

Lovina's draft

Nana | Na Loea Hula
Kumu Hula: Leilani Mendez
Interviewer: Lovina LePendu
Date: 3/08/91

Grace Margaret Leilani Sharpe Mendez. For the hula world is Leilani Sharpe Mendez. I teach in Waianae at the intermediate cafeteria from age five up to kupuna age 76 years old. The name of the halau use to be "Hau'oli Hula Halau", the name was given to me by Aunty Pauline Kekahuna and Aunty Vicky li Rodriques. It was a trio name for entertainers with Aunty Pauline Kekahuna. I was playing music for her so in 1972 when I opened my halau I gave that name in honor of Aunty Pauline the leader of the group and Aunty Vicky the choreographer.

When Aunty Vicky passed away I thought I will put that name at rest. So I spoke with my mom and my husband and we decided to rest the name. See this name was also Aunty Pauline's first senior girls dancers' name with her trio's name. The girls were Leina'ala Heine, Florence Koanui, Mapuana Yasui, Jade Heen, Leimomi Ho, Hu'i Park. They were the dancers for Leikai Hotel, the Lurline, they were very busy. I was dancing with them too. I was a solo dancer too then I became a musician for her. The first sinior girls were the one that went to Merry Monarch to compete in 1971.

I teach kahiko, auana, I also teach Maori and Tahitian. I teach oli also. I taught hula as early as 13 years old. I am now 57 years old. I learn hula when I was two years-old. Tutu Kekuewa, Aunty Edith's mother, was my teacher. We were neighbors when she came for the Mormon Temple so that's how I got to know her she came from Hilo to her cousin (Ms.) Louise Kealoha. That was in Kalihi. At two years-old when every other children were outside playing I was inside to sit down to learn how to say the words. How to express my mind and my eyes. Nothing with my hands yet, not until I was five years-old that I was able to get up on my feet and hula. When I was 15 years-old Tutu passed away. So I went on to Aunty lolani Luahine, and then Aunty Lokalia Montgomery through my dad because my dad's sisters were from the schools of Kao'o. Emily Wong Kaupena's mother Kaeha Kanamu the queen of the ilima lei maker. At two years-old when I was learning I had to mimic everything she said. I had to sit down and listen and pay attention and memorize. When Aunty Edith came from Hil she will dance standing I will always sitting and watch. I realize later that I was tested for discipline. For the hula

you need discipline first so it became very important for myself when I opened my own halau.

Discipline! With Aunty lolani and Aunty Lokalia I had the same kind of discipline. I was very young then but I remember clearly everything were done with prayers the opening and the ending of the classes.

My modern version of the hula I went to Leilani Alama because she lived down the street and she taught in her aunt home. She was very young then. After Leilani I also went to Aunty Sally Wood Naluai and I still respect her as my immediate source of the hula. I danced with Aunty Lokalia until she passed away. With Aunty Lokalia I uniki and also with Aunty Sally, but Aunty lo I don't think she uniki anybody. At 13 years-old I work teaching hula for the wives of the officers at Lualualei Club. After I travelled at least 28 states through the (Marines). To sell Hawaii to the mainlanders. I think all my teachers have influence in my halau. My dancing style I like to think I have my own style, my style is a smooth style of dancing with an oni to the hips and the expression with the body and the hands. I know my most outstanding are my feet. I lift my feet every time I dance and that is the hauoli look. During my career I did not encounter much difficulties. I encountered a bad experience and that was in the Merry Monarch in 1979. I had won the perpetual trophy and that years I lost a girl, Allison Vahine Ho'okai in a car accident. I recall again at that time what I was taught discipline is very impotent. If you don't listen you get in trouble. Also I encounter the death of my baby daughter, so I left the halau for a while she danced for me. I rested for about 4 1/2 years. Lest year was my come back to hula. I took my halau to Hayward and enjoyed it tremendously.

I am happy to share the hula with kupuna because some of these ladies had never dance in their life. It keeps them occupied so for me it is a challenge I have 40 of them kupuna from Waianae.

My accomplishment: I have been able to (teach) Twyla Ululani Mendez. She is now with the award of 1984 Miss Hula--first hula competition. I have another daughter that lives in Hile. Sheryl Wilson that follows the same footsteps she has a show group of her own that what makes me happy.

Kahiko today? Some of these kumu hula that calls themselves such I think they don't have the roots. I see a lot of style that don't belong to them and they say it does. We should be creative in our own, but not to call yourself kumu hula and not be creative in their own personal way.

Hula kahiko is a sacred form of the art of hula that's motivated by the student learning from their master. It is a special form of art that came from generation and should continue as such.

I prefer kahiko. When I win I like to tin in kahiko. My favorite chant "U lei pagodas i ta motu ke welina mai nei" from Tutu Kekuewa.

Definitely Hawaiian language is important. Especially for the children of today. See, when we were small we were around the language, but today the children needs that.

Master, Iolani, Lokalia, Tutu Kekuewa, Edith Kanakaole did a highly regard in her (ere), Kauai _____, Sally Naluai.

I am entertainer musician. Workshop in hula is a wonderful idea. Workshop for kumu hula see uncle George Naope can offer so much we can learn so much. Hula is roots. You have to learn from the old. To the young people in the hula search for the roots. We have them go to them. We (sat), we ate, we digested it. We slept with it and next day we did it again. In our time we had to ask permission to come in the halau we didn't with an oli. Today they came in dirty clothes, dirty shoes, not in our time.

For several years I judged at Merry Monarch, At Kona. I teach Maori and Tahitian to my students. Just as supplement to hula not specifically only those. My students learn maori and tahitian as additions. As senior but I don't teach (Keehi). I don't feel I have the authority to do so. In hula, yes, I can. I am grateful to speak to day about one of my love the hula my fast is the lord then Joe then hula. Tow years ago I changed the name of my halau from Hauoli Hula Halau to at present, "Ka Mele Hula O Na ku'u Pu'uwai".