

I don't know what could have been different the past years but I feel somehow sad when I see that we the hula community can't come together like we used to. We don't seem to look forward anymore. When we come together today we seem to only be competing against each other.

As far as my family was concerned, the hula was a closed book. I came from a straight-laced, Christian family and most anything Hawaiian was not condoned. But in my family was a grandaunt named Helen Correa and to her the hula was great people accomplishing heroic deeds in everyday life. In the old days pageants were known as tableaux and she would be called upon by churches to organize Hawaiian tableaux because she knew the protocol. My tutu taught me the mannerisms, the attitude, and the gentleness of the actual dance performance but my first formal teacher was Lokalia Montgomery.

In those days you had to be invited by the kumu but I think at that time I didn't really want to go. The teacher would approach you and begin to talk about everything but the hula to sound out your character. To them the hula was not a narrow category in life but daily living. Only at the end of the conversation would they tell you to be at their homes, and that's all they would do.

As I studied under her I learned that the kahiko could be performed without all the rituals. I didn't have to be afraid and I didn't have to compromise my Christian faith. I went to Aunty Lokalia at fifteen and at eighteen I was traditionally uniki as a dancer. In those days nobody carried the title of kumu hula. They were all musicians or composers or performers and when the elders were no longer around some of the teachers would improvise and put their own feelings into the dance.

After my uniki I was trained by Lokalia to be a teacher, and by the time I graduated I had started my family. I would dance in between my family life with Pua Almeida, Lena Guerrero, Andy Cummings, and anybody who needed a dancer when they entertained. In 1946 I was asked by my grandaunt to teach the church members at the Blessed Sacrament Church. I was so grateful for the extra money because now I could buy my children the little things besides only saving money for their education.

I was still a young teacher feeling my way through classes and I would go home and try to remember the things that I was dissatisfied with in my education. When I studied with Aunty Lokalia there was no paper or pencil so when I came home I'd cry at the table trying to retain all that we had been taught. Then my tutu Helen would explain the kauna to me and she would open up a whole new world. The knowledge of the culture became very real and a part of modern everyday living, but how many students had a tutu Helen waiting at home for them?

There would be many questions that would be in my mind and my teachers would tell me they would be answered when the time came. Some things were left sitting in the air and my tutu told me if it was meant for me it would be explained. It was a totally different way of learning back then because it was a totally different world, and I didn't think it would work for the young people of today.

Tutu Kawena Pukui told me that we need written instructions these days because we don't speak the language in our homes. So I had a blackboard put in which upset some of my kumu but I needed to teach vocabulary in order that my young people could understand what was being taught to them. I started putting everything into book form because I wanted them to be able to take notes home and study. I didn't want them to suffer like I did because if you don't know how to study, learning becomes only stressful. What I've tried to do with my career is standardize the methods of learning the hula and give it structure and credibility. The students must do the paper work or they are expelled, they must pass the monthly tests or they are expelled. I don't consider myself a master but I'd like to believe the halau is carrying on something that my elders have left me.

Nona Beamer has given a title to the kahiko the young people of today are composing. She calls it contemporary kahiko and I go along with that. Kahiko is a record and reflection of the times it is created in and the kahiko that we look upon as traditional today was contemporary one hundred years ago. I encourage my young people today to compose their kahiko from what they see around them. Today is a part of life and a part of history and in a hundred years it will be considered traditional kahiko. Taken to an extreme there is some kahiko being danced today that is a combination of styles and innovations. We are seeing kahiko today with no history, no tradition, no trace of any original source. It is as if it has arisen from thin air. Sometimes everyone forgets what the hula is all about. But you come back and remember. I've forgotten many times what it really means but as you get older you find that it's real and it's there. The spirit of the kupuna will always be there.



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Maiki Aiu Lake

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