



Forgiveness Stories

2nd annual edition

Published by the
Hawai'i Forgiveness Project

in recognition of International Forgiveness Day
August 7, 2005

available for free download at:

<http://www.hawaiiforgivenessproject.org>

“As we let our own light shine, we invite other people to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence liberates others.”

...Nelson Mandela

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Law of the Splintered Paddle: King Kamehameha’s Story; Hawai’i.....	3
Christo Brand & Vusumzi Mcongo: South Africa.....	4
Larry Brown - How Forgiveness Affected My Life; Hawaii	6
First Nations People: Canada	7
Dr. Martin Luther King: Alabama	9
Jo Berry -- Terrorism: A decision to forgive; UK and Ireland	11
Bishara Awad: Israel-Palestine	13
Stephen Baker -- Forgiveness is a Gift to the Giver; Hawai’i.....	14
Delores -- The Choice to Forgive; Fred Luskin.....	16
Jackie Young: Hawai’i.....	19

Introduction

The most universal way for people to learn new ideas is through stories. From ancient times, storytellers have spoken to us over campfires, in festivals, in song, religious ritual, dance and art, and the benefit of each generation’s experience has passed down from father to son, from mother to daughter. This book of Forgiveness Stories attempts to continue in that ancient way.

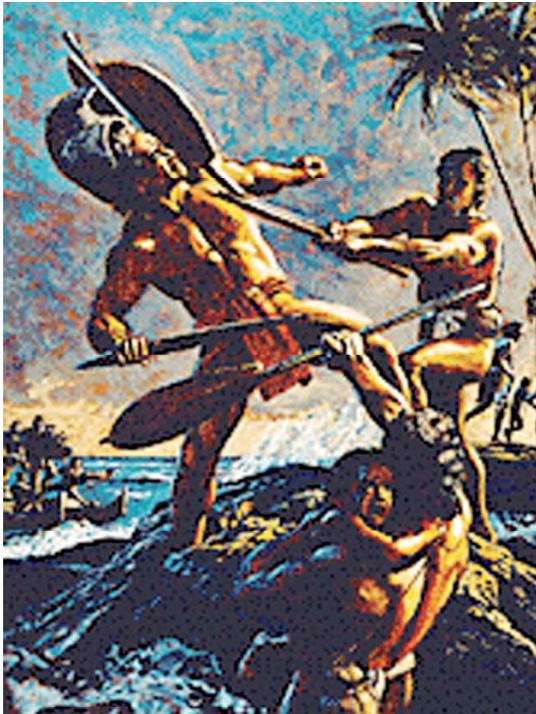
The Hawai’i Forgiveness Project was started in 2003 by a diverse group of people, who live on a few extraordinarily beautiful islands in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, In the geographic sense we are isolated; but we are also intensely connected, as the youngest of the 50 States of the USA, as a vital shipping and communications hub, as a military center, as the place where millions of people come to dream and celebrate each year. We wanted to bring greater harmony to our people.

Though our initial focus was local, we quickly realized that a global perspective was also necessary. Hawai’i is a multicultural society whose citizens deeply respect the first people who settled our islands, long ago. The value of forgiveness is shown clearly by traditional Hawaiian culture, through the spirit of Aloha (welcome, love) and the practice of Ho`oponopono (balance, understanding). That spirit, which is part of our earth, ocean and sky, part of our heritage, is expanded by the people of many nations who have also made Hawai’i their home in the past three centuries.

Hawai'i is an example, both small in size and large in significance, for the world of what is true and possible. We hope you enjoy these stories, from Hawai'i and around the world, and always welcome your questions and discussion through aloha@hawaiiiforgivenessproject.org

...Michael North, editor

Law of the Splintered Paddle: King Kamehameha's Story: Hawai'i



King Kamehameha I, the first ruler of all the Hawaiian Islands, lived before European influence became strong in the central Pacific, from 1758 to 1819.

He had a reputation for independence, strength, justice and compassion -- combined with a fierce determination to unite the people of Hawaii.

Kamehameha's proclamation of Mamalahoe -- the "Law of the Splintered Paddle," came about in a unique way. His story of compassion and forgiveness has been passed down through nearly two centuries, from Kingdom to Republic to Territory to State, and is included today in the Constitution of the State of Hawaii.

The story goes like this:

The young royal warrior Kamehameha, headstrong with youth, was paddling a war canoe with his men near the shoreline of Ke'eau, in Puna, Maui. Seeking a place to rest, they came upon some commoners fishing on a beach, and attacked them. All escaped, except for two men who stayed behind to defend a man carrying a child on his back.

