

Leolani Pratt

My first kumu hula was Mary Keahi Lehan. I was 6 years old in the 1st grade. My ear was pulled to go. I was told to go to hula at that age. Aunt Mary lived right next door to Aunt Edith but at that time Aunt Edith did not teach. I enjoyed watching Aunt Edith in the seminars because the hulas she dances were the hulas Aunt Mary taught me. They either taught each other or had the same kumu.

I went on to Rose Nuki in the 2nd grade where I was taught the use of implements along with ~~ancient~~ ~~amwawa~~ amwawa.

After Rose I moved back to Kalepana to ~~my~~ live with my grandfather, Napua Keakini. My grandfather taught me a lot of chants about the land and about Pele. Most of the people in Kalepana and Kaia are like my family. They grow up respecting Pele as a grandmother and kupuna figure. Everything about her was beautiful. My grandfather was pure Hawaiian. My great-great grandfather was a great Kaluana in the Kaia district.

I went onto Victoria Wright in the 5th grade. She taught me a lot of ohelo dances but I didn't take it seriously. I looked at it more as just exercise. We never took care of it and treasured it.

After that my cousin Martha Kaiame came along and pulled me into her classes. She traveled all over the islands giving classes. I *uniki*'d with Martha but it was not made up with rituals like the *alolo* though we did have prayers to Laka. At that time I was having a battle within me because both my parents were ministers within the Christian church.

My mother had learned the ancient rituals from a *kahuna* and was brought up in a Hawaiian home. She had a gift of sensing whether a person was sincere or not.

After she got married my dad got her to become a Christian but her background was always there and she lived a life that existed ~~on part~~ a Christian, part Hawaiian. In *Kalapana* she was known as a good *kahuna* who battled an evil *kahuna*. In terms of the *hula* we respect the gods of the *hula* but we look to the Lord as the greater god.

When I was a teenager I took ^{*auwaua*} ~~lessons~~ from George Naope whenever he was in the neighborhood. I took a few lessons from Auntie *to* at *Hulhee* Palace but these lessons were all informal. After that I moved to *Kapalulu* and I went to Auntie Rose *Jesuna*.

I told her that I had dreamt of that I was dancing on a heiau and Pele was coming toward me dancing with flames coming out of her eyes. She said to me, "Very Good, you sit right here." She then called me Auntie Alice Kalahui of the Dept. of Parks and Recreation. She told me to go down to the Ala Wai ^{apartment} ~~office~~ and see Auntie Alice. She said Auntie Alice was a beautiful lady and that I was the one she was looking for. I didn't know what I was getting into but I went down to meet Auntie Alice. She told me that Rose had told her everything and could I start work tomorrow. She told me I was going to start teaching hula for the Parks and Recreation and I was 27 years old. ~~I told her~~ she told me to report to Kahala Playground to teach ukulele & hula and I had never picked up an ukulele in my entire life. At this time Addine He was working here. I taught the kids C and G7 all day. For eighteen years I taught at the Parks and Recreation. So Auntie Alice trained me in the proper costuming, she taught me to respect ^{the} different ^{aspects of the} ~~ways of thinking~~ ^{culture}, and how to ^{really} care for the spiritual aspect of the Hawaiian dance. Before my contact with Alice, I had just been looking at the hula through the

eyes of ~~the~~ a performer and a spectator. I had never seen the deeper, more profound aspect of the hula. And I readily ~~learned~~ ^{treasured} the ~~education~~ ^{difference}.

I think when ~~a person goes~~ ^{the kumms go} to see a performance they end up looking at the dancers as teachers. They question every motion and step and I feel it is better to appreciate the good that is there rather than concentrate on the bad. There is something worthwhile in every performance ~~that~~ and that's what should be emphasized.

Auntie Alice taught me the importance of proper costuming. You don't use this because this is for alii, & this is for the gods or a particular god. And you cannot mix any of these colors or costuming because of that.

Auntie Mary Palani showed me that people's feelings are the most important things in life. There are the free things in life that must be respected. This is what I mean by the spiritual aspect of the hula.

Rose Joshua showed me patience in the most demanding circumstances she has weathered many illnesses but keeps moving ahead quietly.

So my style comes from these three women along with my mom. I also have shared with many kumms that worked with me at the Parlor and Rec.

Our halan will pray to the
Lord and that's how we get
our hulas and melas.

My daughter ^{Vengkeni} has been given
the gift of having the notions
come to her in dreams so this
is how we get our notions.