

Lucy Lee

Aunty Lucy Lee opened her halau in 1958 and taught hula and other Polynesian dances until she retired in 1978. She is currently employed by the Hula Supply Center as their costuming consultant.

In a family of seven daughters, my mother said one of us had to learn hula. Nobody wanted to go so my mother said I was the one. I was about seven years old and I remember going to Tutu Makaena in Kapahulu. Her daughter helped to teach because Tutu Makaena's vision was not one hundred percent perfect. Regardless of her handicap, she knew exactly what we were doing. I only had kahiko lessons with her because my dad said that I could not learn hapa haole numbers until I was fourteen. I had many years with her and I remember graduating in the old St. Mark's Building on Kapahulu Avenue.

I went on to Ruby Ahakuelo. A lot of people never heard of her but she was excellent. I danced with her for years. With Aunty Ruby, it was important to be on time for the classes and she made sure that we knew what we were doing. When she felt that you were eligible, we worked hard at all of our 'uniki numbers. I remember graduating several times in the old Civic Auditorium.

I was in my middle 30's when I went to Leilani Alama and I remained with her for four years. We didn't learn much kahiko because she was more into 'auana. She was well-known for her implement numbers. After two years with her, I became her assistant. I taught the numbers that I had learned from her to the class assigned to me. I was inspired by Aunty Lei because she only taught with her 'ukulele and I decided when I opened my business that I would only teach with the 'ukulele.

I got involved with Uncle Henry Pa because he was the hula teacher for the Kamehameha Civic Club and he was also hired by Tavana to be the director of the Hawaiian section. I danced for him at my civic club and was a musician for Tavana's shows for a year.

Uncle Henry Pa had a styling where his dancing was a little more sophisticated and a little naughty with the eyes. His motions were really peppy motions and he had a few of his own fancy little steps. We enjoyed him because he played his 'ukulele and his singing was excellent.

One reason why I became a teacher is because Aunty Lei inspired me. The other reason is that some of the parents encouraged me to teach because they loved what I did.

I did not teach hula kahiko because I felt that there were many good kahiko teachers like Aunty Kau'i Zuttermeister, Aunty Ma'iki Aiu, Aunty Sally Wood and the Kaleiki Sisters. They were all super so I concentrated on New Zealand dancing, Tahitian dancing and my 'auana.

I think I was popular in those days because not too many teachers took babies. I took students from three years and up to high school. My intention was to teach all the little kiddies while they were young. Although I did not teach adults at my studio, I was the teacher for the tourists when the Ilikai Hotel opened in 1963 or 64 and I also taught at the East-West Center.

I felt that I needed to become familiar with the Hawaiian songs and to know the meanings. Aunty Alice Keawekane Garner's mother was my musician and really helped me with the meanings. She would explain the whole song to me. Another person that was very instrumental in telling me what the songs were all about was Aunty Genoa Keawe.

Aunty Genoa was the one who hustled business for me. While singing in a Kaimuki restaurant, she would call me to come up. She would say to the audience, "I want you people to know that there is a young teacher in here and she is starting to teach. I have to tell you that she is very good so that's why I had her come with her students and show her teaching ability. She's going to be our dancer for the night."

After I retired in 1978, I got involved with Tavana's Polynesia Spectacular as his costume designer and choreographer for the Hawaiian section of the show. I also gave advice about choreography and costuming to anybody who needed help. Ed Kenney, Danny Kaleikini,

Kalo and others would call for suggestions and I would give it to them. After fifteen years with the Tavana Show, Mike Kop asked me to come and do the costuming for the Hula Supply Center and I've been here ever since.

When I learned hula, I was always told whatever your teacher teaches you is correct regardless of what the next student tells you. There are big changes because there are a lot of steps and you cannot condemn the teacher because that's her thought, her mana'o and that's what makes her happy.

My advice to the new kumu hula is learn your language and get a good adviser so you have one person to go to. There are many people who are willing to help and share their knowledge. Be positive in what you are teaching.

Hula has brought to me the greatest friends that I adore and worship today. It makes me feel so good because they recognize what I did for them and they respect and love me.

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