During the struggle, the young chief's foot caught in some lava rocks, and he was trapped there. One of the fishermen struck Kamehameha on the head with a paddle, and the paddle splintered. It was a blow that could have killed the young future King.

The man who hit him, in defending the child, allowed Kamehameha to survive. The young chief never forgot this act of forgiveness. This commoner taught Kamehameha that all human life is precious and deserves respect, that the strong must not mistreat the weak.

Kamehameha could have taken revenge on the fisherman, but he learned from the experience instead, and made forgiveness part of Hawaii's heritage, and its future.

Years later, King Kamehameha I proclaimed Mamalahoe, the Law of the Splintered Paddle. It provides that any old person, woman or child may "lie by the roadside in safety." This means that anyone who is weak is entitled to protection and assistance, and to respect, even from the King.

story suggested by Ramsay Taum, researched and written by the Hawai'i Forgiveness Project, from online sources at Kamehameha Schools, the University of Hawai'i Law School, and the State Constitution.

For detailed references, see <http://www.hawaiiforgivenessproject.org/stories.htm#sources>



"We cannot live with broken hearts. In time we have to accept these things have happened to us. To stay with the past will only bring you into turmoil."

Christo Brand & Vusumzi Mcongo: South Africa

Christo Brand was one of the warders directly assigned to guard Nelson Mandela at Robben Island prison between 1978 and 1987. At the same time Vusumzi Mcongo was a political prisoner serving a 12-year sentence. Following the collapse of the apartheid regime, both men now work for the Robben Island Museum in Cape Town.

Christo Brand

The first time I saw Vusumzi was on our way to Robben Island. We both arrived on the same day in 1978. I was a warder. He was a prisoner in chains, on his way to maximum security. We did not speak to one another. The first time we spoke properly was nearly 20 years later when we were both applying for a job at Robben Island Museum. We embraced each other warmly. Now that we work together we talk about what was wrong in the past. Sometimes we have a laugh about things that happened then. There is no bitterness between us.

When I started on Robben Island I was told that the men we guarded were no better than animals. Some warders hated the prisoners and were very cruel. But I could never hate because these political prisoners were far more polite and friendly than any prisoner I'd met before.

Eventually I was put in charge of the educational studies of Nelson Mandela and a few other prisoners. Mr. Mandela was determined to turn Robben Island into a university. It meant that prisoners who arrived with no education at all left as powerfully educated men. He kept saying that as long as you're alive, they can't take away your education. He was even determined to learn how to speak and write Afrikaans.

Mr. Mandela is the epitome of forgiveness, able to reach out to all people. While he was in prison, the man who was the architect of apartheid, Hendrik Verwoerd, died. When Mandela was finally released, one of the first people he visited was Verwoerd's widow, Betsie. She received him with open arms in their house in a white suburb.

Vusumzi Mcongo

I was arrested in 1976 for being a member of the South African Student Movement (SASM) during a school boycott in Port Elizabeth. The charges laid against me under the Internal Security Act were for incitement, sabotage and terrorist activities. I was detained for six months, during which time I was interrogated and tortured. I was lucky to survive. Many died in detention.

In prison I noticed Christo, but prisoners didn't talk to officers. I tried to keep out of his way, as it was my job to carry information from one section of the prison to another. It was a risky job, and to be found out would have meant having my studies curtailed. For us prisoners this was the ultimate punishment. Broadening our knowledge was about broadening our future.

Our relationship with the warders at Robben Island was often a stumbling block. We had to convince them we weren't violent men. But I never hated these warders. They were working for a system and the system was brutal. The people I hated were those who had tortured and interrogated me in detention. I used to dream of revenge.

And yet, after I was released, that hatred diminished. All I wanted was to meet these people again to show them that I'd survived. And what's more, survived with a smile.

By chance, during Steve Biko's hearing at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), I met some of the security officers involved in his case. I greeted them and reminded them that they'd also interrogated and tortured me. Then I wished them luck in their case. I bore them no ill will. I knew then that the experience of Robben Island had not brutalised me. We had all learned different lessons in different ways.

We cannot live with broken hearts. In time we have to accept that these things have happened to us, that those years have been wasted. To stay with the past will only bring you into turmoil. No nation can survive without forgiveness.

Preaching reconciliation has become part of my daily task. For me this is a voluntary change, one that comes from within, even though the government has made me no reparation. But some former political prisoners are still very angry. They are not prepared to forgive. It's not hatred against the white man they feel, but anger at the government that has done nothing for them.

