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Kawai Aona-Ueoka,

When I first went to the University of Hawaii I was this Tita from Nanakuli. I was dorming on campus and one day these two Japanese exchange students came up to me and asked "Are you Hawaiian?" I said proudly "Oh yeah" then they asked "Can you do the hulahula and speak Hawaiian?" I said "No." They gave me a funny expression and said "You not Hawaiian then." I got very angry. Somehow I found the strength to control myself and went to my room to think. I came to the conclusion that they were right. I was born with Hawaiian blood and my Tufu had a wealth of knowledge ^{but} ~~that~~ I never really understood ^{it}. The Hawaiian culture I knew was surface. Having the Hawaiian blood and doing things Hawaiian in not enough. You have to understand ^{and a} ~~why?~~ ~~and~~ to have respect and feeling for the culture in a deeper sense. (Our kupuna were not surface people) ^{the} kaona was the essence of all mele. ^{because our} ~~kaona~~

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(I was hanai by my Tutu Mary C. Pua'ala Aona from the time I was a baby . I knew basic Hawaiian words and phrases and some hula auwana from my Tutu but to me ^{it} it was nothing because Tutu could speak Hawaiian fluently and I've been told that she also taught hula kahiko.) ^{after that incident} I made it a point to learn more of the language and more of the hula. I was introduced to Aunty Maiki Aiu Lake by some friends that were taking hula auwana classes from her. It ^{took} was about a year of taking auwana classes before Aunty invited a few of us to enter her hula kahiko class. I studied with Aunty Maiki for two and a half years. She made Hawaiian history come alive through the mele. Her requirement for research gave me an understanding of the many things my Tutu said and did but didn't know how ^{to} explain. I began to understand the depth of Hawaiian values and ^{the} importance of respecting ^{that} all it stood for. I ^{was} uniki from Aunty Maiki's Ilima class in 1975.

^I I went ^{out} out to Aunty Edith McKenzie ^{who} helped to develop my oli ^{by training me in} with the different styles and techniques. ~~I have taken various workshops from various kumu. I began teaching as Kokua Kumu with Mililani Allen in 1977. I have now assumed the full responsibility of Kumu with the Queen Lili'uokalani Childrens Center since 1979.~~ In all my years of growth I have learned a Kumu Hula is not just a title but a great responsibility. You are not only the source of technical knowledge, but also a model for the behavior of your haumana. Hula Kahiko as I know it is a whole system of values and responsibilities that you have to live and believe in. The process of learning and teaching is never ending and always growing.

I went to the University to study fine arts. Sketching, painting, sculpture, poetry, and photography are art forms from which to express ones feelings. Hula is also an art form from which ^a Kumu Hula can express ^{their} mana'o of our Hawaiian culture. But ^{we have to remember that} please. ^{our} Our source is our strength, ^{our} our essence. Hold sacred the teachings of your Kumu and the values of your kupuna.

A lot of our young Hawaiians are lost. They don't have the confidence in themselves and how they fit in this ever changing world of ~~Western~~ values. It's hard to believe in yourself when you don't even know what you have to be proud of. What does the concept behind the words "Aloha", "Kokua", "Laulima", "Lōkāhi", "'Oiā'i'o", "Hō'ihi", "'Ohana", "Mālama", "Ho'oponopono" mean? ~~(Look it up).~~ I teach hula with emphasis on cultural understanding, respect and pride for the elements within each mele as well as its kaona. If my haumana leave me with good feelings about themselves and pride in the hula they do. If they say "I know who I am dancing for and what I am dancing about and that I am expressing the feelings of my kupuna." If they show respect to their Kupuna, each other, and themselves then it will be that much easier to apply the Hawaiian concepts and values that will still be alive through them in ~~this ever changing~~ world we live in. ^{today's} world

Na ʻŌpio O Hawaii Nei,

To dance the hula is to live it.

To understand the mele is to seek its kaona.

To express the meaning is to feel it.

To love the hula is to respect its ~~kaona~~ (source).

~~Find that something inside of you to be proud of, Build it up with determination,
respect and love. Dream your dreams and go for it.~~