

Winona Beamer

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The hula for me was a family obligation. I'm not sure if I really ^{liked} like it when I began. My earliest recollection of dancing was at Volcano. ^{the} It was cold and there was gravel on the ground and I was very upset with my grandmother for making me dance. ^{on the Big Island.}

My first kumu were my great-grandmother, Isabella Desha, and my grandmother, Helen Desha Beamer, whom we called Sweetheart Grandma. She was a great inspiration to me. She was always ^{trying} to train us to have the right feeling within ourselves so that we could experience the calmness that was all around us. When we walked into a room we had to walk as if our feet weren't touching the mat. If she heard your feet scuffling the mat you would have to go out and come in again. Sometimes she would train us outside and the fragrance of the leaves and the mangoes would be all around.

There was a hallway in the house where my grandfather had collected war implements from all over the world and as a little girl it would frighten me to go through that hall and into the room where we danced. My grandmother would give each of us a ti leaf and talk about faith and hope and love. She would tell us the chants of Laka and she would tell them as if ^{Laka was} we were right there. While she talked she would tell us to feel the shape and the texture of the leaves and to put them up to our faces and feel their smoothness. She would talk of the mist over the mountains being the spirit of Laka and so everything that we do and say should be pleasing. So of course we would try our very best since we had a spirit watching over us.

In 1927 my mother opened a studio on the second floor of the old Kodak Building in Waikiki and in 1934 I began to teach for her. ~~I think I was a very sullen girl at the time because the hulas that were being taught were all hapa-haole and I had no feeling for them.~~ I remember teaching Mary Pickford a hapa-haole number "To You Sweetheart Aloha" and holding her hands like my grandmother used to do. Her hands were so small and delicate almost as if there were no bones in them.

When I came to ^{the} Kamehameha Schools, I began working with underprivileged Hawaiian children at ^{the} Kakaako Mission School ~~(who needed a bath and suffered from open sores on their bodies)~~. I stayed with the program for four years because I just loved working with the children. They were more enthralled with my storytelling than anything else. They would be restless and so I would calm them down with a story. Their eyes would get big and it struck me that this was a way to convey the Hawaiian Culture to them in a non-aggressive, natural way. Maybe I could have made more money in other pursuits but I never considered anything else but teaching. Each individual student is so precious and so important. It's that feeling I get when there's a little bit of response in the eyes, when you strike a little bit of interest in them. I think the biggest key to teaching is letting them know you care about them. After that a class session becomes an affair of the family.

The traditional kahiko to my understanding is the literature handed down by each generation from our forefathers. The kumu of today are trying their best but they are creating a new literature, a contemporary kahiko. I'd like to see standardization arise in the next ten years. We don't need compartmentalization but some kind of control that would encourage quality. We need a clearinghouse where ideas and problems could be talked out and different degrees of competency established for hula teachers and students.

Being Hawaiian at ^{the} Kamehameha Schools in the 1940's was a hardship. It took us such a long time to gain a sense of our Hawaiianess. The great sadness of my life was trying to tell and teach people about the worthiness of the Hawaiian Culture. It was so hard for people to believe. In 1949 almost out of desperation we decided to showcase the Culture through lectures and performances at colleges and universities. We went on a fourteen-week ^{month} tour of the Mainland and Mexico, and ended up in New York ^{City}. We were trying to take the Culture out of the sideshows and circuses and bring it to a level of dignity because you couldn't even give it away in Hawaii.

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Winona Beamer

~~Nona~~

Nona Beamer was born in Honolulu, Oahu and is the great granddaughter of Isabella Desha of Hilo and the mother of Keola and Kapono Beamer.

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Nona Beamer

I was born into the hula. Great-grandmother, grandmother, mother. It was a family obligation. I'm not sure if I really liked it when I began or not. Because I have an early recollection of dancing at the Volcano. It was cold. There was gravel on the ground. I was very upset with my grandmother for making me dance. But they did put me in the classes. I'm not sure if I was all that happy. ~~because I didn't~~ I think I did it because I loved my family. My mother asked me to and I did it but I don't think I was always smiling.

