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# `Awapuhi

Mama loved the scent  
of wild yellow ginger,  
growing thick on the slopes of Tantalus.

In its blooming season,  
she would walk up that steep, curvy road  
to pick two or three.

These she would weave into a brooch,  
to be pinned to inside  
of her blouse - hidden,  
but for that warm perfume.

On the day she was buried  
she wore a lei of wild yellow ginger,  
freshly picked from the slopes of Tantalus,

And left for me,  
in a blue shoe box,  
a thousand, neatly-woven, dry,  
fragrant brooches.

*I always begin with this poem. It has done the most to teach me the difference between truth and meaning. It’s funny how poets can say their own poems teach them something, but it's*

*true.*

*by Puanani Burgess*

# On Naming Children

She had been warned  
by her grandmother,  
long before the birth  
of her first child  
and her second child,  
that the names of birds  
should not be the names of children:

“Lele ka manu.”

She named her first child  
Iwalani, after the soaring beauty  
of the black-winged, blood breasted man-of-war bird:  
This child died of leukemia:

“Lele ka manu.”

She named her second child  
`Iolani, after the cloud piercing flight  
of the royal hawk:  
This child died of war.

“Lele ka manu.”

(The bird always flies away.)

*By Puanani Burgess  
11/1/78*

# Choosing My Name

When I was born my mother gave me three names:

Christabelle, Yoshie, and Puanani

Christabelle was my “English” name,

My social security card name,

My school name,

The name I gave when teachers asked me for my “real” name

A safe name

Yoshie was my home name

My everyday name,

The name that reminded my father's family

That I was Japanese, even though

My nose, hips, and feet were wide,

The name that made me acceptable to them

Who called my Hawaiian mother kuroi mame (black bean),

A saving name

Puanani is my chosen name

my piko name connecting me back to the 'aina

And the kai and the po'e kahiko

My blessing, my burden,

My amulet, my spear

*By Puanani Burgess*

# Auhea Oukou?

Wrapped in Anguish’s clack cape,

We call Your names,

`O Kane,

`O lono,

`O Ku,

`O Kanaloa

`Auhea `Oukou?  
  
and in your places an empty-handed man

with holes in his palms,

dripping blood.

*By Puanani Burgess*

*December 21, 1984*

# Chant of Progress

'O 'Uala, let us remember your names:

`Ae`a-hauka`e. `Apo. `Aumakiki. `Awapuhi.

`Ele`ele. Ha`ai. Ha`ele-lepo. Ha-loa. Halona-ipu.

Ha`ule-lani. Ha`wai. He`i. Hekili. Hi`iaka. Hilo. Hina-pu.

Hokeo. Holei. Holulu, Ho`ohamo. Ho`omanamana. Ho`omana.

Ho`omau. Hualani. Huamoa. Hua-`ono. Ka`e-umu. Kahului.

Kakaka. Kake. Kakonakona. Kala. Kalia. Kalika. Kalika-lau-

ke`oke`o. Kalika-`ula`ula. Kamalino. Kamau. Kane-`ohe. Kapena-

Keoe. Kauaheahae. Kawao. Kawelo. Kawelo-kupa. Keau-mahina.

Keoe. Kihe. Kihi. Kihikihi. Kihi-lau-nui. Ki`i-hekeke.

Ko`oka. Hu`i-popo. Kupala. La`ela`e. Lahaina. Kahalile.

La`ila`i. La`i-o-kona. Lalo-loa. Lana`i. Lapa. Lau-manamana.

La-`ula`ula. Lehelehe-nui. Lihau. Lihilihi. Liko-lehua. Lima-

wiwi. Mahina. Mahina-kehau. Ma`ihu`i-ke`oke`o. Ma`ihu`i-

`ula`ula. Ma-`i`o. Maka`a. Maka-kila. Maka-koali. Maka-nui.

Manini. Maoli. Maui. Moe-ahua. Mohihi. Moi. Mokiawe. Molina.

Moloka`i. Nakulehu. Nanai-`ele`ele. Nanani-ke`oke`o. Na`u.

Naue-wai. Ne`ene`e. Nenewai. Niho-popo. Nika. Nukukau.

