

By Cathy Lee Chong

CLASS RINGS:

Cherished Keepsake or Lost Memento



Sentimental value is priceless, especially when it belongs to a symbol from a person's youth, like a class ring.

These bands of precious metal represent not only a person's educational achievement but also the many rites of passage that come from high school. Just holding your class ring can bring back memories of dances in the gym, pep rallies during homecoming, learning how to drive, high school crushes, playing on a team, and growing up.

"A class ring symbolizes a bond that a graduating class shares," says 'Iolani Director of College Counseling **Todd Fleming**.

Wilfred Pang '40 slipped on the gold ring he says was designed by 'Iolani's legendary headmaster Father **Albert Stone**. The ring has been stored safely in the school archives where Pang, still slim and active as ever, donated it a dozen or so years ago. Not surprisingly, the ring still fits.

"I'm not one to gain weight," says Pang. He recently went on a five week tour to China as a masseuse for a California dance troupe.

When Pang was a student, 'Iolani was a small boys school which housed boarding students and class rooms in rickety wooden structures nestled on a cozy campus in lush Nuuanu. He bought a class ring, had his name engraved inside the band, and wore it constantly as a souvenir of his years at 'Iolani.

Later in life, his mother passed on to him a large, oval jade ring set in gold. And while he loves his alma mater, his affection for his mother is supreme. He replaced his class ring with the one from mom. And his high school ring joined the ranks of items in the 'Iolani archives.

Signe Chambers '08 has never met Wilfred Pang. She will graduate from 'Iolani 68 years after he did. Yet in spite of the generational difference, they share an 'Iolani connection in something no bigger than a quarter.

At the junior ring ceremony in the student center in the spring of 2007, she received the signet ring she hand picked months earlier, while the majority of her classmates got theirs as well.



This 1940 'Iolani class ring is one of three stored in the 'Iolani School archives. The first class rings were issued in 1937.

For students who choose not to order rings, Jostens presents them with a specially engraved key chain in a gift box. That gesture ensures that all members of the junior class are called to the front of St. Alban's chapel to be recognized.

The 'Iolani junior ring ceremony and luau is a longstanding tradition. The 'Iolani chaplain speaks about the significance of the 'Iolani seal which is on each ring. The class counselor, advisor or special guest speaks as well.

"'Iolani has been your cornerstone and foundation," class counselor **Derrick Kang** told the Class of 2009 and their parents back on March 14, 2008. "For some of you it has been since kindergarten, others since seventh, eighth or ninth grade, and some even more recently. Regardless of when you started at 'Iolani, it's important to remember your roots and to celebrate your achievements."

Signe Chambers's simple yet elegant ring is on her finger. She doesn't wear other jewelry while hanging out with her closest friends at the senior benches beneath the library. The girls do homework, talk about their weekends, share plans for colleges and possibly leaving Hawai'i, and laugh about silly things. Some of the others also wear their Class of 2008 rings.

"I'm not a real jewelry person," says **Michelle Morioka** '08, "but I wanted a class ring, after being here so long, it's a nice memento."

Over the years, longtime 'Iolani counselor **Toni Brown** has told students that if they are struggling with whether or not they should buy a class ring, especially because of the expense, then don't. They can always order one in the future.

EARLY RINGS

Throughout history, rings have long represented milestones. The tradition of class rings at universities and colleges was believed to have started in 1835 at West Point.

Wilfred Pang's 1940 class ring is one of three 'Iolani class rings tucked away in the school archives, according to archivist **Rose Marie Panko**.

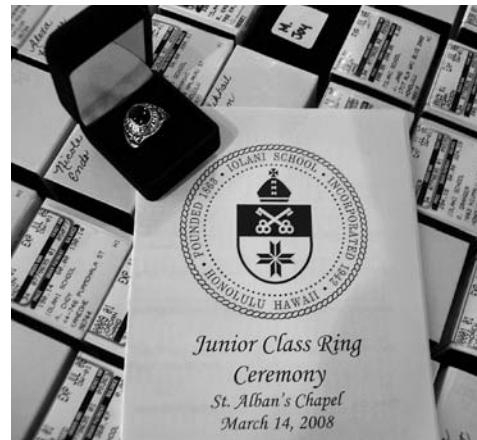
Wrapped in acid-free paper and housed under lock and key is another 1940 ring with the name **John Ome** '40 engraved inside. The third ring is a 1939 ring that belonged to 'Iolani teacher **Mr. Riggins**.