From The Forgiveness Project website

<http://www.theforgivenessproject.com/stories/>



How Forgiveness Affected My Life; Waiawa, Hawai'i

My name is Larry K. Brown, Jr. I am 33 years old, and currently an inmate at Waiawa Correctional Facility participating in the Kash Box Program. I'm getting treatment to learn more about my addiction (crystal meth) and my criminal conduct, but most importantly to learn more about myself.

During my childhood and early adult years, forgiveness was a way to get back at someone. If someone did something to me, I would forgive them until they thought everything was alright, then I would turn around and do it back to them twice as bad. For me, forgiveness was a tool for retaliation.

On January 1, 1981, my dad mom and aunty all got shot. My dad and aunty died. My mom luckily survived. It was a house warming party my dad had thrown for our new house in Waialua.

The party started off well. Everyone was having a good time. Family, friends, all together, celebrating the new year to come. I remember sleeping on the parlor floor. Then all I heard was BANG.

I heard my mom screaming. I woke up and saw my dad laying on the floor. Then another BANG went off. That's when I got up and ran over to my dad. At that time, I thought the bang sounds were coming from the plastic bag bombs that my dad use to tie at the end of a strand of fireworks.

When I ran over to my dad, I thought he was sleeping. He was still alive and breathing at the time, so I tried shaking him to wake him up. He grabbed me in his arms and told me he loved me. I fell back asleep in his arms.

The next thing I remember was paramedics lifting me off of him. Then later on that morning, I found out my dad and aunty got shot and died, and that mom was in the hospital fighting for her life.

Since my father's death, I have felt nothing but hatred for the man who did this to me and my family. As a child, I carried this bitter anger and frustration through my adult life. My ultimate purpose for living was to meet up with this man someday and pay him back for the pain he had caused.

The feelings that I've been carrying with me throughout the years have caused one heartache after another, not only for myself but also for the people who love me. My negative thoughts led to negative behaviors, which led to crime and prison.

Today I consider myself lucky to be alive. I was caught up in a vicious cycle of hate that would have almost certainly resulted in death. I have been in the Kash Box program for almost a year and have taken full advantage of its purpose . It has given me the opportunity to tell my story and express my feelings. I have come to realize that the cycle of hate can be broken and that the power to do this lies within me.

Forgiveness is a virtue I have never processed until now. My desire is to finally be free of the hate that has prevented me from pursuing the life I was meant to live. Anger has been my greatest obstacle; forgiving the man who took my family from me may be the hardest thing that I will ever do.

Larry Brown, Waiawa State Correctional Facility; O'ahu, Hawaii; July 2005



First Nations People: Canada

Recounted by Lency Spezzano

The First Nations woman stood in the center of the seminar room, and trembled with fury.

She was enraged, and she wanted to fight for her dignity and her pride. There was a man in the room, a fellow Native, whom she saw as a transgressor in the extreme. She preached to us of her love for her family, and for her people who had suffered a holocaust of cultural genocide.

The man revealed that he had been a sex offender during his youthful drinking days. He was so filled with regret and remorse that eleven years after the fact he turned himself in to the authorities, to begin a long series of rehabilitative seminars and counseling sessions.

He had been willing to convict himself with his guilt; his challenge now was to win back the truth. Regardless of the mistakes he had made in his life, his true nature as a child of the Creator was perfect innocence. He said that he hoped someday to be able to find forgiveness within himself.

He had abused others as he himself had been abused in the residential “Indian” schools the Canadian government had forced on the First Nations people for over a hundred years. There the children had been torn from their families, separated from their siblings, raped of their language, religion, and heritage, and were taught that everything “Indian” was evil or inferior. Without their families to protect them, the children were preyed upon by sexual predators who were hired by the churches to supervise the dormitories, and teach the classes.

When the children graduated from high school and returned to their villages, they brought the pattern of abuse home. Drugs and alcohol were used by many as an attempt to escape emotional suffering, which caused more damage to families and communities, especially due to their natural physical intolerance for alcohol. Violent death and suicide became common place, as did sexual and physical abuse.

I helped the woman recognize that her issue with this man was that she had not forgiven her own perpetrator for the violation, shame, and loss of innocence that occurred when she had been raped as a girl.

If she could find it in her to forgive her perpetrator, she could recover the innocence and joy she knew as a child. If she could allow this man in the seminar to stand for the one who had hurt her, she could forgive both of them at the same time. If she could free her mind of the judgment she had placed on them so that she could see them as innocent, she could win back their innocence as well as her own.

