



HULA

IS MY

LIFE

Vicky Holt Takamine didn't intend to become an activist for Hawaiian rights, but because of her lifelong immersion in hula, she had to get involved

By CHAD PATA

A dance class is hardly the place most would look to for a militant activist to lead their people against a perceived abusive government. Yet eight years after its inception the Hawaiian rights organization 'Ilio'ulaokalani is still led by a dance teacher, Vicky Holt Takamine, who is having success despite the long odds.

What one must then realize is that hula is no ordinary dance, as Takamine is no ordinary teacher.

Hula is not just an expression of the culture, but a living embodiment of it. It utilizes the history, the language and culture in an outer celebration of an inner soul, and it is in this inner connection that Takamine finds the strength to stand and steadfastness to endure.

"I teach hula, but it's not my job — hula is my life," says Holt, who has been a kumu hula since the '70s. "It becomes a part of everything we do. It becomes innate in you. I do not see it as something separate from me."

This closeness to the culture is what

makes her act out so ferociously when her people are threatened. Many of you have seen her protesting on TV, leading a throng of red-clad Hawaiians protesting the recent Kamehameha Schools ruling or advocating against Stryker brigades. Just another protester, you say, easy to dismiss.

But in person she is something different. She speaks with a quiet ease about her people and their causes. It is not from anger that her appeals come, but an abiding love for her heritage. If listening to her speak is serene, watching her move is divine.

She walks with the practiced grace of a dancer, back straight, head still as a stone and with a seeming oneness with the earth. You would

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Nathalie Walker photo

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