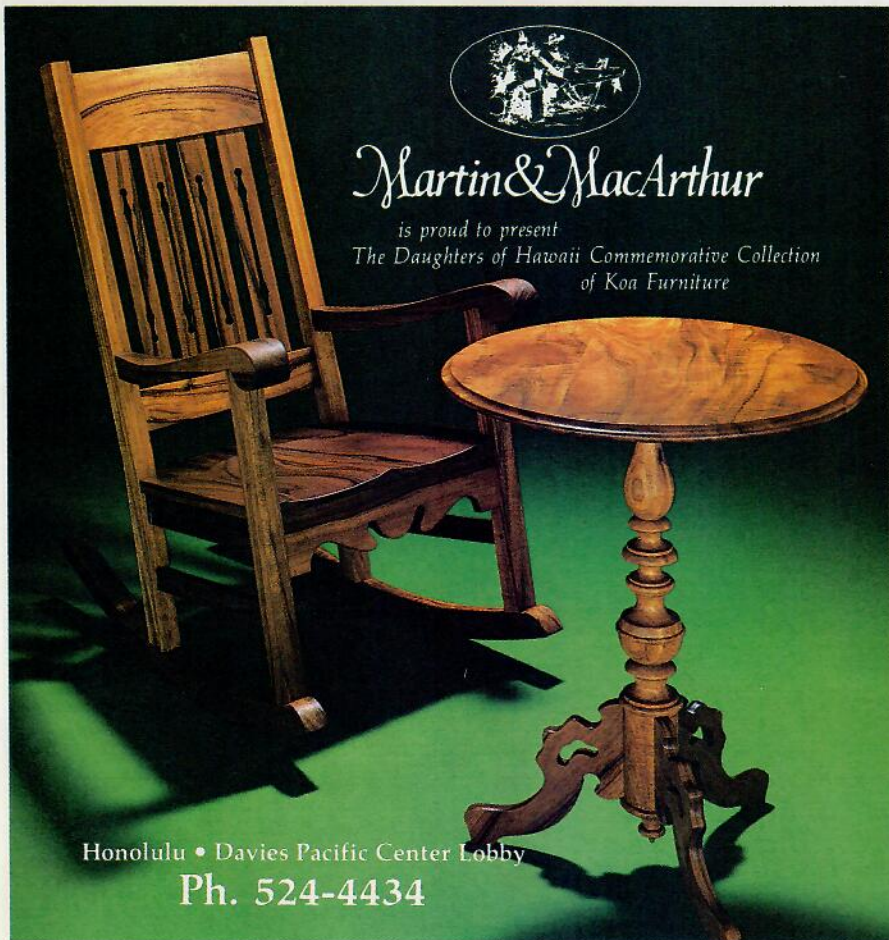
She and her husband, Alexis, who is the state adjutant general, have one son, two daughters and four grandchildren. She describes her family as "very supportive" of her temple activities. Her husband says, "When we got married, I didn't know at the time I was marrying a kahuna. That was before she was chosen kahuna nui. Both Momi and I became interested in Hawaiian religion. We would go up to Kohala and visit her uncle, and he started telling her things and watching her reaction."


When her uncle told her he would like to temple train her and asked if she would like to learn, she recalls, "I told him he had better talk to my father. He said he already had, and my father had left the decision up to me. I answered in three words: 'So be it.'"

That marked the beginning of rigorous training that went on for many years. Says Lum, "There were times when I said, 'Uncle, the glass of water is full'—I was full up with training and didn't see how I could go on, but I did. There was so much to learn. It is a tremendous responsibility."

She pursued with equal diligence the other facet of her unusual dual role, as a policewoman with the Juvenile Crime Prevention Division of the Honolulu Police Department. She feels that her insights as a kahuna helped her effectiveness in dealing with troubled juveniles and their families. She retired in 1982 after dedicating 32 years to this work. "I loved every minute of it," she says, "being able to serve people, to bring kids and their families together and get them to communicate. Kids need guidance and someone to teach them responsibility. They need a firm but fair hand."