Without hesitation, she agreed to do the healing that would be required. The man crumpled forward from the torment of his guilt. For him to step to the front of the room to represent the woman’s perpetrator would be the greatest act of courage and willingness of his life. With great effort, he was able to rise and face the woman in her pain.

My husband, Chuck, suggested that she choose two women friends to walk with her and support her as she crossed the room, each step representing a step forward in her forgiveness.

Clutching each other, the three faced the man, and wailing from pain, began their slow but steady progress toward joining him in the truth. As they came close to him, their faces brightened, and soon the tears were tears of joy and release.

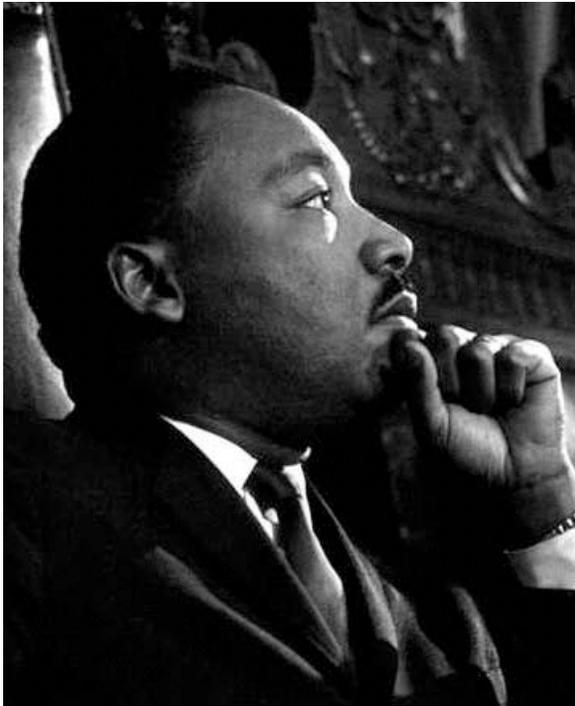
As the woman reached him, she gave him the gift of his innocence and therefore was able to receive it as her own. When they embraced, they were filled with love and gratitude for each other.

During the remaining days of the seminar, whenever I saw her around the compound, she was skipping like a child, a big grin on her face. Forgiveness had made her so lighthearted that she proved the adage, “It’s never too late to have a happy childhood.”

Many people are convinced of personal guilt so great that it separates them from their Creator’s love and acceptance. In the face of the miracle of forgiveness, Reality registers the only Truth in our minds: we are still just as God created us. We are perfectly innocent regardless of our mistakes, and we will one day share God’s evaluation of who we are.

In the year following this seminar, the young man continued to work on self-forgiveness. He started a support group for sexual offenders, knowing that he was in a position to help others.

From <http://www.gaia-mind.com>



Dr. Martin Luther King: Alabama

In the spring of 1965 I marched with King in Marion, Alabama, and experienced firsthand his deep love and humility in the face of injustice. I was visiting the Tuskegee Institute with colleagues from New York when we heard about the death of Jimmie Lee Jackson, a young man who had been shot eight days earlier when a rally at a church in Marion was broken up by police. State troopers from all over central Alabama had converged on the town and beaten the protesters with clubs as they poured out onto the streets.

Bystanders later described a scene of utter chaos: white onlookers smashed cameras and shot out street lights, while police officers brutally attacked black men and women, some of whom were kneeling and praying on the steps of their church.

Jimmie's crime was to tackle a state trooper who was mercilessly beating his mother. His punishment: to be shot in the stomach and clubbed over the head until almost dead. Denied admission at the local hospital, he was taken to Selma, where he was able to tell his story to reporters. He died several days later.

At the news of Jimmie's death, we drove to Selma immediately. The viewing, at Brown Chapel, was open-casket, and although the mortician had done his best to cover his injuries, the wounds on Jimmie's head could not be hidden: three murderous blows, each an inch wide and three inches long, ran above his ear, at the base of his skull, and on the top of his head.

Deeply shaken, we attended a memorial service there. The room was packed with about three thousand people (many more stood outside), and we sat on a window sill at the back. We never heard one note of anger or revenge in the service. Instead, a spirit of courage emanated from the men and women of the congregation, especially as they rose to sing the old slave song, "Ain't gonna let nobody turn me 'round."

