

NALEIALOHA NAPAEPAE-KUNEWA

Naleialoha Napaepae-Kunewa is the Executive Director of Kahua Na'au A'o ma Pu'uhonua o Honaunau NHP, Inc. She is kumu hula of Halau o Kaleiho'ohie o Kona and conducts in Kalaoa and Honaunau. She has taught for the Kona Community School, Konawaena Elementary and other community programs.

I get so wrapped up in life, trying to grow up, trying to do the right thing, working, finding out who I am, trying to succeed in my career and still be able to keep in perspective my hula and being Hawaiian.

Mrs. Loakalia Montgomery was my only hula teacher. She was the director of the Hulihe'e Palace in Kona from 1961 to 1971. My mom worked as curator at the Hulihe'e Palace and she would take me to Mrs. Montgomery's house, next to the Palace, on Saturdays for hula class. In keeping with tradition, the teacher selected the student. Mrs. Montgomery picked me.

I was very fortunate. My experience learning from Mrs. Montgomery was spent sitting at her dining room table. She would sit at one end and I would be on the other end. The only instruments I was allowed to use were the ka'la'au and ili ili. Ku Ka Punohu, Kona Kai Opuu and Aihea o Kalani were my first. All the rhythms were done on the dining room table without ipu or pahu. She never danced. I followed her directions and performed accordingly. She was very knowledgeable in knowing what best suited the person. She didn't have set standards that you had to learn this and that by the first year. She believed whatever a student is able to comprehend, that's what she would teach. She really enjoyed working on a one to one basis. It was a relaxed but serious situation, but it was easy for me being as young to sit with her for long periods at a time. I felt very comfortable with her. Although stern, she was a kind and gentle-hearted person. Sometimes we would just sit and talk story.

I remember I had my 'uniki at about twelve years of age. It was held on the Palace grounds. The preparation included the red fish and sweet potatoes. She told me not to eat the night before. I arrived before sunrise at her house and stayed with her all day. I napped on her

lanai and after I woke up, we reviewed the ceremony. I ate everything she had portioned for me and I performed for her and her kumu Mary Kawena Puku'i. There was an evening celebration and I participated in a week long performance at the Palace. My first and most nerve racking performance was in front of my Kalaoa School mates.

I began hula at the age of seven and continued until 1971. She retired in 1971 and moved to Honolulu. I was accepted to Marylhurst College in Portland, Oregon that same year following graduation from Konawaena High & Intermediate. I transferred as a senior to the University of Portland in 1974 and graduated in December of that year. I returned home to Kona and met with Mrs. Montgomery at the Merrie Monarch Festival in Hilo in 1976. I bravely asked her permission to start teaching. She said yes.

As part of growing up, I realized that I had to make decisions. I realized the need to be true to what I believed and Mrs. Montgomery always said, "you will continue to fall no matter what, yet everytime you fall, you need to get up and make yourself stronger and better." Hula has been that way for me.

Every summer since 1971, I was a cultural demonstrator at Pu'uhonua o Honaunau National Historical Park. I demonstrated hula instruments and the art. My teaching started when a friend who was entertaining in Kona gathered some young children to perform in a Kona hotel. A year later she moved to Honolulu so I continued to teach with the help of my cousin Kaleiho'ohie. Our first performance was at the Pu'uhonua o Honaunau National Historical Park's Cultural Festival. Since that year, Halau o Kaleiho'ohie has participated in the annual Cultural Festival.

In my halau, I teach using Mrs. Montgomery's method of teaching the steps, hand gestures and voice. I've kept the traditional hula Hole Waimea, Kaulilua i ke Anu o Waialeale, Aua la, A Ko'olau Au, and others exactly as I learned them. I have incorporated her teaching with

original compositions and traditional mele learned later on. I remain true to Mrs.

Montgomery's style. I am a firm believer that I am a carrier of the exclusive style of Mrs.

Montgomery and her teachers. Whatever she taught me I keep the same.

Hula is unique to Hawai'i. It belongs to us. I enjoy 'auana because it is hula, however the basics are hula kahiko embedded in tradition. It is important to continue to learn so I may continue to teach.

Hula is a part of me. Hula is Kanaka Maoli. I am Kanaka Maoli therefore I am hula.

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