

hawaiian ✓

## Elizabeth Hu'i Park

A kupuna for the Hawaiian Studies Program and an accomplished dancer, the late Hu'i Park established the "Hu'i Park's Hula Studio" located on Lusitana Street in Punchbowl.

Back in 1959, there were ten of us who danced for Aunty Vicki li Rodrigues and we were called the Hau'oli Girls. We were the best dancers on the Islands, entertaining in the hotels and on the boats during the 1960's.

I learned the basics of hula at the age of eight years while attending the Parks and Recreation program at Lanakila Park in the summer. During the weekdays, I took hula 'auana from Aunty Sally Wood (Naluai) at Likelike School. For the next fourteen years, I learned hula kahiko and hula 'auana from Joseph Kahaulilio.

There were about fifteen girls in Uncle Joe's class. He would always tell us the story and translation of the chant before teaching us the dance. We had to learn the chant by memory. Uncle Joe would teach us the words first, then he would go into the basic steps and hand motions. He taught just four of us to pa'i. I was one of the four and that's how I learned to pa'i with my finger and thumb.

I danced for Leilani Alama for a year and a half before my cousin Flo asked me to dance for Aunty Vicki li Rodrigues who needed girls for her show. Aunty Vicki's forte was hula 'auana and she would do the 'auana portion of the show and Uncle Joe, Kawai Cockett or George Holokai would do the chanting for the kahiko. My cousin and I would teach the dance to the girls who didn't know kahiko.

Like Uncle Joe, Aunty Vicki didn't allow us to copy the words to the song she was teaching. But I wrote it anyway because when you get older, you forget. She told us what the dance was about and let everybody have an input in putting the motions to the dance. We would try it this way or try it that way. She knew who would become teachers and carry on.

Aunty Vicki has given me so much. She inspired me to grow as a person and taught me to be a lady. She polished us to be beautiful hula dancers. Although I danced for Aunty Vicki for seventeen years, my style of dancing is still Joe Kahaulilio's. Aunty Vicki was pleased with me for keeping his styling.

I didn't realize that I was going to be a teacher until Aunty Genoa Keawe asked me to teach hula for her at her recording studio at Kaneali'i. I told her, "Oh no, I don't think I want to ." The second time I went to Hilo with Aunty Genoa as a dancer, she asked me again. I had just quit my job to help my daughter take care of her baby so I said yes to her. In 1974, Aunty Genoa opened up her studio and I began teaching for her. I taught for one year and the second year, she turned it over to me. I've been teaching since then.

I don't believe in 'uniki and my teachers never believed in 'uniki. In the old days, you had to live with the kumu. You had to abstain from sex, and only concentrate in learning the hula. I remember Eleanor Hiram Hoke telling stories about her 'uniki and why we cannot go through those rituals anymore.

On my 15th anniversary of teaching, I graduated six students who have been with me from ten to fifteen years and they were given a certificate of accomplishment. For five years they had to teach the basics to a beginners' class. I gave them a hapa haole number to create into a hula. Before every girl graduated, she had to earn a paper certifying that she knows how to make a ti leaf skirt, can haku a lei or ku'i a lei, and can do everything I taught them.

My joy is having the respect and dedication of a student I taught who has become an accomplished dancer. She is my final product. It's a feather in my cap when someone else wants my students and I feel great that they can go on to other things.

I think kahiko is telling stories of old through a slower medium. I teach only girls so in my kahiko, the dancers are soft. They don't jump all over the place. That's how I was taught

from the very beginning at Lanakila Park and from Uncle Joe.

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