

Iwalani Kalima

Iwalani Kalima established her halau in 1986. The name, "Hula Halau O Ko Lima Nani E" was given to her by her kumu hula, Uncle George Naope.

I was eight years old when I started taking hula from Uncle George Naope in Hilo. I started with the junior class of girls and then Uncle moved me up to the senior group. I was the youngest in the group. Uncle left in 1974 to live in Honolulu and returned to Hilo after four years. During that time, I didn't take hula from any other teacher, but I did dance in a Polynesian show at the Crown Room while he was away. I went back to Uncle when he returned to Hilo and I am still studying with him till today. I've been with him for over thirty years.

Uncle George's style of hula was very basic. You had to know your feet movements. There was no half step or a side step. It was a full kaholo and your basic steps were the most important thing. If you didn't know your steps, you couldn't do hula. That's what Uncle always told us. You can see the difference in the dancing today. Before it was one motion for one sentence. Today it's ten different motions for one sentence. Some teachers try to interpret every word with a motion.

Uncle was a very strong hula kahiko teacher. You had to learn the kahiko first before you learned the 'auana. My first hula was Lili'u E and we learned the 'uwehe step. We learned the kaholo and 'uwehe by doing Kawika. It taught us timing.

Uncle also took us out to entertain at private parties and at the Naniloa Hotel. We first started out performing the hula kahiko and hula 'auana, and then in later years when I was about twelve years old, we started learning Tahitian. He brought over Ray Fonseca and Etua Lopez to teach the girls Tahitian dancing. Etua was the dancer and did most of the teaching and Ray was the drummer and perfectionist. I regard them as my hula brothers.

Uncle gave three different kinds of certificates. One was for the completion of the basic

hula kahiko and basic hula 'auana. The first one was a certificate, then you get a diploma, like an 'uniki of your hula kahiko.

In 1982, Uncle gave me my kumu palapala. It was a special ceremony with a ho'ike and 'uniki. Although I wasn't ready for it, Uncle felt it was the time to give me the paper. I don't know what the requirements were but in Uncle's eyes, I was ready.

Although I had been assisting Uncle since 1981, others considered me his alaka'i only after I had my 'uniki. I continued teaching with him and in 1986 I opened my own hula school.

Uncle was a very hard and a very strict teacher. It was difficult to ask him questions because we were to be seen and not heard. He told you when you were ready to learn this or that and sometimes he would force it on you. At that time, I thought he was being mean and nasty and I didn't want to have anything to do with hula cause I wasn't doing anything right. Today, I look back at the nit picking and realize that he did it for me to become a better dancer. I stuck in there because I was going to prove to Uncle that I could do it.

I want the kids today to come because they want to and not because they are forced to. I try to teach the girls everything I know about the chant or song. When I was learning, I did the motions but could not even ask the name of the dance. I didn't realize that there was a time and a place that you could ask him. Now with my students, I want them to know everything. It took me fifteen years to learn all those dances and I want them to learn it in five years.

When you have your own halau, you must remember that the children are the ones that will perpetuate and keep the hula alive. You must teach them to their fullest of their ability. Love them as they are your own and teach them to have ha'aha'a.

I never thought I'd become a hula teacher. When I was growing up, I was a tom boy and I liked sports. Hula has taught me to respect my heritage, love my culture and respect people for what they are. It taught me how to show people what I feel inside of me without saying a word,

but by the expressions in your hand gestures. Hula has taught me grace, poise and today I am very glad that I decided to start my own school because I see how important it is when you live in Hawaii, you are Hawaiian.