

## WILLIAM KAHAKULEILEHUA HAUNU'U CHING

*In March 1986, William Kahakuleilehua Haunu'u "Sonny" Ching established Hālau Na Mamo O Pu'uanahulu, which is currently located in the Kapālama area of Honolulu.*

← I think hula is getting back to being more traditional. There was a period that hula was getting wild and people were doing all kinds of things, especially with the hula kahiko. It has turned around and I hope people like myself and my other fellow kumu hula are looking to keeping things traditional yet conducive to our times. Hula has changed with the times and that's good otherwise it would die. If everyone did what was handed down to them, everyone would be dancing exactly the same way and there would be no need for all the different hālau.

It was preordained that I was going to be the one to continue hula in my family. Both my grandmother and my great grandmother could foresee it. After I was born, my great grandmother said I was going to be the chanter. At the age of four, my grandmother started teaching me some of the chants and we would progress to the dancing. When I was twelve, my father said, "Do not hula". He didn't want me to dance. So grandmother taught me in secret because she didn't want my father to be angry.

My grandmother, Lena Pua'ainahau Eleakala Nahulu Guerrero, was my best friend. We became very close. She taught me on a one-to-one situation and we did things together on a daily basis, especially during that short period when I was taught in secret. We always preceded our training with prayer, and because my grandmother was fluent in the language, she prayed in Hawaiian. That's how I run my class today. Before we begin to dance, we pray to Akua. My grandmother told me I can never set up a kuahu in my hālau because my hālau

needed to be dedicated to God. But it was all right to do the chants that honor Laka because those chants need to continue, otherwise they would be forgotten.

The method my grandmother used to teach me hula and chant was by imitation. We just repeated this process until she felt I was doing it correctly. She chanted in the style she felt that it should be chanted in and I just imitated it. I wasn't allowed to write anything down which was good because when you learn strictly through memory, things tend to stay in your mind longer.

I had an 'ūniki with my grandmother in February 1984. It wasn't a traditional 'ūniki but more like a huelepo. Basically it was a ritual of prayers and food. I danced and recited some of the things that I was taught. I don't think my grandmother felt that I was truly ready to 'ūniki but she knew that her time was ending and she felt it was necessary to do this. She even told me that though I received her permission to teach, that didn't mean that I was through learning. I was to go on to seek more knowledge.

When I was fifteen, my grandmother gave me permission to experience being in a hālau. That was my beginning with Frank Kawaikapuokalani Hewett. It was incredible to belong to his hālau. The mana within the hālau was very strong and you could feel the spirit permeate the air. The students had so much aloha for each other and they were willing to spend extra time to help you learn.

*but* Kawaikapu is very well versed in the culture, prayers, hula traditions and the protocol of hula. He is probably the most spiritual man that I know. It's kind of eerie but he would know if we misbehaved. When you came to hula, he would talk to you about what you did. There were times when he would say that he went to Kaua'i, yet we knew he was on O'ahu but his spirit had left and had gone to Kaua'i. It was through this way that he would see what we did so we were good. I was never his best student. I did not get enough of all that was offered. Basically what I learned from Frank was the fact that if you are a kumu

hula, it doesn't mean that you just teach hula. Becoming and being a kumu hula dictates your whole life style. It dictates the way you think, your actions and your view on life. All of these things are interrelated.

I was with Frank for three years. He blessed me at Kualoa and gave me the name Kahakuleilehua. After moving to town, however, it just became too difficult to continue commuting to He'eia on the bus with all my hula implements. So I stopped dancing for a year before going to Lahela Ka'aihue. Lahela taught me to appreciate and to love 'auana. She is a beautiful dancer. I could sit for hours watching her dance. The style of dancing that we do, especially my men's 'auana, is really Lahela.

I went through a period where I wanted to be a fashion designer in New York City. Thank God I never pursued that dream. As I got older, I realized the importance of teaching hula. In 1986, Moses Crabb asked me to take over his class at Paki Park because he was concentrating on his kumu hula training with Robert Cazimero. I started teaching a group of kupa and ten years later, I'm still at Paki Park. Some of the kupa in my class today are the same ladies from that original class.

My papa maile lauli'i is my premiere class though it does not necessarily mean that these are my best dancers. It's just that they have a grasp of what we are doing and they are capable of learning more things. I don't consider you my student until you have danced with me for at least two years. If you haven't been with me for two years, that's not long enough to learn anything. By staying with me longer than two years, you show me that you are really interested in what we do and you really want to learn. I don't want to give everything in the beginning because people will just come, take, then leave and misuse what they have taken.

For any of my students to become kumu hula, they need to be stronger in the language. They need to have a better understanding of the poetry of the chants and to understand the kaona or the hidden meaning of the chants. I require them to learn all of the kuahu chants and the dressing chants. In addition, I think it is very important that kumu hula are able to choreograph, be able to create, be able to write, be able to take a chant from the 1600's or 1700's and put it into hula movements today.

I cannot say that what we do is what the teachers of old would do. Like Aunty Kau'i Zuttermeister perpetuated things exactly as they were taught to her by Pua Ha'aheo. That is not my job. My job is to perpetuate hula in the ancient styles and not be too loud or outrageous in the kahiko movements. It needs to be done within these guidelines. You need to maintain traditional even if it is choreographed today. Most importantly, a kumu needs to be strong spiritually. Kumu also means foundation or base and if the foundation is not strong, you cannot build upon it.

I honestly believe that the Hawaiian Renaissance and all other fields of Hawaiian culture stem from hula. Without the hula, the language would not have been resurrected like it is today. Many of the arts and crafts would not be resurrected. Many of the traditional practices like the founding of the lo'i, would not be resurrected. All of these things are done today because of the hula. Hula is out there. It's in front for people to see. It's made people aware of the Hawaiian culture.