

WILLIAM KAHAKULEILEHUA HAUNU'U CHING

In March 1986, William Kahakuleihua Haunu'u "Sonny" Ching established Halau Na Mamo O Pu'uanahulu, which is currently located in the Kapahulu & Kapalama areas of Honolulu.

I believe that the hula is getting back to being performed more in the traditional manner. There was a period that the hula was getting a little ^{too} wild; ^{to} many introductions of other dance forms, especially ^{to} with the hula kahiko. I think it has turned around due to the revival of other aspects of our culture, like the 'Olelo, oli, Planting, la'au lapa'au, navigation, huna, lua, weaving, amongst others. I hope that people like myself and my fellow kumu hula are looking to keeping things traditional *yet* conducive to our times. The hula has changed over time and I think - that this is a good thing or it is my belief that the hula would die. I also believe that in order to be kumu hula, you need that ability to create. I think each of us breathe our own breath in to our dance, our haumana, our halau. This need is why we are kumu hula. That is what makes each of us unique, different. If we all did things the same, there would be no need for different halau, ^a handful would suffice, ^{and} we would be unable to document *our* times.

It was preordained that I would be the one to continue hula in my family. Both my grandmother ^{and} 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 decided that I shouldn't dance, so my 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 confidant, my roommate, my grandmother and my best friend. She taught me on a one-to-one situation and usually did things on a daily basis. We always preceded our training with prayer, and because my grandmother was of pure koko and was fluent in the language, she prayed ⁱⁿ Hawaiian. That's how I run my class today. Before we dance, we pray to Akua ^{and} to Laka. My grandmother told me I can never set up a kuahu in halau, ^{because} my halau will be dedicated to God. But it was all right to do the chants that honor Laka because those chants need to continue, otherwise it would be forgotten. For us, this is part of the ritual that prepares us spiritually, physically, ^{and} mentally for the hula, ^{this} is one of the ways we build our mana.

The method that my grandmother used to teach me hula and chant (*and is the way I teach today*) We just repeated this process until she felt I was doing it correctly.

Was by imitation.

She chanted, I chanted. She danced, I danced. I was not allowed to write anything which was good because when you learn strictly through memory, things tend to stay with you longer.

I had an 'uniki with my grandmother in February of 1984. It wasn't a traditional 'ai lolo ceremony, but more like a huelepo. It was a private ritual of prayers and food, and was held during the day. I was *presented*, and I danced, and chanted some of the things I was taught. I don't think my grandmother felt that I was truly ready to 'uniki 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 it didn't mean I was through learning. That for every thing I knew, there was a hundred other things I didn't know! And that I was to go on seeking knowledge. Thus the saying in our halau "*Ho'oulu I ka na'auao*" - "To grow in wisdom"

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

I was never one of his best students. I know that I did not get enough of all he had to offer. He has so much knowledge of the culture, his whole lifestyle lives the culture. And this is probably the greatest lesson I have learned from him. That becoming a kumu hula doesn't mean you just teach hula. Becoming and being a kumu hula dictates your whole lifestyle. It dictates the way you think, your actions and your view on life. All of these things are interrelated.

I danced with Frank for about three years and it was ^{he who} him that gave me the name I use today, Kahakuleilehua. After moving to town, however, it just became too difficult to continue commuting to He'eia on the bus with all of my hula implements, and my other interests started playing more of an important role in my life. I guess that I did not have the dedication, discipline, and desire strong enough to continue.

After about a ~~year~~^{year} and a half, I started with Lahela Ka'aihue. It was Lahela that truly taught me to love the hula 'auana. She is such a beautiful dancer. I could sit for hours and watch her dance. The style of dancing that we do, especially my men's 'auana is really Lahela.

could sit for hours watching her dance. The style of dancing that we do, especially my men's 'auana, is really Lahela.

A 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 kūpuna and ten years later, I'm still at Paki Park. Some of the kūpuna in my class today are the same ladies from that original class.

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 Auntie 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

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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.