

MINERVA KALAUHIWAOKALANI PANG

Minerva Pang has been teaching hula in her home since 1958 and presently works as a kupuna in the Pearl City schools.

I've always loved dancing, especially the hula. My grandfather wanted me to study instead of dancing because he said hula will not take me anywhere. So I used to hide to take hula lessons.

My cousin taught me the hula when I was three years old. At age seven, I took hula from a kumu hula named Rose Kuamo'o who taught at her home in Hilo. I only took two summers from because I lived in Ka'u. Everytime I visited Hilo, I went to learn from her. I learned only hula auwana from Rose Kuamo'o.

When I moved to Honolulu, I took from my kumu hula, Emma Moniz (Bishop). Aunty Emma had her own way of teaching. She taught me auwana and a lot of implement numbers. She didn't teach too much of kahiko. The kahiko I learned was more the modern kahiko, like dances about King Kalakaua and Queen Lili'uokalani.

As a student, my goal was to take hula from Aunty Emma for two years and get a certificate to graduate. I had to learn the language, the hula and get a certificate of dancing and if I wanted to become a teacher. You needed to understand the Hawaiian words, the interpretation and the story to be able to create your own hula. Aunty Emma said it would take years, but you'll come to learn the language. I got my certificate at my uniki in 1945.

Before I started to teach hula, I thought I needed to take more dancing so I took children's hula from Kuulei Stibbard. I also took private lessons from Puanani Alama and learned some implement numbers and other hula auwana from George Naope.

First I taught my own children and then my neighbors' children. I felt that if they can learn from me, I can teach others. Then my friends came and soon I had over 20 children and it grew from that. I taught for about five years before I had my first recital. I used to have a couple hundred children, but now my class is smaller because I am in the kupuna program and I have less time. We did more entertaining at parties, television shows, fairs, etc., when my halau was bigger and had more time before I was a kupuna. Now that I have two careers, I take my students to Ala Moana Center to perform and few parties when I'm available.

I call myself a hula teacher, but kumu has the same meaning. I teach old Hawaiian songs. Songs about places, islands, love songs, songs that were written before the children were born so they can learn about them. I taught thousands of children in schools and in my home. I've taught some of my former students' children and now their grandchildren.

Definitely the hula of today is different. The children of today have different ideas and sometimes they get easily bored with old ways. So to keep them interested, you have to create new ideas. The steps of today are faster, especially the kahiko. Kahiko today is too perfect, not like I used to know, simple with feeling.

Some of our young teachers are not ready. But I cannot say much because when I opened my studio, I was very new too and everybody learns from their mistakes and improves by learning all the time.