

Namahana Kalama-Panui

Namahana Kalama-Panui is a Hawaiian Studies teacher for the Department of Education, Central District on O'ahu. She also commutes to Maui where she devotes her time to teach the children of Hana.

When I view my life and the blessings that I've received, I realize that I have been nurtured, influenced, inspired, and guided by the Divine, by family, by kumu, by children, by friends, and others. I am the fruit of their love and I am kumu, thanks to all of them.

I was born in Guam and lived in a community called the Hawaiian Village. We were of varied ethnic backgrounds but all originally from Hawai'i. Although we grew up removed from Hawai'i we were not removed from Hawaiian lifestyle. We shared wonderful experiences together that instilled within me the value of family and extended family.

While in Guam, my parents encouraged Hawaiian ways and I was enrolled in hula. Here I learned to do hula for the love of hula. My love of hula has never ceased, has sustained me, and continues to bring blessings to my life.

Our family moved back to Hawai'i when I was 8. My mother saw to it that hula training continued. She took me to Alicia Keolahou Smith, who was at that time, teaching at the YMCA on Richard's Street. I walked from Nu'uanu and Kuakini, where we lived, to the Y and all the way back. We had no car and money was not used for bus fare. Later when I started to earn my own money the bus ride was a welcomed treat.

Keolahou was firm, yet kind; passionate and compassionate; disciplined, loving and respectful. There was an established order to adhere to and standards to strive for and maintain. I grew to love and respect this tradition, this style, and this kumu. In many ways Keolahou's teachings were like my parents' and halau like home and family.

Family was everything in my upbringing. My actions, choices and decisions were reflections upon my family. Some may say decisions made in childhood are short lived but for me they weren't. I remember clearly that at age 10, I had decided, hula would be my life and I would be a hula teacher. My mother wanted me to be happy, my father wanted me to be a minister. Easier said than done! I believe through guiding light of my family, of kumu, of

others, and of God I can say now: I am kumu, I do minister to my students and their families, and I am happy.

Blessings came in many forms. At one point in my life, I had to leave hula due to family crisis; father was working in Guam and mother was trying to raise the family in Hawai'i. Keolahou came to our home and offered to take responsibility for my hula training and my life. My mother shared and entrusted her child in to the care of another as a keiki ho'okama. Although young, I understood and a deeper loyalty and love grew for both my mother and Keolahou. In the years that followed this love and loyalty would swell like a spring, continually renewing my spirit and giving me courage to persevere. Within a 30 year span of my life, Keolahou was my teacher, provider, counselor, minister, guide, mother and friend.

Little did I realize the breadth and depth of this tradition. As the years passed my parents resettled in Guam and I stayed in Hawai'i, first as a boarder at school, then with 'ohana, and eventually on my own. As the training in 'olapa, oli, ho'opa'a, language and teaching continued I began to embrace the beauty of this style and tradition, to understand its principles, to appreciate its discipline, and see the presence of God in hula.

During these years Keolahou often sent me to workshops, to learn from other masters. She also brought kumu and artisans into the halau. It was fascinating to experience the diversity of hula and other Hawaiian traditions; yet each was universal in their love, respect, devotion and dedication. I began to view hula as a way of life.

I have been enriched, enlightened and blessed by what I've learned through hula. My training and my rights of passage to become kumu has been spiritual as well as physical. However the spiritual part remains private. What I can share is that hula has taught me about God and God has taught me about hula. I have learned to view the Universe as community, the Earth as home, and all life forms as family. I've learned to be an instrument of God's teachings and do so through ancestral tradition. Most importantly, I have received God's and my kumu's blessings.

Just as God guided my training, God has guided my teaching. I believe the creation of Na Mamoali'i O Ka'uiki was inspired by God. It's name was given as a gift on my birthday, in a dream. When I awoke I was inspired to write it in the form of a mele. In its purest form the mele and dream was a call to return to my ancestral homeland and emerge anew. A few years later I was offered a teaching position at Hana School. Eventually Na Mamoali'i O Ka'uiki was born. Our name has many levels of meaning and interpretation. These are shared when one is prepared to receive it; for understanding comes through experience.

From its beginning, other dreams, visions, mele, and scriptures have followed and have guided our direction. The halau continues to evolve as a learning center for those who wish to build a sound foundation on God and ancestral tradition.

In today's society, success is often viewed by the rewards or recognition one receives. My rewards have always been the love of children. Our success comes when the students live by traditions and values taught to them and when they are true to God, themselves and each other. If my students and their families continue to remember the blessings of life, give thanks for these blessings, and renew the heart; then my life will have been well spent.

The halau and its 'ohana has enjoyed 15 blessed years. There were high and low times and none are judged as good or bad, but as natural. For the past 10 years I've commuted weekly, and do so out of love. I am often asked if I will stop. My answer remains the same; "It is God's will whether I continue or not. God will always provide; right now it is through me. I remain thankful."

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify Father which is heaven." (Matthew 5:16)