

Nana I Na Loea Hula  
Kumu Hula: Karen Costa  
Interviewer: Lovina Le Pendu  
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My name is Karen Kaohulani Aiu Costa (EXACTLY LIKE this in THE BOOK?) Yes. (DO YOU TEACH PRESENTLY?) Yes I do. I teach at my resident at Kailua Oahu on the island of Oahu. (THE AGE OF YOUR STUDENTS?) My youngest student is 5 years old and it range from keiki to juniors to adults and to kupuna women. (DO YOU HAVE A NAME FOR YOUR HALAU?) Yes, the name of the halau is "Na Vahine No Me Ka Ha'a'ha'a Mai Ma'ike" and Na Kani, O Kaohulani... Na vahine no me ka ha'a'ha'a mai ma'ike and that to be interpreted as with the mannerism of Ma'ike my mother my kumu hula and na kane o Kaohulani the men that danced or selected for myself the kumu hula Kaohulani... (DO YOU TEACH BOTH KAHIKO AND AUANA?) Yes I do. (OLI?) Sometimes, but this is just reserved for students that can handle it.. oli with the hula... (HOW MANY YEARS HAVE YOU BEEN TEACHING?) Actually, I'll say alone by myself since the death of my mother 10 years since she is been gone 10 years and prior to that in between an additional 8 years, and my involvement with hula is 22 years with halau hula o Ma'iki...

(WHEN DID YOU FIRST START HULA?) When I was probably 6 or 7 years is when I took hula as a student. (WHO WAS YOUR FIRST TEACHER?) My first teacher was Maiki Aiu and she was my mother. (WHERE DID SHE TEACH?) Her halau it first started at her home and later at her halau at home it was where we lived in Pauoa and later her halau moved to Wilder Ave. then to Keaumoku and then it depth growing so large to Kalaukaua Ave. (WHAT DID YOU LEARN WITH YOUR MOTHER?) When I first started as a youngster we learned auana or hapa haole songs, the basics I guess kahiko chants Kailia, Lili'u e later as we got into young women or teens the emphasis was put in kahiko we started learning about the dances. Songs for Pele and along with this one research and studies for her halau and when we were learning at that time became an emphasis also in learning... (HOW MANY STUDENTS WERE THERE IN THE HALAU?) In my class

we had at least 16 students...It depended individually on the student basic training and learning about hula the art of hula was extended to our students as we got older and I guess more in depth of research and how one preformed may give advantage to move into private classes where one was pulled from the basic classes and sit aside into a class of kahiko for young women to Kauai and to learn and at this time my mother's school who was Lokalaia Montgomery was alive at that time I guess you'll say way back in the early 60's kahiko was not as popular as kahiko is today, but training as a dancer than was very important and valuable as far as we where our beginnings came from where the hula started songs or chants such as Aua'ia very precious to Hawaiians were held back only for the teaching of special student and fortunate am I as I got older my involvement with the halau I became a right hand or an extension of my mother in partnership in business as well as learning culture of the hula, so for 22 years I was very privileged and honored to hold this position. It was about in 1970 when my mother opened up a class which was going to be for anyone interested in studying to be a kumu hula or a teacher of the old, is when not by choice, but by obligation which was decided by my mothers aunty Hoakalei Defreeze. that I was sure that I made attendance to all of these classes. So for those young people who came to be in that first kumu hula class that lehua class or hoomaiki it was all by choice, but for my self it was something part of my family. it was to be carried on for the future, it was just mandatory. (HOW LONG DID THAT CLASS LAST?) As far as the formal training, or the emphasis, the real emphasis the real hard study of not only the learning of dance by learning part of our craftsman, it was part of extension of 2-3 years of long hours of being able to create chants of our ancestors, learn to do, make your own instruments in fact your own pahu to be completed. So a training also compiling doing the olapa, hoopaa and then fully given the title of being a kumu hula, which was bestowed unto us after all of this training is what in 1972, I presently didn't acknowledge that heavy or very responsible title. I accept