Nukulehu. `Ohe`ohe. `Oki-lipi. `O-kohola. `Omea-lani. `Onohi-

nohi. Pa`apa`a `aina. Pa`auhau. Pa`ele. Pa`ele-hili-maoanoa.

Paha. Paiowea. Pakeke. Pala. Palakaia. Pala-mahiki. Palani.

Pali-kea. Panini. Pani-`ole. Papa`a-koali. Pa`u-o-Hi`iaka.

Pa`u`u. Pehu. Pia. Piapia. Pili-mai. Poe. Pohina. Pohue-hue.

Poni. Pu. Pua-Kawai-hae. Pula-kamaka. Punana. Pu`u. Uahi-a-

Pele. Unahi-uhu. Wai-aniani. Wailua. Wai palupalu. Wehiwa.

Auhea `oukou? (Where are all of you?)

And let us remember the colors of your skin:

from white to yellow, light cream, brown

buff, to pink and red.

(Auhea `oukou?) (Where are all of you?)

And let us remember the colors of your flesh:

from white, yellow, light cream, to lavender

to the smokey-grey-of Pele.

(Auhea `oukou?) (Where are all of you?)

And what of the shape of your body:

flat and round like a swollen Piko;

small and round like an egg;

long------short; and everything in between

(Auhea `oukou?) (Where are all of you?)

And what of the sweet taste of your flesh – each

of you different, yet part of the same.

We have tasted but one, or two, or even three –

Auhea `oukou?

Auhea `oukou?

Auhea `oukou?

*By Puanani Burgess*

# Mauna `Ala

The Kaahumanu ladies, in their black lace mu`umu`us  
Wearing leis made of chicken feathers, dyed yellow,

And a boy in a blue jacket, embroidered with the words,

“HAWAIIAN INDEPENDENCE,” and I are among those

who have gathered on Mauna `Ala to mourn the passing

of Hawaiian kings and queens, princes and princesses.

We bring leis of ilima, maile, and liko lehua;

We bring prayers which all begin “O Ke Akua,”·and end in a wail;

We bring tears which we string on a long, silvery thread,

And lay these in heaps upon the concrete slabs.

An old woman weeps as she chants:

“Stars are buried here,

each wrapped in a yellow wing

of the `o`o.”

*by Puanani Burgess*

*rewrite: 1/22/86*

# He Alo A He Alo

## (Face to Face)

He alo a he alo,

(Face to face)

That’s how you learn about what makes us weep.

He alo a he alo,

(Face to face)

That’s how you learn what makes us bleed.

He alo a he alo,

(Face to face)

That’s how you learn what makes us feel.

what makes us work.

what makes us sing.

what makes us bitter.

what makes us fight.

what makes us laugh.

what makes us stand against the wind

what makes us sit in the flow of power

what makes us, us.

Not from a distance.

Not from miles away

Not from a book

Not from an article you read

Not from the newspaper

Not from what somebody told you

Not from a “reliable source”

Not from what you think

Not from a cliff

Not from a cave

Not from your reality

Not from your darkness

But,

He alo a he alo,

(Face to face)

Or,

else,

Pa`a ka waha. (shut tight, your mouth)

`A`ohe o kahi nana o luna o ka pali;

iho mai a lalo nei;

`ike I ke au nui ke au iki;

he alo a he a lo.

(The top of the cliff isn’t the place to look at us;

come down here and learn of the bbig and little current,

face to face.)

And come and help us dig, the lo`I, deep.

*By Puanani Burgess.*

# INTRODUCTION

In the Hawaiian tradition, language is believed to be a gift of the gods . As we speak each word, the spirit of the gods live within the word. Words, then, if spoken with the knowledge of their Spiritual content, can become prayers. And as we speak, even to each other, sisters, we are praying and the god or gods to whom we thank for Life are with us.

It is to you, sister, to whom we send these words, our prayers. We hope they will evoke in you the reality of the pain and the conflicts we as Native Hawaiian women have felt in having to disown our gods, our spirituality, our culture, our symbols, our language and our dignity and have as their replacement the Christian god.

That our experience speaks to and acknowledges the experience of other native peoples is significant. The Hawaiian Experience is not an isolated experience.

It is not our purpose to produce guilt, but understanding; not merely repentance, but lasting change and an end to the use of the Cross as a symbol of conquest and a partner of the Flag.

