OVERCOMING ANEURYSM. *Maile Yamanaka sings and plays the ukulele while teaching hula at the Shipman House Bed & Breakfast in Hilo, Hawai'i. Yamanaka, 65, studied under the late* kumu hula *Margaret Maiki Souza Aiu Lake. She's taught hula all around the Big Island. She's taught programs on Oahu, including one at Halawa Correctional Facility. (Hollyn Johnson/*Hawai'i Tribune-Herald *via AP)*

A love of hula: Kumu overcomes aneurysm to continue teaching

By Ivy Ashe
Hawai'i Tribune-Herald

HILO, Hawai'i (AP) — Late afternoon light was fading to pastel when the class began. The wide front porch of the Shipman House Bed & Breakfast looks out over a green canopy of trees, with Hilo Bay barely visible through the foliage.

"So. Let's do hula," Maile Yamanaka said. She stood braced by a walker, swaying back and forth as she began to chant in a powerful, sonorous voice that carried far beyond the porch.

Yamanaka, 65, was trained by the late Margaret Maiki Souza Aiu Lake (Aunty Maiki) alongside *kumu* such as Robert Cazimero. She's taught hula all around the Big Island. She's taught programs on Oahu, including one at Halawa Correctional Facility.

"It was an experience, let me tell you," Yamanaka said. "I was really impressed with the guys."

For more than 10 years, she's also been kumu hula at the Shipman House. But for the past several classes, one thing has been different.

Yamanaka walked the small group — just three people — through a couple of turns, then began to settle herself onto a blue cushion, a simple task made more difficult by the immobile prosthetic she wore on her right leg.

"It's not flexible," Yamanaka said as she removed the prosthetic entirely, putting it to the side and sitting cross-legged. She picked up an *ipu heke* and began to sing again.

Last New Year's Eve, Yamanaka went to the hospital with a burst aortic aneurysm and was misdiagnosed with sciatica. She remembers being told to see her doctor the next day.

But Yamanaka went back to the hospital, where the severity of the matter was at last recognized. She was flown to Honolulu, where she stayed until Labor Day.

"Just last month, the surgeon says life expectancy for a burst aortic aneurysm: six hours," she said. "And I didn't make it to Honolulu for 16 hours." She folded her hands in front of her.

"I am blessed," Yamanaka said. "I am lucky, I am most fortunate." Her right leg had to be amputated just above the ankle. There was no circulation to the area, she said; instead, there was gangrene, and maggots.

An Air Force veteran, Yamanaka qualifies for certain health benefits with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, but her prosthesis is, she says, a "preliminary, temporary foot."

Even with the preliminary foot, which is shorter than a real foot but still capable of bearing weight, she returned to Shipman to teach hula. There's no fee for classes, just donations dropped into a woven *lauhala* basket. It was for love of hula that Yamanaka came back.

It is, she often tells Shipman House owner Barbara Anderson, the highlight of the week. Yamanaka lives at HOPE Services Hilo and doesn't drive anymore, not with her temporary foot.

Ideally, she said, she'd like a "hula foot."

"I cannot dance," Yamanaka said. But, she added, "I'm really good at the tell-story stuff, the talk-story stuff, so I compensate." That harkens back to her early days when she returned to hula as a young woman. She started as a child, but when her teacher moved away, there were no more classes.

"Hula was my enjoyment," she said. "I didn't have hula (again) until college."

Yamanaka attended Grinnell College in Iowa for two years.

"I had to learn how to wear shoes," she said.

During a fundraiser put on by the Hawai'i Club, she was asked to perform hula, but couldn't remember *auana* or *hapa haole*. All she could remember were the chants.

She took that as a sign that she should go back to Hawai'i and begin her hula education again. Yamanaka looked for someone to teach her *kahiko*, and eventually was connected with Aunty Maiki.

"I was 19, 20, yeah?" Yamanaka said. "And all the ladies were 50-plus; I was the youngest of them all. I got chairs to the tutus, food to the tutus, made all their lei, made all their costumes. Aunty Maiki called it Gracious Ladies."

"They knew all their words, all the songs, they can write the songs for all the musicians, but the thing is, yeah, these ladies couldn't dance because they were not flexible," Yamanaka said. "The most important thing is talk story, what comes from your experience. that's how I learned hula. Gracious Lady style, tutu style."

When Aunty Maiki began to teach the next generation of kumu hula, kahiko classes were $100 per month. Yamanaka knew she had to take the class, and worked three jobs to afford the lessons.

The hula community was like family, she said.

Yamanaka remembered competitions and performances, and working to master the chants so she wouldn't be asked to leave the classes she loved.

When she started teaching, it was "casual this and casual that," she said.

Anderson, W.H. Shipman's great-granddaughter, owns the B&B with her husband, Gary, and began offering hula classes at the historic house in the late 1990s. Her great-grandmother, Mary Elizabeth

Continued on page 13

The power of tea

By Ivy Ashe
Hawai'i Tribune-Herald

HILO, Hawai'i (AP) — On the second-story porch of his Papaikou home, Mike Longo poured steaming tea from a small glass pitcher into a set of cylindrical porcelain cups painted pale yellow.

