

Two Days in Kalaupapa with Saint Louis Friends

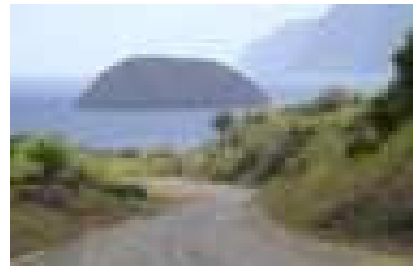


The Peninsula

I was searching for something compellingly mystical, something liberatingly magical on the Peninsula. Kalaupapa co-habits the 12 square mile peninsula which comprises Kalawao County. Unlike “topside” Molokai & Lanai, which are parts of Maui County, Kalawao falls within the jurisdiction of the State Department of Health and the Attorney General’s Office. In fact, it is more like the Island of Niihau in that land ownership is limited. In



Kalawao, there are three (3) landlords: the State Departments of Hawaiian Home Lands & Health, and the U.S. National Parks Service. Today, the “Settlement” has less than 100 residents, including 40 each State & Federal employees, and approximately 12 Former Patients (four (4) in the Hospital).



No one under 16 years of age is allowed within the Settlement, which is bordered by some of the many cattle guards that divide this enchantingly desolate triangle of land. Nevertheless, cats abound there. Accepted as surrogate children, the feline population is especially prevalent on “Cat Lane”, where they reign. In my Honolulu Haste, I accidentally hurried an orange female off the road; did she ever give me a dirty look. Moreover, a visible straight-line path lies between Pauline Chow’s and Gloria Marks’ homes; traffic is regulated by Cat Courtesy. For real!

There are 7,000-8,000 graves scattered throughout the County. The Main Cemetery in Kalaupapa contains the remains of the original Hawaiian settlers. Sign-separated sections for Catholics and Protestants are located alongside it. Most of the graves are unmarked as a result of the 1946 Tidal Wave, which carried the markers first, up to the base of the mountain, and then, permanently out to sea. The white crosses that replaced them, didn't last long. The U.S. Congress has approved re-marking, without funding.



Occasionally, a passing motorist will interrupt the absolute calm. This is called "Rush Hour Traffic". The tire-created trails leading from the Kalaupapa Lighthouse onto the white rock road fronting the Airport, are



facetiously referred to as "H-1, H-2, and H-3". But seriously, acute sensitivity to changes in the natural environment is a common characteristic among Settlement residents. Like noticing a large deer family in midnight darkness; and reading the weather in the clouds, the calendar by the position of the stars.

The Former Patients



As you might expect, the number of Former Patients is dwindling. They range in age from mid-60's to late 80's. At the end of their era, Kalawao County will fully assume its already-declared National Historic Park status. Our group of Saint Louis Class of 1962 graduates, who were sponsored by The Marks', and hosted by classmate, Norman (Louis) Soares, had the honor of meeting five (5) of the dozen surviving Former Patient-residents. Permit me to introduce them.

Richard Marks

Mr. Marks is the Sheriff of Kalawao County. He is an entrepreneur, ambassador of Aloha, museum-class collector, and Norman's mentor and boss. Among the myriad functional items in his collection, one would discover: 1. a Jitney bus that once belonged to former Philippines President, Ferdinand Marcos. It is a Jeep, the long wheel-base

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model, powered by a 4-cylinder engine.; and 2. a Harley Davidson motorcycle, which he rode down the steep and winding 3-mile Mule Ride trail. Reclining, almost semi-conscious, in his hospital bed, he was still able to muster the strength and enthusiasm to share his “Aloha! Welcome to Kalaupapa.” greeting.

Gloria Marks

Richard’s wife, Gloria runs her husband’s multiple enterprises, including the town bar. It was through her generosity that our group was able to spend two (2) nights in Kalaupapa. We presented her with a stuffed toy puppy as a token of our appreciation. When told that it breathed, she responded, “I better not take ‘em to Bingo!”.

Henry Nalaielua

One of us had read his book, “No Footprints in the Sand”. So, we were interested in conversing with this musician, artist, and natural Hawaiian wit. Henry learned everything the old Hawaiian way, by watching. When we heard that his home was being readied for sale, we asked him what he thought about it. He remarked, “Better I say nothing, because then they do everything!”. Then, someone wanted to know if he still played the ukulele. To this inquiry, he complained , cajoled, “Hard, because it’s in Honolulu.”.

Clarence “Boogie” and Ivy Kahilihiwa

They are among the youngest, most-recently arrived residents. This couple runs the Bookstore; Boogie attends Daily Mass. All of the Former Patients we met, were ebullient in their welcoming. After meeting us, he volunteered, “Come back; I be your sponsor!”.



The Damien Tour



Joseph DeVeuster, “Jef” to his family and friends, chose “Damien” for his religious name because 4th Century physician-brothers, Damien & Cosmas were his patron saints. Kalawao couldn’t have asked for a more uniquely qualified servant-priest. Father Damien was a builder and nurse, a religious & medical intercessor to the Hansen’s Disease patients of Molokai.



Siloama (Congregational) and St. Philomena (Catholic) were the only Christian churches on the Peninsula when Father Damien arrived in 1873, seven (7) years after the first victims were exiled to Kalawao. Initially, Damien slept outside the original Chapel, under the pandanus tree, which has since been removed. That space currently serves as his gravesite; his right arm is buried

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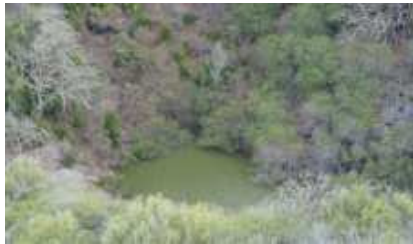
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there. The St. Philomena Church we visited, is the result of two(2) Damien-expansions
 NOTE: During Damien's 16-year ministry, the patients lived in the Kalawao district, only later moving to Kalaupapa after Franciscan Sister, Mother Marianne Cope (Barbara Koob) came to the Island.

