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Cultural Experience

For my cultural experience, I attended a luau held by the Dixie State Polynesian Club on March 1st in the Gardner Center Ballroom. I have never been to any of the many polynesian islands, nor have I associated with anyone of Polynesian culture. I was excited to attend and bought the tickets weeks in advance. I even dragged my husband along for companionship.

The luau was to start at 6 P.M. with dinner which would be followed by a display of cultural dances from the many islands of the Pacific. Dinner started a little late. I noticed that the Polynesians didn't seem concerned. They chatted and laughed without a single glance at the clock, while the caucasians fidgeted and whispered about the time. In fact, many Polynesians ended up at the back of the line because they didn't arrive on time. I appreciate that aspect of the culture.

Dinner was simple (pork, chicken and rice) influenced by the culture, but not prepared by the Polynesian Club. This was disappointing. I was looking forward to authentic food. (I found out later that there is a campus policy that disallows food not made by Campus Catering.) Now, my husband and I have many different ethnicities running through our veins, but we both look about as White American as you can get. When food was being served, the guy (caucasian) handing out the generic green salad gave my husband and I a decent portion. The Polynesians serving the rice and meat gave decent sized portions for me. But my husband felt short changed, especially when a ten year old Samoan girl sat down at our table with a plate that was heaping with food that she never finished. Most of the Polynesians came away from the buffet line with heaping plates. When he asked if there was an option for seconds, he was told he would have to buy a second ticket. Several other men went back to the buffet line to ask for more, all white. To be honest, I don't think that it was consciously done. But isn't most discrimination done unconsciously at first and only realized after someone points it out to us as a flaw?

The dances were beautiful and exciting. Hawaii, Tahiti, Samoa, Tonga, and others were represented. It was well organized, but without the sense of urgency that I am accustomed to for a dance recital. There was a happy, laid-back atmosphere in the room. Many people were singing, dancing in their chairs, throwing money on the stage, and even getting up and dancing along. I'll admit. In a classroom, I'm fine. However, I am a wallflower in social situations. I stayed in my seat with most of the rest of the room and clapped and cheered my support. Overall, it was a fun night and one that I look forward to repeating. I have even added going to "the islands" to my bucket list and I'm not particularly fond of beaches.

There were several things that I learned that night that I will be able to take into a classroom. First and foremost, relax. Polynesians don't seem to have sense of urgency that I

have grown accustomed to. I need to remember that walking in a moment late, moving more slowly to start a task, and a laid-back attitude aren't signs of disrespect. They are just cultural differences. Perhaps if more members of my family adopted these cultural ideals, our blood pressure wouldn't be so high.