POHAKU KAHO'OHANOHANO  
*Master Lauhala Weaver*

**Weaving the Legacy**

Pohaku Kaho‘ohanohano’s fingers move quickly and smoothly in an easy rhythm, bending the thin strips of *lauhala* (padanus leaves), weaving another across, bending and weaving, bending and weaving. For Pohaku, weaving lauhala is relaxing, even therapeutic, a chance to enjoy the company of other weavers and quietly talk story.

A Maui son with deep family roots in Kahakuloa on West Maui’s north side, Pohaku began delving into his genealogy at age 19 after graduating from Lahainaluna High School. He was amazed to discover from his research that weaving was profoundly entwined in his family’s history. His great-great- and great-great-great-grandmothers were lauhala weavers. Both of his father’s grandmothers were lauhala weavers born in Kahakuloa village, with one later moving to Honokohau on Hawai‘i Island.

In earlier times, lauhala weaving was an integral part of the lives of Hawaiian families, with women learning to weave at a young age, harvesting the long dried leaves of the *hala* (pandanus) plant and using them to create floor mats, mattresses, fans, baskets and more.

With Pokahu’s grandmothers passing away long ago, and the family home and lauhala creations washed away in the 1946 Hawaiian Islands tsunami, the family legacy was in danger of extinction. Almost 50 years later, when Pohaku discovered his past, he knew he was meant to carry his family’s weaving legacy forward.

Pohaku began by asking female master weaver June Ka‘aihue to help him learn, beginning an intensive years-long apprenticeship with seven mentors who took the young weaver into their homes and shared their food, handiwork, Hawaiian language and *mana‘o* (knowledge) with him. Pohaku took his training seriously, immersing himself in every part of the art form, from finding, stripping and cleaning the thorny leaves, to learning and understanding all of the craft’s complex patterns and weaves. During his years of training, he also took courses in Hawaiian studies at University of Hawai‘i Maui College and liberal arts at Hawai‘i Community College in Hilo.

Two decades after his first weaving lesson, Pohaku is now a master weaver who embraces his *kuleana* (responsibility) to share the vanishing art form. Too young to be considered a *kupuna* (elder) weaver, he enjoys his role as a *kumu* (instructor), teaching frequent workshops on Maui and exhibiting his work at the Maui Arts & Cultural Center’s Schaefer International Gallery. Pohaku, his wife Ki‘i (a *lomilomi* massage practitioner) and their young daughter Leihala even ran a store for several years in Wailuku called Hale Ho‘olana, where they sold his hats, mats and other intricate creations.

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Many of Pohaku’s kumu have passed away, and new weavers of his level are rare. Still, he hopes the next generation will carry on the art form. He continues his gentle but firm instruction at every opportunity, gradually reviving the art of lauhala weaving on Maui, one strand at a time.

“Lauhala weaving has been part of Hawaiian families for thousands of years,” Pohaku says. “Every family has its signature style. I can look at a hat and know who made it by the type of lauhala, the weave, the pattern. We continue to honor these patterns.”

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