

hawaiian ✓

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Currently a dance teacher at the 'Iolani School, Ed Collier has been teaching hula for over thirty years and is the kumu hula of the "Halau O Na Pua Kukui" located on the Sand Island Access Road in Kalihi.

When I first started to teach hula, my halau was known as the "Ed Collier's Dancers." At that time we wanted to use the word, halau, in our name. In the late '60's and early '70's, I was dancing with Kawai Cockett and the Lei Kukui Dancers. I wanted to keep the association with the Lei Kukui Dancers. One day the name "Halau O Na Pua Kukui" came to me. I asked Kawai Cockett if it was alright to use this name. I used the word, "pua", instead of "lei" because as the pua, we're still growing and learning about hula. Also the kukui is symbolic and the Hawaiians used it for their food, medicinal uses, their dyes, and mainly for their light. I felt this was a nice name and it gave me a good feeling to be a kukui and to be a Lei Kukui Dancer.

I first learned hula when I was about twenty years old. Instead of being a dancer first, then studying to become a teacher, it was the complete opposite with me. I was a teacher first. While involved with the St. John's Church in Kalihi, I got kids who didn't have anything to do and who had studied under different hula teachers to share with all of us. Because these kids loved to perform, we did shows at hospitals, old folks homes and service clubs.

My first students were also my teachers. They showed me the basic steps. I just had a love for the hula. Although I didn't know how to dance, I was able to choreograph by watching my kids. But I wanted to learn ancient hula. I wasn't trained formally and I didn't really understand it. I used to watch somebody dance and copy it, thinking it was alright. I later found out what I was doing was wrong.

My first and only teacher was Henry Pa. He was teaching at the Magic Hula Studio located on Kalakaua Avenue. He and Aunty Rose Joshua shared the studio. I stayed with him for about four years. Uncle Henry Pa set me straight. He told me that hula is your own creativity. You

have to create your own dance. You cannot use somebody else's hula.

Uncle Henry taught me kahiko, 'auana and how to choreograph. He would sit with me and teach me the pa'i first. He would show me the drum beats and then we would go over the words. I remember getting scoldings from him when I didn't remember the words the following week because I had not done my homework. After that I made it a point that whenever he taught me the dance or pa'i, I made sure that when I came back the following week, I knew my dance or pa'i. I wanted to let this man know that I appreciated what he was doing for me. He told me to teach my students what I was learning from him. As I taught my students, it enabled me to remember the dances.

Uncle Henry had a fantastic mind. The man was way ahead of his time. He was amazing. He once presented a hula ballet that was danced to all Hawaiian music with Hawaiian movements. The only thing different was that the dancers were dressed like ballet dancers.

I wish I had more time with Uncle Henry Pa. He spoke the Hawaiian language fluently. He was able to translate and tell me what the song was actually about. He made me write and gave me handouts, the Western way of teaching hula. At times he would test me just to see if I was able to pick up from listening to him.

Today, I teach hula the way I was taught. I also choreograph my own. It depends on what I'm going to use the hula for. For a show, I would rechoreograph the dance. If it's for a recital, then we do it the way it should be. I'll tell my students that this is how this dance was taught to me, so now, I'm teaching it to you. And then there are times I'll tell them, "This is my creation." I teach them "Kawika" in its very basic form because "Kawika" is a chant that starts everybody off who wants to study kahiko. This is traditional. And after a while I'll come back and I'll say, "You know how to do the traditional form, now I'll teach "Kawika" to you in my form. This is not traditional, this is my creation."

After teaching for thirty years, my biggest joy is that I'm now teaching the children of my first students. I enjoy giving people the pleasure of knowing a little of their Hawai'i through hula. I have learned a lot and am still learning. I want my students to learn through hula too.

The advice I give to most young kumu hula is that the road is tough. When you fall down, you cannot stay down. If you stay down, that's where you're going to remain. You've got to pick yourself right back up and keep going.

I used to feel bad because I didn't 'uniki. But other kumu and even some of our masters did not go through that old style of 'uniki. I think that the desire to teach and share is the only thing that is important. People ask me why I don't 'uniki anybody. I'm just waiting. Each kumu who is getting on in age will know eventually who they will select to carry on their work or select to carry on their halau. When the time is right I will know who that person is. I'm hoping it's my daughter but it could be somebody else too.

I define hula kahiko as the past. Twenty years from now, we're going to be the past and chants written about things happening today will be kahiko. The true form of kahiko is the traditional works and the way the dances were passed on to you from your kumu. There are some changes from what I remembered the kahiko to be when I first danced. I believe everything has to have a change to survive. Hula is no different. I enjoy the work of the young kumu hula. I see a lot of innovations in the hula and I tell myself, "that's different." Change is alright if it inspires the young people to continue to hula.

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