

"Nana I Na Loea Hula"
1st draft

KEITH KALANI AKANA

A teacher for the Hawaiian Immersion Program at Waiiau Elementary School, Keith Kalani Akana is kumu hula of Ka Pa Hula Ho'oheno Hawai'i established in 1987.

When I was a sophomore at Kamehameha Schools, I was originally hired as an aid for Hawaiian language but I helped Ho'oulu Cambra Richards teach hula to the students in the Explorations Program. I was really shy but Ho'oulu made me teach. She ingrained in me poise and confidence. Watching the effect she had on the students sparked my interest in hula as a teaching tool to reach children.

Shortly after, Palani Kahala, a fellow Hawaiian language student who turned out to be my relative, talked me into learning hula from him. One afternoon in Aunty Nona Beamer's room, he started teaching me the rudiments of hula. Aunty Nona was very supportive of us and gave us access to her files and consultations. She even entered us in a hula competition at St. Andrews Priory in 1974. That's where I first saw Kaha'i's men perform.

After graduating in 1975, I saw a newspaper ad for hula classes from Ka Pa Hula Hawai'i. I signed up and traveled all the way to Waiahole Poi Factory where the classes were held. Kaha'i Topolinsky has been my kumu ever since.

Kaha'i engraved in me the love for the tradition of hula; how it's passed down from kumu to kumu and family. I was especially touched by his treatment of his family chants because I could see the direct tie between kumu, family and the past. He is also a history buff and he brings it to each of his hula. Touching not only the emotional but the intellectual cord within me that hula embodies also our history.

I had what they call a huelepo ceremony. It was a private and small ceremony held at noon. It was attended by Kaha'i, the family and myself. We had

those special 'ailolo foods, chanting and pule. I observed a kapu period prior to a small pa'ina and a performance test.

Kaha'i was very gracious to allow me to take workshops from other people. I attended Aunty Edith Kanaka'ole's workshops, and at the same time, I started taking chanting lessons from Kalena Silva. Later on I learned from Aunty Edith McKinzie when she conducted workshops for the State Council on Hawaiian Heritage.

A memorable hula highlight for me was going to the South Pacific Festival of Arts. We were able to learn from different kumu hula like Aunty Pat Bacon, Aunty Maiki Aiu Lake, and see the different styles handed down to them by Joseph Ilalaole, Keahi Luahine and Lokalia Montgomery. I think that every hula person should have this opportunity to know that there are distinct styles. One day, I would like to learn the Pua Ha'aheo style from Noenoe Zuttermeister.

As a child, I was fascinated listening to Mahi Beamer, 'Iolani Luahine and Hoakalei Kamau'u chant. In school, I didn't consider myself a good hula dancer and I didn't think I had a strong voice since I flunked concert glee. But I listened to the chanting of Ho'oulu, Aunty Nona and Kalena and they became my models. It wasn't talent but hard work and dedication to develop my voice.

I was fortunate to receive a scholarship in Hawaiian language from the University. I saw hula and chant as a vehicle to reach the Hawaiian youth and language is what made that all tie in together. Hula gave me that arena to internalize and ruminate on the meaning, kaona and language of hula. All I have to do is use my knowledge and abilities in language to explain to the students the stories brought alive through hula.

I recently opened an 'olapa class and scared a lot of students off because I conduct class only in Hawaiian. But one day, every kumu hula will be able to do that because they should be able to speak Hawaiian.

I'm not a part of Ka Pa Hula Hawai'i, but I'm like their big brother. Kaha'i asks me to help his students with chant and language. You can never repay your kumu, so even though I have a busy schedule, I continue to help his halau.

That my kumu is satisfied and approves of what I do is an accomplishment. Graduation is one way that the kumu acknowledges the student. Anyone can graduate if they put on a good show, but the proof is if you can continue to please your kumu. If I didn't do that, then there's really no sense of me even continuing.

Language is the key for aspiring kumu hula. The young people have an advantage because they can decide very early on to learn the language. Secondly, whether they 'uniki or not, they need a kumu or a mentor to fall back on. That's why we have the word kumu, meaning the source. If a person doesn't have a kumu or a mentor, they're going to flounder. Thirdly, the young kumu have to develop their own style. In the area of creativity, they have to develop something unique to them that marks them a little bit different. And fourthly, every kumu has to have and preserve the tradition of their halau. If I teach a dance from my halau, it's my obligation to teach it in the exact way.

I don't like the term hula kahiko. We always used the word hula 'olapa in our halau. Hula kahiko technically means old hula and I don't like stereotyping hula s being something old. The Hawaiians had a name for every hula by its type and style. Hula noho, hula 'uli'uli, hula pahu, hula 'a'alapapa, and so on. A hula person has to know all these kinds of hula. So hula kahiko is a broad term that is not linguistically correct and I think it's too stifling because it doesn't account for the traditional kinds of hula and it doesn't account for hula that we need to branch off into.

I have my masters degree and soon I would like to start on my doctorate. But I can truthfully say, of all the formal Western style education that I've had, there's more satisfaction in the formal traditional graduation and training in hula. There's

a lot more pride, a lot more satisfaction and you receive a lot more that you can give. I've come to the realization that nobody cares what I got my masters in. It only means that I make \$2,000 more a year. We tout higher education but you cannot compare it with what you get from hula: the pride of knowing that you are continuing a tradition.