

IOLA YOLANDA CALDITO BALUBAR

I, Iola Balubar, founded the Halau Hula 'O Keola-Aliiokekai in 1975. I have taught at my home, The Salvation Army Hall, Centural Maui Youth Center and presently at my Halau in the Wailuku Industrial Park, Wailuku, Maui, Hawaii.

My father Richard Caldito Sr. is of Filipino descent. My mother Dorothy Lovell Caldito is of Hawaiian, Chinese and German descent. My na kapuna are the late Hiriam La'a and Victoria Lovell La'a. I was strongly influenced at a young age with Hawaiian songs and dance by my na kapuna. I remember my mother's step-brother, William La'a, playing his guitar and singing his Hawaiian songs while my mother danced the hula.

My mother's kumu hula was Elizabeth Lum Ho. Mrs. Lum Ho was also my first kumu hula. She was a Chinese-Hawaiian lady who trained us from the basics in learning the foot steps and making sure we learned the name of each step. If we had a hard time doing the "Ami" for example, she had us place our hands against the wall, bend our knees and push our hips making sure we moved only our hips.

I remember kneeling down and she would push against one of my thighs with her foot to strengthen the thigh muscles. I also remember she used the "Puili" (split bamboo) to correct us. Just a tap on our hips, elbows, knees or feet to remind us to concentrate on doing our steps correctly. I was very disappointed that after the "Hula Uniki" (Recital) I was unable to go back to hula because it was too expensive since only my dad worked.

Later when I was in the sixth grade, Auntie Becky Kaopuiki taught my sister, Charlene Rodrigues and I with her daughter in her yard in Naska. We learned implement hula, Polynesian dances, hula kahiko and 'auana for performances at the local hotels. My experience as an entertainer started at a very young age.

I was very fortunate to have studied under na kumu hula Uncle Johnny Hokoana and Uncle Robert Kalani. Uncle Johnny Hokoana concentrated on hula 'auana and comical hula. Uncle Robert Kalani taught hula kahiko, implement numbers and Polynesian dances.

Auntie Becky Kaopuiki gave her daughter Luana Kanamu and I confidence to use our creativity in creating our own hula. I enjoyed being creative and I felt confident creating my own hula. I also remember being only in the seventh grade.

My friends knew me as a dancer. During my high school years I danced at local night clubs, hotels and local luaus. My dad was a politician and whenever I went to rallies I was always asked to do a hula. The love for hula lives on in me and I am proud to carry on the culture through song and dance.

After my son was born in 1974 I couldn't return to dancing because I became very "momona" (fat). My husband suggested I stay home and care for our son and start a dance studio. I agreed, I put an ad in the local paper, the response was unbelievable! My halau was originally called Iola Balubar's Polynesian Dance Studio. I enjoyed using my talents and I really love teaching.

I continued learning kahiko from Uncle Robert Kalani so I could teach my students. I also decided to teach Hawaiian Studies through the Department of Education so I could become more familiar with Hawaiian vocabulary and language.

In the 1980's I started entering hula competitions on Maui. The first year I entered the Ka'ahumanu Festival with senior girls and keiki. We entered the 'auana divisions and placed first. Uncle George Naope saw us and asked me several times to come to the Merrie Monarch. It was not the right time, I was busy being a mother and teaching my Halau. My interest is Polynesian Dances. I entered the Tahiti Fete on Kaua'i and the Kaleponi Hula and Tahitian Competitions in California and Las Vegas.

I became interested in hula kahiko when my halau was invited to participate in the Queen Lili'uokalani Keiki Competition. That's when I started creating my own kahiko and trying to put my own tune to the contest chant. Watching the video tape every year I have grown, but there is so much more to learn.

I feel the "Aloha" from my students when I teach them foot steps, step names, movement of the hips, good posture, head turns, facial expression, interpretation of the hula, expressing feelings of the dance and memorizing the hula so they will have confidence when performing.

I also train the na haumana (student) dancers in personal grooming, costuming, dressing routine in preparation for a performance, helping one another use their good judgment and common sense. To have "Aloha", caring, sharing, confidence and respectfulness in carrying on the Hawaiian culture through HULA has been very rewarding in so many different ways. Mahalo keAkua for the guidance.