

Mae Loebenstein

Working at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel is one of the fondest memories I have in my life. It was like Cinderella going to the Ball every night of the week. Everything was the best. The waiters had style and training and they treated everyone there as if they were honored guests. We were given one of the huge hotel suites as our changing room and the management would send us waiters who would serve us as if we were guests. The people who stayed at the hotel were different. These were families from all over the world that had been wealthy from generation to generation. They had class. When we performed there was no talking or whispering or loud drunken laughter. And when we finished they treated us with the utmost respect and appreciation. We would sit on the side and watch the parties on the great lawn and it was all like a wonderful dream. And then the Second World War ^{came} and the Army took over the hotel to house the soldiers. That was the beginning of the end. We will never see anything like the Royal again.

Hula, a living experience in the home of Henry and Ida Long of Kahului, Maui, was a routine in my growing up. Mama, born Ida Pakulani Kaaihue, studied with the hula master, Kamawae of Maui. She lived in the halau and was trained in the art of kuahu, and hula olapa. Passing this knowledge to us was her way of sharing her hula life as our first kumu hula. This knowledge is a living reality and a vast experience of learning and sharing. Everyday we were taught a little bit of the dance, or the use of the implements, or we would just kaholo to get a sense of rythm and beat. I come from a very big family. There were fifteen kids and the little ones just joined in the back. We would dance in the afternoon after all our work was done. It was like our recreation time. Sometimes my mother would take us to the mountains to learn about which ferns were used for dancing. Or we would be taken to the ocean to learn which seaweed should be used for healing or eating. My mother started us off with kahiko and then auwana. The biggest thing my mother gave me was a sense of discipline. From discipline came assurance and confidence. Our dancing was ^{taught} to us not to perform but only to know the culture.

I came to Oahu to ^{attend} St. Andrew's Priory and I traveled by boat between islands. It was something the kids today should really experience. After high school I became a musician and met Lena Guerrero. Eventually we joined up with Daddy and Mama Bray who were performing at the Royal Hawaiian. Once-a-week they would give luaus for tourists at their home in Puunui and we would provide the entertainment. Mama Bray was our teacher in the hula and she had an aura that surrounded her. When we dressed, everything had to be just so; our dresses, our hair, we had to be just like fashion plates.

I went to Henry Pa during the last two years of his life and he was something extraordinary. Henry was somebody you sat back and watched. You did not question him to much. He was a very sensitive and talented man. You had to be very cautious around him and pick the times when you could approach him.

When I turned thirty I began to play music at Don the Beachcomber's and dancing became lost in the shuffle. I knew Alicia(Smith)when she was small and I played music for her when she grew up to be a dancer. I had a little granddaughter who had grown up on the mainland and was very haole, so I asked Alicia to accept Melia as a student. In 1973 Alicia asked me to help her polish a children's show that Melia was appearing in and that's how our union began.

The hula of the past was simple with basic steps but if you had to watch every group do the same thing you would get very tired. There has to be a little difference. There is nothing wrong with taking basic steps and combining them because the dance has to look fresh and new. It's still the same step but it's just being used in a different way.

You cannot say one style of hula is right and another is wrong because each island had their own style. They shared basic steps but all in all each in their own way was different. As a person grows older he learns to value his culture. What you think is nonsense when you are young becomes very important the older you get.

Mae Loebenstein

May 9, 1911

Kahului, Maui

Hula was a living experience at home. It was part of my bringing up. My mama did go into a halau. It was the old fashion style of halau where the student practically lived with the teacher until graduation. My mother's maiden name was Ida Kaaihue. She lived in the halau when she was a youngster. When we came along she wanted to pass on this knowledge to us, she wanted to share a part of her life with us. This knowledge of hers was a living thing. You learn from me and its a part of my life. It was simply a part of our life. Everyday we were taught a little bit of the dance, or we were taught the use of the implements, or we would just kaholo to get the beat and a sense of rythm and time. That was the most important thing about the hula was getting this rythm down. A lot of people want to dance but you have to have rythm. The whole family got up and danced. I come from a very big family. There were 15 kids. The little ones just joined in the back and that's how we learned to dance. We would dance in the afternoon after all our work was done. It was like our recreation time. We would practice long enough so that something was learned that day. Sometimes my mother would take us to the mountains to learn about which ferns were used for dancing. Or we would be taken to the ocean and my mother would teach us which seaweed should be used for medicine, or dancing, or eating. My mother started us with kahiko and then auwana. Our dancing was taught to us not to perform but to know the dance, to know the culture. The biggest thing my mother gave me was a sense of discipline. She was a disciplinarian. If she told you to sit you had better not even wiggle. After awhile we were able to go to the sea and the mountains and we didn't need anybody to show us the way or pick what we needed so along with discipline came independence. So my mother gave us a sense of assurance and confidence.