My first kumu were Isabella Desha, my great-grandmother, and my grandmother, Helen Desha Beamer. My mother, Louise, married into the family so we were in the same classes. I have pictures showing the older aunts in the back row, the younger aunts in the middle row, and the kids in the front row. My grandmother would be sitting there, usually with a scowl on her face. She didn't speak much English. She really wasn't too happy about conversing in English. She much preferred conversing in Hawaiian. After awhile we understood even a raised eyebrow. She was very eloquent in her signs. My earliest recollections of my training center around the rituals. I remember feelings more than I remember dance routines. The house in Hilo is right on the banks of the Wailuku River. Sweetheart Grandma always had stalks of bamboo in the corners of the house, and there was a nice kind of a breeze, a nice flow of air always through the house. I always mesmerized by the feeling of this breeze, how soothing it was. And of course right next door was the Wailuku River and it is not a quiet river. It was always very soothing to me to hear the sounds of the breezes, the river, and the rustling of the bamboo

Sweetheart Grandma was a great inspiration because she was always telling us of the right mood, the right feeling, even the sound of our feet on the lauhala mat. She was training us to have the right feeling within ourselves so that we could experience the calmness that was all around us. When we walked into the room we had to walk as if our feet weren't touching the mat. If she heard your feet scuffling the mat you would have to go out and come in again. Sometimes we would go outside and practice and the smells of the leaves and mangoes would be all around.

There was a hallway where my grandfather had collected war implements from all over the world. I would be so glad to get through that a hallway and into the room where we danced. My grandmother would give us ti leaves and talk about faith, and hope, and love. While she talked she would tell us to feel the shape and the texture of the leaves, and to put them up to our faces and feel their smoothness. Basically her gift to us was a love for nature. My grandmother was always ~~pulling my~~ gently pulling my fingers and my hands, ~~and in my mind~~ My Aunt Harriet had beautiful hands so in my mind I was always thinking that grandma was going to make my hands beautiful like Auntie Harriet's hands.

My grandmother would tell of us the chants of Laka and she would tell them as if we were right there. She would talk of the mist over the mountains being the spirit of Laka and so everything that we do and say should be pleasing. So of course we would try our very best since we had a spirit watching us. My grandmother was a very happy and sensitive person. She did a lot of community work so we had to dance a lot of hula auwana, but that ~~has~~ never pleased me as much as the ceremonies and rituals.

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Nona Beamer

The kahiko always intrigued me. Here was the yellow cloth wrapped around the bowl for Laka and they brought in this little laulau and I thought to myself this was church? We were in Haili church at the time and here was my grandmother putting on a pagan ritual. W never questioned her. When I was about ten I began to ask her who were the people, where were the places she was ~~talking~~ talking about, was the goddess Laka real, and where could I get these chants? It confused me because I loved the Lorad Jesus Christ and here I was in terested in other gods. My grandmother told me there are all God's angels and they were put here to help us live a happier life here on earth. So that satisfied me at ten years old. S;e was on one level a very Christian woman who taught Sunday school and choir at Haili church.

My first classes were held in 1934. My mother had opened a studio in 1927 in Waikiki on the second floor of the Kodak Building. I think I was a very sullen girl at that time because the hulas that were being taught were all hapa-haole and I had no feeling for them.

One summer my mother was ill and my sister and I came to Honolulu to -help her teach. Mary Pickford was here on her honeymoon and so she came to the studio to learn a hapa-haole number--I think it was "To You Sweetheart." This sweet little haole lady came up the stairs and I remember holding her two hands, my grandmother used to do and they wer so small like there were no bones in them. ~~Wke~~ I enjoyed teaching her.