Those familiar with Lum's work say that's exactly what she gave them, and that during her police




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career she has helped countless youngsters and touched many lives.

Says Lum, "It's been a fascinating career, and I have met many challenges over the years of police work. Now I'm ready to meet new challenges—with my heiau."

Her uncle Heloke Mo'okini's efforts to preserve the heiau led to its designation in 1963 as the first site in Hawaii to be named a National Historic Landmark. When her uncle died, her father took over as kahuna nui and, in 1977, when her father died, she succeeded him.

The following year the heiau site was turned over to the state—with the specific stipulations that there be no excavation and that the state consult the kahuna nui on all matters relating to the heiau. The strong-willed kahuna says, "I don't want them to tell me what to do; I know what to do. As kahuna nui of the temple, I have stood firm. I have a commitment to my father, to my uncle, and to all the kahuna who came before me."

The nearby Kamehameha birth site was turned over to the state at the same time as the heiau, and Lum was one of the key people involved in its restoration.

When the heiau was incorporated into the state park system, Lum lifted one of the kapu on it to make it safe for people to go there. She says, "It is a very sacred site. I only lifted one of the kapu; there are many more of them that will remain there."

She cannot talk about the remaining kapu, nor can she say anything about the religious services she conducts there, which are only for members of her family. At the temple services, she wears a full-length white kapa cloak, passed down through generations of the Mo'okini line.

Being the keeper of an ancient heiau is not all ritual and ceremony. It has some decidedly down-to-earth aspects, as well. Because the state has made little money or manpower available to fix up the site, she has done much of the work herself. It is not uncommon to see the kahuna nui, assisted by a few friends or relatives, planting grass or weeding at the heiau site.

Equally as important as the physical preservation and maintenance of the historic site is the need to pass on to present and future generations an understanding of its meaning and context in the Hawaiian culture.

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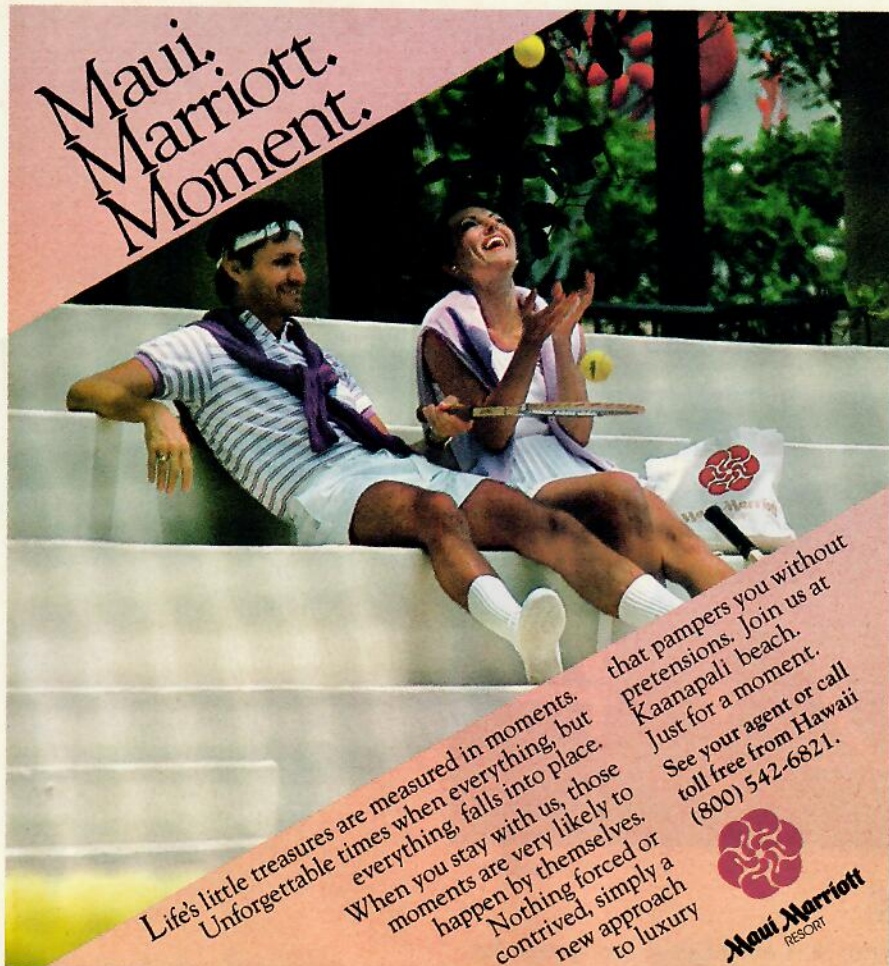
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years she has hosted a Children's Day at the heiau. All the schools on the Big Island are let out and the children come to Mo'okini Luakini and learn about it directly from the kahuna nui. This year's Children's Day, Nov. 8, she expects 2,000. Her aim is to reach and teach the children about this part of the heritage that is both hers and theirs.

