

Nana i na loea hula  
Kumu Hula: Iris Napaepae  
Interviewer: Lovina Le Pendu  
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Iris Marie Naleialoha Napaepae-Kunewa. I just go by Naleialoha Napaepae-Kunewa. (DO YOU TEACH PRESENTLY?) Yes, I teach presently at Kalaoa, at my home. (THE AGE OF YOUR STUDENTS?) Usually they need to be in school, so about 6 years old to kupuna, they just stay as long as they stay. (YOU TEACH BOTH KAHIKO AND AUANA?) No, only kahiko. I teach auana for adult education at Kona Community School, elderly activities for the Hawaii County which is the kupuna program, and on occasion, but those are like for 10, to 20 weeks, and it is not like the halau program, the halau is exclusively kahiko. (DO YOU TEACH OLI?) Some oli, but not focusing especially on oli, but mostly on oli that goes with the dance. (HOW MANY YEARS HAVE YOU BEEN TEACHING?) Since 1975, I started teaching in 1975 on my own. (WHAT AGE DID YOU START HULA?) About 7 years old. (WHO WAS YOUR FIRST TEACHER?) Mrs. Lokalia Montgomery. She was my only teacher. (DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT SHE TAUGHT YOU?) I still do the same things that she taught. She was the curator at Hualahee Palace, so she lived in the curators house which was on the grounds and mom was working at the palace, so I would go down on Saturday's with mom and I would go to class

on Saturday's. Then, they are not like today, she picked, she did it the traditional way that the teacher picks the student. So, I was picked by her, <sup>I guess</sup> too because I was there waiting for mom, but she had the ability to select <sup>people</sup> who she wanted to teach which is the true way of teaching especially for them and they believed very strongly in that. So that was how I began to learn. (HOW LONG DID YOU STAY UNDER HER?) Until 1976, she retired in 1971 and moved back to Honolulu, and I went to college in Oregon and I attended Maraners College and the I graduated from the University of Portland in 1974, when I returned home she was already living in Honolulu, but she had given me permission to start if I wanted, <sup>well</sup> she always encouraged me to continue, but in 1976 I asked her if it was okay with her and she said yah. It kind of started, it was a friend from Honolulu who was entertaining here in Kona and she had collected all these kids and she had a show so we were working together at Hotel King Kamehameha at the time it was Kona Lagoon and there was a Kona Lagoon Resort, <sup>Xo<sup>o</sup></sup> and she moved back to Honolulu and she was only supposed to move back temporarily so I just kind of continued with the kids she had, the children she had, but she didn't come back, she came back but she told me she wasn't going to move back, so I had already, because of my relationship here with Puuhonua in 1971, I was hired as a park seasonal

~~range~~ during the summers so every time I come home from college I have the job for the summer and then I go back to school. In 1975 they started <sup>park service</sup>

the ~~first~~ <sup>celebrating</sup> celebration of the bicentennial, ~~so~~ here at Honaunau I was always

demonstrating a few times a week the hula and in 1975, they asked me if I would come down to help with that festival so I brought her students here,

~~and in~~ 1970, the State Foundation on the Culture and Arts had funded Mrs.

Montgomery to teach in N. Kona and Iolani Luahini to teach in S. Kona so ~~then~~

that year, in 1970, my cousin was also a student of Mrs. Montgomery just

for that time that the State Foundation had funded her to teach, so I asked

my cousins in 1975 <sup>to come down with me and we</sup> ~~to help me~~ gather <sup>ed</sup> all these children to ~~go~~ <sup>came</sup> down and

<sup>er</sup> <sup>put</sup> preform, then after that I thought if the children are interested and the

parents are might as well keep going even though my friend from Honolulu

didn't move back, <sup>Didn't</sup> ~~to take~~ care of her students. I really didn't have

intentions of teaching. My cousin and I were going to do it together, but

it didn't work out, so I named the halau, "Halau O Kalei Hoohie", so I named

<sup>the halau</sup> it after her (my cousin), <sup>So</sup> at that point in 1975 I just kept teaching, I

decided to teach. Two of ~~the~~ <sup>those original</sup> students from my friends ~~group~~ became the first students, and ~~now~~ <sup>the</sup> they <sup>now</sup> are <sup>almost 30, 29 years old, around there.</sup> like ~~19 years old~~ now around there, so

those 2 were my first students and over the years I've had students that

come and go because of my relationship with Puahonua it just kept



growing from that point, not in numbers but consistent as far as carrying on the traditions of Mrs. Montgomery. (THE METHODS THAT MRS.

