

CY BRIDGES

Cy Bridges is the great grandson of Kuluwaimaka, the court chanter of Kamehameha IV. Cy is a dedicated Bishop of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and is employed by the Polynesian Cultural Center.

Hula is just different today. We have movies of hula dances of the past. All you have to do is to pop in a video and watch and you can readily see how much it has changed. Hula and chanting were really the textbooks of Hawai'i. The history and the words that were contained in the chants were very important. Today, you find the words are secondary and the motions are important. The crowds go wild when they see certain motions, and the people may not know what the words are saying but those movements are electrifying. There are a lot of things that I enjoy watching that I would not do with my own students.

There were four of us who first started to teach: myself, Bill Wallace, Enoka Kaina and Keith Awai. Bill Cravens, the President of the Polynesian Cultural Center called us in and asked us to put together a halau so our students can get involved." That's how itl got started.

Enoka suggested the name "Hui Ho'oulu Aloha" for our halau. I thought the name was nice and appropriate. "Ho'oulu" is to grow and since we were starting from nothing, of course we wanted it to grow. "Aloha" has many meanings. I think the most important thing is love, not only for each other but for the culture and for what we do.

After a while, everybody moved. My cousin, Bill, finished school and moved to the Mainland. Enoka moved into Honolulu. Keith took over when I dropped off for a little while and then I came back and Keith left. Everybody was so busy doing their own thing.

Ever since I was young, I was fascinated, not so much with the dancing of the hula, but with the sound of the ipu and the way that the voice carried. I wanted to learn how they did that. The only kind of training I got was from my mom and my grandmother telling me how it should and shouldn't sound, and by myself trying to listen and copy other chanters or recordings that I

heard.

My formal hula dancing started when I was in high school with Aunty Sally Wood at the Cultural Center. To me, she is my hula mother because I was with her for a number of years and I graduated with her. I started learning by doing shows for her. Aunty Sally had special programs for cultural days like the Kamehameha Day, May Day, or Aloha Week that we would do a performance for.

Aunty Sally graduated me fourteen years after I first started dancing with her. Aunty Sally called me early one morning. She was crying on the phone, telling me that she was sorry. She said she took a look at a lot of kumu hula who were teaching and were entering competitions. She said, "I thought of my own students that I've trained for so many years and they didn't graduate. I want you to graduate." We got together and started training. Sunday and Ellen Gay were the first to graduate. Keith and I followed soon after.

Aunty Sally has a beautiful style. It's simple like hula should be. She made it enjoyable and it was fun. She made no secret about the fact that when she came across things that she wasn't sure about, she would go and ask Tutu Kawena.

While I was with Aunty Sally, I was also learning from Aunty Hoakalei. It started from the need for male teachers to teach male dancing at the hula workshops. Prior to the workshops, there was always a ho'ike at McKinley High School so we could learn all of the routines. Peter Lonoae'a and I started to come over and go through the classes with Aunty Hoakalei. In 1976, she took a group to the South Pacific Festival of Arts in Roturoa, New Zealand. It was a small group and I was very fortunate to be a part of it.

During part of the time when I was with Aunty Hoakalei, we also learned from others because of our involvement with the Arts Festivals. We had the opportunity to learn a lot of numbers informally from Aunty Edith Kanaka'ole and her daughters, Pua and Nalani. What I

enjoyed the most was the talking and the information that was shared. I was fascinated when Auntie Edith would explain the different winds and the different rains and how she associated that with certain chants that we learned.

I also learned a few dances from Auntie Pat Bacon and Auntie Pele Suganuma. I still call Auntie Pat when I need advice.

One special thing is the fact that Auntie Sally is one of the students of Lokalia Montgomery and I had the great opportunity of learning chanting with Auntie Lokalia. I met her when we did a performance for the crowning of the Lei day queen at the Kapi'olani Park Bandstand. A few months later, I was invited by Auntie Lokalia to learn from her. That really thrilled me. I was able to learn chanting and feather work from Auntie Lokalia. Auntie Sally was my hula mother and Auntie Lokalia was my hula grandmother. What was even more special was that one of Auntie Lokalia's teacher was Tutu Kuluwaimaka, my great grandfather.

I did not train intensively in chanting with Auntie Sally. I was given the words and she would chant it for me and I would follow her until I got the gist of it. But as I went to other teachers, I found that Auntie Pele and Auntie Lokalia were a little bit different. I gathered a little bit from everybody. Somebody took me to Ka'upena Wong. He told me that working with Kalena just took so much out of him, but he made tapes of a few chants for me and said if I have any problems, to come back and he would help me on some of the techniques. Although it was nothing more than just talking and getting some tapes of his voice and words of the chants, I consider him as one of my teachers, to a small degree.

My dancing style is part and parcel of all of my teachers. I don't toy around with a lot of new things. I may get a little creative with the entrance and the exit but I don't fool around too much with the dances. It is important to me what Auntie Sally, Auntie Hoakalei and Auntie Pat would think about my dances.

The joy that I get back is seeing someone who did not know how to dance at one time, be able to do a performance and perform well. The interesting thing with my group is that the line is made up of girls from the Cook Islands, New Zealand, Fiji, Rotuma, Honolulu, Kaua'i, Big Island, Japan, and Spain. They're from all over the world and they all come to learn hula. It gives me a lot of joy to have someone who did not know how to kaholo, but in a year, she turns into a beautiful dancer. Yeah, it's worth it.

Revised: 10/31/95jy