Fixing up the heiau site and establishing Children's Day were only the beginning of Lum's new challenges. Her projected plans, which will be accomplished in phases as funds become available, include a docent program. She wants to have someone on the site daily to guide visitors and inform them about the heiau, as well as to protect the site.

Last year on Kamehameha Day, the Mauna Kea Beach Hotel hosted a benefit 'aha'aina, a traditional Hawaiian feast, to assist in fund-raising for the docent program. On that day, Lum personally guided visitors through the heiau, looking for all the world like a majestic Hawaiian hostess graciously showing guests through the family home, which, in a very real sense, she was.

An important part of her plan for the ancient site's future is to build an education center and museum near the heiau, to tell the story of the history that resides there and to house the artifacts that have been passed down in the Mo'okini family. (Contributions to this project may be sent to Mo'okini Luakini Inc., P.O. Box 7125, Honolulu 96821.)

Lum is a kahuna with a computer. On it, she is in the process of recording the wealth of historical information stored in 15 file cabinets, which she inherited from her father. This treasury of lore, accumulated by generations of her family, she will share with the public through the museum and education center.

She has a sense of having been chosen to bring new life to the heiau. Part of that revitalization is sharing the site with the public and giving them an understanding and appreciation of it. She says, "When I first became kahuna nui, I promised new life to this site and new vibrancy to each stone."

Just as Momi Mo'okini Lum has reached many people, first through her juvenile crime prevention work and now as keeper of a heiau, so has Mornah Nalamaku Simeona reached many through her seminars, classes, lectures and counseling.

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Honored last year as a Living Treasure of Hawaii, Simeona is a *kahuna lapa'au*, a medical kahuna. She not only knows herbal medicinal use and *lomilomi* massage but, most especially, has developed a system of relieving stress, which she uses to help others help themselves. In her system, she has adapted ancient Hawaiian concepts and techniques for practical use in today's world.

As a child, she participated in family gatherings for *ho'oponopono*. That is the great traditional Hawaiian method of family therapy, of "setting to right" problems and stresses among family members. Con-



Pat Pitzer

Morrnah Simeona, kahuna lapa'au, adapts traditional Hawaiian concepts to contemporary use, sharing them widely in the form of a self-help method of relieving stress.

ducted by the family senior, the session included prayer, identifying the problem and resolving it, repentance and forgiveness, freeing those involved from guilt, grudges and resentments.

"The ancient Hawaiians were outstanding psychologists in their own right," says Simeona. "They also believed in the triune nature of the mind, which we today would call the subconscious, conscious and super-conscious." What Simeona has done is taken the belief in the triune self and the traditional practice of "setting to right" and fused them into a system of conducting *ho'oponopono* with one's self. It is a way of getting the three parts of the mind working together in harmony to identify and relieve the causes of stress and get rid of all the mental garbage we carry around.