Later, at a second service in Marion, the atmosphere was decidedly more subdued. Lining the veranda of the county court house across the street stood a long row of state troopers, hands on their night sticks, looking straight at us. These were the same men who had attacked Marion's blacks only days before. The crowd of whites gathered at nearby City Hall was no less intimidating. Armed with binoculars and cameras, they scanned and photographed us so thoroughly that we felt every one of us had been marked.

Afterwards, at the cemetery, King spoke about forgiveness and love. He pleaded with his people to pray for the police, to forgive the murderer, and to forgive those who were persecuting them. Then we held hands and sang, "We shall overcome." It was an unforgettable moment. If there was ever cause for hatred or vengeance, it was here. But none was to be felt, not even from Jimmie's parents.

Not long ago I read about a remarkable act of forgiveness by the children of Selma in those same days of early 1965. Local students had organized a peaceful after-school march when the town's notorious Sheriff Clark arrived. Clark's deputies began to push and prod the children, and soon they were running. Initially the boys and girls thought the sheriff was marching them toward the county jail, but it soon became clear that they were headed for a prison camp almost five miles out of town. The men did not relent until the children were retching and vomiting. Later they claimed they wanted to wear out Selma's "marching fever" for good.

A few days after this incident, Sheriff Clark was hospitalized with chest pains. Unbelievably, Selma's school children organized a second march outside the court house, chanting prayers for his recovery and carrying get-well signs.

Reprinted from *Why Forgive?*; Ebook by Johann Christoph Arnold; www.bruderhof.com; Copyright 2003 by The Bruderhof Foundation, Inc. Used with permission.



Terrorism: A decision to forgive; UK and Ireland

In 1984, the Irish Republican Army tried to assassinate British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and her entire Cabinet, as they met at the Grand Hotel in Brighton, England.

The huge bomb killed five innocent people.

Jo Berry is the daughter of Sir Anthony Berry, one of the five who died that day. Harvey Thomas was Thatcher's press secretary at the time, and barely survived.

And Patrick Magee was the IRA terrorist who planted the 100-pound bomb behind a bathroom panel in the hotel and remotely detonated it, changing the lives of Jo Berry and Harvey Thomas forever.

Not long ago, the three met at the historic St. James' Church near Piccadilly Circus in London. They talked about the lessons they have learned from terrorism.

"The fact that the three of us will stand side by side as friends is a story in and of itself. It shows that true reconciliation is possible," said Thomas. "Reconciliation isn't easy. But how do we move forward if we cannot forgive our enemies?"

Reconciliation means convincing hostile armies of true believers to treat each other with respect, if not tolerance. What is the alternative?

"What happens if nothing is done is almost certainly global warfare," said Thomas. "We have to ask ourselves: What are we willing to do to try to head that off?" Berry asks the same question.

Two days after the bombing, although she was a non-believer, she fled to the sanctuary at St. James and prayed for peace to deal with her grief. Her journey ultimately led to a meeting with the terrorist, who was caught and served 14 years of a life sentence in prison. Magee was released as a peacemaking gesture as part of the Good Friday peace agreements in Northern Ireland. The two first met privately. Then they talked in public about forgiveness, this time before the cameras of the BBC.

Then Berry and Magee held a public forum with Thomas, as the next stage in the bridge-building process. That forum on forgiveness drew political activists, therapists, diplomats, and believers from many different sanctuaries.

"I dream of a world in which we have choices to resolve conflict other than violence," says Berry. "Talking with Patrick Magee is a way of learning from the past, which may give insight for creating a different future. I am learning about the effects of blame and looking at how we make choices not to blame."

Thomas made a similar pilgrimage, to connect with the terrorist who seriously wounded him. Millions of people remember one indelible image from this bombing: rescue workers pulling the 6-foot-4, 280-pound Thomas out of tons of concrete rubble. His own memories center on hours of frantic prayers for his family.

Now Thomas has created new memories. His started exchanging letters with Magee while the bomber was still in prison. After his release a few years later, Magee was invited into the Thomas family kitchen, sharing baked beans, stories and regrets. They talked about decades of oppression, the bitter choices of civil war, and the dehumanizing effects of violence.

And one of Thomas' youngest daughters asked Magee: "You do realize that if you had succeeded in killing Daddy, I wouldn't be here?"

Magee wept and so did Thomas and his family.

