



On May 1, the Department of Parks and Recreation will present the 88th annual Lei Day Celebration at the Queen Kapi'olani Regional Park and Bandstand.

**T**he last time Louise Alina was part of Oahu's Department of Parks and Recreation's annual Lei Day celebration was when she was in high school.

"I can just picture her," Alina recalls as she gushes about seeing the Lei Day court queen for the first time. "She was so pretty. Her white satin gown ... all the flowers around her, it was all so beautiful."

Fast forward to 2014, after a friend convinced her to run for the kupuna division in the Lei Day court, Alina was chosen as the annual Lei Day queen.

"I hadn't experienced Lei Day again until I was actually in it," chuckles the Kaneohe resident who used to associate "Lei Day" with lavish school programs at her elementary and high schools. "We were a working family so we didn't really go out as much. And if you live on the countryside, like we did, the last thing you want to do is drive into town."

After experiencing the 2014 Lei Day and all the hands and hearts that went into the special day, Alina grew a renewed sense of appreciation of the state's momentous occasion.

"What a wonderful experience it was," Alina

says. "The flowers, halau dancing, arts and crafts, the lei competition ... I told my family we all have to go and see it every time now."

From weary arms holding up wilted strung-up plumeria flowers on Hotel Street to the bountiful flora at Queen Kapiolani Park and Bandstand, Lei Day has evolved into an endearing event that celebrates Hawaii's most popular symbol of love.

In the burgeoning tourism year of 1927, when Matson Navigation Company's luxury liner service began between California and Honolulu, Don Blanding — an artist and a poet laureate — suggested to his Honolulu Star Bulletin co-workers that they name a specific day in celebration of lei making.

"Hawaii observed all of the mainland holidays," Blanding explained in *Hula Moons*, his 1930 book of memoirs. "Why not have a 'Lei Day?' Let everyone wear a lei and give a lei ... Let it be a day of remembering old friends, renewing neglected contacts, with the slogan 'aloha,' allowing that flexible word to mean friendliness on that day."

After Blanding discussed his idea with "Kamaaina Kolumn" columnist Grace Tower Warren, she enthusiastically pursued it and

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**“Let it be a day of remembering old friends ... with the slogan of ‘aloha,’ allowing that flexible word to mean friendliness.”**

suggested that the day should be May Day, coining the popular phrase (and song) “May Day is Lei Day.” In 1929, Governor Wallace Rider Farrington signed a Lei Day proclamation urging the citizens of Hawaii to “observe the day and honor the traditions of Hawaii-nei by wearing and displaying lei.”

As interpretations of Lei Day range from a child’s May Day program at school to locals donning their favorite aloha wear and exchanging or wearing a beautifully strung lei, what’s often forgotten is the actual art and diligence of lei-making.

“Lei is so much a part of our local life,” says Brian Choy, a retired Department of Health manager and currently a lei-making teacher at the Honolulu Museum of Art School. “(It’s for) any occasion to express your love — birthdays, graduations, weddings, funerals or just to say aloha.”

In 1976, a year after enrolling in Beatrice Krauss’ “Ethnobotany of the Hawaiian Island” class, Choy submitted his lei (and won many) in the Lei Day competition up until his last in 2007. Choy says that lei-making, like the essence of Lei Day, represents peace and love for yourself and others. A quality needed to make

a beautiful lei, and harvest the benefits of the joyous state holiday.

“Lei is a tradition that we give to others to say how we feel,” Choy asserts. “You can never make a good lei if you’re not in a good mood. You have to find peace within yourself to be comfortable with your lei.”

To get a glimpse of the artistic talents of lei-makers, the annual Lei Contest Exhibit will be featured and open to the public between the park bandstand and the shell from 1 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. There will also be a section of Hawaiian artisans, storytelling sessions, games, crafts for adults and keiki, and lei and food vendors from 9 a.m. through 4:30 p.m.

If you don’t have a child to watch in a May Day program or have yet to experience the appreciation of Hawaii’s most festive event, Alina says the Parks’ Lei Day celebration at Kapi’olani Park is the place to be.

“I think (people) will get a really warm and happy feeling being in Hawaii for our world is so troubled now,” she says with a heavy sigh. “This will help everyone see the other side; how we have such a variety of people and cultures. Hopefully they can take that with them and share it with other people: the aloha spirit.”



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