

## PI'I LANI

A professor for the Hawai'i Loa College Pacific Islands Institute, Pi'i Lani teaches hula, Hawaiian culture, language and history to the elder hostiles. She was the original coordinator of the Waimea Falls Park hula competition.

I started teaching hula in my home in Hau'ula and then later when I lived in Waialua. I've also taught the teenagers at the Queen Lili'uokalani Children's Center, the Senior Citizens in Haleiwa and at the Waimea Falls Park.

My mother, Ku'ualoha Terry, was my hula teacher. She started teaching me when I was 3 years old. She had her own studio on Aulike Street in Kailua and she taught at Camp Kokokahi in Kane'ohe. She learned from Mother Davis.

The first few dances that we learned from my mother were the hula dances of olapa that introduced basic hula steps. These dances were used as drills for these steps. "Kawika" would be for the kaholo, "Lili'u E" would be for the uwehe, "Kalakaua" would be for the Kalakaua step. She drilled us in those basic steps. When we got to the intermediate level, the dances consisted of many different steps in one dance. The form of hula that she taught us was hula ala'apapa, and we were taught not to kahea the verses. It was important that you knew exactly what verse came next so there was no kahea being given. When we got to the advanced stages, some of the dances would be very long. The hand and foot movements of these

dances that she taught us were given to her and had not been changed for over 100 years since the 1860's. So we were very careful to teach these dances exactly the same in word, melody, timing, hand gestures and feet as they were in 1860.

We come from a hula line. My grandmother on the maternal side was a hula dancer in the days when they danced without their tops. Grandma was from Hana. There are some pictures in the Bishop Museum of Grandma and her sisters sitting on the pahu drum wearing no tops, just skirts. Grandma never told us that she was a dancer. She became very Christian and although she was pure Hawaiian, she almost frowned upon too much hula. She wanted us to be Christian. She did make sure that my mother learned from family to continue the hula line. Her name was Elizabeth Kawahineke'oke'ookala Ka'anana.

My uniki was held at my home in Hau'ula. I did uniki along with my two sisters. We had completed the ancient hula course taught by my mother. The uniki was finalized by a lu'au where we each did solo performances as well as some dances together. At that time, my mother, my two sisters and I were performing as a family at King's Alley Bishop Museum Heritage Theater.

My mother never had a halau so to speak. It was just us kids. We

always danced with the family for church functions and for friends and families. When I married, my husband didn't approve of me dancing so I decided to teach because the hula was such a force in me that I could not stop doing it. It had been with me practically my entire life and it is very much a part of me. I could not stop being involved with the hula so I chose to begin teaching. I've been teaching for over 20 years now.

I kept my mother's dancing style, but I also allowed myself growth as a kumu hula because this is the 1990's and the hula is evolving. It is still a growing thing. I don't like to be stagnant, although I keep the dances I learned as they were. But I have composed many chants and have put my own dancing styles and melodies to them based on the foundation I was given by my mother.

I teach my students everything that I can. I teach them the hula steps, how these hula steps got named, as much mana'o and background that I can give them so that they become better at what they're doing because they understand the hula. I give them chanters' training so that they can become ho'opa'a. I teach them oli so that they learn the difference between mele hula and oli oli and kepa kepa. I teach them about the ancient Hawaiian games and the reason the Hawaiians played them. We make our own hula implements and I teach them as many crafts as I know



of. When something is new or very old, we research or learn from someone who knows. We've had formal language classes so there is a lot of Hawaiian spoken in my halau.

The uniki or graduation process that I designed was not based strictly on what happened in early Hawai'i but also on what they'll need for today. There are three phases that I take them through. The hula experience is very important. They need to have the ability to teach successfully. They have to go through phases of researching botanical areas so that you know what plants are available, what were used for adornments. They research about the ancient ways, the costuming, and how you put your halau together. Those are the paper work. The final phase is to compose some chants, learn language and focus on that.

As part of the uniki, the student must have the ability to choreograph and compose. Otherwise you have these kumu hula that are out there who just borrow chants and borrow motions and they don't know what they're saying because they don't understand the language. My understanding of a hula teacher is like a spring that shoots forth. Someone that's going to help expand, preserve and protect. If they don't have these background skills, then they go nowhere. They're just going to teach the same ten dances they know from somebody else. They have no

way of going forward.