MONTGOMERY TAUGHT YOU?) She didn't. <sup>With</sup> me, she was very..she'd sit,

we'd sit on her dining room table. She'd sit on one end and I'd <sup>be</sup> sit on the

other end, she didn't use any instruments except the first hula noho was

Kona Kai 'Opua and the second was <sup>with the illi</sup> Aua O Kalani. She also taught me

Kukapuanohua, and from that point everything else was done on the dining

room table, <sup>we</sup> didn't use an ipu or a pahu, and she was very...lots of people

today say that she was a very strict person, <sup>that we did with kumu hula.</sup> that film <sup>with</sup> George Naope,

~~he~~ said that she was very strict. ~~She~~ was stern, ~~She~~ was very serious in

her teaching and very knowledgeable <sup>as far as</sup> in knowing what she felt suited the

person. <sup>She didn't really have - like you supposed to learn by the 1st year, you supposed to know Kumu hula.</sup> ~~She~~ didn't teach you the standards, ~~She~~ believed that if that

persons able to comprehend that, that's what she would give you. She

really enjoyed working individually with people and she would... it was a

very relaxed situation and it was easy for me being as young as I was to

sit with her. I felt very comfortable with her because it wasn't a school

<sup>where</sup> ~~where~~ there was other students or her having to be there <sup>at a cer</sup> ~~on time~~ at a

certain time, it was very informal. It was very good, and she'd sit and

talk and sometimes I'd go over and she'd be cooking, she loved to cook, she

was always cooking for me and she'd invite people <sup>for lunch.</sup> ~~over~~. Her favorite was

corned beef and cabbage, and after a night on the town Auntie Io and Uncle

George would come by and she'd say no, no, no I have my girl here and you  
folks <sup>go</sup> hele, hele, hele <sup>don't bother us.</sup> and <sup>And they'd come on the side</sup> she'd ~~see them go down~~ by the windows and look  
<sup>the window</sup> in and she'd say hele, hele, hele, ~~don't bother us~~ and she'd close the

curtains. Being as young as I was I would look, ~~look, look~~, but <sup>they're</sup> their all  
good friends, and she'd <sup>go</sup> say <sup>"</sup> ~~their~~ always bothering us. <sup>"go away, go away."</sup> They go out and have

fun and then they want me to stay up all night with them. That was the  
time when all of these people were there, ~~and~~ I cherish that time <sup>because</sup> you see

the real people, you see <sup>the way</sup> they are and she was very...she wasn't  
<sup>originally</sup> ~~originally~~ from Kona, she was from Kauai and growing up in Honolulu and

spending most of her life in Honolulu, she knew <sup>a lot of</sup> ~~many~~ people, and Mary

Kawena Pukui was her very close friend who'd come up and kind of check it

out and she'd invite Mrs. Pukui in and I always had to call everyone Mrs. or

Mr. I wasn't allowed to call anyone Auntie, ~~So~~ Mrs. Montgomery was always

Mrs. Montgomery and Mrs. Pukui and Mrs. Bacon, and she'd have them come

for different functions at the Palace and she'd cook and she'd invite people

for lunch and sometimes I'd go over in the morning and kind of frustrated

because I'd be <sup>all ready for</sup> ~~there to~~ hula and she'd be in the kitchen, ~~and then~~ she'd tell

me to sit in the kitchen with her and she'd <sup>go on and on</sup> tell me about so and so and so.

I'd sit there and wait and wait because I want to get in there ~~and then~~ she <sup>because I'd don't</sup> see her.

Then she'd say  
we'll

says oh I guess you're ready, so we go into the living room and sit down and

she's not really into it that day, she'd rather talk story, so we'd talk and

she'd talk on and on about so and so and what's coming up and so I think oh

well, I guess that's the way it is, and some Saturday's I'd go and imua, but

today I realize that I was learning something. She never danced, she only

And that was it.

had me get up and tell me how to do it. (DID YOU UNIKI FROM HER?) Yah.