"I have no doubt that I needed to forgive Patrick Magee," he said. "It's what God wanted me to do. So I did it."

based on a story by Terry Mattingly, Scripps Howard News Service



Bishara Awad: Israel-Palestine

Like so many others on both sides of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Bishara Awad, a Palestinian acquaintance of mine, has been wounded by his share of injustices. Speaking recently about his life-long struggle to forgive, he told me:

In 1948, during the terrible war between the Arabs and the Jewish settlers, thousands of Palestinians died and many more became homeless. Our own family was not spared. My father was shot dead by a stray bullet, and there was no decent burial place. No one could leave the area for fear of getting shot at by either side; there was not a priest nor a minister to say a prayer. So Mother read to us from the Bible, and the men who were present buried my father in the courtyard. There was no way they could have taken him to the regular cemetery in the city.

Mother thus became a widow at the age of twenty-nine, and she was left with seven children. I was only nine years old. For weeks we were caught up in the crossfire and were unable to leave our basement room. Then one night, the Jordanian army forced us to run to the Old City. That was the last time we ever saw our home and our furniture. We ran away with nothing but the clothes on our backs, some of us only in pajamas...

In the Old City we were refugees. We were put in a kerosene storage room that had no furniture. A Muslim family gave us some blankets and some food. Life was very hard; I still remember nights when we went to sleep without any food.

Mother had been trained as a nurse, and she got a job at a hospital for \$25 a month. She worked at night and continued her studies during the day, and we children were put in orphanages.

My sisters were accepted in a Muslim school, and we boys were placed in a home run by a British woman. To me, this was a real blow. First I had lost my father, and now I was away from my mother and my family. We were allowed to visit home once a month, but otherwise we stayed at the boys' home for the next twelve years. Here, with my two brothers and eighty other boys, my suffering continued. We never had enough to eat. The food was terrible and the treatment harsh.

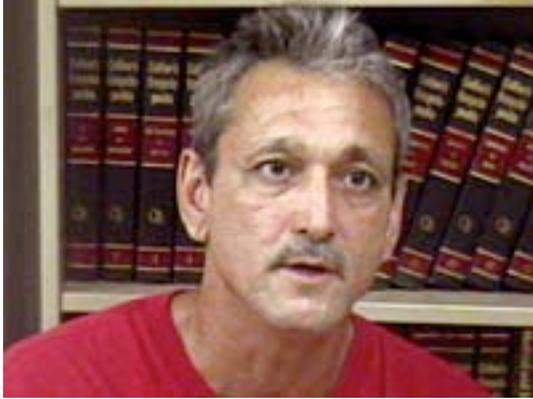
As an adult, Bishara went to school in the United States and became an American citizen. Later he returned to Israel and took a job teaching in a Christian school. Looking back, he says:

That first year I was very frustrated. I did not accomplish much and I felt defeated...There was mounting hatred against the Jewish oppressors: all of my students were Palestinians, and all had suffered in the same way I had...I wasn't able to help my students, because of the overriding hatred in me. I had harbored it since childhood without even realizing it.

One night I prayed to God in tears.

I asked forgiveness for hating the Jews and for allowing hatred to control my life. Instantly he took away my frustration, hopelessness, and hatred and replaced it with love.

Reprinted from Why Forgive? Ebook by Johann Christoph Arnold www.bruderhof.com Copyright 2003 by The Bruderhof Foundation, Inc. Used with permission.



Forgiveness is a Gift to the Giver; Waiawa, Hawai'i

No human being escapes misfortune.

When I was ten years old my father committed suicide by pistol. Then, shortly after my thirteenth birthday, my mother committed suicide by a drug overdose.

I was devastated. Many people at the time tried to help me—social workers, teachers. Police officers, judges—but I didn't want help. I was too busy rehashing both suicides in my mind and imagining how I could have prevented them.

I also spent quite a bit of time wondering where God was when I needed him.

To deal with my pain, I found alcohol and drugs. To fuel my addictions, I turned to crime. I was busy feeling sorry for myself and I had a ready-made excuse for my behavior; at the height of my insanity I was addicted to heroin and robbing banks. My actions led to repeated incarceration — and a cycle of drugs, crime and prison that spanned 30 years of my life.

2005 found me in prison once again at 50 years old — bitter with the belief that there was no hope for me. The difference was that I at Waiawa Correctional Facility in the Kashbox Treatment Program. I began to talk about my experiences with the death of my parents; I saw the mistakes I had made in life and felt the pain and blame that was still there.

In one particular session I broke down and finally grieved, 40 years after the fact. I learned that grief is a process.