While records dating that far back are scant, Panko discovered a page in the 1937 *Ka Moolelo O Iolani* year book that describes the first graduating class to start the class ring tradition. In a conversation between **Douglas Forbes** '37 and **Alex Burso** '37, both now deceased, Burso wrote: "I hope the senior classes after us will keep up the plan of buying class rings that we started this year."

The 'Iolani junior ring ceremony and luau is a longstanding tradition.

Then in a November 8, 1940, *Imua* 'Iolani article, the topic of class rings was covered: "Detor Jewelers will not sell an Iolani ring to anyone who does not have a slip signed by **Mr. Villers**, senior class adviser, stating that he is a member of the senior class or an alumnus of the school. The reason for this action was that many underclassmen have purchased rings, and it was felt by the senior class and the student council that the wearing of a senior ring should be a privilege restricted to seniors alone."

Left page: It still fits! Wilfred Pang '40 put on his class ring 68 years after graduating. Right: 'Iolani School holds a class ring ceremony in St. Alban's Chapel each spring for the junior class. Pictured is a program and ring from the past event.



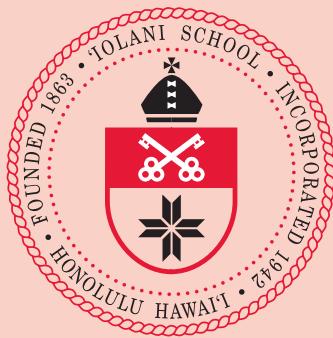
ABOUT THE 'IOLANI SCHOOL SEAL

On each class ring, whether on the face or on the side, is 'Iolani School's seal, which has been refined over the years.

The central features of the seal come from the seal of the Episcopal Diocese of Hawaii.

Prominent on the seal is a shield with a Greek cross, symbol of God's love, revealed in Christ, and crossed keys, symbolic of Saint Peter, perhaps the greatest disciple of Christ, to whom Jesus said, "on this rock (Petra) I will build my church." Atop the shield is a bishop's miter, the distinctive hat worn by bishops, and symbol of their ministry as chief pastors, priests and teachers.

A seal in some ways is a symbol of power and authority. When used by bishops on documents, it gave that piece of paper the full weight of the authority of the Church.



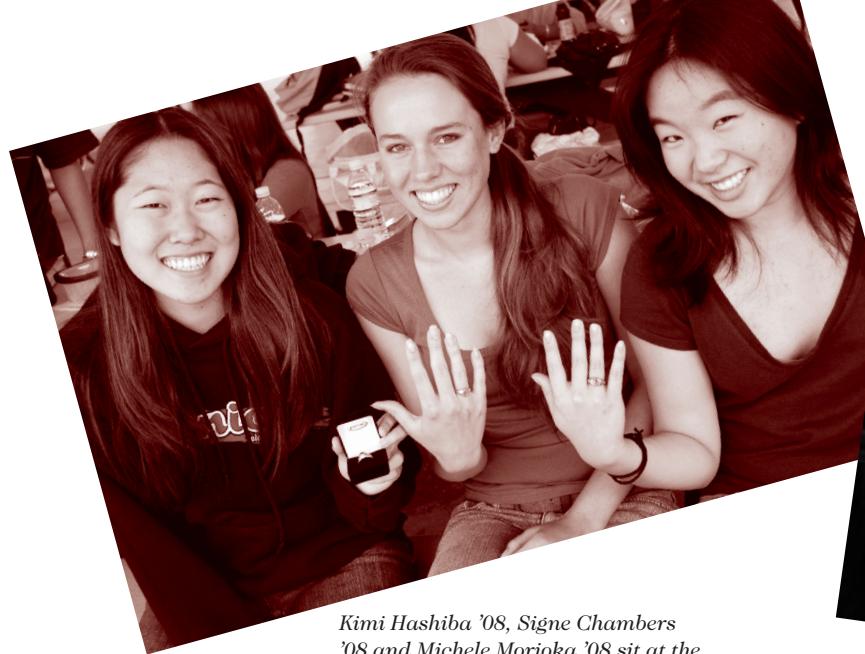
It made what was ordinary, "official," and for all who witnessed the seal there was no doubt as to its authenticity. This is certainly true of when this very seal is applied to the 'Iolani School diplomas.

