

# Green Eggs and Spam

Davinia Yalimaiwai, 2009

Keola Beamer, one of Hawaii's best known slack-key guitarists, eats Spam and loves poetry. Let's just call him the Dr. Seuss of the Hawaiian island chain. Although he isn't a published author like the late Ted Geisel, Beamer collects Spam haiku poetry that he posts on his website. Once a fun pastime, Spamku is now Keola's religion. But can a local island girl like me blame him? After all, Keola is a descendent of the great King Kamehameha I, unifier of the Hawaiian Islands. If Kamehameha's descendent is wrong about his Spam religion, then I don't want to be right! In fact, our love of Spam in the islands brings us so close to Keola that, when spotted, it is not uncommon to hear shouts of, "Eh, howzit braddah Keola? How yo maddah? You hungry? You like come grind wit us?"

To the tourist who decides to grace our islands: never say "No" when we ask you to come eat with us. Your noncompliance will be taken as snobbery, and your inability to adapt to our local standards will be held against you for generations to come. Yes, we will tell our grandchildren of the rude *haole* who said, "No." Trust me, you don't want to be labeled a foreigner for your entire visit. And there is always enough Spam to feed everybody thrice over. So, hang loose, Brah, and no worries! I have taken the liberty of picking out my favorite Spamku from Keola Beamer's website to show just how much we treasure this fine meat:

*And who dares mock Spam?  
You? You? You are not worthy .  
Of one rich pink fleck!*

After eating with us, some uncle or aunty will always bring up braddah Keola's first song, "Honolulu City Lights." It might not even be a blood uncle or aunt considering that we call everyone older than us "Uncle So-and-so" or "Aunty This-and-that." Nevertheless, Keola's first hit is a classic. And, if you are a local who doesn't like 1970s Western-style Hawaiian music, you keep that information to yourself. God forbid that blasphemy ever leaks out because what ensues is a good two hours of drunk relatives singing and saying, "Braddah Keola, why you nevah wen bring yo slack-key?"

There might also be some talk about his mother, Winona Beamer, during this musical jam session. Winona is one of the key activists of the Hawaiian revival movement in our high schools. This is obviously where Keola received his calling to pay homage to the voiceless Spam. But usually the mood is too light to get into any political stuff—especially on a sunny surfing day like the day a friendly tourist decides to eat with a local family.

*Born in World War Two  
Hogs marching off to battle  
Dressed in tin armor*

If this were *Animal Farm*, it might be easier for a non-Hawaiian to imagine the haiku above: pigs going off to war, marching in blue armor, ready to defend their country. Or perhaps the “hogs” suggest the raw power of actual human soldiers who went off to fight during the war. Either way, history shows our lovely Spam did not migrate to our islands until the mid-1900s. Hawaii became a strategic location to send American troops during World War II. Being in the Pacific Ocean, and midway between continental USA and Japan, troops often stopped off at Hawaii, particularly Pearl Harbor, to refuel and strategize for the next attack. Unfortunately for the food and farming economies, this meant thousands of troops entered our small Hawaiian chain. Trying to feed the locals and the soldiers proved to be a bigger task than anticipated. It was also a waste of money to ship fresh meat all the way out to the Pacific Ocean just for it to spoil by the time it reached land. And then there was Spam:

*Pink tender morsel  
Glistening with salty gel  
What the hell is it?*

Shoulder of pork and ham or so Hormel Inc. has us believe. No one really knows for sure the exact ratio of pork or ham or feet or fat or unknown substance that is in Spam. All we know is that it is salty, and meaty, and that it tastes good with just about anything: Spam musubi (Japanese sushi made with Spam), Spam saimin (hot soup with noodles and a slab of Spam), Spam fried rice (self-explanatory), Spam and eggs for breakfast (now on our McDonald’s Dollar Menu), Spam and cheese sandwich for lunch, and Spam and shoyu rice (white rice covered in soy sauce) for dinner.

*My friend pork shoulder  
I return to you. This time  
I’ve brought mayonnaise*

Soldiers during the war found it to be a convenient source of protein that they could depend on when food was sparse. Since Spam doesn’t have to be refrigerated, we locals buy it in bulk. During the rare instances when the islands are placed on hurricane or tsunami watch, we stock up on three necessities: water, toilet paper, and king-sized cans of Spam.

*Jelly for mortar  
Seven hundred tins and more  
I build a Spam house*

Surprisingly, Hawaii is not among the fattest states in America. However, you might disagree with me when you see my three-hundred-pound Aunt Leilani. According to Calorie Lab's "United States of Obesity Map for 2007," Mississippi weighs in as the fattest state in America, with a few states like Alabama and Indiana coming close behind. In fact, this map makes Hawaii one of the leaner states.

I'd now like to insert my expert opinion on the matter; completely unbiased, of course. Apart from the various Hawaiians, and Samoans, and other Polynesians of slightly smaller numbers: we have Blacks, Whites, Hispanics, and *many* Asians populating our islands. Most of our Asians are Japanese: the ancestors of farmers who came to Hawaii to work on our rice plantations. I'm not saying local Japanese don't eat Spam. Au contraire! Remember the Spam musubi? It was invented by the Nagasaki family, or the Hayashis, the Nakamuras, maybe the Tanakas. The point is this: local Japanese families in Hawaii eat just as much Spam as any other group in the islands. But ask yourself one question: have you ever seen an obese Japanese man or woman? Exactly. (Sumo wrestlers were not taken into consideration during my extensive research on overweight Asians in Hawaii).

Where, then, do all of the side effects of consuming millions of cans of Spam end up? And why is Hawaii *still* not ranked among the fattest of fatties? Because "fat" in American standards means overweight. Whereas all the other medical problems that come along with constantly eating crap, such as diabetes and heart disease, can affect even the skinniest of us.

*Old man seeks doctor  
"I eat Spam daily," he says.  
Angioplasty*

We still have our share of big-boned people. Hawaii is a Polynesian island, and, like all Polynesians, we love us some food. Fish is an essential food if you want to live on an island. Pork is also an essential, especially if you don't want to be excluded from family get-togethers. A *lu'au*—a local celebration where we eat a big pig that's been cooked underground for a day—stems from victory parties hosted by the great King Kamehameha. Girls (big, small, and in-between size) dance the *hula*, and Aunt This gets into an argument with Aunt That over whose husband provides the best for his family. My bet is on Uncle So-and-so.

So imagine how my dad's side of the family reacted on the fateful day of my freshman year in high school when I announced I wanted to become a vege-

tarian. They reacted the same way any Polynesian family would. They laughed.

"You realize you can't eat meat anymore, right?" That was my Uncle Peter. He's about seven years younger than Dad, but his daily ritual of consuming *yaqona* (a slightly intoxicating root drink) and beer, has left him with wrinkles and ashy skin which make him look a million years older.

"Yes," I replied.

"You know Spam is meat, right? You can't eat Spam." Uncle Iguanodon, I mean Uncle Peter, has great deductive reasoning skills.

"My teacher says Spam is for poor people and that Spam is trash." Strike two.

"Trash? What are these schools filling your head with? You tell your teacher that God made three things in this world: Spam, sex-I-mean-marriage, and more Spam."

*Pink beefy temptress  
I can no longer remain  
Vegetarian*