

Chanting for the Life of the People

Not all rainbows are in the sky, but in the heart

By **Kat Avila, Contributing Writer** | Published on LatinoLA: May 13, 2012



John Keola Lake.

Dedicated to John Keola Lake (died May 15, 2008)

I dug up a children's story I had written from another life I had in Hawaii after I fled graduate school. I went from studying Chicano theatre to participating in theatre at the **University of Hawaii, Manoa**, which included a bilingual English-Hawaiian community production. As part of the original play, I learned how to chant in Hawaiian and that's how I met

John was a master chanter, and after the production was over I joined his halau hula to learn more about chanting. It seemed a little awkward at first since I wasn't an indigenous Hawaiian, but John made me feel right at home and he was even fluent in Spanish. (He taught not only the Hawaiian language but Spanish as well, having Master degrees in both Education and Linguistics / Spanish.)

I took to chanting like a duck takes to water. It's a wonderful medium to convey history and culture and life. But it wasn't my history, my culture. Eventually I left the halau, came back to California, and gradually forgot the Hawaiian chants I had learned.

But I have my story about a Hawaiian girl Pua who learns how to chant from her Tutu Malia (Grandma Malia). "For the life of the people and to the nation of chiefs," as Kamehameha III once said. As her tutu tells her, it's important to know where you come from, so you know where you're going...

"Tutu Malia was pointing out a bird, when Pua started chanting. Her chant started out softly, and gradually became as loud and strong as the wind whistling overhead. Pua couldn't stop. It was if all the words she had bottled up inside of her had decided to come out all at once.

"Pua chanted of the blue skies,
 the blessing rains,
 the scent of plumeria,
 the crying of peacocks,
 the Battle of the Pali,
 the sunset from Pokai Bay,
 and the love of her kumu (teacher),
 the grandmother who had taught her how
 to speak from her heart.

"Pua couldn't stop chanting. She chanted all through the night. When Pua finally stopped, the sun was just coming over the hills. It was Sunday, a day of rest for everyone. She had finished chanting her world."

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