She has no qualms about adapting traditional concepts to contemporary applications. Not surprisingly, she has been criticized by some Hawaiian purists who object to her taking something traditional and modifying it and applying it in a modern way. "I have heard a great deal of that," she



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says, "but I don't listen. I have my own feeling that it is nice to have tradition, but if there are ways of using the knowledge today to help people, we should be using it. So my mission is to share it as widely as possible."

Last year Simeona conducted two seminars in her system at the United Nations and, as a result, has been invited to Geneva to conduct additional sessions. She is currently traveling on the Mainland, giving lectures and conducting workshops in California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas and Virginia. Among her speaking engagements have been several universities, colleges of nursing and medical centers, and she annually conducts a series of classes for psychologists and psychiatrists in California.

She no longer is surprised by all this, though she was once, a few years ago. "When Johns Hopkins University called me, I thought they must have the wrong person. But they said they had heard my system was unique and they wanted me to come and give a talk on my approach. With the upsurge of interest in holistic health, people have come to realize there are different viewpoints to be heard."

She has also spoken before many business and professional groups, introducing them to the idea of using ho'oponopono to relieve stress, avoid burnout and release untapped energy in their work.

Simeona is founder and president of Pacifica Seminars, where she and her chief executive, Dr. Stanley Hew Len, who is a psychologist, and their staff regularly conduct workshops.

Pacifica Seminars is headquartered in Waikiki, where Simeona was born and raised at a time when it was mostly duck ponds and bullrushes, with one hotel, the Moana.

As a very young child, she was gifted with skills in herbal healing. Says Simeona, "My parents were very Christian-oriented, but we did have kahuna who would come and stay with us from time to time when I was little. When they came over, they knew of my aptitude for herbs, so I would help them gather the ones they needed." She recalls the neighbors saying, not approvingly, "There go those kahuna again."

She also acquired skills in lomilomi and, prior to beginning her ho'oponopono seminars about 10 years ago, she operated health spas in

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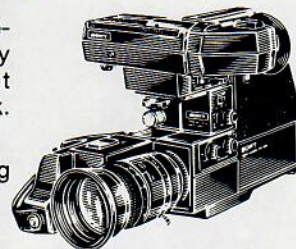
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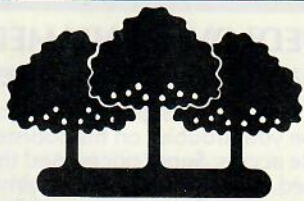
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the Royal Hawaiian Hotel and the Kahala Hilton. Among her massage clients at the Hilton spa were Lyndon B. Johnson, Jackie Kennedy and Arnold Palmer.

There is something very calming and soothing about Simeona's presence and her voice, a sense of serenity about her, as she talks about teaching people how to relieve stress and attain peace of mind.

Says Simeona, "Ho'oponopono is a tool we can use to bring peace and harmony and balance within ourselves. The idea is to help people better understand themselves so they can identify, unlock and release the causes of their problems and stresses."

Her system uses ho'oponopono techniques to create a working partnership among the three parts of the mind or self, which she calls by Hawaiian names, as well as by the terms subconscious, conscious and super-conscious.

The subconscious, she says, acts as a memory bank, a computer, which records, catalogs, stores and retrieves. We all have stored within our memory bank vast sources of information, with emotions and attitudes attached. Stored along with that which is useful are many things that can cause stress and disrupt our function—fears, guilts, anger, resentments, anxieties, insecurities, unforgiven conflicts and painful, unwanted memories.

All of this stuff we have either programmed into our own computer or allowed someone else to program for us. The good news, according to Simeona, is that we are capable of cleaning up the garbage in our own computer.

"The problems arise because too few people are in tune with their computer, their subconscious," she says. "But once we are tuned in, we can erase our fears and the causes of our stresses and reprogram whatever we want to be in there. We take all these negative things that we have created, accumulated or accepted, dredge them up and sever our connection with them. And as we release them, we are set free from them."

