

I first thought the Hawaiian Renaissance was a re-awakening because that's what the word meant to me in school. But as I see what's happening it's a time that's fostering new growth. It's the beginning of a new life and not just the reclaiming of past treasures.

When I was growing up, our home was a stopover place for strangers as long as I can remember. Strangers were welcome and they would return again and again. My mother, Blossom Clark, taught hula so there were hula skirts on the walls, and music and the implements surrounded us. She never prodded my sister and I to dance but once we showed the interest she began to train us. I began with my mother at age three and I continue to study under her till today. I was taught auwana and the basic steps of kahiko but she didn't separate the hula into those two categories. It's only recently that there has been a clear distinction between the two. Back then the hula was just one dance. I did not uniki with my mother or go on to any other teacher and it is a decision I regret today. In 1975 my daughter was in kindergarten and I wanted her to dance in my mother's style. I was six months hapai but I got together a few girls who were interested and I began to teach.

I've never thought of myself as a kumu hula but a hula teacher. I've gone very, very slowly and I've kept my goals small because I wanted to fit my family into my life. I've tried to train my girls to tell the audience what the song is all about by feeling what the writer had in mind and to portray Hawaii in a dignified way. The most important thing for a student is that the heart must be willing. Age and race doesn't matter. To see a little child go up on stage and forget about everything else except the fact that she's dancing is exhilarating and more important than bringing home a trophy.

I grew up in a time when everything Hawaiian was discouraged and I'm grateful to be alive today during an age where I am allowed my freedom to grow as an individual. I respect the old ways and I'm thankful for the old kumu that are practicing the old ways. The kahiko goes back to the very basis of fundamentals and simplicity but that simply is not in my nature. I cannot help but be what I am. The competitions have created a new style but they have also motivated people to work hard and work together. I think you have to let the kumu of today alone in terms of creativity in the kahiko. Everyone will end up doing what is right for them anyway. You have to let the judges and the audience either accept or reject a style on their own.

My mother had a great influence on me because she was in my opinion the very essence of hula. She was always giving and that's what the hula is all about. Whenever I hear the word makaonaona in songs I think of my mother because to me she had the most beautiful eyes I've ever seen. She had to raise a large family and she had a hard life but the hula lifted her above everyday life, away from the worries and sadnesses of her family. When she danced the hula, life was beautiful.

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