

## Karen Kaohulani Aiu Costa

Karen Kaohulani Aiu Costa, daughter of the late renown kumu hula Ma'iki Aiu Lake, established the halau, Na Wahine No Me Ka Ha'aha'a Mai Ma'iki and Na Kane O Kaohulani in 1984.

Back in the early 1960's, training as a dancer was very important and valuable as far as where our beginnings came from and where hula started. Kahiko was not as popular as it is today. Chants such as Aua'ia were very precious to Hawaiians and were taught only to the special students.

I became a student of my mother, Ma'iki Aiu from the age of six or seven. As I got older, I was fortunate to become a right hand or an extension of my mother in the partnership of the business as well as learning our culture of the hula. So for twenty-two years, I was very privileged and honored to hold this position. In 1970, my mother opened up a class for anyone interested in studying to be a kumu hula. It was not by choice but by obligation. It was decided by my mother's aunty, Hoakalei Defries, that I attend these classes. All the young people who came to that first kumu hula class were there by choice. For me, it was to become part of my family tradition and carried on for the future.

Our class started off with a total of at least seventy-eight students but dwindled down to about fifty-two. The desire to be a kumu and to learn what a kumu's responsibilities were...were not as easy as we thought. The formal training lasted over two years with long hours creating chants of our ancestors, learning to make your own instruments, training as 'olapa, ho'opa'a and then, given the title of kumu hula. This title was bestowed unto us after all of this training in 1972. I accepted the title but I didn't acknowledge it because of all the duties and responsibilities that such a heavy title carry.

My mother gave us the opportunity to bring paper and pencil to write notes and to ask questions regarding any chant, song or dance that we were learning. She also issued some chants that we never heard of on paper to make it easy for us. Tutu Kawena Puku'i encouraged her to

satisfy the need for paper and pencil because when we went home, we would be totally lost if we didn't have anyone who spoke the language. We would be frustrated and lose interest in learning. It would be more damaging not to have something to fall back on like notes.

I have had the opportunity during those twenty-two years with my mother of visiting and learning from many elders. Many of them are gone, like Aunty Alice Namakelua, Vicky I'i Rodrigues, Uncle Bill Aliiloa Lincoln and Tutu Kawena Puku'i. Today, I am fortunate to have these caring teachers; mentors Aunty Malia Craver, Kaupena Wong, Namaka Bacon and my godmother, Kekauilani Kalama.

As I got older and hopefully wiser, I experienced things and saw the love of people who came to me and believed in me and my teaching. They told me that I really had a lot to share. My interpretation of kumu hula has always been what I saw in my mother. She was so enlightening, full of love and she had so much to give. I didn't think I was that kind of a person. But the people looked to me for all of the same things that they saw in my mother. Today, I share the knowledge that my mother's hula masters left with her and she has left with me. Now I leave it with all of you.

I visualize hula, in time, will come to full circle and we will return to that which was the most important, the basics. We will go back to the beginnings, to our ancestors and that will be vital to our survival. We do have elders; we do have beginnings; we do have grass roots, and where we all come from and the source of the elders is there. Without the source, we don't have much of a future.

As a teacher, my mother was strict but there was also love and concern. To me, she was a master in all that she did. She appealed to the young because she made hula exciting. She wasn't selfish with her haumana and she was always forever giving. All of these things made me look up to her. Hopefully all these qualities is what I as a kumu hula can someday leave to my

haumana.

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