Two roads provide access to the Kalawao district. The Lighthouse route was unquestionably picturesque and bumpy (like Kaena Point, except worse). Deep into the rocky desert, we happened upon a beach house equipped with an open, outdoor toilet flushed by bucket water, a BBQ



stove for cooking, and a bathtub and sink without spigots. Further in we discovered a top-open cave that led to the ocean, and the "Boom" which had once been used to off-load heavy machinery. The other, more popular route took



us to Kauhako Crater, the rock-islands of Okala and Mokapu, the "birthing stone", and Damien's reservoir system. The hill overlooking Kauhako Crater is the highpoint on the Peninsula. It serves as a resting place for Island royalty (burials, 1890 – 1893); and looks down on a miniature 800-foot deep lake.

We then proceeded to Kalaupapa, where we were formally introduced to Mother Marianne, who along with Father Damien has achieved "Blessed" status (i.e. the second



step toward Sainthood). Her burial marker stands in the middle of the Settlement, close to the Baldwin House (for boys) & Bishop House (for girls), and



St. Francis Church which was finished in 1908. At St. Francis Church, several of our Saint Louis group celebrated 5:30A Mass for our classmate, Mike Chow. It was the feast



day of Saints Damien and Cosmas, who you will remember, are the patrons of Father Damien. The Epistle reading was special: "A time for every thing... a time for weeping... a time for scattering...etc". A member of our group testified that she could feel the presence of the whole community even though only a hand full of participants, including Father Felix, were gathered. "To me", she said, "the Church was filled!"

The Classmates

Norman Soares invited several classmates (whom he met at Family Day, 2008) to Kalaupapa, where he supervises tour bus maintenance and, more recently, conducts Damien Tours. Although he resides in Kailua, for the last 10 years, he has commuted spending two (2) weeks in Kalaupapa, and then four (4) days on Oahu.

Norman is the quintessential host. Everyday he would inquire re: our interests, “Whatever’s in your heart?!” And that’s what we would do. During the course of our tour, he took us to the foot of the Trail, where the Mule Ride cowboys were gathered. He had asked them to bring down five (5) loaves of fresh Molokai Bread for us. The rest of our Saint Louis group was comprised of Jacob and Priscilla Vasconcellos from Las Vegas, Nevada, Kawika (David) and Darleen Freitas from Sandy, Utah, & Rupert and Collette Hunt from Honolulu. Listen as I recount some of our most insightful experiences.

Each morning our gang awoke, like little camp kids, anxious for a new adventure.; to the innocence of the 1950’s and 60’s. No attitudes, no expectations. We simply enjoyed whatever came our way. The usual obstacles seemed to melt away like the Wicked Witch of the West. Examples overflow: when one’s camera battery died, another offered to take the photos; when we were “ono” for sweetbread French toast, the neighbor was more-than-willing to share the maple syrup; & when we couldn’t swim at the pier because the barge was in, we came back later. No problems, no excuses.

NOTE: Norman was the only one to jump from the pier, the way some of us used to “jump Tower” at the Waikiki Natatorium (“The Tank”).

There were times, usually before meals, when the guys sat around the living room, piercing the natural silence with conversation. On one occasion, since each of us



was at least half Portuguese, we decided to differentiate “Portuguese” from “Portagee”. Jake offered the following: “Portuguese reside in Upper Palolo Valley.”

Speaking of meals...we flew over 229 lbs. of food & beverage for our 2-day stay (6 meals). Of course, the wine and beer, steaks and hamburgers, salmon and lasagna accounted for much of the weight. However, we couldn’t forget the from-scratch makings for Bernaise Sauce, Manhattans (with Crown Royal & long-stem Maraschino Cherries), real bacon for baked potato bits and breakfast, “Girlie’s Portuguese Pickled



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Onions”, Ruger Market boiled peanuts, the requisite several varieties of poke and ocean seaweed, and many gourmet selections of regular foods (i.e. Manoa Buttered Lettuce, Hilo Rainbow Papayas, etc., etc.)

We were constantly reminded that residents of Kalaupapa need to be ingenious in order to survive. Norman’s apparently casual reactions to various challenges regularly signaled this vital characteristic. All meals were consumed from a backyard picnic table, where the flies geometrically outnumbered us. As if he had done it many times before, Norman simply positioned two (2) fans to blow the flies away. Then, there is the “bus graveyard” which serves as the Napa Store for used parts. Finally, Kawika interjected, “Hey, we all had to be creative when we were growing-up on Oahu. I remember an old Hillman (Minx) radiator, which I kept together with broken sticks and bubble gum.”.

Before starting to write this reflective piece, I scoured my notes for a valid focus. I would not be content to recite a laundry-list of memories. Actually, I expected to share the mystical religious, altruistic experience I was intent to uncover. Perhaps I was looking too hard or for the wrong things, because what I did find was just as compelling & liberating. I found true satisfaction in the rekindled comraderie of my Saint Louis brothers and their spouses. Without a doubt, every one of us has moved on. But the people we have become are just as anxious to reconnect, just as capable to stand together again, with hands clasped, in the tradition of our Alma Mater. Even more so!