# E `Olelo Kakou, Sisters (Let us speak together, Sisters) E Pule Kakou, Sisters (Let us pray together, Sisters)

Sisters and Brothers

Hear our prayer to you,

In the spirit of Aloha which our gods   
bequeathed to us and

to you,

We ask you to hear our words and

feel our pain.

Long before your Christian forefathers   
came upon our sacred 'Aina (Land),

We were three hundred thousand strong.

Strong in body, mind and spirit.

Our gods, our ways, our 'aina, our sea and sky

provided and nourished us.

But your forefathers came to our shores   
they brought with them the Cross and

the Flag, and

Disease, and   
Alcohol, and   
Despair, and   
Greed, and

Shame for what we were - "lowly heathens"

(I think they said).

They offered, no, demanded,

that we accept the Cross and the Flag

(these Siamese twins of Power)

And said, "Here. With these you will prosper."

We tried to put into their hands, our symbols:

The Kalo, (taro) from whose body we take sacred nourishment.

The 'aina, from whose body we take sacred nourishment.

The Wai and the Kai, (the inland and sea Water) from whose body we take sacred nourishment

But they scorned our symbols, They scorned us.

They said, "Here. With these, you will prosper."

But look at us now, Sisters.

We are the poorest.

We live in cars, tents, on benches and sidewalks.

We occupy more jail cells, more hospital beds, more morgue

slabs and coffins

Than any other race in Hawaii.

Our children are labelled “DISADVANTAGED” and can't read

can't write

can't get a job

can't get an education.

We are beggars in our own homeland.

But no more.

As we lay down the Cross,

As we lay down the Flag,

We search and have found those symbols which spring from this place

this time

this People.

In our hands we offer you

a scoop of earth, the 'Aina

a scoop of water from the land and the sea, Life

a rainbow, Hope

and Aloha, Love.

But let us be clear.

Whether you accept our symbols

or not,

We will continue to speak the truth of our history

the truth of our pain

the truth of our oppression

the truth of our colonization.

And through this truth we will be free.

This is our prayer to you, sisters.

Listen to it with your soul, sisters.

Amene.

*By Puanani Burgess*

# The `Ahu

Onto my flattened hand Diane placed,

First, the white pu keawe

Then, pink a`ali`I,

And, from a deep pocket, a red-topped spine of `ohelo

Then, a silver sliver of tree bone,

Finally, globes of `ohelo berries.

Look, the hand is an altar;

That is the function of Hands.

*August 29, 1987 at Volcano National Park*

*By Puanani Burgess*

# Autumn Lullaby

In her hand she held,

a green leaf from her Tutu's kukui nut tree.

It was large and familiar.

Once, it was a hat,

Once a fan,

Once a plate,

And once it was a boat,

floating her to worlds beyond Ma`ili stream.

She pressed it to her nose and smelled

roasted kukui kernels mixed with

the Kai,

the pa`a kai,

the i`a.

She held it up

and saw in that mirror

the green-life that was part of her.

And she began to sing.

*By Puanani Burgess*

# Hawa`I Pono`Ī

On Friday, August 7, 1987

Forty-three kanakas from Wai`anae,

In a deluxe, super-duper, air-conditioned, tinted-glass

tourist-kind bus,

Headed to Honolulu on an excursion to the Palace,

`Iolani Palace.

Racing through Wai`anae, Ma`ili, Nānākuli—

Past Kahe Point, past the `Ewa Plain—

In the back of the bus, the teenagers – 35 of them

Rappin’, and snappin’, and shouting to friends and strangers

Alike: Eh, howzit, check it out, goin’ to town…

(Along the way, people stop and stare, wondering,

What are those blahs and titas doing in that bus?)

Cousin Bozo, our driver, (yes, that’s his real name)

Spins the steering wheel, turning the hulk-of-a-bus,

Squeezing and angling it through the gates made just

Wide enough for horses and carriages and buggies.

Docent Doris greets us:

“Aloha mai. Aloha mai. Aloha mail.

“Only twenty per group, please.

‘Young people, please, deposit your gum and candy in the trash.

“No radios. No cameras.

“Quiet. Please.”

“Now, will you all follow me up these steps.

“Hele mai `oukou, a `āwīwī.”

Like a pile of fish, we rushed after her.