(WHEN AND WHERE?) I don't remember when. I uniki at the Palace. I

remember her going to get the fish, the red fish, she had to have the fish,

(Anybody else)

She cooked corn beef that day. Then she had to have sweet potatoes, and it Just

myself. was only us. I was about 11 or 12 when I was uniki. I don't know if it was

puka I had to wait. The Palace close and I have to wait. She told me not to eat the nig before. uniki or what. All I remember was that I couldn't eat. I came down that

morning and I stayed with her all day, and she had me sleep. I slept on the

I remember eating.

lanai and after that we went through different things, she had everything

portioned. There was no dancing involved. We had a performance coming

up which was supposed to be the first time in a hoike at the palace, and that whole week we (per)formed everyday, the school came and watched me

(pre)form. (DO YOU KEEP HER STYLE IN YOUR HALAU?) I've kept her style,

I've tried to remain true to her style, I am a firm believer that she learned

from her teachers and from that we carry on an exclusive style and

whatever she taught me I keep the same, I don't change. (DO YOU WRITE



CHANTS?) Lately, for about the last 3 years or so its been really strong,  
~~and we dance to those chants~~ Some oli, mostly mele hula, noho, ~~but I have~~

with the halau I teach her method of teaching the steps, I keep that. Her  
voice and hand gestures, I keep that and then I keep the traditional hula, ~~like~~  
*Quaia Koolau au.*  
Kaulilua, ~~what~~ ever else I learned after that, I incorporate that into the

style and my own I try to keep the basics and interpret my manao. (DID  
YOU ENCOUNTER ANY DIFFICULTIES?) I don't think real difficulties with

hula, ~~hula~~ has always been the real outlet. ~~It's~~ always been the good part of  
me that I am glad I have. It's always the saving grace, ~~when~~ life does get

difficult when I was away at school, I used it in my classes. I liked

~~the~~ philosophy and arts and the humanities, so I've used hula. ~~Here~~ at work,

when I went to college and all the teachings I reflect back and try to

remember what she would have done. Hula cannot be separated from me.

We as Hawaiians have certain things we are good at, ~~and~~ ~~hula~~ is mine and

all other aspects that do with that: lei making, making of the pahu, *pa'u?*  
colors, she was very.. what you ~~do~~ with your feet <sup>that you always kept your feet</sup> so that you cannot see

the dirt underneath, <sup>this way - not out like that or</sup> you always keep your hands close, <sup>and had to</sup> you always have to

know what you were doing. She was always clear <sup>Colors.</sup> about the colors and

<sup>about</sup> who wore what <sup>what color and what stages the person had to be.</sup> and she taught all this to me, <sup>all of that mornings when we weren't dancing, that was the reason.</sup> When you don't apply <sup>it</sup> you

don't know <sup>really</sup> that is the lesson, ~~and~~ the lei, the lei that went with the

You always had ~~not~~ a very mean look but not uncaring.

certain mele, the place, having an identification with the place is very important. <sup>it has been</sup> This place has been for me, my place, <sup>and</sup> even if I go away for a long time and I come home, I always come back to Puahonua, <sup>u</sup> Well it is a refuge it is a place of peace and a place to come back to yourself. ~~and~~ so she stressed that and she always stressed. <sup>stressed</sup> the fact that you need to....its not so much the movement and the dancing.. I had knee surgery in June and the doctors always give the bad before the good and he said he doesn't know what's going to happen or if I could ever fully recuperate to the point that I could ever dance again, so there was a kind of depression because I thought I may never be able to dance again, so what do I do ? Do I pay big money to go to therapy and it was a hard time for me, but <sup>then I thought</sup> Mrs. Montgomery always said if you...if those times come you have to think and you have to know that whatever you have inside it doesn't matter that everything outside is just there. Your hands, your legs and your head and everything they really can't do anything if inside <sup>doesn't</sup> isn't telling them what to do they are just extensions of the inside, so if you don't get up and uehe the next year it doesn't matter <sup>because it's still in here.</sup> ~~and~~ I've had to slow down and not get involved in so much and really come back to myself because that has caused me to do <sup>the</sup> that and then to really think back at her teaching, so ~~here~~ teaching has become so much stronger. I've made a lot of good friends with hula, close