it, but I didn't acknowledge it per say, because of all the duties and responsibility that sat with such a heavy title as far as we were taught what a kumu hula was. (1972 WAS CLASS OF PAPALEHUA?) Yes, that was the 1st class of papalehua, that was the class that Aunty Naiki Wood She never really knew that she would have as many students as she did. (HOW MANY OF YOU WERE IN THAT CLASS ?) We started off with a total of at least 78, that first came to the halau that 1st night and after the first night it then dwindled down to about 52, so I goes to show in all halaus that when you first begin you may have a big class but the strength and the desire to be the kumu or to learn what a kumu and its responsibilities were was what one found wasn't as easy as we thought it was going to be. (HOW MANY GRADUATED?) In graduation, I think we graduated 38 or 42, I don't know the exact total, so it showed that the very interest in the kumu in the very beginning that people from all walks of life I can tell you one thing, you know C. Heftell's wife, she was in there too. I don't think they realize how strenuous or demanding that it would be for an individual. (DID SHE HAVE REQUIREMENTS TO MEET?) There were requirements, people questioned, I guess you'd say, she being the kumu no one questioned what she said as far as requirements she set her own protocol or demands on the student. So her training and her background with tutu Kawena and many of the other elders, and Lokalia set a precedents for all of us which we were supposed to follow. The hardest thing was not the question, it was just to be an obedient hard working student and be able to give of ones self. (METHODS THAT SHE USED WHEN SHE WAS TEACHING?) At that time the method that she used, number one having the opportunity for us of bringing paper and pencil to write notes, to ask questions regarding any chant, song, or dances that we were learning. She also issued to make it easy for us some chants on paper that we never heard of only due to tutu Kawena encouraging her that there was a need for paper and pencil because when we went home if we didn't have anyone to speak to as far as the language or even the kauna we would be totally lost. And then being lost



we would be frustrated, and being frustrated you couldn't get the interest or even show an interest in learning. It would be more damaging not to have something to fall back on like notes or paper and pencil than just go home to a blank room.

(WHAT MAKE YOU WANT TO BE A TEACHER?) Initially, like I said when I went into the class of kumu hula it wasn't by choice, later as one gets older and hopefully wiser and you experience things and you see the love of people and people that came to me and said they can believe in me and my teaching, and they were the ones that told me that I really had a lot to share. In giving and dancing and the knowledge, just being a student of mine and so I looked at it, and I have always loved hula but to say that I am a kumu hula brings a lot of weight and responsibility, because for every life that you touch, once hula begins because hula is not just motions, hula is feeling, loving, its crying, its part of our life, so hula is life. So any human being that I touch with hula is an extension of my ancestors with a love of my culture and just knowing that if I can share a little bit of my culture not much but just a little, even if it means just a little in dance, and their belief when they look at me and they find that this is Hawai'i, this is culture, this is love, it makes them happy, so with them having all that faith in me I look to myself and say that my interpretation of kumu hula has always been what I saw in my mother. She had so much to give, life, it never ended. She is so enlightening, full of love and I really didn't think that I was that kind of a person. I was kind and friendly, but in the long run other people looked at me in the same way and they said so much of you is like you mother and we want you to be our kumu, so with that and all the reasons that they told me they looked at me for all of the same things that they saw in my mother, so in all of this in depth feeling, like I said Hawaiians are emotional and loving, I turned to myself and today that what I do and to that's why I say with the mannerisms of my mother, I share this with all those that are interested in coming to me, and wanting to know the part of knowledge that here hula masters left with her

and she has left with me and now I leave with all of you.

(DID YOU HAVE ANOTHER KUMU?) No, as far as in the oli and the kahiko, the only kumu would be the elders that is as with, in today's interpretation you would say they'd be teachers of mine and those would be many that have now gone, which was tutu Kawena to spend many hours at her home, Aunty Alice, Vicki Eei, Uncle Bill Lincoln, just many people that I have had the opportunity for those 22 years with my mother in the visiting and learning from all these people, so to know that I am very fortunate that where my training came from that actually having another teacher care.

