

Nana I ha Loea Hula
Kumu Hula: Iwilani Ohelo
Interviewer: Lovina Le Pendu
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Bernie, Iwilani Bernadette Silva and I later married now am Ohelo, for the book "Iwilani Silva Ohelo". (Teach Presently?) Yes I do, I teach at Kauluwela Rec. Center under Kalihi Palama Culture and Arts and I also have home classes at my house. The youngest I have had is a year and half, the oldest is 72. I have approximately 97 students. (The name of the halau?) "Halau hula o na pua Mokihana" (Where the name came from?) I always wanted to teach hula and I believe my styling of hula originated on Kauai with that I also live on Mokihana street and I first started my halau at my home not having too many students you don't have the funds to go rent space for a halau..so I decided to call it "Halau hula o na pua Mokihana"..(Can you tell me when you started to teach?) I started teaching actually in Intermediate school while I was learning as far as May Day programs, Aloha Week festivals or any type of festival that was being held in the school when I was there. Later I went into high school, the same thing I also taught at Kalani High School and Kaiser for programs. Then I decided I would open up my own at this time. I was already married and 20 years of hula and studying and dancing just about for everybody I decided I was going to open up my own halau and I did..I enjoyed it..when I first opened up we were at Kauluwela and that time I was only teaching maori and tahitian. However I did have my own halau at my house at the same time. (You teach Kahiko and Auana? oli) Right, Oli with the dance it is very important that they know the oli, they know the dance, they know the meaning. (How many years you have been teaching?) I think approximately 15 certified.. (What age did you start hula?) I first started when I was 3 years old in those days they weren't too many kumu hula or hula instructors that would take children younger than 5 and there was one Rose Look she was a friend of my moms that would take me only because I was dancing all over the

place..you hear Hawaiian music..you dance..I took from her for about 2 to 3 years and then she stopped teaching and she moved to Ewa, we found another lady her name was Rose Joshua. (Your first teacher were did she taught?) She did, she taught in her garage and it was on 6th Avenue. When you are that young you learn auana and mostly hula noho, your coordination is not all that terrific. Your just standing up, and walking so it was mostly hula nohos. (And hula noho in auana?) Yes.. (Can you remember what year?) I would say 1958 to maybe 1960..(I know you were young..can you remember the method of hula you had learned?) Yeah! Her styling was very nice, she was a very good teacher because she was very patient, loved children and made it enjoyable and that is very important when you have children that young, because they enjoy it and they want to continue with it. (Was she teaching alone?) Yes she was. (After her you went with?) Rose Joshua. (What age were you?) Between 5 going on 6. (Kahiko and auana?) Yes we had to be rounded dancers not only Kahiko and auana but we needed ot learn Maori, Tahitian, Samoan and Tongan.. (She was alone teaching?) She was alone, she had two daughters that will come in and help her out every so often, her style of teaching was she would interrupt then she would teach you the oli and the dance but most important I think is she always told us the meaning as she taught us words, so the understanding of the dance was very easy. (Her styling?) Her styling was almost of ballet styling. I know Henry Pa was also with her too and teaching within.. the halau which is magic hula studio that syling was just so graceful and the inner beauty that she projected on the songs that she danced just captured me and that's what I wanted to do, I wanted to dance just like that. (Henry Pa was teaching with her?) Yes, it was a joint halau.. (So you learned from Henry Pa?) Yes! From Henry Pa. (After Her?) I've danced for people but no I truly believed that she was the one that I wanted to carry on her styling. I have been to seminars and to other different projects and programs was two days classes or one day class and I really enjoy that. I like to look at other people styling and see what they have out

there. (Did you uniki from her?) Yes! From Mrs. Joshua I uniki there were only 5 of us who did uniki and certificates were not given out for the past 40 years, so this was quit special.

