

<sup>Kahiko</sup>  
THELMA KAHIKO CUMMINGS

I started hula when I was a little girl. There were fifteen of us in the family and we all learned from our mother, even the boys. In those days, there was not much entertainment except for fundraisers and church socials that featured hula. My family was always involved with these shows and that's how I began to dance.

My mother, Ida Pakulani Long, was the greatest influence in my hula. She passed her love and knowledge of the hula to myself and others in our family. When my mother taught us the hula, there was very little verbal instruction. There was more actual demonstration, and we learned by copying her motions. The puili was a very important implement in my mother's halau. It was used to help us hear the proper timing for the hulas we were learning. It was also used quite often to correct improper hand and feet motions.

I was about twelve when <sup>Alice</sup>~~Alice Mahi~~ began to teach us through the church. From Alice I learned auwana and unlike my mother, she explained a lot of what was going on in the dance. My mother had trained us in kahiko and her knowledge and range of style seemed narrower. I stayed with Alice until I was seventeen and then there was a lull in my training. I went back to the hula only after my sister, Mae, began to make frequent trips back to Maui. She taught us the dances she had learned in Honolulu while working with Lena Guerrero.

I began to teach at the age of seventeen because people needed someone to teach dancers for concerts. I did not uniki but for a lack of a teacher, I was asked to help. I kept helping one group after another and I found that I liked it because it was a way of expressing myself. I like to teach little children because you can get your point across faster than with adults. You can be stern or cross with them and they forget about it.

I feel that as long as the chant is composed in the kahiko style, the entire hula should be considered kahiko. But today, they have taken ancient hula which has been danced a certain way for generations and have made it into a harder, more aggressive dance because that's what the modern audiences wants. I'm not sure if that is good or bad for the hula.

I'm in awe when I see the different kind of steps and the tempo of today. It's exciting and I enjoy it but when I was being taught there were eight steps to the ancient hula. Today there seems to be a million. If things keep changing, our children will not understand the hula and our culture. Our style of living, our clothing, our traditions are either gone, drastically changed, or deteriorated. Our dance and our music are about the only things we are going to be able to hand onto and perpetuate in our culture.

*Thelma Kahili Cummings*

Thelma Cummings is the daughter of Ida Pakulani Long and the sister of Mae Loebenstein and Leiana Woodside.

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