Seals then connect us to something often larger than ourselves. Blessing the rings does not make these rings into objects of worship or devotion. Instead, they are blessed to remind us of who we are and to whom we belong; that faith and heritage are an integral part of our lives and, as a result, we too are blessed.

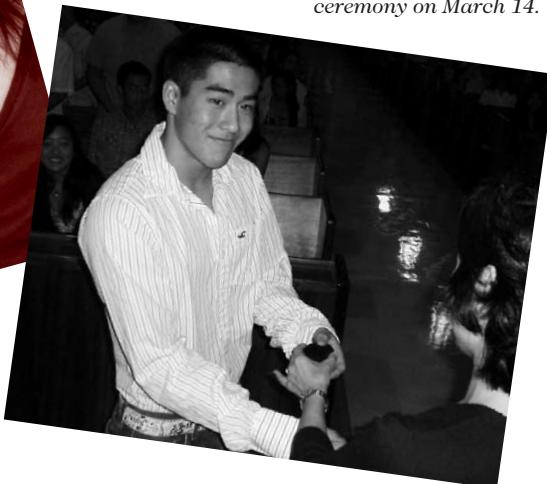
Encircling the shield of red, black, and white is a band on which are the dates of 'Iolani's founding, 1863, and incorporation, 1942. Finally, the whole seal is bound together by a stout rope border, an endless circle of strength and love.

—Courtesy Rev. Daniel Leatherman





Kimi Hashiba '08, Signe Chambers '08 and Michele Morioka '08 sit at the senior benches with their class rings.



Rayfe Gaspar-Asaoka '09 receives his class ring during the junior ring ceremony on March 14.

Years later, that restriction was lifted. To commemorate his 20th year at 'Iolani, retired Director of College Counseling **Dan Feldhaus** ordered a ring with 'Iolani's Class of 1981.

"My wedding band is on my left hand, and my 'Iolani class ring is on my right," Feldhaus says.

Like Feldhaus, **Kenneth Quon** '48 knows exactly where his class ring is. He stores his keepsake in a box in a desk drawer, but when he takes it out, the memories come back.

"I wore the ring for years," he says. "It was something to be proud of, graduating from 'Iolani. I was very fond of my tenure there."

Other alumni, like **Kevin Hata** '78 of Seattle, wish they knew what happened to their rings. Hata remembers ordering a ring with a black onyx, but now he has no idea of its whereabouts. It would be cool to have it again, he admits.

Ben Almadova '51 had a class ring as well. "Class ring?" Almadova laughs and recalls. "Well, you give it to your girlfriend then you don't know what happens to it."

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MODERN TIMES

Over time, the tradition of boys giving their class rings to their girlfriends to wear from a chain around their necks has waned, the way a term like "going steady" now seems old-fashioned. Social clubs from the 1970s have become extinct, too. Yet the tradition of a girl wearing a pin from her boyfriend's college fraternity, as a symbol of their commitment to each other, seems to still exist.

"Back in the old days, we didn't have as many choices, so the (class) ring was a big identity piece or symbol," says **Ron McNichols**, who has represented Jostens, one of the country's largest class ring jewelers, for 38 years.

Signe Chambers, **Michelle Morioka** '08 and **Kimi Hashiba** '08 laugh when they hear about the outdated boyfriends and girlfriends exchanging class rings ritual. No one does that anymore, they say. One of



This 1979 'Iolani class ring belonging to Armand Chong '79 was recovered on Ewa Beach approximately 20 years after being lost.

them, though, vaguely recalls her mother talking about this quaint practice.

Still around is the class ring tradition of having friends turn the ring once it's on your finger. Another custom calls for 'Iolani seniors to wear the ring with the seal facing them. When they graduate, they turn the ring around so that the school seal faces outward and represents their journey into the world.

Nowadays, students have a wide range of designs to choose from, but the traditional signet ring with a flat or domed surface is still popular. Students can also select a stone or one of 400 motifs that reflect their interests and activities. And the type



Jenna Arnold '09 smiles as she receives her junior class ring.



