



'I WALANI TSEU

Founder/Dance Instructor

'I WALANI SCHOOL OF DANCE

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Hlo'eae'ae Ranch, Oahu's first Macadamia Nut Orchard, has a significant place in my life. I was born there in 1950, and raised in Honouliuli, a town noted for the Ilima flower farms. At the tender age of six, I enrolled in Auntie Ku'u'lei Clark's hula class at Hans L'orange Park in Waipahu.

The art of hula fascinated me as I continued to watch the older girls dance. The unity and aloha spirit they expressed gave me the incentive to work harder, as I desired to be as good as they. I did not realize then the impact hula would have in my life.

My ethnic heritage of Malaysian, Filipino, Chinese, English and French, motivated me to learn varied Polynesian and Asian dances such as Tahitian and Filipino.

As a teenager, my mother was instrumental in enhancing my interest in dancing. Remembering my early training years, mother helped me to be aware of how vital it was to project the inner beauty of a mele (dance). She encouraged me to flow with each mana'o so that the story would be felt as well as viewed.

I auditioned for Polynesian shows that paved the way for travel to the mainland and abroad. Chosen as a lead dancer was a privilege for me to represent Hawai'i in thirty states. It also included a tour to Tahiti with a Filipino group called the KAISAHAN DANCE COMPANY.

Returning to the islands, I danced in the Luau shows in Waikiki for Leina'ala Simmeron. Noelani Cypriano was our drummer, and Leimomi Ho our line captain.

In 1970, an audition was held for an international revue. Fortunately the Polynesian and Asian training that I received gave me an advantage for being selected. A few island girls were contracted with other dancers from the mainland. Several were Polynesian in appearance but were raised on the mainland with a mixed culture of Mexican and Indonesian descent. Their training also included Jazz, Mid-Eastern, Hawaiian, Maori, Tahitian, and Indonesian dances.

Our dedication and discipline under the direction of Kimo Mansfield

was a challenge. We had to adhere to strict rules in appearance, manners and overall conduct. For being a hula dancer was very special.

The INTERNATIONAL REVUE opened at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel in the Monarch Room with the hula as the main attraction. Kimo Kahoano a fire knife dancer, was also my hula partner. Marlene Sai was the featured female singer.

After the Royal Hawaiian, I was offered to do a two week promotion for American President Lines on the PRESIDENT CLEVELAND. This promotion developed into a commitment which lasted nearly three years. The opportunity to travel abroad again became a reality. Traveling to exotic countries such as Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand, Singapore, Philippines, Borneo, India, Africa, Peru, Chili, Argentina, Alcapulco, Brazil, Canada, Tahiti and New Zealand brought rewarding memories and gratifying insight of their culture. Exposure in each of these countries helped to perfect and reinforce what I already had learned.

The Art of Hula is recognized throughout the world for it is a dance form as well as the history of our Kūpuna. Their mana'o was transformed through songs and dances within our body and soul as a way of communication. It is also a way of expressing our cultural heritage, the wealth of our Hawaiian Islands which makes us so unique. In the Islands, unconditional love is shared through the hula haumana where mental and physical discipline are obtained. Respect and loyalty are traditions and values vital in our culture. Only in Hawai'i, a multitude of ethnic culture is able to accept the differences in peace and harmony. This is truly the meaning of ALOHA! I am honored to have the opportunity to share this art of Hawai'i and be part of the Hawaiian Renaissance.

One day I was asked to teach a few young girls the hapa haole hula. These little girls brought their friends and before I realized it, the class increased tremendously. Their eagerness to learn was so refreshing, this brought back memories of my childhood. I was thrilled to watch the progress of my haumana.

'IWALANI SCHOOL OF DANCE, originated in August 1974. The love and support from many Kumu Hula inspired me. I consider myself a dance instructor rather than a Kumu Hula because of the variety of dances that are taught at the school. Others have called me Kumu Hula and I felt honored by such a compliment.

I would like to acknowledge my teacher, Uncle George Naope for being my inspiration and mentor; and to a dear friend, Kimo Alama, who unselfishly continues to share his expertise, mana'o and encouragement; and to many others who have helped me in attaining my goal.

I enjoy being a resource teacher, specializing in Pan Pacific with the Leeward District Hawaiian Studies Program, under the Department of Education.

I have much to share knowing our Hawaiian heritage will be perpetuated with pride and dignity.

My husband, Leighton Tseu, understands and accepts my commitment. He gives me strength through his love and positive outlook. This has brought happiness in my life as I endeavor to accomplish goals of sharing my talents with others.

I thank the Lord Jesus for His guidance. For without Him, I would not have been so blessed.