friends. Finally, I was invited to KA every year to hoola, but I've never attended, because I've never really felt <sup>like</sup> that I should go, ~~so~~ last year I went and I met Nani Kalama who is Mrs. Montgomery's first student and that was...now I know I have some kind of connection they always know about me. I knew that there were other students and over the years I think the most difficult part is when I run into younger people who claim that they learned from Mrs. Montgomery. But when we sit down and talk, they don't even know her. ~~So~~ that is an experience that I really treasure, meeting Nani, and then I went to Honolulu over Christmas and New Years' and spent new years day with Sally, and found out that Sally, <sup>L</sup>Nani, and Maiki. I only knew Maiki because she'd come up all the time and we sat down and Lokalia was sitting right there and she'd look at...and we'd go on about this and that and they'd always called her mama but I always called her Mrs. Montgomery. <sup>They'd say,</sup> ~~So~~ I wondered what mama would say, <sup>now, ~~we'd~~ we'd sit the</sup> and we danced <sup>in Sally's house a</sup> oh, <sup>probably sit</sup> and chanted, and what a way to spend the new year, <sup>here night</sup> and they were very excited to know I felt very good inside because they were so excited to finally <sup>met</sup> meet me because she always told me that someday we would met and now that they are getting on in their years, they feel very comfortable knowing that there is someone else carrying on Mrs. Montgomery's beliefs and philosophies which is very important I think and especially today

when we get so wrapped up in...that would be really myself and life, trying to grow up, trying to do different things, working, finding out who you are trying to succeed in your career so you can keep your career and keep your hula and keep this and keep being Hawaiian and what not,<sup>3</sup> but I gave up on trying to be American and at the same time try to be Hawaiian. I finally realized that there's no two, you chose what you are and that's what I am. So I gave up already, I just have found that I need to be true to what I believe and she always said that you will continue to fall no matter what. You will continue to fall, but what you have to remember is that for every time you fall and you get up again you become stronger and you become a better person and there's times you fall real hard and you feel like you'll never get up again, but you do. Hula has been that for me. (YOUR GREATEST ACCOMPLISHMENT?) The joy of being able to carry on her beliefs and what she stood for, ~~She~~ is a very noble person, ~~She~~ joked about making money, she always said that if you can get to the point <sup>where</sup> ~~that~~ you give and give, but you give and your reward is what you see, especially in another human, she said that is the best reward, ~~So~~ that I feel is the biggest accomplishment is being able to teach to the point <sup>where</sup> ~~that~~ I do receive. ~~that response~~. (DO YOU UNIKI YOUR STUDENTS?) No, I haven't yet. Someday there will be someone to carry on. (ADVICE TO NEW HULA

TEACHERS?) They need to know who they are as a person and to know really what to feel, not only because you had a dream, but to really look at it long term and to see what your priorities are and not to compromise the teachings that are traditional that they should be kept traditional so the culture stays in tack over the years. If we tend to compromise too much, then we lose. (WHAT IS THE MEANING OF KAHIKO?) We never really talked about it. <sup>Halau,</sup> <sup>today</sup> ~~Hula kahiko, auana is a division of a chant of song.~~ I always learned from Mrs. Montgomery that hula is hula. Hula is unique to Hawaii, it belongs to us. Anyone can do auana, and auana being that it is free, it is open and can be done any place, any time with different...whatever your manao is of the auana, it will live. So there is really no need to focus on auana for her, and <sup>what</sup> so she just said ~~it~~ is important is <sup>begin that it's hula</sup> ~~just~~ hula and hula ~~being that it is just hula,~~ belonging to Hawaii, you need to learn and know what it is to be Hawaiian, so that when you know that and you know the importance of that, <sup>then you</sup> ~~the~~ hula becomes a part of you, and so that's what I teach today. Kahiko is hula. (HULA KAHIKO OF TODAY?) I look..when I look at it I am attracted to certain halau because I can feel that . If I can feel a halau I look for is the feet, the steps, I can feel the steps. And the mele I don't really focus on the motions or the choreography. That's what I look for, if that turns me on



and there's a connection there, then I feel good about it. I like halau that remain with their own style. I let the ones that are trying to be like someone else that try to copy from others, those kind I just kind of...it's okay, but after a while you run out of things to teach because you don't have a base, so you don't have a strong foundation to come back to, but when you remain true to your own style, it's endless and I didn't realize until my husband and I started to work together that he was really responsible for getting the physical part because Mrs. Montgomery wasn't up there dancing with me and because it wasn't that kind of relationship when I first started teaching I had a hard time with that, so he belongs to a tai kwan do association so he helped me with the physical part and he helped me develop different exercises to suit the girls and for children and he's a recreation major, that's what he graduated with from college, so he know how to work with children and he know what their body can do and their potential, so from that point I developed the physical part and then I took what I remembered from Mrs. Montgomery and I incorporated that so the halau form that point has become even stronger because of that, because I was kind of lost on how to get them physically inclined. A lot of children now don't have that, unless it's structured, they don't go home anymore and play, they sit around and watch t.v. and do their