At the top of the steps,

We put on soft, mauve colored cloth coverings over our

shoes and slippers,

to protect the precious hard wood floors

from the imprint of our modern step.

Through the polished koa wood doors, with elegantly etched

glass windows,

Docent Doris ushers us into another Time.

Over the carefully polished floors we glide, through the

darkened hallways: spinning, sniffing, turning,

fingers reaching to touch something sacred, something forbidden – quickly.

Then into the formal dining room, silent now.

Table set: the finest French crystal gleaming; spoons,

knives, forks, laid with precision next to gold-rimmed

plates with the emblem of the King.

Silent now.

La`amea `Ū.

Portraits of friends of Hawa`i line the dining room walls:

a Napoleon, a British Admiral … But no portrait of

any American President. (Did you know that?)

Then, into the ballroom,

Where the King, Kalākaua, and his Queen, Kapi`olani, and their

guests

waltzed, sang and laughed and yawned into the dawn.

(No one daring to leave before His Majesty)

The Royal Hawaiian Band plays

the Hawaiian National Anthem and all chattering

and negotiating stops. As the King and his shy Queen

descend the center stairway.

And up that same stairway, we ascend – the twenty of us.

Encouraged, at last, to touch …

Running our hands over the koa railing,

… we embrace our history.

To the right is the Queen’s sunny room … a faint

rustle of petticoats.

To the left, we enter the King’s study:

Books everywhere. Photographs everywhere.

The smell of leather, and tobacco, ink and parchment –

The smell of a man at work.

Electric light bulbs (in the Palace of a savage,

can you imagine?)

Docent Doris tells us to be proud, that electricity lit

the Palace before the White House.

There, a telephone on the wall.

Iwalani longs to open those books on his desk,

Tony tries to read and translate the documents,

written in Hawaiian, just lying on his desk.

La`amea `Ū.

Slowly, we leave the King.

And walk into the final room to be viewed on the

second floor.

The room is almost empty; the room is almost dark.

It is a small room. It is a confining room.

It is the prison room of Queen Lili`uokalani.

Docent Doris tells us:

“This is the room Queen Lili`uokalani was imprisoned in

for eight months, after she was convicted of treason.

She had only one haole lady-in-waiting.

She was not allowed to leave this room during that

time;

She was not allowed to have any visitors or

communications with anyone else;

She was not allowed to have any knowledge of what was

happening to her Hawai`i or to her people.”

Lili`uokalani `Ū.

I move away from the group.

First, I walk to one dark corner, then another,

then another. Pacing. Pacing, Searching.

Trying to find a point of reference, an anchor,

a hole, a door, a hand, a window, my breath …

I was in that room. Her room. In which she lived and

died and composed songs for her people. It was

the room in which she composed prayers to a

deaf people:

“Oh honest Americans, hear me for my downtrodden

people …”

She stood with me at her window;

Looking out on the world, that she would never rule again;

Looking out on the world that she would only remember

in the scent of flowers;

Looking out on a world that once despised her,

And in my left ear, she whispered:

E, Pua. Remember:

This is not America.

And we are not Americans.

Hawa`I Pono`Ī.

Amene.

*By Puanani Burgess*

# The Mouse is Dreaming

In a dark hole behind the washing machine

the house-mouse is dreaming.

Whiskers, body, tail – twitching and trembling,

paws scratching the air.

That mouse he's a dreamin

of great chunks of cheese, and whole loaves of bread,

of a nest made of the finest pieces of cloth and paper

dry, warm and snug,

of living out in the open once again, to be sun-warmed

and star-shined,

of walking. Of walking through the territory patrolled

by the cats.

of cat traps, and cat cages,

and cats without claws and teeth;

Of a world without cats.

And this mouse, she's a dreamin

of acres of lo`i kalo, of nets full of `opelu,

of rocks choked with opihi and limu,

of forests of Koa and Iliahi and Wiliwili,

of empty and crushing buildings which no longer

scrape the sky;

of living in the open once again, to be sun-warmed

and star-shined;

of walking. Of walking through the territory controlled

by the Cat.

of cat traps, and cat cages;

and cats without claws and teeth;

Of a world without Cats.

And the mice dream dreams

that would terrify the cat.

*By Puanani Burgess*

*January 22, 1986*