(How did it went?) It was not a traditional uniki only because she was not feeling well at that time she was very sickly and shortly after that she did pass on, but she was not going to go until she graduated some of the students she felt had deserved it and worked hard for it. She had another way of doing things she taught you and a lot of studies were on your own and she would tell you and she could really tell you if you studied or not, what knowledge you had and what certain point and what knowledge she expected of you at a certain point so the studing was not only her teaching you had to do your own researching and do everything else on yourself as well.

(Is it dancing?) Research on lyrics, research on where the chant came from, who composed the song, basically she is letting you get your background, your feet wet for your teaching years.

(Can you remeber the others people that uniki?) Palani Olson, Pa Mai Tan, Nalani Young, Myself,.. (Your uniki day?) I would say it was a ho'ike only because it was held at the hotel like I said she was very sick she had something she wanted to accomplish before she passed on and she stayed around long enough to do it, as far as the traditional concerned it did not matter to us.

(Was the ho'ike public?) Oh yes. It was the whole halau we had Nalani Olds, we had a lot of Kumu Hula she is been in the business for how long, in fact one of her students I believe was Maike Aue so we had a lot of kumu hula and it was very nice. Her favorite song, well she had two favorite songs. One was "Minei" and the other one is "I ali ni'oe" and it was so nice to see 3/4 of the audience at the end of the hoiki uniki stand up and dance I ali ni'oe the other 1/4 were men that did not dance but everybody whether they knew the motions or didn't they stood up and danced... (What made you want to be a teacher?) I just love dancing so much it was always in me, I used to be punished not to go to hula. If I did something wrong, that was my parents way of doing things. (Of the teachers you had which one had the greatest influence?) Mrs. Joshua as I

said earlier the way she taught not being familiar with the hawaiian language when she taught a song she will tell you the meaning of the song, or of that verse then she will tell you word for word what each word meant in english. You know the hawaiian songs are not easily translated so when you have that kind of teaching your understanding of the language is much easier. I understand the language but I do not speak. (Did you keep her style?) I kept her style as much as possible on songs that I learned in the 20 years that I have been with her. New songs that are composed within my time I put my own styling in it but it still reflects hers. You can't change it just some of the motions are a little more moderized, but other than that you can't change your style. (Had any difficulties?) Not as far as the hula is concerned or the chanting was concerned or playing music, the difficulties were that I was scared I had a hard time getting jobs because I was not the traditional hawaiian looking polynesian, Waikiki type, but that was just an obstacle that I hurdled over. (Your most joy in teaching?) Teaching girls and or men and having them dance for you in the exact way that you have taught them with the emotion that you want them to have and totally enjoying what they are doing. (Your greatest accomplishment?) I think now days, my greatest accomplishment is learning or teaching, being around the teacher not only teaching auana, kahiko, but being able to do maori, tahitian. Now days the hula teahcers are strictly just hula. I think that is an accomplishment. When your a rounded teacher and you can expose them to this, must the shows in Waikiki or elsewhere want rounded dancers. They don't want dancers that just learned hula and when you are an adult it is hard for them to learn the poi balls, so that is an accomplishment by being versatile. (Do you uniki your students?) I will when the time comes and I feel that they earned it and they can really prove to me that they are going to go out and teach what's right. (What do you expect from them?) They would need to learn or need to know not so much of the hawaiian language I don't think learing to speak is important, I think learning the values that the hawaiians had, just totally being hawaiian, being

