

## Denise Ka'uhionamauna Kia Ramento

Currently teaching hula and Tahitian dance in the Waipahu area, Denise Ka'uhionamauna Kia Ramento founded the hālau Aloha Pūmehana O Hawaii Nei in 1972.

I began to learn hula at the age of seven years old. My first teacher was John Pi'ilani Watkins who taught at his home in Kaimuki. He was not really into traditional hula. John was very theatrical. He liked using a lot of cellophane. He also taught us Tahitian, Samoan and Maori dancing. After two years, my parents moved to Waipahu and I had to stop my lessons with John.

I then went to Aunty Luka and Louise Kaleiki at the 'Ilima Hula Studio. It was through their lessons that I got more involved in the hula. Aunty Luka did more of the teaching. Aunty Louise did the paper work for the business and she was the disciplinarian. I was with them for about nine or ten years.

The girls that were selected to perform in public were known as the "'Ilima Hula Sweethearts." Nine of us auditioned for the show at Fort DeRussy ~~Officers' Mess~~ and Aunty was able to get the contract for ten years. We also performed at Bellows and on Johnson Island.

I learned hula kahiko from Uncle Henry Pā when <sup>he</sup> came to the hālau to teach Aunty Luka. Before we started the kahiko, he sat and explained about the dance. He met with us for three years and during the last year, he taught us hula kahiko for our 'uniki.

I graduated six years after joining Aunty Luka and Louise. There were six of us that were up for graduation. All of the dancers that were graduating had to learn a number of their own. Aunty Luka and Louise chose the song and the girls learned their particular song privately. Not everybody learned it. I would come in on Wednesday from three to four o'clock to learn the motions.

All the students from the hālau participated in the graduation lū'au held at Ka Makua Mau Loa Church in Kalihi. The graduating class danced hula kahiko chosen by Uncle Henry Pā and each of the graduates had to dance her special song. My song was "Kau'ionā'ani".

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Aunty Luka and Aunty Louise had a unique style. Because they had so much respect for Uncle Henry Pā, they kept his hula kahiko separate from their hula 'auana. They were known for their <sup>m</sup>Missionary outfits, (~~their~~ Gibsons). My favorite was a turquoise gibson with black feathers and a hat.

While I was taking from Aunty Luka, I was hungry to learn everything about hula. Although I was afraid Aunty Luka and Aunty Louise would find out, I took lessons from Ku'ulei Clark at the Waipahu Recreation Center with my school friends. I attended her classes for about six months. Aunty Ku'ulei had a more commercialized, ~~haole~~<sup>?</sup> style. I found that it was very different from Aunty Luka and Louise.

Aunty Luka and Aunty Louise asked me to become an alaka'i, but my parents sent me away to Maui to attend Lahainaluna High School. Because I missed my hula, I started to dance at the Royal Lahaina Hotel as a solo dancer where I was under the direction of Robert Kalani. I performed Aunty Luka's songs and choreography. After living in Maui for a year, I decided to return home and went back to Aunty Luka. But because all my hula sisters had left, there was a kind of emptiness there, so I decided to rest.

I was eighteen years old when I was asked to teach some teenagers in Waipahu. I began with Tahitian because I was stronger in that area. My twin brother, Dennis took care of the drumming and I taught the dancing. We had hula on the side but when we were asked to do shows, they wanted Tahitian. Aunty Louise encouraged me to get involved with the Tahiti Fete held in Kaua'i and sent me the application. I felt very privileged that my kumu hula supported me. We entered the Tahiti Fete in 1975.

I concentrated so much in hula that I never got a chance to go to football games. Aunty Luka and Louise were very strict that if you missed one performance, you couldn't dance. I remember a few of us never went to our proms because there was hula. Today, I don't do that

with my own students because I know what I missed in school activities.

Aunty Luka and Louise had the most influence on me. They taught me and gave me a lot of desire to move on and to learn more. They were the biggest inspiration on my hula career.

My advice to the young teachers is to know what you're doing. Learn the language. Respect the kūpuna and our culture. We all have our different styles because our kumu hula all learned from different people. Don't go over the extreme of elaborating our hula. Just take it from the roots and don't forget the basics.