

Hoakalei Kamaui

As a little girl I saw people dancing and someday I wished I could be a dancer. I did not have a strict training until later on in my years. I danced for the USO during the war but it was still dancing with different people. Someone knowing a few things would share a little with you. It was in 1943 when I came to Honolulu that I really began to be trained in the hula. My first kumu hula was Emma Morio Bishop. Her studio used to be right in the middle of Pensacola Street. As you came up Pensacola to ~~Young~~ King, the street ended, and ~~the studio~~ Pensacola would begin at Young Street again but the studio was right in the middle. That's where my first training began. Coming from a background where I had no regimented training she seemed very strict. She wanted you to learn and really be someone. My classmates and I must have gotten something because we seem to carry on her style even though we're all gone to different instructors. He was a great influence on me because being ~~my~~ first contact with strict she made me realize there was a right way of learning the hula, and she was satisfied with nothing less. ~~As~~ We had to sit on the floor for hours rolling our backs down to the floor and up.

She gave me a desire for learning from the first day. Emma Moring Bishop trained me modern hula. We studied a little kahalao but not that much. Because it was wartime, we graduated a class every six months. Each time we would graduate to a different level. Being a regular student, then getting a certificate, then getting your diploma, until finally you received professional credentials.

My mother and the rest of my family lived in the studio because Aunt Emma had her home in Kaneohe. So we would take care of the studio. That's how I started to teach some of her classes with Emma present although I only had been taking from her for a few years. I stayed with Aunt Emma for three years. I then moved ~~in~~ with ~~my~~ and lived with my aunt, Tolani Luahine who was living in Kakaako on Ilaninai St. ~~Tolani~~ Aunt Tolani was my greatest influence because she was able to make me see the values that are in the dance ^{not just being a dancer.} By then I could also appreciate the dance & love what I was doing. She always said you have to set your goals. Attain the highest that you can and work towards it. She also said your kumus can help but it is the individual who must work to attain their goals.

~~From~~ It was Kawena Pulea that told Tolani that she begin to train someone that was within her family to carry on. So I really appreciate and give credit to Kawena for making Tolani see the need to start training. That's how she started to train me in Kahala. I was trained in the chants to become her hoopaa. The concert in 1947 was the first time that I chanted for her. Still I had to learn the dances as well. Many people think I was just the chanter but I had to learn the chants as well as the dances. She put a tremendous emphasis on fundamentals. She felt once you got your fundamentals you were set. We spent 3 months learning ~~only~~ the fundamentals, ~~with no chants~~. If you don't get a solid foundation, you can't grow and this is what I've learned from Tolani. ~~and~~ With Aunt Emma you learned the dance and the steps that go to the dance. With Tolani it was all fundamentals. She said don't look to how many dances you can learn but how well you can do one. When I learned with Emma Bishop everyone looked forward to the graduations. Receiving the certificate was a great joy for me. With Tolani there was no paper.

It was a continued learning. Today the paper was very important, with Tolani it was what you know and what you could do. Tolani learned and was trained from the old ways but she never said I have to go back to the old ways. She taught it to us, she told us about it, we learned and appreciated it but we have to live in the present. She said you live in the present but respect what was done in the past.

So she ~~would~~ and I would travel through the islands performing at different events and receptions. I never had to make any hard choices because I was always able to work my career and my family together. Even having my children, I would teach until I would have to go to the hospital, I would have them then come back and teach. I remember when my second child was born. We were entertaining at Queen Surf, an old time Hawaiian show that Tolani was in charge of. We went to the hospital and the next week I was back. We just worked it in together. One didn't hold me back from the other.

Tolani would hold classes right in her home in Kalaheo. Then she opened her studio on Queen St. between Kaula and Ward Avenue. There was a printing building downstairs and upstairs she opened her first studio.

Plus she would hold classes outside the studio on Coconut Island and at the Mardes's home. I would help teach in all these places. What gives me joy as a teacher is the feeling of sharing something with someone else. Being able to see a student learn something that you have been trying to pass on is everything. You can look at a student later on and realize you had a little part in their education.

