

Aka and I First Meet in the Ocean View Grocery Store

AS I PULLED INTO THE GROCERY STORE in Ocean View, I could already imagine the taste of the fresh raw *Ahi Poke* (raw Ahi tuna) that was marinated with sesame seeds, toasted sesame oil, and tamari sauce. I had better pick up some "Ramen" too. I made dozens of variations of the noodle dish. There was still plenty of time to get back to Paleaku Peace Gardens before dark. Cruising around the grocery store, I became acutely aware of my lone status. Beautiful, golden brown-skinned, happy locals, with children in tow, were shopping for families, as could be seen by the full carts that they pushed up to the checkout counter.

I had gotten used to the patois or pidgin English that so many local people spoke. It had a lilting sound that was almost like laughter or singing and was playful and fun. But as a visitor, I dared not use it myself, as local people might think that I was poking fun at them.

I had been quite content being alone this month at Paleaku Peace Gardens until this visit to the grocery store. Suddenly I deeply missed my family in California and the missing tugged at my heart. I was reminded of all the full carts of groceries and full bags that I had brought home to our family over the years. With five children, a large garden wasn't enough. There were still many trips to the store. "A woman's hunting trip" was what our daughter, Stacy, called grocery shopping. And for the vegetarians out there, I always say that if we buy meat in store packages, we are on a hunting trip with our credit cards or wallets. I have always had great ambivalence about eating meat and admired my friends who had become vegetarians or vegans. There were months at a time that I followed the vegetarian diet, but I had not been able to sustain it for long. No matter what we eat, I feel it is important to give thanks and bless our food before taking it in.

There is something very lonely about a "shopping cart for one" when surrounded by many happy, local families. I pulled my cart up behind a large Hawai'ian woman wearing a black sports bra, a *lava lava* (sarong) of bright red design, a shell necklace, and slippahs (what we mainland people call "flip flops"), and a large black and white purse flung over her shoulder. She had a full cart and the checker was picking up one thing at a time and ringing it up. She turned around suddenly and faced me, "full on," with such force that I almost fell over. Her smile was full of vibrancy and warmth as she said, "Aloha, sistah! That's a beautiful necklace you are wearing." She was admiring a friendship necklace that my Pueblo friend, Maria from Santa Domingo Pueblo, had made for me. I told the woman what Maria always said, "A prayer in every bead."

Without any physical contact at all, I felt I had just been hugged with big love and big *mana*. All lonely feelings evaporated. She looked and felt like the “cosmic mother of man.” Tall, strong and big-breasted, she had a soft feminine face, with full sensuous lips and wild salt and pepper hair that seemed electrified. Her large beautiful eyes sparkled with fun and love, but also spoke of hidden powers, prayerful invocations and *kahuna* (priestess) magic. She looked like she was very Hawai’ian, and I thought that she just had to be a *Kahuna*. Her eyes were penetrating as well as kind. I could tell that she could see clearly, with great discernment, and I knew she would



do no harm.

Then she asked me, “Why do women think they have to be thin, rich, young and beautiful to be marketable?” I don't remember my answer but I thought, Well, she's getting right into it with me, as if we were old friends. She continued on, “Well I'm not thin, rich, young or beautiful, but I'm hella marketable.” At this she gave out a robust laugh! “I can feesh, grow gardens, make temple instruments, craft, dance and sing and collect healing herbs, and I think that makes me hella marketable!” Again she laughed with a laugh that shook her body, and I could tell she was totally enjoying herself. She asked me what I was doing here and where my family was. We went back and forth a few times and then her groceries were bagged and she had to pay and leave. She bid me a big “*Ah hui hou* (see you later) *sistah*” when she left, and before I could ask her name, she was gone, in a cloud of dust, driving down the road, with gusto, in a green Forest Service truck.

Who is this woman in the red *lava lava* (sarong)? I wondered. I wanted to know who she was and where I could find her again. This encounter felt like destiny and certainly like soul recognition. It is odd how it happened, after a full day of circling the island, and praying for a navigator. Now I felt that I had found my navigator and I wanted to see her again. But she was gone. If she lived here in Ocean View, it was at least an hour away from where I was staying. What were my chances of encountering her again? I wondered.

Little did I know, at the time, that I had already known and had the highest regard for her mother, Auntie Fern Pule, for many years.