



ROSELANI O'NEAL FERGUSON



In the small New England village of Portland, Connecticut shines a beacon which draws and nurtures Hawaiians and those who love the Hawaiian culture. This beacon is our classmate, Roselani (O'Neal) Ferguson. Roselani owns and operates a store called "Pineapples and Coconuts" which carries food, clothing and gifts from Hawai'i. But it is not what her store sells that is important. It is what she gives to everyone that she meets that makes all the difference in the world.

Roselani fondly remembers being with all of us at pep rallies. She recalls stopping the Christmas program in our sophomore year to pay homage to Walt Disney who had just passed away. She remembers the Gray Ghost and Up with People. She also feared being caught by Mr. Honnaka while running across the street for lunch.

After graduation, Roselani's proudest moment was being invited to join the Hawaiian delegation to the White House Conference on Children. Her dream was to become a teacher, but when she went to college in California, she was unable to succeed in her studies. She has only recently discovered that she has dyslexia so she might go back and give her dream another try. Back then, not knowing that her medical condition might be interfering with her performance in school, she left college and returned to Hawai'i where she became the lead singer in a group called the New Kolohe Band. They were widely acclaimed and performed all over the state. Roselani had the time of her life and got to meet many celebrities.

During her travels, Roselani also met her husband, Jim Ferguson, who would change her life forever. Roselani and Jim moved to Portland and, like most Hawai'i people who move to the mainland, Roselani went through culture shock and was homesick. Even though she missed Hawai'i, Roselani resolved that no matter where she lived, she would keep Hawai'i with her in her heart and share it with other people. Roselani and Jim have four daughters and three granddaughters.

Through the years, Roselani worked as a manager for a pharmacy company and a toy company. She worked as an auto parts distribution clerk. She also worked as a revenue agent for the Connecticut State Department of Revenue. All the while, she did volunteer work at her church, St. Mary's of Portland. She has helped with donations, taught religion to children, volunteered with the Cromwell Children's Home and has

been appointed the new Religious Director for St. Mary's starting in 2010. Other charities she supports includes public radio, public television, animal rights organizations, Special Olympics, Hawai'i conservation groups and native Hawaiian causes.

When Roselani first started Pineapples and Coconuts (www.pineapplesandcoconuts.com), she met many people who were ignorant of Hawai'i. They asked how she learned to speak English, how long she had been in America and how she liked living in the U.S. Some were even rude to her. Roselani, however, wanted to hold her heritage and culture out for people to see in a positive light. She has since met many people from Hawai'i, people who had visited Hawai'i, or those who wanted to come to Hawai'i and she has shared her knowledge and experiences with all of them. She has helped many people plan their trips to Hawai'i and is happy to hear resoundingly positive accolades from them about Hawai'i and its people. The most impressive response has always been about the kind, caring and light-hearted nature of the Hawaiians. Roselani treasures being able to teach her customers about Hawai'i and to hear how much they have enjoyed their Hawaiian experiences. When her customers return from their trips, they often ask how she could have left Hawai'i and her response has always been that Hawai'i has never left her.

Roselani knows that it is not what Pineapples and Coconuts sells that is important. What she gives away is far more important, especially to folks in New England who do not comprehend the unexpected gift that she shares with them. They do not understand or know until they have felt its touch and have been changed by it - that gift is Aloha.

"O ka pono ke hana 'ia a iho mai na lani."

(Blessings come to those who persist in doing good.)