Whenever you use the ipu or the pahu, you are doing traditional. Modern hula is accompanied by music. There's a little more movement in the hands, there's a flow to the movements while the ancient is more regimented. This doesn't mean ^{the} ancient hula is stiff. But the movements are not as constantly flowing as in the modern. I think there should be a limit to creativity in ancient hula. I have learned it in one style. When I go to choreograph a kahiko dance, I choreograph it in the style that I have learned. The same fundamentals and not creating a dance altogether different from the kahiko style I was trained in. The Hawaiians have our basic steps and we shouldn't go and modify our dance with motions and steps altogether foreign.

We should keep it ~~at~~ as it is. I realize that there are many different schools of ~~thought~~ reflecting the hula of different islands but there is a basic set of fundamentals shared by all. Traveling around the Pacific I've seen the different dances and we must keep our dance unique and individual from the others. We have so much at hand and so much to do if we just be Hawaiian & not try to be something else. Every dance is important, every mele is important because you're giving the story of an individual. That's why I don't have a favorite mele. There's no ~~no~~ difference between a children's dance and an adult's dance. Every dance ~~was made to~~ is perfectly suited for a certain level of dance education.

When I was invited by Bill Furiolen to teach "Kamika" to his young students I had to learn it in his style. That's why I try to keep the 3 styles separate & not combine them into my own style. If you can learn the different styles of your ~~huna~~ & not melt them together, you'll really get ahead. I tell my girls don't just work to be a dancer, work to be an artist. You have to work your way up, you can't reach the top overnight, that way you appreciate every step that you go.

In '69, I taught all along the way, ^{and had taught in different areas,} opened my hula. But in '69 the State Foundation called me to come in as the State Dance Coordinator. My job was to go around and try to find some of the old-time kumu hulas to share what they know. Because there were so many kumu hulas that didn't know that wanted to learn, I give Mr. Preis credit because he foresaw the need for this. Back in '69 hardly anybody was doing the ancient hulas.

Many people felt at that time that ancient hula was kapu and you weren't supposed to do it. So people got scared of it instead of wanting it. Iolani made us enjoy and want to do the dances whether it was ancient or modern. She never came to us and said don't do this, you're not supposed to. There were kumu that were apprehensive.

My answer to them was always if its kapu you shouldn't be teaching it. The State Foundation decided to fund another program through the Model Cities Program and ~~that~~ it was administered by the Waiānae Coast & Kāhiki-Pāhama Culture & Arts agencies. This is how it all started. My job then was to train instructors in the ancient hulas. The point was to train instructors in ancient hula so that they in turn could teach it better.

~~We put on workshops in Nanakuli & Waikane~~
~~and got a Kaliki~~ I feel ~~the~~ we
are creating something new that
is not keeping to the traditions &
fundamentals of ancient hula. But
we are still calling it ancient hula.
Perhaps it is new today and will
be called traditional fifty years
from now but what's going to happen
to our culture, to our traditional
styles? Part of the problem is human
~~compet~~ nature, competitiveness. If you
come up with a dance, I'm gonna
~~try and beat you the next time.~~
We all want to be better than someone
else. ~~Well~~ ^{If} you came up with a dance
and it looked real good, but
I'm going to try and beat you the
next time. I'll come out with a dance
a little more spiritual than yours.

I was always taught that the ~~amona~~
could be anything but the kalikau
must be very simple. The modern
described practically anything. The
ancient is much more secular
In the beginning I always told myself
I was going to be a nurse. But
when I started dancing that
was it. I ended up in the hula
and just kept on dancing. I
think hula will carry on. Some
people think hula will die but
they're wrong. There is always new things
to learn, new songs, ~~new chants~~

to understand and perform. People can choreograph a chant in a modern way but they must respect the fundamental steps & motions. The hula is not just learning a dance but how well you can express the dance in your feelings and motions. ~~You have to strive~~ You can't be a mechanical doll that you wind up. People ask me have you learned everything and I say no. There is always something more to learn in the hula. In the beginning I wanted to be ~~the hula~~ a mure but once I got started in the hula that was it. I never got to first base. When you learn the hula you have to learn what the teacher gives you not what you want to learn.