

Harriet Kuuleinani Sheldon Stibbard

The late Harriet Kuuleinani Stibbard was a public elementary school teacher for forty-one years before retiring. She opened the "Kuulei's Hula Studio" in October 1931.

When I was young, my parents did not want me to dance the hula, but I was determined to learn. I did not learn to dance until I was about twenty-one years old and married.

I was teaching school on Maui where I met Alice Garner, my first hula teacher. Alice was a soft-spoken and beautiful person from whom I learned kahiko and 'auana. After five weeks of lessons, she told me "Harriet, I don't know why you are coming to me. Your talent is God-given, I just can't teach you anymore." I continued with her for two months.

Once, while dancing on stage, a Hawaiian woman said, "What is that haole lady doing up on stage?" I have Hawaiian blood in me and I am proud of it. Her remark encouraged me to do better. After I went on my own, I asked Aunt Daisy Boyd to translate the Hawaiian songs for me. The hula came very easily to me.

In 1934, I started my classes teaching 'auana first, then kahiko much later. I had my own style and it was very different from other halau. My costumes, pa'u, holoku and ideas came naturally after I visualized my songs and dances. My best memories are of the children. I always said to them, "Do not waste your parents' money if you don't want to learn." I taught boys and girls. Some were as young as three years old. Men and women also took lessons, but the men learned just for fun, not to perform. After taking hula for about six months, the children were given a certificate with a picture of myself for learning good manners, good feelings, attire, and discipline. My advice was to put their heart and soul into what they do, work diligently, strive and have goals.

I also taught at Punahou School. After three years they wanted me to give up my studio to

teach full time for them. I refused because I wanted to keep my studio in Honolulu. After one of my recitals in Hilo, a guest, Mrs. Helen Desha Beamer said that she would send her granddaughter to me for private lessons. That was a great honor to have Mama Beamer trust me so much.

The hula has changed a lot. When I look at the 'uwehe of today, we never opened our legs. Old Hawaiians were rascal and naughty, but in a clean way. My definition of hula kahiko is something in the old tradition. I love kahiko, but I never composed because I felt I was not an expert to do so. I prefer 'auana songs, and my favorite is "Mi Nei".

Language to me is very important in hula. If Aunt Daisy Boyd did not translate for me, I would not have been able to do anything.

I take pride in the fact that the students of Kuulei's Hula Studio were on the cover of "Paradise of the Pacific", "Times", "Newsweek" and inside of "Collier's Magazine". All of these articles and dates are in a book that my granddaughter, Maunalei Love, is using in her halau, O Ku'ulei Aloha. The newspaper articles about my keiki were tremendously rewarding.

I also am proud that Oren E. Long, Superintendent of Schools, felt it was important enough for me to be excused from teaching school for a whole week on Maui to take my keiki to Honolulu to entertain with Ray Kinney's troupe at the King Theater in Honolulu.

I am very honored to be recognized today. It is a compliment when somebody reminds me that I was his or her teacher and that I was teaching their granddaughter. What a beautiful reward for me. My greatest joy is what I give to the children because it lives on today.

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