My first introduction to the “Forgiveness Project” came while attending a program on Restorative Justice. In the class I found closure for my grief though voicing my forgiveness to my parents, to myself, and finally by making peace with God. My soul felt a lot lighter once I forgave—I lost the baggage of resenting, bitterness and self-pity. I now understood that forgiveness freely given is truly a gift to the giver—*I felt new.*

I think back and regret my actions as a drug abuser and criminal -- the people I've hurt, how I've affected the community. Today instead of taking, discouraging and using people -- I can do the opposite. I can care about, help and encourage others, be kind and decent—make a difference for the better; rejoin the “Brotherhood of Man.”

I'm especially grateful to Lorenn and Diane who taught all of us that caring makes a difference—as they showed by example.

Stephen Baker; Waiawa State Correctional Facility, O'ahu, Hawaii; July 2005



Delores -- The Choice To Forgive

Delores was good natured and attractive, but I could see the hurt in her eyes and the sorrow in the way she held herself. Though her parents were successful business people who raised her in an upper middle-class neighborhood, her mother was cold and critical, while her father was quiet and aloof.

Delores grew up feeling unattractive and uncared for, and she struggled to create strong relationships.

When Delores was thirty, her fiance Skip decided he was more interested in sleeping with local waitresses than remaining faithful to her. One day she came home and found him in bed with someone else. She saw this betrayal as an example of how unfair the world was—as proof that she never got a break. She was angry, hurt, confused, scared, and lonely. Skip moved out, but Delores constantly thought of begging him to return.

I met Delores when she came to a class I teach to help people learn to forgive others. She rarely spoke without mentioning at least one of the many people who had done her wrong. When she began the forgiveness training, she doubted it would do her any good. She was there because her therapist had recommended the class.

I've known many people like Delores. There's no shortage of people in the world who've been hurt—by someone they love, by a friend, by someone they didn't know at all. My classes rest on the simple and radical notion that how we react to these hurts is up to us.

Delores had mastered the first step to forgiveness before we even met: She determined what she did not like about her fiancé's behavior and knew in gruesome detail how she felt about it. She told anyone willing to listen what a louse Skip was.

Learning the second and third steps of forgiveness was more difficult. Even a year after Skip had cheated on her, Delores was in so much pain that she could not think straight. At first, healing meant only that she would revive her relationship with Skip. It was a struggle for her to want to heal just for her own well-being. In fact, Delores considered taking her fiancé back because she did not think other men would ever find her attractive. In her mind, Skip was both the cause of and the solution to her problem.

Delores thought forgiving condemned her to being a doormat her entire life. She thought it meant staying with Skip and overlooking his cheating. She suffered under the misconception that forgiving Skip meant condoning his actions, or that it meant forgetting the painful things that had happened.

I emphasized to Delores that she could not change the hurtful parts of the past, but only how much space she rented to them in her mind. By putting less blame on the past, she could change the way she felt in the present.

Delores got her first glimpse at an alternate way of living when she started to practice stress management every time she thought of Skip. She saw, if only for an instant, that breathing slowly and deeply affected how she felt. It gave her body and mind a break and a glimmer of peace. When she did not practice, she remained in a state of upset and continually blamed her ex-fiance for how she felt. After a few weeks of this pattern, she started to understand that she could reclaim her emotional life.

Delores also started to examine her theory that her parents had ruined her life. She noticed that she had an “unenforceable rule” that her parents must love her and treat her with kindness. Her parents had treated Delores the best they could, which included some cruelty and lack of care. Her parents' behavior was a reminder that no matter how much Delores wanted things to go her way, she did not have the power to control either the past or other people's behavior.

By continuing to insist that her past should somehow change, Delores was dooming herself to endless blame, offense, and suffering.

As the forgiveness training progressed, Delores began to look at her suffering and ask herself what “unenforceable rule” she was trying to enforce. I reminded her that she would not be so upset unless she was trying to change something that was impossible for her to change. Delores saw that trying to change her ex-fiance's behavior would always lead to pain and helplessness. She saw that just because she hoped for something, it did not have to come true. She understood that she would not be continuously upset if her rules for life were more in line with reality.

Therefore, Delores took it upon herself to create more enforceable rules. She was finally able to ask herself the revealing question, “What do I really want?” What she wanted was happiness, confidence, and peace of mind—things only she could provide for herself. Through asking this question, she saw that Skip and her parents did not have to remain in control of her life. Because of this insight, she started to work on her “positive intention,” or life goals described only in positive terms.

In response, she concentrated on learning about herself and approving of herself. She talked about blaming other people and holding onto the past as impediments to her goal of healing. She told me how she was entering counseling, looking for male friends and not lovers, and appreciating her good qualities. She did not gloss over the difficulties she faced—there is no miracle cure for life’s struggles.

