

KEITH KALANI AKANA

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

As a child, I was fascinated by the chanting of Mahi Beamer, 'Iolani Luahine and Hoakalei Kamau'u. 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 Cambra Richards, Aunty Nona Beamer and Kalena Silva and they became my models. It wasn't talent but hard work and dedication that developed my voice.

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

Shortly after, my relative Palani Kahala, a fellow Hawaiian language student 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 Topolinski's men perform.

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

Kaha'i engrained in me the love for the traditions of hula; particularly how it's passed down from kumu to kumu and family. I was especially touched by his treatment of his family chants. I could see the direct tie between kumu, family and

the past. Because as a history buff, he brings a great knowledge to each of his hula. He touched not only the emotional but the intellectual cord within me.

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 the performance test and a small pā'ina.

Kaha'i was very gracious. He allowed 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. Also I learned from Aunty Edith McKinzie whenever she conducted workshops for the State Council on Hawaiian Heritage.

I don't like the term hula kahiko. We always used the word hula 'olapa in our hālau. Hula kahiko technically means "old hula" and I don't like stereotyping hula as being something old. The Hawaiians had a name for every hula by its type and style. Hula noho, hula 'ulī'ulī, 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 for hula that we need to branch off into.

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

There are four important things to become a successful kumu hula. First, language is the key for any aspiring kumu hula. Young people have an advantage because they can decide early on to learn the language. Secondly, whether they 'ūniki

or not, they need a kumu or a mentor to turn to. 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, a young kumu has to develop a style and creatively develop something unique that makes him/her a little different. And lastly, every kumu has to have and preserve the tradition of their hālau. If I teach a dance from my hālau, it's my obligation to teach the exact way I learned the dance.

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.

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 greater satisfaction in the formal traditional graduation and training of hula. There's a lot more pride, a lot more satisfaction. You receive much more than you can ever give. I've come to the realization you cannot compare a degree with what you really get from the hula which is the pride of knowing that you are continuing a tradition.

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