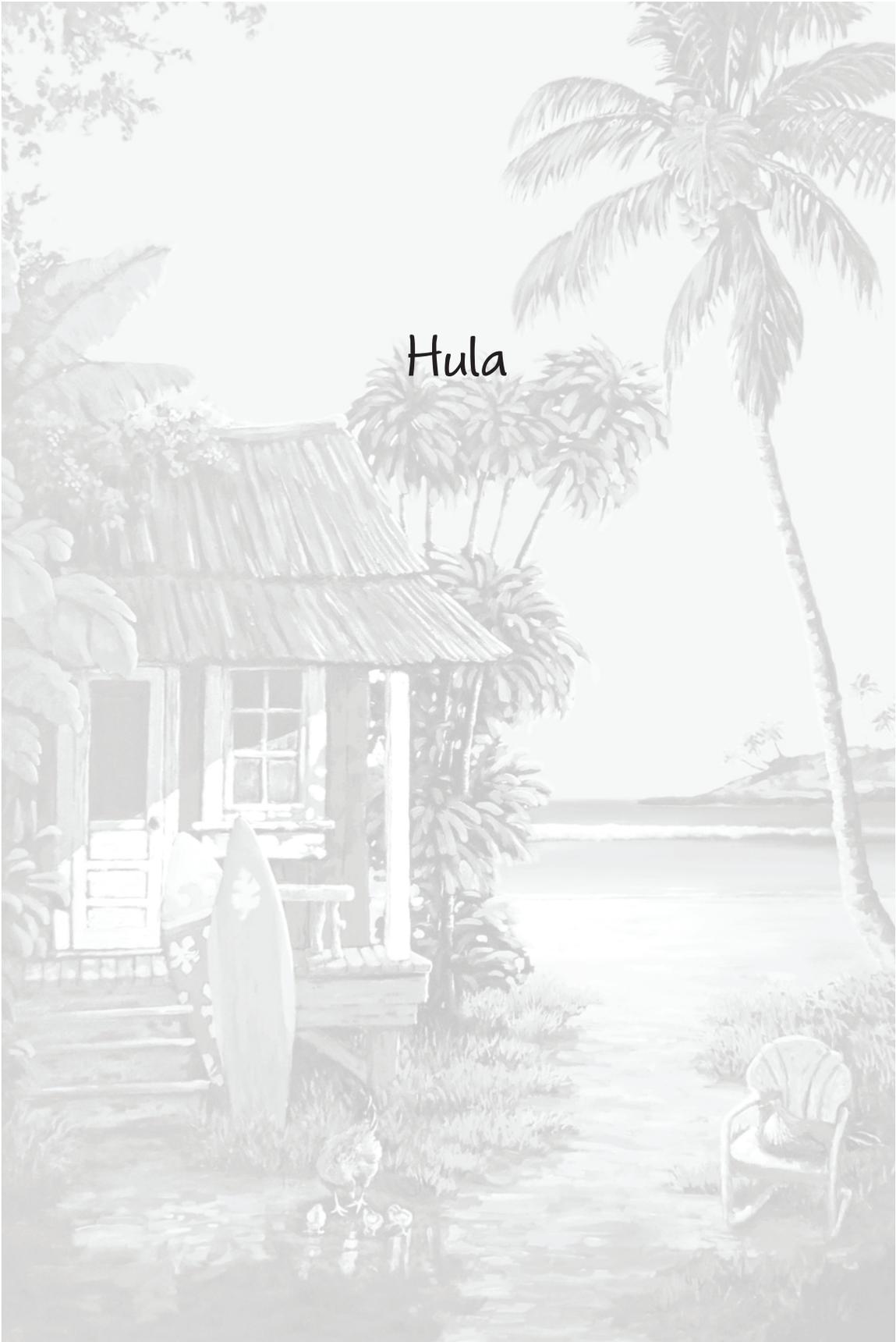


# Hula





# Hula from the Heart

Breeze and Jeslie Pavao

*Sisters Breeze Ann Kalehuaonalani Vidinha Pavao, 13, and Jeslie Ann Kapulelehua Vidinha Pavao, 11, began dancing hula as toddlers. Individually and together, they have entranced audiences from the docks of Kauai's harbor to the country of Japan, where their mother, multiple award-winning kumu hula (hula instructor) Leinaala Pavao Jardin, teaches hula to Japanese hula instructors.*

*Breeze and Jeslie would blend in with any group of teenagers, but when they dance hula, they are transformed. Their graceful, flowing movements, delicate hand motions and joyful facial expressions transport you to wherever they are dancing about.*

*Both girls have danced in the prestigious Queen Liliuokalani Keiki (Child) Hula competition for children 6 to 12 years of age on Oahu, where each has won the coveted title of Miss Keiki Hula, Breeze in 2009 and Jeslie in 2013. Sitting with their mother in the spacious carport of their home, where Leinaala holds classes for students of all ages, the sisters speak from their hearts about their love for dancing the hula.*

**Jeslie:** I was about three years old when I started dancing. My mom brought me to one of her hula classes and I felt the beat when I was sitting down and watching. I started dancing behind her students and ever since then I started going to class.

