

Rachael Akau Kamakana

The late Rachael Akau Kamakana established her halau on the island of Moloka'i in 1968. The name, "Hula Halau O Moloka'i" was given to her by her kumu hula, Harriet Ne.

My mother used to get very upset because I was a real tomboy. I was more interested in playing baseball and basketball with the boys rather than doing girl things. So I was hauled to Tom Hiona at the age of fifteen to learn how to dance the hula. He was supposed to make me feminine and act like a little lady. They had to drag me to him and it wasn't a very happy experience for me.

I was sent to Tom Hiona because he and my uncle were good buddies. I guess he was doing my uncle a favor by taking me, so I went to his class. I wanted to learn how to dance 'auana but he said that he was going to determine what I was going to learn and he only taught kahiko to beginners. I learned all the standard traditional chants, like "A Ko'olau Au", and "Aia La O Pele." He was very strict during these sessions and he made me cry every time I went to class because I didn't do it right. After one year, I told my uncle that I was pau. I wasn't going back.

After living in California, my husband and I came home to Moloka'i to take care of his father. After I had my last child, I joined Auntie Harriet Ne's classes in 1962 or 63.

Auntie Harriet had all her lessons planned. She would have the words to the song or chant done for us. She talked about the song or chant and gave us whatever knowledge she knew. She did not require us to research the mele but she encouraged us to talk to our tutu or aunties. We were responsible for writing the directions and if you lost your paper, you had to recall it from memory.

After about three years, she did a 'uniki; a completion for those lessons given to us. Although we had no paper or certificate, she said it was the old way where she brought witnesses to see that you had completed a certain part of the training.

Auntie Harriet was pleased that we had completed the 'uniki and she wanted us to continue

to become kumu hula. She then moved to prepare us to be kumu hula. She gave us certain chants and mele to research. We were to do the research and give it back to her. In addition, we had to teach a new student the basic fundamental steps and one hula number. During our training, she would also require us at a moment's notice to do a demonstration while she gave a lecture. People would come here and she would provide lectures for them and we would be a part of the demonstration. She was in charge of the annual May Day Program, Aloha Week Program and other Hawaiian cultural activities.

Under the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts, Aunty Hoakalei Kamau'u started a training program to develop kumu hula in the community. They contacted Aunty Harriet because she was known as the historian for Moloka'i. She called me and encouraged me to join the program. She said that it would help me in my hula.

When I got involved in the program, one of the conditions of receiving the training was that we would have to teach for free in the community for one year. So after the classes, I fulfilled my commitment by teaching on Moloka'i. After one year, there was a great response for me to continue to have classes. I talked with Aunty Harriet about opening a school and she thought it was a wonderful idea. She was really happy that I finally was opening a school.

To tell you the truth, I never wanted to be a teacher. I wanted to dance my life away. I saw myself as going from teacher to teacher, just learning and having a wonderful time. But once I started to teach, I was besieged by people who really wanted to learn.

My greatest accomplishment as a hula teacher is the experience of teaching and being able to teach these many years. I have had to learn to do research and learn all the different aspects of the culture. Now I am able to transmit this information to others. I have had a lot of help from other kumu hula and knowledgeable people, like Aunty Edith Kanaka'ole and Aunty Edith McKinzie.

To me, the language is the important key. It is the key to understanding. The key that can better define a feeling, a sense and a thought.

Corrected: 12/12/95jy

Approved: 01/08/96wk