It is a sort of mental house cleaning, going through the rooms and tidying up, getting rid of the clutter, discarding the junk—the old, unwanted memories, attitudes, anxieties—useless items that get in our way and are best tossed out.

(In a similar manner, Simeona, who is often called upon to do a

blessing of a place, says that underlying the blessing is the cleansing of the place, releasing from it all the unhappy and negative connections of the past.)

Her version of ho'oponopono is a simple self-help process. You become, in effect, your own personal therapist. She says, "Once you learn the process, you don't need me. I don't carry the ball; I throw the ball to you and you run with it." With irrefutable logic, she points out that she's not always going to be there wherever and whenever you are having a problem, while you, of course, are.

It's an old Hawaiian problem-solving process—given a new twist.

Says Simeona, "Many people have said that I'm doing the wrong thing by teaching that which is Hawaiian to non-Hawaiian people. While my system is based on traditional Hawaiian concepts, the application is universal. It can be used by anyone. These are useful old Hawaiian beliefs and we are now bringing them up to date and sharing them."

Kamaki Kanahale, a kahuna born on Niihau and raised in Nanakuli on Oahu, confirms that the need to achieve harmony among the three parts of the self, as taught by Simeona, is a modern interpretation of a traditional Hawaiian belief. He says, "I certainly sanction what she's doing, although for me, personally, translating my knowledge to accommodate the modern interpretation, dealing with it in terms of the subconscious, conscious and all those levels of things would drive me up the wall. But if the approach gives human beings in this contemporary world a better understanding of themselves and life, I'm all for it. I'd be the last to criticize a methodology that works for someone."

"What is that wonderful phrase the Canadians use?—'Whatever turns your crank!'"

Kanahale, who is deputy director of the Education Program for the National Endowment for the Arts, has been living in Washington, D.C., for about nine years. The road that led him to Washington had some unusual turns in it.

Trained in the ancient kahuna arts by his parents and grandparents, he was also trained in the Polynesian arts and culture, hula and chant. He was educated at the Church College of Hawaii and Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, then taught at a high school in Salt Lake City.



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Among the art techniques he taught his students, who were almost all haole, were Hawaiian arts and crafts.

At the same time, the energetic Kanahale also owned an import-export business and a Polynesian dance studio with a touring hula troupe.

During this period, he did some work for the Utah Arts Council and work for the governor's office, mostly in the areas of minority affairs and culture and the arts. It was through the governor's office he learned of the position open at the National En-



Pat Pitzer

In the milieu of Washington, D.C., Kamaki Kanahale practices his kahuna arts and retains his cultural identity.

dowment for the Arts. He applied, was selected, and headed for Washington, where he's lived ever since.

Kanahale, a man of commanding presence, says, "I have met many great people in the cultural and artistic world, and have mingled with the rich, the powerful and the avant-garde. It's been a very exciting, very challenging period in my life. At the same time, I have retained my own identity, my own culture, and these same people have come to respect my views.

"In Washington, every morning at 6 o'clock I still chant. Every time a new neighbor moves in, I have to go to him and say, 'If you hear drums at 6 in the morning, don't be alarmed. I'm the one. So please don't call the police.'"

While he has gained a broadened perspective by his experiences in Washington, through it all he has never lost sight of his roots in the Islands.

Says Kanahale, "Niihau is a unique spiritual experience, something deeper than can be explained. It is, for the Hawaiian, as if Niihau is itself a heiau, its own temple and sacred place. It is rare that such a place can occur in this very modern world."

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Kanahele is descended from a long line of kahuna on both sides of his family. He says, "Both father's and mother's sides practiced *lapa'au*, the healing arts, and, on the other hand, '*ana'ana*, which is, for the lack of a better word, the use of sorcery. Although the latter sounds, for the naive, evil, it is not necessarily. It serves its purpose. It can be used to stop the spread of something evil. There are processes of extinguishing evil and clearing and correcting situations without harming a person.