**Breeze:** I started dancing hula because I used to come outside and watch

all my mom's classes. I would get up and dance with her students. Now it's my passion and basically my life. I wouldn't trade it for anything.

**Leinaala:** From when they were in diapers, I never had to ask them. They just came out and sat down for every single class, then they began dancing with my halau (*school*).

When Breeze wasn't even three years old, I'd put a little dress on her and some flowers in her hair and drive her to Nawiliwili Harbor where the cruise ships come in. The musicians would put a little bowl in front of her and in a matter of an hour she'd have over \$100. I'd sit on the side and crack up! The visitors thought she was this little famous hula dancer.

I try to get my son, Napali, who is four years old, to come sit outside with me during my classes, but nope, he wants to play sports, he wants to go to the pasture, he wants to go golfing. When my kane (*male*) students come here for hula practice, Napali takes out his bat. He thinks it's 10 boys coming to play baseball.

### Give Them the Whole Picture

**Breeze:** Before Hawaiians had a written language, they had to memorize everything to tell the next generation. It was sort of like the game of Telephone, where one person tells someone something and it's supposed to be repeated down a line of people. With words, it almost never works out; something gets changed.

With hula, it's easier to pass down stories through generations because of muscle memory. We learn songs that our kupuna (*ancestors*) learned and we are dancing the same way they danced.

When I'm dancing I think about the meaning of the song and what each line means. I think of everything that could make my motions, my facial expressions and my body movements tell that story: our beautiful oceans, the rolling waves, the sky.

*Breeze Ann Kalehuaonalani Vidinha Pavao  
during the Miss Keiki Hula competition  
held on Oahu in 2009, which she won.  
Photo courtesy Leinaala Pavao Jardin*



When you're giving your all, the audience understands your story. It's like the difference between skimming a story versus reading every word. We give them the whole picture.

### **Like I Was Floating**

**Breeze:** The first time I competed in the Miss Keiki Hula solo competition on Oahu, I danced about my family on the nearby island of Niihau. To this day I can remember dancing but not feeling the floor. I felt like I was floating. It was really nerve-wracking. After I finished my dance, I recalled that before I went on, my mom and I prayed. Mom asked my late grandma to lift me up and carry me while I was on stage.

**Jeslie:** When I competed at the Miss Keiki Hula contest the first time, I was thinking, "Don't mess up." Now when I step on a stage, as I start my song, it all flows because I've practiced it so many times. I know what to do. I've just gotta tell my story that I'm dancing about.

My family always taught me that delivering my story is the most important part of dancing hula, and that winning doesn't really matter as long as you share the story.

**Leinaala:** In all halau, the kumu teach their students to be humble. That's one of the biggest characteristics in Hawaiian culture, being humble. I always remind my students that every dancer who participates works just as hard as you, and maybe some even harder, and that we are grateful and appreciative of the honor the judges give us.

### **Dancing in Japan**

**Breeze:** It's pretty amazing to dance in Japan because they have so much love for hula. They have so much love to learn just one hula motion – then we help my mom teach them a whole song! They have great memories and remember everything we show them.

When we teach them new moves, they step aside and draw little stick



*Jeslie Ann Kapulelehua Vidinha Pavao dancing in the Miss Keiki Hula competition in 2013, which she won.  
Photo courtesy Leinaala Pavao Jardin*

figures of where their hands and feet are supposed to go.

**Leinaala:** That's not traditional in hula; some kumu say it should be all in your head and your heart. But I encourage their drawings because I'm only in Japan periodically.

**Breeze:** We show them photos on the Internet of Hawaii so they can get a feeling of the places they are dancing about.

**Jeslie:** It is so beautiful to see all the kids of a different culture learning our culture. They're learning hula very well. It's really fun helping my mom teach in Japan because they watch you very carefully; they follow every single step you do. It's really good training for me because if I put my foot crooked, they put their foot crooked!

I feel really proud knowing that my mom teaches all those teachers. It's breathtaking to see that they take what they learn from my mom and then teach their own students to dance the hula.

### **The New Generation**

**Jeslie:** We all have our different styles of hula and that all depends on how each kumu's kumu was taught, from generation to generation. I hope that I can start the new generation. I think I would teach the same way my mom does because I was taught the way she was taught, and that's how her kumu was taught.

When I get older I want to become a kumu hula, but I would also like to be a doctor.

**Breeze:** I also want to become a kumu hula and carry on my mom's halau after she retires. I think I would take over and Jeslie would be my alakai (*assistant*). When I retire Jeslie can move up.

**Leinaala:** (*Laughing*) You can see we haven't discussed this yet.

**Jeslie:** My favorite part of hula is getting to share with people and carrying on what my kupuna, my grandmas and grandpas did before me.

It's an honor for us to dance because of our love for the hula and our gratitude when someone invites us to dance for them. There is a feeling inside of us that this is what we were born to do.



*Kumu hula Leinaala Pavao Jardin with her daughters, Breeze, left, and Jeslie,  
at the 2015 Merrie Monarch Festival, the world's most prestigious hula competition.  
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