Delores found this strategy helped her free up mental space so she could uncover other ways to meet her needs. She realized that neither Skip nor her parents were ever going to approve of her in the way she wanted. She was going to have to find that in herself. Her old habit had been to see her glass as empty. She started retraining her mind to see where her cup might already be full.

Delores also practiced gratitude when doing ordinary, everyday tasks. She found that one can be thankful for anything at any time, whether it’s the beauty of the trees one passes while driving, the phenomenon of one’s breathing, or the embarrassing riches of 21st century America. When shopping, she made it a point to marvel at the opportunities she had to purchase a stupendous array of items. She learned to stop for a minute at the local shopping mall and say thanks to all of the people working there. She would walk into her local supermarket and take a moment to appreciate the abundance of food choices in front of her.

When I bumped into Delores a year after her forgiveness classes ended, it was rewarding to see the changes in her. She was filled with energy and showed a lovely smile. When I asked her about Skip, she almost responded, “Skip who?”

Instead of Skip, she wanted to talk about how much she had learned about herself. When I asked about her parents, she said her relationship with them had improved. Delores accepted what they could offer and realized their enormous emotional limitations. As an adult she understood she was the one with the best chance to create a good life for herself. She was learning to let her parents off the hook. She forgave them for their mistakes.

The biggest change in Delores was the way she turned her grievances into more positive stories about herself. She talked with pride of forgiving Skip and learning how to take care of herself. Delores was a woman who took her forgiveness training to heart.

Fred Luskin, Ph.D., is the director of the Stanford Forgiveness Projects and an associate professor at the Institute for Transpersonal Psychology; he is also author of *Forgive for Good: A Proven Prescription for Health and Happiness*.



Jackie Young: Hawai'i

Jackie Young harbored the burden of her deepest betrayal for almost half a century.

Her third marriage was breaking up as she underwent chemotherapy for breast cancer. She lost her hair. She began radiation, and she became reflective.

In a guided imagery therapy session, she visualized the thing that would bring her peace. She imagined herself in a beautiful garden with her grandchildren. But she also visualized something darker.

"I sort of blurted it out," she said. "I said I think the only way I could heal myself was to forgive the person who raped me when I was 18."

She imagined meeting the man who raped her 46 years earlier, when she was a student at the University of Hawai'i. She imagined what she would wear and what she would say. She imagined her father appearing behind the rapist and saying: "It doesn't matter what he says. Just tell him how he hurt you." So she did.

"That day," the 68-year-old Kailua woman said, "I felt as if a plug came out of my heart."

While none of the research indicates forgiveness can cure cancer, Jackie Young is sure that at least it can't hurt. She is a breast cancer survivor. Young, director of marketing for the American Cancer Society, has a long list of achievements in addition to being a survivor. She served as a Hawai'i state representative from 1990 to 1994, was the first female vice speaker of the Hawai'i House of Representatives and at the time was the highest Korean American elected official in the nation.

Though her forgiveness brought her a sense of peace, it also sparked her drive to be an activist in life instead of a spectator. But to get that point, her forgiveness didn't end with her rapist. She also sent a letter to her first husband and met with her two other exes. She told them she was sorry she wasn't as present in the relationships as she might have been if she hadn't carried around the feeling that she didn't deserve to be loved in a relationship.

"It was brought on by my knowing I had to heal myself," she said. "It's given me an uplift in my life."

Before her cancer diagnosis, she was commissioned to write a Korean book of her memoirs. She thought she had a finished version. But it was just a rough draft.

Edited version reprinted from July 14, 2002, The Honolulu Advertiser article: "Is forgiveness the key to your survival?" by Tanya Bricking.



Forgiveness Stories

Hawaii Forgiveness Project 2005



this book, in several formats, may be downloaded at no charge here:

<http://www.hawaiiforgivenessproject.org/stories/>

permission to reprint and redistribute this document, in print or digital form,
is freely granted to all, provided it is unaltered

this book produced with the assistance of:

ca des · schutte

Cades-Schutte, Honolulu

<http://www.cades.com>



Greenstar, Haleiwa

<http://www.greenstar.org>



Scott Foster & Associates, Waialua

<http://www.scottfoster.org>



Sunset Homes, Haleiwa

<http://www.sunsethomes.net>



Jade and Arts, Kailua

<http://www.jadeandart.com>



Gaia Mind; Psychology of Vision

<http://www.gaia-mind.com>