

kawai aona

When I was a little girl my grandmother taught hula auwau in Hanalei. She would always tell me that I was going to be her little hula dancer. I never thought anything about it and she died when I was in the sixth grade.

I completely forgot about it and in time I was attending school at the University. ~~I was~~ While there I was introduced to Aunt Maiki Aiu Lake by some friends who were taking classes under her. I decided to sit in on the classes and I became interested.

My grandmother's name was Mary Aole. I was hawai'd by my grandmother but I did not study under her. She taught me a couple moves but no ancient hula.

I started off in auwau with Aunt Maiki and then for some reason she chose me and a couple of other students to join her hula pahu class.

~~That~~ When I first went to college I was this tita from Hanalei. I was dorming on campus and one day I was sitting in the lobby and these two Japanese exchange students came up to me.

~~They asked me if I was Haw~~ "Are you Hawaiian?" ~~And I said, "That's right..."~~

They asked me if I was Hawaiian and I replied that's right yes. Then they asked me if I could speak the language and I said no. So they asked me if I did the hula and I replied no. They looked at me a little funny and ended the conversation by saying, "You not Hawaiian."

At first I was really angry at them and my first impulse was to tell them off. I went up to my room instead, and ended up spending the night thinking about what they said.

And I came to the conclusion they were right. I did have the blood, I did have a little bit of knowledge from my grandmother but I only knew the Hawaiian culture from the surface. (You can have the blood but that doesn't make you Hawaiian. You have to have a respect, a feeling, na'ian for the culture in a deeper sense. The Hawaiians were not surface people. There was a hana to all these mele. On the surface you can call yourself whatever you want but <sup>the surface</sup> ~~what matters~~ <sup>is not what counts</sup> ~~is underneath~~ and so those Japanese students were right. I decided that ~~evening~~ nobody was going to say I was not a Hawaiian again.

I made it a point to learn the language more, to learn the hula more. When I was a student I felt very inadequate trying to learn kahiko. I felt like there was so much Auntie Mairi was trying to get across that I couldn't soak it up fast enough. The problem was not only soaking up the knowledge but being able to project it out. At the beginning I had entered the class for the sake of learning kahiko to a degree that nobody could say I didn't know. And then as the class progressed I found out there was a test at the end. There was a panel of Auntie Mairi's peers sitting against the wall with kahu'ai fern in front of them so you couldn't see their faces. All of us one by one would have to pick a mele out of a bowl and we would have to oli, and poi the mele we drew. Afterwards I was so hialulu because I didn't perform up to my expectations. So after a few weeks we were tested again and this time I was determined to do well so I said a short pu'e and began to oli the mele I drew. I closed my eyes and it was like a different voice came out of me. ~~It was~~ It was from that time that my oli began to get better.

I found out later that the class was for the purpose of graduating and training kumu hulas.

I stayed with Auntie Maie for 2 1/2 years and so did not go into another teacher for many years. The big influence she had on me was research. If you're going to do any ole, you have to know what you're doing. Don't just pick a mele just because somebody else did it. If you're going to do mele about a certain ali, you have to do research on that ali. When you do it, you do it right to the best of your knowledge and with respect to that ali. That strong discipline to research the subject along with her aloha has been her great influence on me. This is becoming more difficult because there aren't that many old resources left to rely on.

After Auntie Maie I took a year and a half with Auntie Edith McKinzie to develop my oli. She exposed me to the different styles of oli. I also took hula workshops here and there and studied with Auntie Kani Zuttermeister for a brief time, but Auntie Maie has been my main kumu.

I began to teach about six years ago. I was a kupa kumu for Miliani Allen.

Mildani needed help so Lany Maida told her I was in the area and to look me up. I was a waitress at that time. I was thinking of going into the service and I wasn't thinking of teaching at all. I didn't have any confidence. But Mildani came and talked me into going in with her. I had gone to UH to study art and that was my initial goal. I did just about everything; painting, sculpture, sketching, poems. So I look upon hula as just another ~~step~~ opportunity to express feelings.

