

Iwilani Silva Ohelo

Iwilani Ohelo, kumu hula of Halau Hula O Na Pua Mokihana, was the choreographer and mistress of ceremonies ^{for} of the luau show at the Sheraton Hotel for nine years.

"Dance from your heart and you will always be the best."

I first started when I was three years old and since there weren't too many kumu hula who taught children that young, my mom's friend, Rose Look took me. After taking from her for three years, she stopped teaching and moved to Ewa.

We found another teacher. Her name was Rose Joshua who taught in her garage on 6th Avenue. She was a very good teacher because she was very patient, loved children and made hula enjoyable. That is very important when you have children that young because they must enjoy it to want to continue.

Rose Joshua taught us to be well-rounded dancers. We not only learned hula kahiko and 'auana, but we learned Maori, Tahitian, Samoan and Tongan dances. She taught us oli and the dance, but most importantly, she always told us the meaning of the words. So the understanding of the dance was very easy.

She also taught you to do a lot of studies on your own. You had to do your own research on lyrics, where the chant came from, who composed the song and the background of the song. She expected you to know certain things at a certain point.

Her halau, the Magic Hula Studio, had a styling that was so graceful and the inner beauty that she projected on the songs that she danced just captured me. I wanted to dance just like that and I wanted to carry on her styling.

Henry Pa basically taught us a lot of hula kahiko. He taught us the chanting and the dancing. He taught with Mrs. Joshua until he passed on.

Mrs. Joshua would have people from the Polynesian Cultural Center come to teach us Tahitian or Maori numbers. She brought them back every year to teach new dances. Most of

these people either came from Tahiti or New Zealand. Al Barcarse was also very involved with our halau and I danced for him. He had gone to New Zealand and came back with newly composed songs. He formed a group and we joined him.

There were only five of us who did 'uniki. Mrs. Joshua had not given certificates for forty years, so this was quite special. It was a ho'ike and not a traditional 'uniki only because she was not feeling well at that time. She was very sick and shortly after, she passed on. But she made sure that she graduated the students that she felt had deserved and worked hard for it.

I kept her style as much as possible on songs that I learned in the twenty years that I have been with her. I put my own styling to new songs that are composed within my time but it still reflects hers. You can't change your style, just some of the motions are a little more modernized.

I started teaching for the May Day programs and Aloha Week festivals while attending intermediate school. During my high school years, I taught for the programs at Kalani High School and Kaiser High School.

When I decided to open up my own halau, I was already married. I had been in hula for twenty years, studying and dancing for just about everybody. I taught hula at my house and at the same time, I taught Maori and Tahitian dancing at Kauluwela Playground for the Kalihi-Palama Culture & Arts Society, Inc. I took over Kalihi-Palama's hula program when the other hula instructor left.

Now days, the hula teachers teach strictly hula. If you're a well-rounded teacher, you can expose them to Maori or Tahitian. Much of the shows in Waikiki want dancers who know other dances besides hula.

When the time comes and I feel that they've earned it, I will 'uniki my students. They must prove to me that they are going to go out and teach what's right. They would need to know

the language and more importantly, they must learn the values of the Hawaiians. They must be able to take apart a chant and create motion to it and bring it back to life.

Hula is my life. Hula is part culture, part drama, expression, bringing a song to life and dancing from within yourself. I see hula changing. There are more steps now than there were before only because of the creativity of the kumu hula. The kumu's creativity identifies the halau but as long as we remember our steps and our styling of old, I think hula will always be around.