(WAS YOUR MOTHER THE ONLY INFLUENCE ON YOU WHEN YOU WERE GROWING UP?) No, the influence in my life for hula are many really, but like I said, fortunately have I been to visit with like Kawena Woods many a time the songs of Matty Lam who was a composer, Uncle Bill Lincoln, these people in visiting and spending many hours of sharing songs with my mother were other ways of learning for me and all these elders that have been gone for many years, for the influence they have given me in song learning and chants and today I am very fortunate because I still have very special loved ones that I can fall on which is Aunty Malia Craver, Aunty Pat Bacon, Kaupena Wong they are still a living part of my life in hula and if you want to say that they are your kumu, would say yes, but not just a kumu, not just a teacher, mentors, if you want to call them that, but know that that is where the source of my hula life is still alive, even though my mother and many of the others have now gone. (DESCRIBE THE DANCING STYLE?) Well, the style, if it means having a style, my mannerisms are similar to those of halau hula maike with my mother being the teacher, meaning there is an innermost feeling that students project, a feeling of love and understanding that hula is an art form, expressing all the things we see, feel and that which touches us. That style I can honestly say are the mannerisms which people still see in my students and the halau name exactly identifies that and that is one style

that I would really like to maintain is that of Maika's mannerisms.

(ANY DIFFICULTIES IN YOUR HULA CAREER?) Well, I don't say difficulties, I say there is always a time when one needs to search themselves to see to it that we are not getting away from that which our elders or kumu that trained us has left us and not to look at things in like a western or new wave or a change of hula. I look at hula as a time that my mother which was more than 25 years ago called it a renaissance, today I call it a challenge. The challenge is do we hold in the art of the hula that rich art that our kumu hula prior to us left us our ancestors have left us a courner which we share, or do we just dance today for excitement. (WHAT GIVES YOU THE MOST JOY OF TEACHING TODAY?) It is to see the haumana be able to share in their physical being all that hula is life. Meaning, love, happiness, sadness, joy, and just the beauty of being able to dance and to share because dance is an interpretive art form is that which the student does. That give me the greatest joy, weather its a keiki, a kane, a tutu, I just really love to see that light, the happiness, all that they have to convey.

(DO YOU DIVIDE YOUR STUDENTS?) Yes, I have a basic class, and really the priority when a student first comes is basic feet the wawai, then the lima and this always the beginning for all students weather your a keiki to an adult. From there it's some learning, which is auana or hapa haole song which is the easiest, which one can first learn a simple song say no shoes, by Auntie Bina and it's all English but then a youngster has to convey and feel a hula, how they feel if their happy, to dance and to walk freely when your a little one, with no shoes and later on start to wear shes, so simple songs as that they're interpretation of being able to share where the viewer looking at them can feel and enjoy that which they have to share. So, basically you learn auana, then we go into Hawaiian song learning, its a crossing of hapa haole and Hawaiian songs and eventually depending on the length of time the students is with me or a youngster gives me as a kumu hula the decision as to now is the time to offer kahiko, I do offer kahiko, but one



would say these are the songs that are basically taught, like hula kawika and liliu'e that youngsters need to learn the history of whatever ali'i we are learning and eventually as we move along as you get older there is more research, there's excursions that we go on to see where Ema lived, the Palace, so besides hula and dance we also have a manner of learning history and this history is visual and the visual is to go to the Palace if we are learning about Kalakaua, visual is to know about this person, what he left the palace, it is very important in learning a song of instruments, definition, how it is used, it's proper use of an ipu, what is an ipu, where does it come from, it's a guord, Hawaiians not only use it to dance, but they use it for their food, water, it's not just dancing its history, it's culture, it's what hula is, and so this is what youngsters learn, so eventually as a student stays and they are 4 going to be 5 years old, they usually stay until they are grown women usually going onto college so their song learning varies from being a keiki, to young teen, to grown adult and this gives them an opportunity and variety of all types of song learning, but kahiko is hand picked at the present time. The training is intense and is very demanding and is for the strongest for one stride not only to seek knowledge in kahiko about our ancestors and our past but to link it to our future of who and what we are. (DO YOU HAVE A STUDENT THAT HAS BEEN WITH YOU FROM YOUNG?) I have young teens that started at the age of 5 and are now 13 years old that have been hand selected are now in a formal training of kahiko. There intensity and desire to learn this is just unbelievable they are like little sponges, they just want to know the knowledge. The discipline they've committed to and just knowing that this part of our culture, not only in dance along with this goes history, we learn about Pele, we learn about the land, the aina, all these things in these young people. I look to see that it has a future, so being with em more than 13 years, I've had this opportunity just as my mother has, from a youngster taking hula as a keiki whose now in formative year of training to hand select youngsters and to train them.