Wher I came here to Kamehameha there was a notice on the bulletin board asking for volunteers at the Kakaako Mission School. About three or four of us went down to help teach the Hawaiian children. It was t totally different experience for me because here were underprivilaged children who needed a bath and who had open sores on their bodies. And I thought if this is part of teaching and I guess this is what I have to learn. So they gave us big washtubs and great big bars of smelly brown soap. The children climbed into the tubs and we began to wash them. I thought the children can't see me crying because I'm there teacher so I began to sing the Kakui song to keep myself composed. And pretty soon all the children began to line ~~me~~ up in front of my tub which made me realoze I better stop singing.

I stayed with that program for four years because I just loved working withthe children. They were more enthralled with the story telling than anything else.

They would be restless and so I would calm them down with a story. They would calm down and there eyes would get big and it struck me this is the way I can convey the Hawaiian culture to them in a non-aggressive, natural way. What stirs the heart and mind of the student is what will turn on the student to all knowledge. If you cannot find a way into their hearts, they are just going to sit there.

At Kamehameha there was no Hawaiina Club, or chanting classes so I began those programs and fortunately there was a trustee who believed in the Hawaiian Cultuere. Frank Midkiff. He gave me a great amount of encouragement.

I had come back on the staff in '49 because there really was no Hawaiian program. Maybe I could have made a lot more money in other prusuits but I never considered anything else but teaching. There was nothing I considered a sacrifice, it was just the way things fell into place.

Each individual student is so precious and so important. Its that feeling I get when there's a little bit of response in the eyes, in the face of the student when you strike a little bit of interest in them. I follow the careers of my students and I feel so proud to know I helped to form a little bit of their beliefs. I think the biggest key to teaching people is to let them know you care about them. A class session becomes an affair of the family after that.

B Being a Hawaiian at Kamehameh Schools was a hardship because it took us such a long time to gain a sense of our Hawaiianess. The great sadness of my life was trying to tell and teach people about the worthiness of the Hawaiian culture. It was so hard for people to believe. In '49 I felt maybe what needed to be done was to take the Hawaiian cultue to college and universities, places of higher learning and showcase it through lectures and performances.

You couldn't give it away in Hawaii so we went on a 14 week tour through Mexico and the United States. We were trying to create a demand for it on a level of higher learning. We ended in New York. We were trying to take the Hawaiian culture out of the sideshows and the circuses and bring it to a concert level, a level of some dignity. At that time people didn't know we had a culture. In order to ~~prove~~ improve the pride of the culture, we had to educate people to realize that it was something commendable. When I returned in '49 I felt the next step was to expose the school teacher here to the culture. I went to the DPI and organized the first Hawaiiana workshop for the teachers. That was the foot in the door to educating the community.

The modern kahiko is more innovative than the traditional kahiko. The traditional kahiko to my understanding is the traditional literature handed down by each generation. The modern kumus of today are creating a new literature. I think kahiko should be left alone as the traditional hula.

The greatest change has been the openness. ~~people~~ People would not communicate about the hula before. A lady slammed the door in my face at Bishop Museum when I was 12. This was supposed to be a resource for the Hawaiian people? Perhaps during that time the community was not enlightened and resources were afraid of being scoffed or laughed at, or of chants being used for commercial purposes.

Because my family are Big Island people I tend to remember the Pele chants because they were the first powerful ones I remember being taught. To this day I still get thrilled when I hear the great pig chants. The diversity of the animal chants thrilled me.

I'd like to see standardization arise in the next ten years. Not so much compartmentalization but some type of control that would encourage quality. I would like to see some kind of clearinghouse established where ideas and problems could be talked out. I'd like to see different degrees of competency established for a hula student and teacher. This is not to make it commensurate with a B.A. degree but something to make the position a little more credible.

I think the young kumu of today have to keep their principles intact, they have to try not to be swayed by money, and they have to keep the hula from being taken lightly and desecrated. I think they are trying their best in all of this.