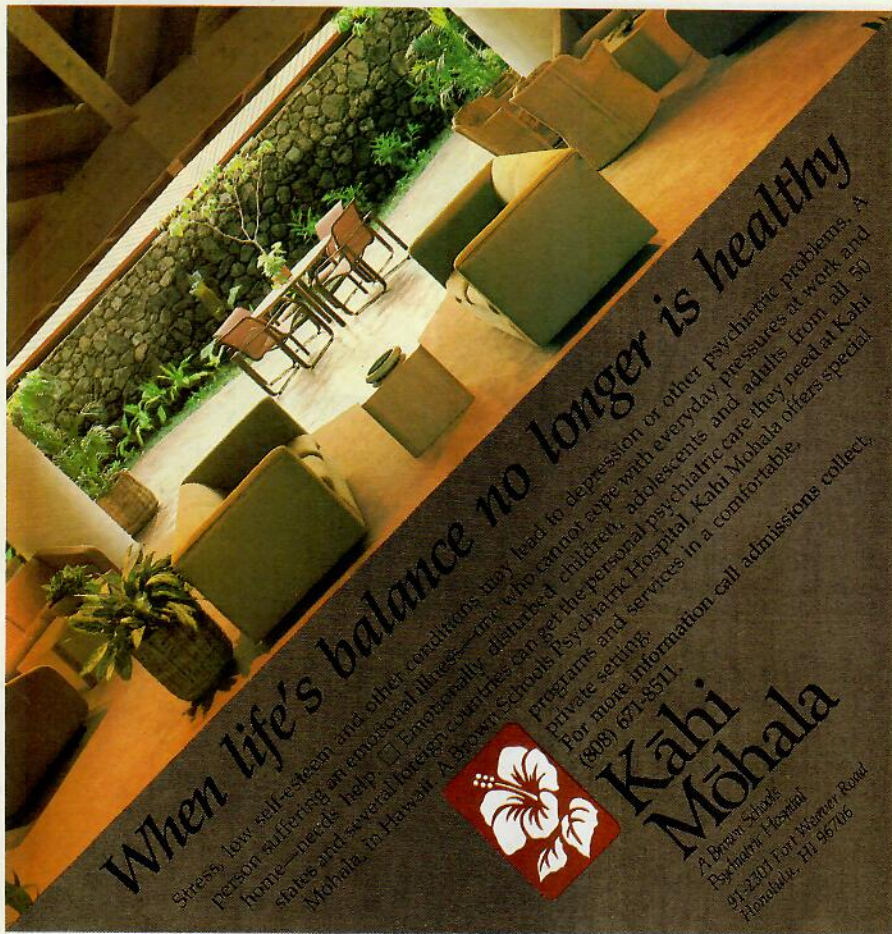
"For both '*ana'ana* and *lapa'au*, the processes are technically detailed, and the reason why I chant every day is for me to keep the knowledge."

Considering his family background, it is not surprising that his childhood recollections are not your ordinary sort. He recalls, "When I lived with my grandparents, my job was nailing up Army blankets on the wall to cover the windows so nobody could see what my kahuna grandparents were doing. From early childhood we were being trained, though we didn't know it. When we were very young we had absolutely no idea what they were doing, but we saw it so often that without realizing it, we were learning it."

There were some aspects of it that didn't exactly thrill him as a child. In practicing *lapa'au*, the grandparents would inspect the kids' tongues or check to see if they had a fever or cold, and would say, "We have to take care of that." And they would have young Kamaki fetch certain plants or herbs for treatment. "Some of them tasted just horrible! So we tried hard not to get ill because we knew those crazy things would be shoved in our mouths again." Despite the distasteful episodes, he was picking up the practice of *lapa'au*. "It was our normal, average, everyday way of living," he says.

Today, Kanahele practices his kahuna skills privately at home and at times is called upon to practice them publicly, in such situations as the blessings of babies or homes or sick people.