I came to Oahu to continue my education at St. Andrew's Priory. I would travel by boat between the islands and it was something the kids today should really experience. It was so much fun. I played music for awhile after high school. ~~Then~~ I met up with Lena Guerrero. Eventually we joined up with Daddy and Mama Bray. They performed at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel and once-a-week they would give luaus for the tourists at their home in Puunui. They had a big lanai and we would dance there and be the entertainers. If anybody wanted to give a private party, the Brays would organize it and provide the entertainment.

Mother Bray was our teacher for the hula. She was a beautiful woman. I used to think to myself one day I would dress like her. She had the most beautiful holoku's. She was just a gorgeous woman. She had an aura that surrounded her. I learned how to look good from her from the top of your head to your toenails. When you dress everything had to be just so. Your dress, your hair, you had to be like a fashion plate. ~~not stayed with~~ The Brays retired from teaching and from giving luaus ~~theyntom~~ and they turned the whole group over to Lena Guerrero. Of course they were always there to watch over us.

I went to Henry during the last two years of his life. He taught me the different chants and hulas that he knew. Henry was somebody you sat back and watched. He was something extraordinary. You did not question him to much. He was very sensitive to how one dances the hula. You had to be very cautious around him and pick the times when you could approach him.

Music was the thing that kept me in the entertainment world. It wasn't dancing. After a certain age dancing was put aside. I did not even think about going out and teaching. It was enough for me to know that I had this knowledge and anytime I wanted to use it, the knowledge would be there. I went strictly to music and the dance got lost in the shuffle. I was in my 30's and for 19 years I played at Don the Beachcomber's.

The Hawaiian people of my time did not go around bragging about who they uniki'd with. In my time everybody learned from the home and did not have to uniki. because you lived with the hula, it was part of your daily life.

~~ingotinstanred~~

I knew Alicia when she was small and she was dancing. Now I was playing music and she was dancing for us. I have a little granddaughter very haole who was brought up on the mainland. I told her to come home so she learn some Hawaiian. One day I opened a can of salmon to eat with the poi and she asked me if I was going to eat cat food. I thought this girl better learn how to dance hula. But nothing is more boring than teaching one little girl how to dance. You must have a lot of people dancing before the interest is there. Alicia accepted my granddaughter into her classes when she was age four. Then Alicia had a big job at the Royal and I would sit in the back of the practice room and tell myself to be quiet and not butt in. Then one day Alicia turned to me and asked me if everything looked alright and was correct. That was Alicia's big mistake...

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~~if everything looked alright and was correct. That was Aliecia's big mistake.~~

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~~Wendell,
I would like to
go with this paragraph
for the Loeb.
What do you think?
Aliecia~~

Henry Pa was very sensitive to talk and how a dancer performed which is a trait shared by anyone who is talented. You had to pick your words carefully ~~xxxx~~ around him.

When I say I stopped dancing I mean I only performed in holoku and not in ti-leaf which I thought was more suited for the younger dancer. This is a different world today. There was one halau of young people that was competing against our halau at the Merry Monarch and very flippantly they asked me for my credentials as a teacher. The Hawaiian people before did not go around making such a big noise over themselves if they were kumu. Not like the young people of today.

I knew Alicia when she was small and I played music for her when she grew up to be a ~~xxx~~ dancer. I had a little granddaughter who had grown up on the mainland and was very haole. I brought her home because I wanted her to learn the Hawaiina side of her. My daughter was going to whittier at the time so I brought my granddaughter home at three years old. I thought this little girl has to learn how to dance and nothing is more boring than for me to teach one little girl how to dance. For two years I kept asking Alicia if Melia could come to learn and Alicia had no room. Through this little girl that's how we got together. All the time I had kept my ~~xxx~~ mouth shut and sat in the back. Then Alicia had a big show at the Royal and the little girls couldn't come together. Alicia asked me for help and that's how the union started. ~~This~~ This was in 1973.

When I was being trained all the hula seemed to be kahiko. The auwana ~~xxxxxx~~ ~~xx~~ came in only recently. I danced and trained before a kuahu. But I refused to take the dapu because of the kickback.

I created how I see and feel in the kahiko. I look at the overall. Kahiko is a modern word. It used to be called olapa. In terms of professional costuming you cannot beat the halaus of today. Everyboday looks good and its ~~xxxxxx~~ uniform.

I think everybody is coming creative in their dances. I see a lot of outside Polynesians dances in the kahiko. The hula of the past was simple with basic steps but let me tell you if you had to watch every group do the same thing it can be very tiring. You have to have a little difference. I take a little u'eke and put a little hela and make a new step because it has to look new. But its still the basic step just being used in a new way. As a person grows older he learns to value his culture. What you think is for the birds when you are young becomes very important the older you get. You cannot say one style of hula is wrong and another is right because each island had their own stle and each on was dancing the hula. Even each teacher within each island had their own peculiarities. They shared rudimentary steps but all in all they were different.

The firs t hula teacher probalaly stared off with one step then another step was added until before you know it they had a whole slew of steps.