

Odetta Nesmitte

Keokaha

April 3, 1935

I became interested in the hula because my parents were entertainers. I was about 13 or 14 when I started. I come from a big family of girls and musicians need dancers. My mother said she wasn't about to beat the bush looking for dancers, she had them right in the house. She told us we were all going to be dancers so we were dancers. I left the Big Island in 1940 before the war & we lived w/ my aunt in ~~the~~ Kalihi. In '41 we moved to Kaneohe & I grad. from Castle in '53. After grad. I spent 2½ years in the army & 7 years away from home. I came in '59 & moved to Kauai in '60. I only came here planning to stay 2 years but we've ended up raising 7 kids here. ~~but Honolulu is~~ My first kumu was Eleanor Hiram Hoke. I studied with her for two years, she was teaching next door to Honey's Inn in the ^{Kaneohe} Community Center. I learned Kahiko & awwana but my mother was not too happy about us learning kahiko. We started with Eleanor when mama told us we were going to be dancers. She was hesitant about kahiko because of the lapsus. ~~she was not really~~

I studied w/ tute Alice Namakelua. She was a constant visitor at our house because we were musicians. I studied w/ Auntie Alice from about '50 to '54. She would not teach me kahiko.

I studied for 2 years w/ Pearl Keawe and that was it. Each of my kumu were different in teaching styles. Eleanor had great discipline in her class, the same is true for tutu Alice. You never asked why, you just moved. Pearl K. was a little more open to questions but she still was quite strict. My mother & tutu Alice refused to teach me chant & kahiko so I learned it from the Culture & the Arts Program. I did not want to dance but my mother said we would dance and after you have danced since 13 years of age it becomes a part of you. I was named after the daughter of Daddy Bray, Odetta Bray.