

## Leilani Rivera Bond

Leilani Rivera Bond established her keiki hula halau fifteen years ago on Kaua'i where she was born and raised. Leilani's Hula Halau now includes adult women, with classes held in Wailua and Po'ipu, Kaua'i. In 1994, Leilani began teaching hula to a group of women in Reno, Nevada.

Kaua'i was such a good place to grow up in, and our family had a lot of fun. As a child, I really had a lot of good experiences and got to meet many famous people who came to Kaua'i because I helped my dad, Larry Rivera, with his shows at the Coco Palms Resort and in Honolulu. He began working at the Coco Palms in the early 1950's, and he composed and performed many songs that have become famous. "Waialeale" became really popular, and I remember that we were all invited to perform it at the Waikiki Shell.

In those days, the tourists came on the ocean liners, and my dad frequently sang "Love and Aloha," which talks about when the Lurline sails away. My sister and I were photographed holding a lei up so that one of the ships could be seen through the middle opening of the lei, and that photo became sort of famous.

I started taking hula lessons from Auntie Ku'ulei Punua when I was about three years old. I really enjoyed the Hawaiian music, the stories, and the many ho'olaulea we participated in. There were no stressful competitions then; the gatherings of musicians and dancers were a lot of fun. I tried my best to learn as much as I could. My classmates and I became very good friends. When I was young, I decided that I wanted to teach the hula too, but I knew I had to work really hard to learn the meanings of the words and the spirit of the dances.

Meanwhile, my father had started to entertain at Coco Palms, and he developed a Polynesian show, and my sisters, brothers, and I performed when we got older. Eventually, at about age thirteen, I became his lead dancer. That involved creating costumes, training other dancers and organizing the shows.

After I graduated from high school, I started Hawaiian studies classes at Kaua'i

Community College, but soon decided to postpone the rest of my education in order to assist my parents more with the shows. I also put on shows of my own for conventions and other hotels and entered some competitions. I began working in guest services at Coco Palms and got to know and learn from Mrs. Grace Guslander, Aunty Sarah Sheldon, Aunty Sarah Kealamapuana Malina Ka'ilikea, and others about Hawaiian culture and arts. In order to educate tourists about our culture and history, I did a lot of research on hula and Hawaiian music while I worked in the historical museum at the resort. I taught tourists how to play the 'ukulele, sew a lei, make a hula skirt, and other Hawaiian arts and crafts. These skills became part of my everyday life, and I learned leadership and developed my creativity while making many good friends.

An informal club of co-workers, friends and neighbors encouraged me to start teaching hula classes, and some of my students joined my father's Polynesian show. I met Steven Bond through this group of friends, and he joined my dad's show as a guitarist. Later, we married and when I had my first daughter, I became determined to pass on the Hawaiian culture to my children as a way of preserving a culture that my husband and I had grown up in. I decided that I could do this through hula. So, I started holding classes in my home for neighbors and relatives, and continued teaching as my family grew to five children, Kamalani, Lanuilani, Jonah, Stephanie Mahealani, and Ariel Leilani Keonaonalaulani.

Throughout the years, I've learned from several great kumu hula. Aunty Sarah Kealamapuana Malina Ka'ilikea worked with my father, and so she has given me friendship and knowledge over many years. Through the tutelage and continuing friendship of Uncle George Naope, Frank Hewett, Vicky Holt Takamine, Aunty Sarah Sheldon, Pat Namaka Bacon, Edith McKinzie, and Pua and Nalani Kanakaole, I've gained a better understanding of the Hawaiian culture. I received a year of training in hula kahiko from Willie Pulawa, who was teaching on Kaua'i in the early 1980's. I enjoyed being a haumana again for a while, without the pressures

of being a kumu hula. His training encouraged me to be creative with kahiko. All these teachers helped me to recognize and realize the traditions of hula.

Besides learning hula, I had to learn and perform Tahitian and other Polynesian dances because they were all part of the Polynesian shows being presented at conventions and hotels. Therefore, I sought training from Teipo Foster and Roiti Sylva, well known teachers from Tahiti. I also learned to drum from Jesse Jesse from the Cook Islands and Lloyd Chandler. They inspired me to create my own drumming rhythms. Perhaps in a year or two, I'll be able to take my halau to Tahiti, so that we can all learn from our cousins.

As a kumu, I try to teach my haumana to understand what they are dancing about and how to express the emotions in the chants and songs. Because I don't come from a family that speaks Hawaiian, I've worked hard to learn the language and am still learning. Before I create a hula, I study the words and try to list all the meanings I can find, then try to decide what the writer intended to say. That helps me to create and enjoy the emotions of the hula.

Like everyone else, I start my students with the basics because they need to have that foundation and discipline. Usually, kahiko is taught first, but because of today's modern English-speaking environment, I teach the keiki an English Hapa-haole song. That's how the children learn that the motions, words, and timing all move together. Then they learn kahiko and 'auana, and I always explain the meanings of the Hawaiian words. As the students get older, they learn aspects of Hawaiian arts and crafts. This year, we are holding monthly lauhala weaving classes for students and parents. I tell the keiki that it's important for them to learn the hula, otherwise it will die.

Preparing and participating in competitions take a lot of time and energy. I have wrestled with the idea of competing for profit or prizes, and it never really settled in my spirit. I try to convey to my haumana that, if we decide to and are invited to compete, then I challenge

them to compete against themselves, to convey, in a true spirit of aloha, their sincere affection for their hula sisters. I ask them to practice and exemplify what Hawaiian call ha'aha'a (humility) and to see competition as a chance to perpetuate our Hawaiian culture. When I see my haumana understand these concepts, then I feel I've succeeded as a kumu hula, and no prize can replace the inner peace that I gain.

About five years ago, some mothers of my students and other friends asked me to start a ladies class. Some were in my classes as little girls; others stopped taking hula when they became teenagers and had other interests. The ladies dance with a lot of feeling and try hard to understand the songs. A new challenge came to me a year ago, when Janet Rasmussen of Reno, Nevada, asked me to teach hula in her home. I go there every six weeks and these women have really blossomed into good hula dancers. They had their first ho'ike this September and danced with the Makaha Sons, along with some students from Kaua'i. The Reno students come to regard the Hawaiian culture with great respect.

Now that my youngest child has started school, I am determined to start my college education again. Most important to me, now, is learning more of the Hawaiian language because it will help me with my hula and I want to be able to converse with friends from Niihau. Eventually, I want to compose original songs in Hawaiian. Composing and performing music is my way of spreading aloha. I also want to study various styles of chanting. And, I hope that at least one of my children will decide to study the hula and teach it.

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