



OHIA LEHUA

According to Hawaiian Legend, the Ohia Lehua found in Hawaii is the result of an imposition placed on a young couples desire to bridge the forbidden gap of class intermarriage. Like many other cultures, the early Hawaiians also maintained the segregation between Royalty and Commoners.

In the early years on arrival at South Point (Kalae) from Kahiki, (a far off place) the small group of voyagers found the Island to be friendly with an abundance of sea food, water, and some edible vegetation. The soil was rich but lacked the staples that they were accustomed to. However, they had the foresight to bring with them on their long journey seedlings of plants that would someday supplement their diet of seafood.

The small group of adventurers was composed of a few from the ruling class (Alii) and a majority of commoners. It was imperative that they all work together in preparing the fields for the planting of their imported seedlings. They labored together, Alii and commoners, the Young and the old. Their evenings were spent in the dim light cast by the single campfire sharing stories reminiscent of their distant homeland and their long ocean journey. There was no mention of regret for leaving family, friends, or the oppressive governing rules that prompted their journey beyond the horizon to a land visible only in their dreams.

While the adults talked, the children played in the flickering light hiding in the shadows then racing to safety as if chased by some unseen creature. Each new day began at the crack of dawn with everyone doing their part in the newly cleared fields.

Among the children was a young boy named Ohia. He was an Alii Keiki (child of the ruling class) the only Alii Keiki in the group. The other Kamalii (children) were all commoners who were not aware of the required segregation between classes. In their play time, Ohia especially enjoyed being with a young girl named Lehua. As the months turned to years, the two found themselves arranging their time so as to be able to spend their evenings together. Inevitably, they fell in love. The adults, so involved in their agricultural endeavors and their evening story telling time never noticed the evolution of friendship between Ohia and Lehua.

In time, Ohia told his parents of his fondness for Lehua and was immediately admonished and reminded of the Kapu (prohibition) for such behavior. He reluctantly told Lehua of the rebuke he received but his love for her refused to submit to the Kapu. After a few months, Ohia brought his desire to marry Lehua to the Kupuna (Elders) council and was again rebuked. He questioned the reason for the Kapu but was told that the reason was long forgotten but the Kapu remains and he was forbidden to see her ever again in this life.

That evening, both Ohia and Lehua managed to sneak off into the shadows and met at their favorite rendezvous spot at the cliff where he shared with her his experience with the Kupuna. She wept quietly at their seemingly hopeless situation. In frustration, Ohia blurted out that it seems as though their only hope of being together was to die together.

As they embraced, the cliff seemed to beckon, offering them eternity together in death. The fine evening mist driven by the wind coached them closer to the edge of the precipice.

The voice of a woman startled them back to reality, embarrassed at being caught in an embrace; they nervously regained their balanced at the cliffs edge. They watched as the woman confidently placed herself between them and certain death. She inquired as to their reason for the seeming act of despair then offered them an opportunity to spend eternity together. They eagerly accepted the offer and were transported by some magical means to the lava fields of Kahuku.

Madam Pele then changed him into a tree and planted him securely into the lava field. She then fashioned Lehua into a beautiful red blossom and placed her into the arms of her lover where she remains to this day gracing the otherwise barren lava fields.

There is song that says:

Don't pluck the red Lehua, if you wish for weather fair
Tis Pele's sacred flower, which she guards with jealous care
Her Akuas all are watching, and to her they will complain
For surely as you do it, she sends down the rain

The '***ōhi'a lehua***^[2] (*Metrosideros polymorpha*) is a species of flowering evergreen tree in the myrtle family, Myrtaceae, that is endemic to the six largest islands of Hawai'i. It is a highly variable tree, being 20–25 m (66–82 ft) tall in favorable situations, and much smaller when growing in boggy soils or on basalt. It produces a brilliant display of flowers, made up of a mass of stamens, which can range from fiery red to yellow. Many native Hawaiian traditions refer to the tree and the forests it forms as sacred to Pele, the volcano goddess, and to Laka, the goddess of hula.

The Waimea Nature Park has a collection of trees that are of the dry land grey leaf variety. Their colors extend from the common red to the brilliant yellow. Within this spectrum are numerous variations and at present, the park has about 8 of the variations. There has been numerous claims made of a White Lehua but to date, we have not been able to confirm or acquire a tree that produces the white blossom.