homework. Now I teach for the kupuna program at Honowai Elementary and I realized that the children in the classroom by the end of the day they were supposed to have learned 20 different things, subjects, but how much do they learn, so when they come to the halau, they saw wow this place is so quiet, it's just us, they have to really get themselves. Now with that physical part, we work out before we practice and then when pau, they are all relaxed, they got all their frustrations out and then we learn. And then coming here has really helped, the children swim when pau. Before we went to Kauai I took my first 2 students, one is married now with 4 children and she lives on the mainland, but when she was home at the time and the other one isn't married yet, but their about the same age and before we went to Kauai, we did the performance here and we spent the afternoon down here and they had forgotten what it had been like to be down here and you know when they had danced that night we hadn't danced together for about 15 years and it was like it had just happened yesterday and they felt that they could come home anytime, so the mele hula that I wrote for them is "hula lae ho", to dance again, and it describes their feet, that the feet never forget no matter where you go, how far your feet take you, where ever you go, whatever you do, your feet will never forget because this is your place, this is where you come from, this is

who you are. I stress as much as possible to teach Hawaiian children, and to keep the classes with Hawaiian children because I feel that it is very important. I am not saying that I don't accept non-Hawaiian children, but, I believe that it is just as important for them when they are with me in the halau as well as when they go home. If the family is not Hawaiian oriented or that kind of feel it is very hard for them to have the full concept of what it is. The classes are small, right now we only have 5 that are active and I just started with a young man, he's 13, so that's a challenge because he is my first kane. He is very interested, but he was kind of uncomfortable in the beginning with all of the girls, but he's very interested, so it's a challenge for me. Mrs. Montgomery was teaching kane for her special programs but she didn't really go over it. I never learned how to teach kane, but I know a few mele and now that I'm composing my own mele which are mostly about this place in Kona, I feel that I am ready to take on that new challenge with kane. (FAVORITE CHANT?) I guess "ule pahu", it has always been my favorite. (HAWAIIAN LANGUAGE IMPORTANT IN HULA?) I think language is important in if you are going to learn the language you need to learn it in the formal text as far as taking classes like at the university or language classes today, I think that it is important for us to do and also to practice it as a living language because



if you don't have both...to live the language and to practice it with native speakers is very important, that to me is first priority. but to learn it in the formal text because there's going to come a time that we are going to be the keepers, we have to be the kahu of our won language because our kupuna are going to go eventually. (WORKSHOPS?) I think it is good to have, I think I'd like to see more theory workshops, as far as extending values to students because I think you can get steps, you can get dancing hula even the use of the pahu, ipu, chanting, you can go, you can pick a halau for that and then you will learn their style, but what I think with the people we still have living and with us today I think it is important that we extend their experiences to the point where it can apply to the person. I used to go to a lot of the State Foundation funded workshops, and it was okay, but it wasn't deep enough and they weren't meant to be that way they were just feeling around. That's what it is teaching appreciation not living in such a fantasy that a lot of today's people need to acquire the values. I was just looking at a video tape that Pua Kanahalele did for her class and she was talking about how your teacher will teach you only certain things and they will leave it up to you later on to decide what to do now, and then you figure it out yourself and that makes you a better teacher or a better person. When I heard that it reminded me of what Mrs.

Montgomery always said that you will receive and when I was with Nani and Sally I realize the way I do auana..is not the same way they do it. the rhythm and everything was the same, but the motions were different and the steps are slightly different, but they were older, they were young adults when they were learning and I was a child, so she taught me the easiest way so my motions are so easy compared to theirs, so Lani's daughter and I were dancing and Lani was on the pahu and we laugh because her daughter was younger than me, her daughter Shylani, I was a child so I couldn't learn the hard way but in order to keep it alive she taught it to me so Lani laughed and she said yah that is what's important because it still lives with you, and even if you still do it exactly the same way it doesn't matter how old you are and that's how I was taught.

Listening to Lani that's the way we did it that's the way we learned, the voicing, the use of the pahu, how you cup your hand when you hit the pahu, the roll of the ipu which she was known for. Not everybody can do everything, Sally was the dancer, Lani was the chanter. Lani loved the pahu so that's what she's good at she's good at everything, but not as good as the pahu. Sally was a dancer so she loves to dance and as far as the words and using the pahu, she can, but that is not her, that's not what she loves, her first love is the dance and so these are the things we need to

recognize. I really admire, "halau O kekuhi" I really admire that.