

## Chick Daniels

Palm Tree, as indeed he was at any bar or party. He would get up and move a potted plant next to his table, saying, "I need some shade." He would slip off his watch and drop it in a stranger's drink. Winking at his victim, he would say, "Just checking your timing." At tourist gatherings when the host said, "Ladies and gentlemen, we have a famous beach-boy with us tonight from the Royal Hawaiian Hotel!" Chick would get up and drop his pants.

His pants-dropping act, which could come at the climax of any one of his many hulas, was not lewd or offensive, but it frequently shocked the uninitiated. Chick would loosen his belt buckle, cross his arms, and begin swinging his hips—'round and 'round—until his pants slid down to his ankles to reveal polka-dotted or striped underwear.

The pants-dropping hula became identified with Chick during his career as an entertainer. That career spanned some 40 years and began its ascent in 1925 when, on his first trip to the Mainland, he performed with the Los Angeles Philharmonic as part of a Hawaiian opera, *Pele and Lohi'au*. When the Royal Hawaiian Hotel opened in 1927, Chick formed his own troupe, the Royal Hawaiians. For more than 10 years he played at cocktail parties, dinners, and late-evening dances, although perhaps his finest moment occurred when the Royal Hawaiian had its opening. As Princess Abigail Kawānanakoa stepped up to be the first to sign the register, Chick burst into "Hawai'i Pono'ī," prompting the princess and everyone else to join in the singing.

Chick made his second trip stateside in 1929. A planned voyage to the South Seas had been called off because of the stock-market crash, so Chick accepted the invitation of Montana copper magnate William Clarke and traveled to Hollywood to play with the Biltmore Trio, which performed in supper clubs and on radio. Clarke was one of many wealthy men with whom Chick forged close relationships. In the early 1930s, millionaire Chris Holmes hired him as a companion and as caretaker for his palatial seaside estate at Queen's Surf. Chick subsequently worked in a similar capacity for millionaire Bob Topping, whose home near Diamond Head featured a 60-foot slide that swung from the terrace to the swimming pool below.

Like Panama Dave, Chick was popular with rich men because he kept them laughing and at ease. He also was a philosopher who handed out backrests, towels, and advice. "The way to stay young is to relax all the time," he would

tell them. "You people don't have a life. You have a schedule. If you take a day off, you don't know what to do with yourself. Take a day off! Break the schedule!"

More instructive, though, was his attitude toward money. Chick was that rare individual who taught the rich how to enjoy wealth. When he sat down with his millionaire friends, he outspent them. He always picked up the check. In part, he was demonstrating his hospitality, but he also knew that sometime in the future the favor would be returned. For Chick the payoff came on boat days, when he reaped huge tips.

Still, by any standard, Chick was exceedingly generous. He had trouble entering a bar without buying drinks for the house, and he was forever lending money to his beach buddies, buying them drinks, and taking them on trips. "Chick's money was from day to day," recalled fellow beachboy Harry Robello. "At no time did he have a bank account, that's for sure. If he made \$1,000 today, it would be gone tomorrow."

Chick's relationship with money—how he made it, how he spent it—was a continuing source of fascination. A good chair on his beach, for instance, carried the same prestige as a ringside seat at a prizefight. Accordingly, there was a section where his favorites sat, and then there was "Siberia," a remote section way off in the corner where he sent those whom he did not like or who did not tip.

But Chick was also discriminating about whom he gave money to. It is said that when he stayed at a hotel he would leave a \$5 bill as bait on the dresser. If it disappeared, he wrote room service a note when he checked out that read: "THANK YOU AND MAHALO." Honesty received a more substantial gratuity.

How could someone who was so obviously *akamai* ("smart") about money also be so reckless? Kalei Holck, a musician and former beach attendant at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel, theorized that Chick "hated" money. "When you spent it like he did, you had to hate it," he said. "If you like money, you can't be close to a millionaire." Holck recalled that Chick kept a large container at the beach into which he threw his small change. It was mostly silver dollars, but it added up. "When he had about \$700, you could see he was getting nervous," said Holck. "He's like a volcano. He's got money. He has to spend it. And then bam! He's gone for three or four days. When he comes back, he's OK."

To curb his compulsion to spend, Chick had friends hold his money. Others tried to get him to invest some of his

money, but Chick was never interested. "That bugga could have been a millionaire twice if he would have saved his money," Moloka'i Horner recalled. "But you could never get Chick to save a dime. He would have to blow it." Harry Robello recalled asking him one time, "Chick, how come you no save?" Said Chick, "Well, you know, the more you give, the more you get." That was his philosophy.

Chick no doubt realized at a certain point in his life what he had squandered, but according to friends, he had few, if any, regrets. "He didn't kick himself for what he could have bought, what he might have had," said Charlie Lambert. "I always hated it when people said, 'I've never seen anyone spend so much money so quickly as Chick.' It had the wrong connotation. He was just a generous man, a giving man. There's a difference between those who are too free with their money and those who want to have fun with it."

Chick Daniels was not one to fear for his financial security. Life for him was something to be lived, not something to be collected and left behind. Money was the fuel that kept the good times rolling. Not surprisingly, people admired this attitude and celebrated his excesses. Acts others might have had a hard time getting away with—diving into a fishpond while having lunch with Arthur Godfrey, for instance, or arriving by rickshaw at an exclusive Waikiki restaurant outfitted in a safari suit and hat—were, when they involved Chick, readily accepted.

His shortcomings were just as easily overlooked. Not only was he a big spender, he was a big drinker who could be *pilikia* ("trouble") when he had too much. He was also something of a philanderer. While working for Chris Holmes in 1934, he was arrested and fined \$100 for conducting "petting parties" with an 18-year-old girl in his Waikiki apartment.

"Oh, he was a wild one all right, said beachboy Joe Akana, recalling a time in 1929 when Chick took care of a group of stockbrokers vacationing in Waikiki. Akana saw Chick driving them home one morning in a Packard Twin-Six. They came roaring by wearing nothing but sheets. "Do you know where Chick had taken them?" he said. "The brothel. And they had wives, too."

Chick, in fact, fathered five children. He had two sons by his first wife, Ann Noa, and two daughters and a son by his second wife, Violet Ornellas, a young hula dancer who was half his age when