In addition, he says, "Sometimes people have come to me and asked me to use kahuna-ism to harm or stop someone, and I was totally shocked by that, because you would not think the human spirit would be willing to come and ask you to harm people. I simply say, 'No, I would rather not get involved.' Kahuna-ism is very powerful. If it is misused, the



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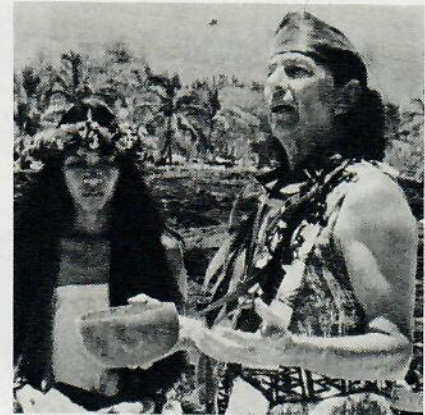
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mana, the inner power, that is sent out will reverse itself upon the sender. I hope I am using my powers in a positive way.”

He frankly admits he has put his kahuna skills to work for him in his career, using them as you would use any skill you possess that can help you advance. “I’ve used them without question. I’ve used the ancient practices of the kahuna art form to do for me what I need to do to get ahead, and I have not harmed anyone in the process of clearing the path.”

Kanahele believes the kahuna arts are a part of Hawaii’s great heritage



Thalia Drunsc

A Kona kahuna, Lanakila Brandt, is pictured performing an early 19th-century Hawaiian wedding ceremony.



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that never died out, and that there are many people practicing them today in the Islands.

“Only a few are practicing openly, but I’m sure in the privacy of their own homes, there are more kahuna,” he says. “Some people wonder why we don’t all gather together and have a wonderful kahuna conference. That is simply not feasible. My kahuna *mana* is my own kuleana and I’m not going to split it up and share it with people. It’s my own precious gift that has been given to me by blood heritage.”

A Big Island kahuna, Lanakila Brandt, at one time believed a conference of kahuna was possible and attempted to put one together. He sent a courteous invitation in Hawaiian to a dozen kahuna, inviting them to a day-long caucus at his Kahanahou Hawaiian Foundation near Kealakekua. Seven responded favorably and went. “I told them I wanted to create a center where we might all come together and work together,” says Brandt. “After seven hours of meditation and discussion, they concluded they were not going to cooperate with me or anyone else.

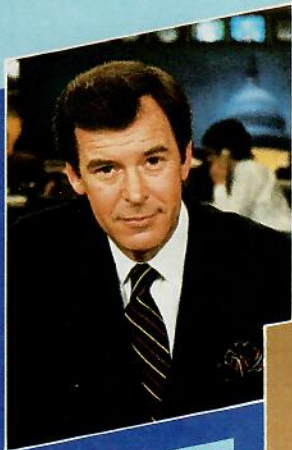
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Their philosophy is that you die with your knowledge or impart it to one person chosen as your successor."

Kahanahou Hawaiian Foundation's purpose is to perpetuate Hawaiian cultural, philosophical and spiritual traditions. Brandt is teaching others what he knows so that they can carry it on. "I realize the knowledge will have to be shared more broadly if it is to continue," he says. "The reason so much of it was lost is because it was not shared. Of what value is knowledge if you just keep it in your head? This particular piece of my philosophy does not endear me to some of my own people."

Brandt began spiritual studies with his Hawaiian grandfather on Oahu at the age of 11. Of the five boys in the family, he, the youngest, was the *punahele*, the favored one to receive the knowledge, and he was the only one interested. The grandfather never referred to himself as a kahuna, but he had a wealth of knowledge about Hawaiian religion and philosophy, which he imparted to his grandson, who was eager to learn.

Brandt, whose mother was Hawaiian-Portuguese and whose father was Austrian, says, "My parents looked on the whole thing dimly. Very dimly. My brothers grew up to be successful businessmen, like my father. My parents wanted me to be a doctor or a Christian minister."