Jamie Souza '06, now at Occidental College, cheers at her junior ring ceremony back in the spring of 2005.

of metals varies too, from the modestly priced white lustrium (nickel alloy) to the high end 14-karat gold. And with the addition of girls in the 1980s to the student mix, 'Iolani class rings now come in femininely proportioned dimensions.

"Your class ring is symbolic or emblematic jewelry, not necessarily fashion jewelry," McNichols adds. "It represents something you've accomplished. It tells a story."

LOST AND RECOVERED

Armand Chong '79 now knows where his class ring is, thanks to a resourceful treasure hunter who recovered and returned it.

Chong remembers giving his 'Iolani ring with a football design on the side to his college girlfriend. But the two eventually went their separate ways, and the last time he saw his class ring was in the mid 1980s. He didn't think about the band after that.

Then two years ago, he received a phone call at his office from a stranger. The man told Chong that he found his 1979 ring with a red stone on the sand at Ewa Beach and that he wanted to put it back in Chong's hands. Chong was skeptical.

"Was this man someone I could trust?" Chong admits. "I was a little worried that maybe it was a hoax."

The man did bring the ring to Chong and, lo and behold, it was indeed his 'Iolani class ring, graduating year around the insignia, name engraved inside.

Jostens' McNichols says that prior to class reunions, some alumni reorder class rings because they have lost the original as the years after graduation accumulate. Other alumni pass their class rings on to their children when they graduate from 'Iolani.

"Why do you still have those things?" McNichols asks. "It stands for something. It's who you are."



This 2007 'Iolani class ring has a dome signet style.

LOST AND LOOKING

Two years ago, 'Iolani School received a long distance phone call from a man who said he had found an 'Iolani class ring with the name **Stanley Vincent** engraved inside. However, there was no one listed by that name in the school records.

Director of Alumni Relations **Mike Moses** '93 looked in the phone book and found a Stanley Vincent, Jr., and called the number. But **Kerri Vincent**, wife of Stanley Vincent, Jr., had never met her father-in-law who died in 1979. She told Moses that her husband's dad didn't go to 'Iolani.

But later she talked with her sister-in-law in Arizona, **Cathy Vincent Ah Yo**, daughter of Stanley Vincent, Sr. Kerri Vincent learned that her father-in-law did, indeed, graduate from 'Iolani, but the family was unsure of the year because it was during the war. During World War II, 'Iolani enrolled students only up to eighth grade and so records of students back then were incomplete during those years.

Kerri and Cathy would have liked to retrieve the class ring because it represents a special part of their father-in-law and father's youth.

Unfortunately, the man who recovered the ring on the mainland can no longer be located or reached. If somehow, there's

a way for the Vincent family to recover their father's ring, they would be grateful.

A 1942 yearbook lists Stanley Vincent as a junior, which would have made him a member of the Class of '43. Another interesting aspect of Stanley Vincent's education is that, according to a *Honolulu Advertiser* article dated June 11, 1947, he received his 'Iolani diploma in 1948, five years after his high school career was interrupted by the war.

"If we find his ring, that would be neat," Kerri says.

MEMORIES ON YOUR FINGER

Over the years, what has remained constant about an 'Iolani class ring is the school seal being part of the design.

"On each ring, whether on the face or on the side, is the center of the seal of 'Iolani School whose own history dates back to our founding in 1863," says 'Iolani chaplain Rev. **Daniel Leatherman**.

The central features of the seal come from the Episcopal Diocese of Hawai'i and the coat of arms of Bishop **Thomas Nettleship Staley**, the first Anglican bishop sent to Hawai'i by the Church of England in 1862. 'Iolani School was established under Bishop Staley's leadership and the desire of **King Kamehameha IV** and **Queen Emma**. Also on the seal is the bishop's miter which is the distinctive hat worn by bishops and symbolizing their ministry.

"A class ring can be a powerful reminder of who we are and where we come from," Leatherman says. "It represents a time and place in our lives."

It's memories wrapped around your finger. ☀



Ron McNichols of Jostens holds up samples of 'Iolani class rings.



After all these years, Kenneth Quon '48 still has the class ring he ordered through Balfour Jewelers. The ring displays the original school seal in black onyx.