Depending on how its taught to the younger ~~people~~ people in respect to the art and the culture, hula can be a vehicle for a young Hawaiian to find more purpose to their lives. Because now there's lost. They don't know if they want to be a rebel, they don't know if they want to go on welfare. They don't have confidence in themselves as people to go out and conquer the world or to create. Do whatever they want to. They don't believe in themselves as people to set the highest goals for themselves. They have to start by finding that little bit of self-esteem, that little bit something inside themselves that they can be proud of. That little bit that they can say I learned this. I learned the hula and not only can I dance it but I know the background and the different meanings

within it. I'm expressing the feelings of my ancestors, of my kupuna. And if they've learned that from the hula, if they've learned ~~to~~ respect to their kupunas, ~~their other people~~ classmates, themselves, then the next step will be that much easier. If you can get that little bit of self-esteem you can begin to step out and you can apply so much of it to any your experience as a haemana to any work place. The Hawaiian concepts are still alive.

Hula kahiko today are the mele that have been passed down from generation to generation. In my training it was the traditional mele passed down from Tutu Irealia Montgomery to Auntie Mairi and then down to us. Auntie Irealia had taken from Tutu Irealia, Polani's grandmother, and Tutu Irealia had taken from Joseph Palaoe. That's kahiko. That to me is kahiko. I try as much as possible to keep the mele as true as when they were taught to me by Auntie Mairi. If I change it around to much it no longer belongs to the line. It no longer belongs. It would be of my own ideas. To me that is kahiko and there is a time and place for that. And get him still a person, him still a haemana hula and I have

my own ideas, my own feelings, my own dreams. Being an artist I have ~~an~~ <sup>a</sup> ~~urge~~ <sup>need</sup> to create and so whether its a new mele or whatever, I will have my own. I will do my research and I have my own. If I want to make my own steps, I put my own steps because the mele is mine. In this way I am not showing disrespect to my line of kumu. I can still keep my own individuality by having my own mele. The Hawaiians were never stagnant, they were creative people and you can tell this by the craftsmanship of their kapa. The fine details they put into a lot of things they did shows they were not a stagnant people. The Hawaiians were dreamers and they were artists. ~~At the~~ My favorite kauliw mele is "Kauli 'ula Waialeale" because its talking about a woman and her different temperaments. It likens a woman's qualities to Waialeale. Sometimes she's green and she's beautiful and sometimes she's angry with her rivers overflowing and wild.

If you as a kumu are not ready to assume the responsibilities of a kumu hula than you are going to hurt your students. A kumu hula is not ~~just~~ <sup>only</sup> going to teach the technical knowledge of the hula but a kumu has to be a model for the students

because they are not only learning the mele, they are watching the kumu. If you set guidelines for them and then you break your own rules, they have no reason to follow you. A kumu has to ask him or herself, are you instilling in our young people the values that are Hawaiian. It's not just a mele. It's a whole system of values and responsibility, ~~to~~ the hula is not just dancing. The number one thing is respect for other people. Today the feeling of aloha is so commercialized but the true meaning is not felt. You have to kaula each other. If someone is having trouble with their leis, you should kaula. If the group is not ~~has~~ of one mind, the hands and feet ~~to~~ will not be of one mind. Grooming was emphasized by Aunty Mailei. Your costume and your appearance was taken care of so when you go into the public you do yourself and your kumu honor. This is what I'm trying to teach at the Ilioukalani Trust with the children out here in the country. ~~Sometimes students come to the hula and act the way I want them to act to~~ I work with kids who are like the bulls of the school but they don't show me that in the hula. I hear from other people about their behaviour in school.



It is fantastic that the hula has  
come out into the open more. It is  
fantastic that more young people  
want to do it. But its getting  
to be so commercial almost to  
the point of cheapness. I'm  
talking only of ~~a~~ certain kumu  
and how they treat the hula. I  
feel like its been cheapened. Some  
performances that I've seen, the  
meaning of the mele and the  
motions are lost. And the meanings  
are what you do hula kalikoa for.  
We have auwama to do all the  
flashes and jags. But kalikoa is  
beginning to get glitter on it.  
Its more for show than anything  
else. The Hawaiians loved to show  
their talents but not to the point  
where you're selling yourself. There's  
a lot of ~~beach~~ people who call themselves  
kumu that have bounced around taking  
from kumu after kumu for one or  
two months. A kumu has to be trained  
in a much more responsible, and stricter  
way.