(ARE YOU LOOKING TO UNIKI YOUR STUDENTS?) Right now, I wouldn't use the work uniki, I would consider the word maybe hoike, to show the things that they have learned that they are rather young and as far as training goes, hula has as many changes. Hula has the 10 years that my moms gone but I still see the beauty that hopefully the basics of the kahiko or the art of hula can be maintained, but that's questionable. (WHAT ADVICE DO

YOU GIVE TO YOUNG HULA TEACHERS?) The kumu hulas of today, many of them may not have had that opportunity to train like I trained or to have the opportunity to know the elders that I've had the chance to be with. I would say to them today that hula is life remember that hula has history, it has existence, it has feel, it has emotion, especially happiness and sadness, and language. Today, fortunate are we to know that language is here which we didn't have in a time of our learning, the language came on what my mother taught us with paper and pencil and then too many of the elders were against this other than tutu Kawena who encouraged it and Kaupena.

(DO YOU THINK HULA HAS CHANGED?) Hula has changed, Yes. The old way of learning is not here today, the old form of learning for young kumu hula is when they see something, a dance or a chant and somehow if it catches their eye, it is their opportunity to take it from there, but for me I guess in the changes of the kumu hula, one would say this, the can only experience and live to make that art of the hula and to remember the old as well as that which is the past and incorporate and keep it in our hula. Don't be so much in a hurry to be so pleasing with the excitement of dance and not having a knowledge of our culture and its beginning.

(WHAT IS YOUR DEFINITION OF HULA KAHIKO?) Hula is an art form of dance and kahiko linking us with that of the past as well as with the future also one would say its an expansion of what was then and what we have now, because what is presently now will someday be that of the past. We need to remember our beginnings and especially the root or the source, especially the hula or the art of the hula, with this all incorporated together, our expansion that we give of



ourselves can be astronomical really, hula is life, hula is to give. There are really no boundaries unless we teachers of today or the young kumu hula set boundaries of not sharing and not giving. (GIVE ME SOMETHING OF YOU THAT IS OF HULA KAHIKO?) For myself, in interpretation for kumu hula today, hula kahiko would be chants as my favorite is Au'aia, especially Au'aia, I hold on to that many as simple as the words, how true it is in spirit and life of us, but the question is how many of the kumu today have ever heard of such a chant. How much respect is given to the numbers such as Kauliliua or do they find that old fashion that is our roots the one that I love the most which has really no bearing other than just the olapa is Kalei Maila Oli Lei, I love it because it conveys so much of what versus a dancer learns and feels to be the pride also with a double kauna meaning of one that one can love and interpret it to , so my selection I guess you can say are of the past, they are not per say the time way before Kalakaua is my love as far as chants go.

(HOW IMPORTANT IS LANGUAGE IN HULA?) Language is very important and like I say, we have the opportunity today to have even what we call basic language for schooling but the kauna in conveying the language should not be so westernized, meaning our thinking to be of today, which I call western time not being able to know what the word in its entirety meant in the time when Hawaiians lived. (SPECIAL LANGUAGE WHEN IT COMES TO HULA?) That is a very interesting question because I like to make a reference to something or works that were given to us Hawaiians or people in hula some 25 years ago, the word was Kumu which means basically teacher, and kumu hula is a teacher of hula, but if one would look at it in a time of our ancestors or elders that work was very quiet, one showed what one was able to do in order to be the kumu. Today I know it really had a lot to do with my mother and such words as kumu and olapa and many other words that she brought about in teaching even us in our classes, because it became such a familiar word that the interpretation of like if I say an olapa I go farther than just being