able to take apart a chant through all the Kaona of the chant or the song composing motions to it and bringing it back to life sort of speak. (You have people in mind?) Yes I do. I have 2 people in mind. (Why do you uniki?) You need to prepare them. I regret not having a traditional uniki. In this day and time however the uniki itself is something that is not done all that often. If time and sources are available I think they should go into the traditional uniki where they do their own clothes and abstain from certain fish but in modern days. (Do you expect somebody to carry on your halau?) Yes I am, either to carry on my halau or to go out and expand my halau. (Do you have to uniki from your kumu or can you go out and uniki elsewhere?) I do want them to go elsewhere but I want them to have that experience. (What kind of advice can you give to young kumu hula?) Study hard, teach from your heart and it will pass on very easily, I am not strict, I was never strict. I enjoy it and it shows in my dancers. (Do you think hula has changed?) Yes! Hula changed to be more modern, the songs that are being composed, you can see the translation that it is modern. The dance itself has changed, there's more steps in there that I don't even remember learning but who am I to say what step is right and what step is not. Everybody is allowed to use their creativity and that's really what makes hula the hula. (Definition of hula Kahiko?) A chant or an oli danced with very traditional motions, very traditional steps, hula steps with appropriate attire. (What do you think of the hula kahiko of today?) It's changed in many ways. First of all Kahiko the chant itself you got a lot of young people that are composing which is really good I mean you need people to do this to keep this going on. The chants of before and the chants of now are different but in years to come the chants of now will be the chants of before. The steps, I like it, it adds a little "Zip" to it. (Traditional motion?) Very simple, no spins, no jumps, no nothing like that, very straight. (You have a favorite chant?) Yes! Kaulelua!..I like the pahu the pa'i of the pau on that chant. I like the words, I love the dance. Mrs. Joshua taught us that and did a great job with the motions, very

simple but traditional, very simply but yet very to the point. (Do you compose?) I compose in English, what I do is that I compose then I take it to my brother Wendell and he'll help me with the translation. (For the chant?) For both and only if I do composing is within the halau only and for the halau or of the halau, something that we have as our little gift. (Is this for the performances that you do?) Yes! (You have a favorite song?) That would be Mi Nei also. (Because of Aunty Rose?) Yes, the way that she explained it to us when she taught it this was her favorite song as a matter of fact they even did it at her funeral, it's just the way she did it, her motions when I danced it, I was pregnant with one of my kids. She was not in the audience, she had passed on already, but I could remember people were telling me I never seen you dance more graceful in my whole life and it was funny. It was funny because I was hardly moving my feet because I was in labor already, but I think it has so much meaning. (You prefer Kahiko or auana?) Auana. You can be much more creative like I said, I like the traditional stuff. When it comes to the songs of now days its modern, you have that lee way to be little more creative with your motions, with your steps. (Is the hawaiian language is important?) Yes it is very important, if you don't understand what you are dancing about, you will never have the feeling in your heart to show what the song is really telling you. Hula is like acting, you have to act it out in order for the audience gets the full effect of what you are trying to say and what the composer of the song is trying to say. (How about language in class?) Conversational I would like to offer it in my classes. However, one hour and 15 minutes is not long enough to cover all the areas that I like to; I would like to see the children going to hawaiian language schools and I would like to see young adults or the teenager start taking hawaiiana, or hawaiian language in school and later pursue at the UH if necessary.. (Do you use language in your class?) Yes! Especially for my baby classes, children are like a sponge, they absorb. They watch you and they imitate you, the more you teach them, the more they want to learn, so now when they are

young is the time to teach them hawaiian language, they will retain it. It will take a little bit longer for them to learn it but they will retain it a lot longer than teaching someone that is older, language is important if they want to pursue a career in dancing as well as teaching. (With your teachers did you have language also?) Yes they did, Hawaiians are very sharing people, everything was shared, implements, costumes, but she would talk to us in hawaiian on and off english-Hawaiian go back and forth not constantly but long enough so we knew what she was talking about and also very important she will always tell us what was frowned upon and what was not frowned upon. If we did anything out of the hawaiian tradition.. (Can you talk about Henry Pa?) Henry Pa basically taught us a lot of chants, he was the one that taught us the chanting itself. He taught us dancing too. Henry Pa it was a joint, there was Henry Pa and Mrs. Joshua until Henry Pa passed on, and then Mrs. Joshua's daughter came over. (Did you entertain while with Joshua and Henry Pa?) Yes, I was dancing with Louise Kaleiki, Louise and Leeha, .. with their group. (Can you explain?) Well, Louise wanted a solo dancer and I was her solo dancer. I was not really taking from Louise, I was dancing Mrs. Joshua's numbers at her shows. I was being paid as a feature dancer and with Mrs. Joshua's permission it was totally acceptable. (With Rose Joshua and Henry Pa what kind of entertainment did you do?) We did kahiko, auana.. we danced at Kahala Hilton, Sheraton, Queen Kapiolani, Camp Smith. Every Saturday or Sundays in fact Saturday and Sundays, she did even have shows during the week that I went a couple of times with her like at Kahala Hiloton and so forth, and she was always there you know to watch, oversee. (The whole class?) No it was a selceted group that went mainly the advanced dancers in our classs. (Do you have people that you consider as hula master?) Aunty Edith Kanakao'le, Ms. Joshua, Henry Pa, I like Edith Kanaka'ole. I like her chanting everytime, I saw her doing anything, it was like I can just relate to it.. (What other things do you do beside hula?) I teach Maori and tahitian, when I was dancing with Mrs. Joshua. She would have people

