



# Talk Story



Executive Director Naomi "Sissy" Lake-Farm

**W**e recently sat down with Sissy to learn about the direction and initiatives the museum has taken during this time of forced closure. At the same time, we were able to get better acquainted with the woman also known as Kahakuhaupiokamakani (Sissy's Hawaiian name) which translates as the lady of the cold piercing wind. Her inoa, she told us, came to her father in a dream that took place at 'Iao Valley.

Although born and raised on O'ahu, Sissy spent her summers and vacations in Wailuku a few blocks from Hale Hō'ike'ike where her father, grandparents and their ancestors lived dating back to the time of Kahekili.

"This land where the museum sits, 'Iao Valley and the four waters are in my DNA," Sissy declares. And one has only to witness Sissy dancing hula or instructing her students on the museum grounds and the hairs stand up. You feel that piercing wind from 'Iao and imagine her kupuna there watching and guiding her.

She tells us as much, saying that each day

she asks herself what would her kupuna do? She feels her parents, her grandparents and all her teachers have shown her a special path and that her work at the museum and in her Hālau (Nā Hanona Kūlike 'O Pi'ilani) is not just a job, it is her kuleana to both live and pass on those Hawaiian cultural values and practices bequeathed to her.

Sissy is gifted with a natural passion to educate and to ignite the fire to learn in others. This is also in her DNA as both her parents were teachers. Her late father Kumu John Lake was renowned locally, nationally and internationally for his work as a Hawaiian educator. He was a master kumu in the arts and traditions of hula, chanting and a perpetuator of 'ōlelo Hawai'i.

Sissy said she knew at a very early age she wanted to dance hula and by age 5 she was studying with her father's kumu and her very own Aunty, Mai'ki Aiu Lake, an influential kumu hula who many considered the most important hula teacher of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In her own hālau as kumu hula, Sissy extends the same "e komo mai" she offers at the museum. It is this inclusivity that best describes Sissy and has made her such a galvanizing force in this community. It has helped make the museum an important gathering place on Maui and even now, as the doors are closed, volunteers and staff buoyed by her enthusiasm and commitment continue to work (mostly on Zoom) to find innovative ways of achieving the museum's mandate: Collect, preserve, study, interpret and share the history and heritage of Maui.

Recently the neighboring Yokouchi estate was purchased by Imua Family Services, Maui's early childhood development agency. Their plan is to create a community space for outdoor nature-based learning for Island keiki.

Sissy sees this as a wonderful opportunity to partner with Imua as stewards of the land for the purpose of education. In the time of Kamehameha III this land was given to the missionaries for those "who were seeking knowledge." The ali'i knew the importance of education, saying "knowledge is fundamental to living as a chief."

You feel the winds of 'Iao again as Sissy shares her vision of Hale Hō'ike'ike and Imua working together. "Who better to share our history and heritage with than the keiki of today – they are our future generations. "

Covid-19 has been a challenge for many of us but Sissy has a forward thinking and positive message: First, look for the silver linings: for her personally she has been able to spend more time with her 'ohana both at home and at the museum. From this quality time at the museum new initiatives and innovative projects are underway to continue the work she, staff, volunteers and board members passionately believe in.

Her final message is an invitation. If you have a desire to learn, to pass on knowledge or just to be part of our 'ohana at Hale Hō'ike'ike now more than ever we need community and kōkua. Contact us through our website: [mauimuseum.org](http://mauimuseum.org) to see how you can participate.



## From the Archives



**H**awaiian society under the 'ai kapu system was stratified according to rank. An individual's rank was not determined by wealth or gender, but by genealogy. One important symbol of rank for the highest ali'i, both men and women, was the lei niho palaoa, a whale tooth pendant. The curved hook pendant, symbolizing the tongue of Kū, one of the four great gods in the Hawaiian pantheon, is strung on thousands of finely braided strands of hair from the wearer's family and ancestors. This is one of four in our collection.