"You don't want to waste a good oolong," Longo said, passing the cups — called aroma cups — around the table. Each was capped with what looked like a miniature bowl flared like a bell: a tasting cup. All at the table held their aroma-and-tasting-cup combination between their thumb and middle finger, and flipped it upside down with a wrist flick.

It was the third time the oolong had been poured out, and after everyone carefully separated their two cups so the liquid spilled into the tasting portion, Rob Nunally took note of the scents lingering in the aroma cup. It was stronger than the previous two pours, he said. Cinnamon tones, with a little peppermint. A Christmas tea.

People lifted their tasting cups, and sipped the perfectly-brewed oolong, which tasted not like spice but flowers.

Tea, the second-most popular beverage in the world after water, is a showcase for the possibility contained in the shiny, serrated leaves of *Camellia sinensis*, part of the evergreen tree family. White tea, black tea, green tea, oolong tea: it all comes from the same source.

This is one of the first things Longo and Nunally point out to guests who visit their 1.5-acre certified organic tea farm, Onomea Tea Company, and one they say consistently blows visitors away.

"When people say tea, at least in the U.S., they have kind of a generic understanding of it ... something that's brewed with hot water," Nunally said. "But really, tea should be just from *Camellia sinensis*, not herbal (plants) like chamomile, mint."

And even after 12 years of farming, of experimenting with *Camellia sinensis* seedlings and cuttings from around the world, trying to find the plants that will yield a smooth drink both flavorful and aromatic, Longo and Nunally themselves are still impressed by the power of the tea plant.

They began growing in 2003, four years after buying a stunning expanse of former sugarcane land above Onomea Bay. The original property deed hangs in their living room, beneath a framed black-and-white photo of the old sugar flume passing high over the land.

At first, the plan was to grow daylilies, building on Longo's success as a daylily hybridizer on the mainland. They brought 800 different varieties to Hawai'i upon returning to the Big Island.

The elevation did not agree with the flowers.

"Ninety-nine percent of them didn't bloom, or bloomed very sporadically," Longo said.

But they wanted to grow something. The land was zoned for agriculture, and, being along the Hamakua coast, had an established heritage the men wanted to promote. Longo, whose father was a nursery man, had a background in organic gardening. Nearly all of the pieces were there.

Neither knew anything about tea — Nunally used to work in technology sales and Longo is a semi-retired chiropractor — other than that they liked to drink it. But one day while drinking Earl Grey, Nunally became curious about what tea plants actually look like. A Google search turned up *Camellia sinensis*, and the intriguing fact that it was a subtropical plant.

The same week, Longo and Nunally heard that United States Department of Agriculture scientist Francis Zee, who was

AWARD-WINNING TEA. *Rob Nunally holds a tea leaf at the Onomea Tea Company farm in Papaikou, Hawai'i. Tea, the second-most popular beverage in the world after water, is a showcase for the possibility contained in the shiny, serrated leaves of* Camellia sinensis*, part of the evergreen tree family. White tea, black tea, green tea, oolong tea: it all comes from the same source. (Hollyn Johnson/*Hawai'i Tribune-Herald *via AP)*

leading an effort to diversify Hawai'i's agricultural economy, would soon give cuttings and seeds to anyone who wanted to try growing tea.

"So, OK, this is a sign," Longo said. "And we discovered they grew very well here."

Attempts were made to develop Hawai'i tea beginning in the late 1800s, but those focused on creating a commodity market that ultimately could not compete against the global tea powerhouses of China, Japan, and India.

"Not until the interest in specialty tea came about did it make sense to be able to produce tea in Hawai'i," Nunally said. "You really have to specialize. Hawai'i should have a reputation of high-quality clean agricultural products."

With help from Zee and Kang Fang, a Taiwanese tea man who visited the farm several times and helped Longo and Nunally get the right processing equipment, Onomea Tea Company was on its way.

Fang's visits, as well as a trip made to Taiwan in 2009, were instrumental in solidifying the tea routine, from picking to processing to packaging.

The middle step is crucial. It's there that *Camellia sinensis* becomes green, black, or oolong depending on whether it's cooked, left to wither longer, or tossed so that the leaves bruise. Nunally and Longo prepare almost all of their tea orthodox style, meaning the whole, unbroken leaves are used.

"We could do it, but (Fang) helped us fine-tune our process," Longo said. Still, the first two years came with a steep learning curve because of the variability inherent to tea plants.

"Tea grows differently in every terroir," Nunally said.

Like wine, tea is heavily influenced by regional characteristics. Part of Hawai'i's terroir comes from the volcanoes — tea loves to grow in acidic soils.

"There's a similarity in many of the teas grown here," Longo said. "The black teas have a certain similarity no matter where they're grown, volcano or here. There is a Hawai'i note, and that's what we're trying to establish with all the tea growers here."

In November, during the first-ever Teas of the United States (TOTUS) tasting competition, the Onomea-grown entries picked up awards in six of the nine categories they entered, including a first-place green tea.

The competition, organized by volcano tea grower Eva Lee, featured blind tastings and was intended as a showcase of the developing market for American-grown tea. TOTUS entrants came from ten states.

Hawai'i earned the most awards.

"Hawai'i is a great place for tea," Longo said. "We'd like to see a lot more small farms, not conglomerates. Hawai'i can be a viable place for this."

Continued on page 13