come in mostly from the Polynesian Cultural Center, don't ask me their name, I can't remember. They came and taught us the numbers and every year she will bring them back and I assume she will pay them or whatever, but they will teach us tahitian and something Maori or sometimes both.. Most of these people came either from tahiti or from New Zealand. Al Barcarse was also very involved with the halau and I did dance for him. We had rehearsal at the hula studio with Mrs. Joshua there he had gone to New Zealand also and came back with songs that were composed which was at that time Nanihahinu. Because he could speak Japanese fluently and play music he formed a group and we kind of joined his group. (Do you teach Maori and tahitian?) Yes I do, I like the drumming that I was taught, I say it is important for the students to be well rounded if she is going to pursue a career in dancing or a career in teaching. They become well rounded dancers and they can perform any type of dance, any culture. (You think a teacher should learn every culture?) Well a hula teacher is strictly a hula teacher, I do teach hula auana and kahiko, however I also teach tahitian to the students that I have to expose them to other cultures. A lot of time the steps that are in the Maori or the tahitian are basically the same steps that's is in the hula. It is important as I said if they are going to be a professional dancer to be well rounded. As far as the kumu hula is being concerned it is up to them what they want to teach. Hula is still my favorite, I just offer the tahitian and Maori to round them out, make it complete and it comes in handy when you are doing shows. (What is hula for you?) It is my life, hula is part culture, part drama, expression, bringing a song to life and dancing from within yourself. (How you see hula in the future?) I see hula changing. There are more steps now than there were before only because of the creativity of the kumu hulas nowadays as well as slightly before my days it is nice as I said earlier to have a little zip, a little creativity sometimes it even identifies the halau, but I do see it changing, but as long as we remember our steps and our styling of old or of the past, I think it will always be around. (How about in the future?) It will be a lot more

creativity as far as steps and motions are concerned a lot of composing of songs which is good a lot of young artists composing more beautiful songs for us dancers to dance. (Do you have anybody that you consider hula master of today?) Probably would be Hoakalei Kamau. I think she is great, she impresses me very much when she oli.. Her dancers impress me, her costumes impress me, I think that the knowledge that she has is just remarkable. (What do you think of workshop?) Oh! I am for it, the workshop that I have attended that Kalihi Palama has put on I enjoy it that was for 2 days. The first day you study the chant itself, you study the dance, you study the pa'i. You break for lunch, but it was one full day of practicing, the students are limited to the teachers so you got a lot of close attention. These are teachers that are not afraid to tell you that you are doing something wrong, they are correcting it right there rather than letting it go. Chants that are taught once and that's it, is good; because there was only 4 or 5 students that know that chant which makes even more special. The next day all the classes get together and perform for each other to show their accomplishments and to share I think that's how it should be, sharing. (Should the workshop for Kumu or student or both?) I think you should have for kumu hula there's always young kumu hula like myself that are interested and wanting to learn from masters themselves. I think you should offer to students who are interested, only because if they don't have that background later on in life how can they become kumu hula, every little bit helps, and it will be nice for that culture to be offered to them. (Something special to say?) Dance from your heart and you will always be the best.