the dancer, I have more demands or disciplines, I would want out of the olapa that she would need to be able to seek knowledge, show an interest not only in dance in the culture, but be at the highest peak of dedicating ones self and for the kumu, like I said when I was first given the title, I wasn't ready yet to acknowledge the responsibilities that went with that, today, I look at the word kumu as a teacher, a teacher of hula, a teacher of language. Credentials to Hawaiians at that time was what one showed, when it was your turn to show, you showed, that showed the Hawaiian people that in all you training you became a master today we go to the universities and we get a paper, all that paper doesn't make you a teacher until you live it, it's like we say hula is life, so in after years of living of the work of kumu hula, I can honestly say that at this point I have such a title, I am able to share and to give, but to be a 17 year old, fresh out of the university, and be told you are kumu hula, you do not have the life experience behind you that made you that.

(DO YOU HAVE OTHER HAWAIIAN ACTIVITIES THAT YOU ARE INVOLVED IN?) We do crafts, its part of our halau, we do flower making, we do nature and outdoor activities, all of these things and visiting and travels have a lot to do with hula, learning to be a dancer, learning to be a chanter, and then becoming a teacher plays a very important part of life today, so not only in dance or in crafts but everything we do, the flower lei we make the name of the flower, the place we visit in history, these all make up part of what one needs to be part of in hula.

(IN YOUR HALAU DO YOU THINK THAT YOU NEED OTHER PEOPLE TO SHARE?) No, I have a different attitude as far as being a teacher in hula, the basic of what I teach my students, I feel are sufficient as far as basic learning, knowledge doesn't come from just one person, so our invitation for my elders to come and visit or for us to visit are very important. They are discussions of life experiences of a chant, of a song, of a mele, of an invitation one wants to write in Hawaiian all of these things and those elders are invited to come and be guest visitors, guest

speakers within my halau because I feel the knowledge that they have to share is priceless.

(DID YOU EVER SERVE AS A JUDGE?) Yes, I served as a judge for the Keiki Competition for 2 years and I found it very interesting and exciting, and I enjoyed it a lot. (WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE FROM THE OTHER SIDE?) Well, from the other side, the only other difference I feel as a judge is this, that hopefully my remarks and my comments as a judge as well as a kumu hula is only an instrument of helping that person that teacher or halau that is performing only enhance them with their hula and be only as a suggestion kind of more of a conversational kind of thing to share nothing demeaning but to be helpful and anything or anything else especially to be enjoyed and shared by that halau, but as a judge I find it very rewarding to know that there's such great love for the art. (WHAT DO YOU THINK OF HULA WORKSHOPS?) Workshops in hula are beneficial I think, and learning for those who are offered the opportunity take advantage of it, not all learning comes from one source or one school and as young teachers or as kumu hula there's always something to learn with what one has to share either of their beginnings their type of training or learning or the islands that they come from. (HOW DO YOU SEE HULA IN THE FUTURE?) I visualize hula in its time it will come to full circle we will go back to that which was the most important, which is the basics, the beginning, the source because without it, we don't have much of a future as much as we think the future is now, we still have many more years to go, so this is the present, the future is many more years, we will go back to the kahiko, we will go back to the old to the beginnings, to our ancestors and that will be the vital part to our survival and I believe we will do it. Hula today is different from what it was 25 years ago, and 25 years from now it'll be different again, but because we do have elders, we do have beginnings, we do have grass roots, is where we all come from and the source of the elders is there.

