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Kumu

Namahana Kalama-Panui

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also

teach

It was the night of my nineteenth birthday that I had a dream. That night I composed a mele called, "Nā Mamoali'i" and it talked about my ancestors. I wished to return to their homeland. Years later, a position opened up at a school and I moved to Hana. When I started to teach my first class, I added to the name of my mele, O Ka'uiki", the school. Ka'uiki is the birthplace of Ka'ahumanu, my 'ohana. Those of us who know Hawaiian folklore or tradition or genealogy will understand why the name "Nā Mamoali'i ō Ka'uiki" tells you who you are.

My first and only kumu hula is Alicia Keolahou Smith. When my mother moved to O'ahu from Guam, she took me to the YWCA on Richards Street where Alicia was teaching at the time. I was eight years old and my first reaction after the first class was, "Wow! That's a real Hawaiian, yeah?" I have been with Alicia ever since. That is not to say that I have not been inspired by others or touched by others. She is my kumu.

I always liked the subtlety of Alicia's style and the drama and the "in-touch" with the oneness between fellow hula students, the oneness between kumu and students, the oneness between the language, the music, the choreography, the earth, and God. It is a refined style, very controlled. It's made to look very simple like it's flawless and it does not exert energy, but yet you are exerting a lot of energy. It requires great discipline and control.

'Oli for me has come in different ways. Some kumu teach 'oli kepahepa or ho'ae'ae, 'uwe'uwe. Mrs. Smith teaches 'oli the way you do it for mele hula. I learned that whoever is your first kumu builds the foundation of the 'oli. For me, 'oli has developed over the years and she provided the foundation.

People have different traditions and we have books that say how one becomes kumu hula

or written resources as to how one becomes kumu hula. But you know, there are always exceptions to the rule. What books may say reflect only certain traditions, not another. 'Uniki is only the ceremony to say, "Yes, you have passed as a student and now you can go on to this next stage which is to teach." Just because you 'uniki only means you 'uniki. That does not mean you have earned the status to be kumu hula. If you look at the work that has been accomplished by myself and my students and you ask me if I am a kumu hula, then I will say, "Yes." Look at the work. Look at the students. Look at what we have done. Look at what we have yet to do. In that respect, I think you earn the right to be a kumu hula. You also become kumu hula when your kumu recognizes you as kumu hula. I had already left and teaching on my own when Alicia saw my work. She told me, "You are a kumu."

I cannot find only one instance in which Alicia had influenced me because she had been in my life for thirty years. There has been so many ways that she has influenced me: love, devotion, respect, spirituality, foundation, gut, soul, spirit, hard work, joy, oneness, happiness, pain, sore body. I am totally devoted to her. I love her tremendously and I have great respect for all the traditions and the teachings that she had shared and taught. It's important to remember that besides being a kumu, she is like another mother. There are times when she is kumu, there are times when she's my mother, and now that I am older and also a kumu, there are times when she is a friend. But she always reminds me that I will always be her student and she will always be my teacher, which I acknowledge.

I believe that a good teacher is one who watches and listens to her or his students. Especially children because I believe children are closer to God than adults are. In their own innocence, they can teach you great wisdom and teach you great understanding. In all the times that I had taught, the most memorable instances are when those students have shown me their face through their countenance of God.

Trophies mean nothing to me. Awards mean nothing to me. Prizes mean nothing to me. It is a recognition by worldly things which has very little value to me and very little value in hula. When you see the students emulating and securing the traditions and the beliefs and you see them applying it to their daily life outside of the hula, those are accomplishments.

"Nā Mamoali'i ō Ka'uiki" was established to become a total Hawaiian school and we are still working towards that end. Hula has only been the foundation. That is not the only direction we are going and we have worked hard to continually add on important aspects of culture, language, tradition and history. I want more for the children. I want them to realize that they have a right to want more and the right to ask for more.

Hula is my life. Through hula I have learned about people, about the world, about nature, about love and about God. And God has taught me about hula. Build yourself a strong foundation before teaching others through your struggles in life. Look into the eyes and the smile and the warmth of a child to remind you why you are doing this so that their life and their future and the future of Hawai'i and the future of the world will be a good one.

"O ka mana'o au. O ia ka mole o ka ike." Wisdom is the foundation of understanding. After you've built your foundation, it is important to remember who or where is your guidance from. You can get guidance in many ways. For me, God is my guidance.

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