

Thelma Cumming

I started when I was a little girl. There were fifteen of us children in the family and we learned from our mother. We all learned, even the boys. In those days there was not much entertainment. So there was always a hula show being put on as a fundraiser or in connection with the church. My family was always involved with these shows so that's how I got involved.

My mother, Ida Kualani Long, was my first kumu. There was not much talking when my mother taught. I've gone to different halau and there's always a lot of explanation but my mother said that in her way of learning it was more like a copying of the teacher. The kumu would get up and demonstrate what needed to be done. There was just watching and copying, talking was kept to a very minimum. She would keep time with the puili and its purpose was twofold. If your motion was sloppy she would use the puili to correct it for you. She was the main kumu for me. As we grew older Alice Ma'i taught us through the church. I was about twelve when she taught me and she was the next step in my education. The difference between she and my mother was that she was very informative. She explained a lot of what was going on. She had a wider range of different styles. My mother's knowledge was more narrow.

I learned hula kahiko from my mother first. From Alice Ma'i I learned mostly modern. When I was being taught the hula, words like kahiko and auwana were not used. There are a lot of terms like hela for instance that I never heard of until recently. Before we started the class my mother would have a warm-up session where she would chant and we would go through all the basic steps.

I stayed with Alice for about five years and then there was a lull. I got married but then I had a sister, Mae Loebenstein, who was playing music in Honolulu with Lena Guerrero. So when she would come to Maui she would teach us what was going on in Honolulu so that's how I got started again. She would come during Christmas and other holidays or when the church was going to put on certain programs.

(My greatest influence was my mother because she loved the hula and she passed that love for the hula onto us.) Hula was an everyday thing for the kids in my family. Whenever there was any kind of music, the hula was always part of that.

When I was being taught there were 8 basic steps to the ancient hula. Today there seems to be a million.



Thelma Cummings

I began teaching because people would put on concerts and needed someone to teach the dancers. For a lack of a teacher I was asked to help. I just kept on helping one group after another and I found that i liked doing it because this was a way of expressing myself. Now if i was supposed to do a particular motion i would do it in a creative way. I did not uniki. Frankly speaking I've forgotten practically everything i learned save for the idea and the style of the dance. If you were to tell me how my mother did it, I couldn't tell you. I'm in awe when I see the different kind of steps and the tempo of today. It's exciting and i enjoy it. Idon't knowif it's good or bad for the hula but its a crowd pleaser, people like it. *but why, D*

~~Kahakamamwasmaihwayamdma~~

Today they are taking ancient hula which has been danced a certain way for generations and adding harder definite motions to the same dance and still calling it kahiko. But the steps seem to be the same. As long as the chant is kahiko the whole thing is kahiko. Even if it has been composed in the kahiko style but in modern times i would still consider it kahiko.

I think the thing that gave me the greatest joy was that ~~uhm~~ my father considered me the best dancers of the girls. To me that was really something.

To me I always told my dancers that when the competition begins that is the proving ground.

I like to teach little children because they're teachable. You can get your point across. You can even be stern or cross with them and they forget about it the next day. The older they get the harder it is to teach because they get involved with other activities and end up missing class and giving excuses. That is my biggest dissappointment is seeing my students not following through or keeping up with some kumu. You have to be dedicated, you have to love what you are doing. You can always see in a child whether they are coming because they are interested or whether their parents want them to come.

When I teach I don't charge the kids. I feel that when I teach I'm learning. I'm drawing from them. Sometimes when we get together i haven't choreographed a whole chant and i'll sit them down and ask their opinion on how they like a certain motion. We discuss different things and then we all put it together. My mother always told me two things that i think should go for any hula dancer. One was ha'a and the second was paakookino. Haa means to go down and if you don't go down there is no movement. Paakookino means to stand straight and if you slouch you don't look good.

I think its a very important part of our past. Everything else, our style of living, our clothing is gone or has deteriorated. Our dance and our music are the only things that we are going to be able to hang onto.

If things keep changing the children will not undersztand the culture. It is up to the kumu of today to revive the hula if they want the children to understand the culture. The children have to be schooled, they have to be taught. It's not a matter of going through the motions. They have to know a little background of each dance.

At 17 i was a hula counselor with the girl scouts and that's when i would consider i started teaching.

I thing Pua leilehua is my favorite kahiko. ~~It's~~ a soft dance. It's not a hard dance to understand. Aloha Piianoa Maui is my favorite auwana because i used to do it all the time when i was young. It's an island song that allows you to portray so many emotions in so many ways. It's not repetitious.

You have to put your whole being in the dancing.