(HOW WOULD YOU HELP A NEW KUMU HULA?) If I was asked to come and help, to kokua



it would only be as a person coming to help. this would be what a kumu today has brought with them realizing their training and their selection of whatever their bringing to you would be mainly for you to take a look at not to criticize, but to embellish, and when we say embellish, it would be not just motions, it would be their manao or understanding of the song or chant that they brought. Their waiwa and lima, their gestures, their inner most feel which is hula, like we say Piko is like the beginning like throughout the adventure of life. So what does on understand about hula is not a matter of us doing motions but its if we say hula kahiko then I say look at what they present, it is a link between the present and the past, in choreography if you want to use the word or in gestures is what Hawaiians would say mainly your gestures. Is this that which is rightfully shown correctly, their concern has always been gestures, mannerism and feel so do the young kumu hula today understand all these. That is the most important thing that I could bring to them to share with them as my knowledge from my elders of all that was left to me, which is the feel is there feels the gestures, are gestures that which is most apropos or is it just hula has always had excitement because men for the first dancers and they were exciting but for a teacher to come and to ask what can you help me with is what I would say, show me what you bring, how can I help you, not for me to tell them what is all wrong with them but how can I help you. (WHEN YOU WERE YOUNGER DID YOU TEACHERS GET HELP FROM OTHERS?) Yes, they always went back to their source which were their kumu who were my mother was very fortunate to has tutu Kawena and her kumu hula that she finished in dance which was Lokalea and Lokalea's teacher was tutu Kawena so she was very fortunate to have such people and wisdom, knowledge of the hula, for myself that's why I say today I am fortunate to have people like Pat Bacon, Auntie Malia, Kaupena Wong, and people to help me, but for the young teachers, do not be afraid, I would say to approach me. (DO YOU THINK TODAY ITS HARDER FOR THIS GENERATION TO ASK?) Yes, I think its harder for them, never having the

opportunity to sit amongst the ones we call elders or people that were formally trained and once they were all gone there are only a limited few, and the few that we do have are very selective at times that is why I for myself in being, if one came to ask me as many do, my comments or my suggestion when given to them have been very meaningful and helpful, but the problem is that how does one identify with who is your elder, is anyone who is older than you in years or the length of knowledge and training in hula, but where do we find these people maybe if you've seen any competitions you have a familiar name, but that's why too, workshops, getting together, education those interested in hula whether it's a hula are, seminar, whether it's a culture, whether it's a floral, flowers, artifacts, crafts, these elders that are alive today and those of us who are in hula need to be there for the young of Hawai'i For the young, all of our future and if we too are not there for them...

(DO YOU HAVE CHILDREN?) Yes, I only have a son. I have 2 haumana at the present time that I see, I also have accessibility, my brother has 2 girls and they have often danced for me and their in school and college and one is married now so as far as like having someone to follow again. I hope maybe the future of hula for me which is a question, I always ask my mother if she had daughters and usually you feel you had others so if it isn't in that which is a blood line by birth there is still hula is still from many others not only for Hawaiians the two that I had selected are young Hawaiians and I see future in them in perpetuating my style, my legacy that was left to me... (SO YOU BELIEVE HULA IS NOT ONLY OF FAMILY?) Yes. (SOMETHING ELSE?) The only thing that you asked me is that hula is my reflection it is really from my mother that is why I see it as today a new kumu hula.. (DO YOU THINK HULA WAS ONLY IN THE HALAU OR IT CAME FROM HOME TOO?) It was part of our family life it is like something that's there everyday; so I guess we were limited because kahiko being so private, unless you are in a time a class or a selection you'll be allowed to have that opportunity. why I say hula is life everything

my mom will always say was incorporating into that and as a young person it is very hard to see and you cant related to it until maybe later or you look at other peoples life style and this is one thing she would really stress is hula is a family and these people that come your Haumana is the same thing hula is family and as a kumu hula the life that you touch becomes very important and part of your life is not to be taken for granted to be abused or misused..

(AS A HAUMANA CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR MOTHER?) As a teacher, I'll say the word emphasis of strict was there but right next to strict was love and concern and to me she was a master in all that she did. She appealed to the young she made hula exciting, her gestures were of what one felt and what one could convey, all these things and just being a human being in whom that she was I think it is a one thing that always made me look up to her as a master she wasn't selfish with her haumana...And she was always forever giving and doing and hopefully all these qualities is what I as a kumu hula can someday leave to my haumana...