Brandt earned a bachelor's degree from Loyola University and a doctor of divinity degree from Brantridge Forest in England, where his dissertation was on comparative religions.

Meanwhile, he continued to absorb knowledge of Hawaiian philosophy and spiritual traditions from his grandfather and two kahuna to whom his grandfather sent him, though it was not until many years later that he really practiced what he learned.

In the intervening years, he was an entertainer in Waikiki. He became well-known as a Polynesian dancer, singer and choreographer, using the stage name Otea. "Then," he says, "I fell into the trap of getting carried away by the money and the popularity and drinking too much. I got off the track. My grandfather had predicted I would go through a bad time because of my ambition.

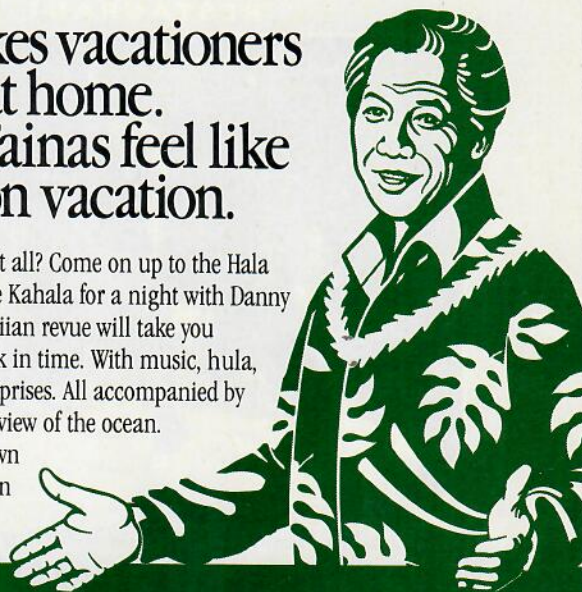
"I made a commitment to my grandfather before he died. He said, 'I know you will not fail. That is why I gave you your name.' My full name

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is Lanakilakahuokalani, which means 'victorious keeper of the gods.'

Even when he was in his entertainment period, he never lost contact with the Hawaiian beliefs and carried on the teachings in the family, with his six children.

It was after he moved from Oahu to Kona in 1967 that he became involved in teaching Hawaiian philosophy and cultural and spiritual practices, in conjunction with his hula halau. Says Brandt: "Our work at Kahanahou Hawaiian Foundation is re-creating aspects of the ancient Hawaiian culture. A lot of these things were suppressed because of the missionary influence—which lasted a lot longer than most people think it did."

His halau was very active in the resurgence of hula *kahiko* (ancient hula). "In teaching chanters and dancers," he says, "it's important also for them to understand the philosophy of what they're doing. Once you get into philosophy, you've leapt with both feet into Hawaiian religion. So I started to teach about it to those adults at the halau who were interested."

Almost all of his students are Hawaiian, though he will take non-Hawaiian students if they are willing to put out the effort he expects of them. He says, "Everything we do here is in Hawaiian, so the students have to learn the language and the *kaona*, the hidden meanings."

In his teaching he's also preparing a handful of others to become kahuna and carry on the traditions.

Brandt has conducted centuries-old Hawaiian temple rites at Hale O Keawe, the main heiau at Pu'uuhonua O Honaunau. When the temple was being reconstructed, he relaxed the kapu so the workmen could do the work. When the reconstruction was completed, he performed the reconsecration rites. Each November, at the time of Makahiki, he invites other Hawaiian spiritual groups to join with his at Pu'uuhonua, where he conducts the rites of Lono with other priests.

Brandt's aim is to lead his people in a return to the ancient traditions and encourage their interest and participation in Hawaiian spiritual and cultural organizations.

The roles of these contemporary kahuna are diverse, but each is trying to perpetuate something of value from the past and contribute something of value in the present.

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