

-- The Story of a Pencil --

KU'UIPO

The Life and Work of Gigi Cocquio

Translated and Adapted
from the Original Italian by
Joseph A. Vancio

Translator's Note

Gigi and I have been friends since our days in Milan, Italy (1965-66) where we were both seminarians at the PIME Major Seminary on via Monterosa. Later, we worked together as PIME missionaries in San Pablo Apostol Parish in the squatter area of Tondo, Philippines from 1972-75 when I was pastor. It is, indeed, an honor for me, through this translation, to be able to contribute in some small way so that Gigi's work is known to the English-speaking world. The account of the life and work of this friend will speak for itself. Yet, these pages offer only, as it were, a glimpse of the full scope of the altruism, dedication, and energy with which he gives of himself for God and his fellow humankind.

The book was originally written and published in Italian, *La Storia della Matita*, in 2008 by Gigi's cousin, Elisa Barelli (Ku'uipo). Ku'uipo's inspiration for the format of her original work — the title and chapter headings— is drawn from a book of reflections entitled, *Like the Flowing River*, by Paulo Coelho. I ask pardon from the author for taking the liberty, because of my personal experience in Tondo with Gigi, to have redacted some of parts 6 and 7 found in Chapter Two, along with other additions throughout.

I present below the relevant section of Coelho's book that is included in *La Storia della Matita*. I hope that the reader will better understand the Coelho-inspired structure of Ku'uipo's account of Gigi Cocquio's life story.

A boy was watching his grandmother write a letter. At one point, he asked:

'Are you writing a story about what we've done? Is it a story about me?'

His grandmother stopped writing her letter and said to her grandson:

'I am writing about you, actually, but more important than the words is the pencil I'm using. I hope you will be like this pencil when you grow up.'

Intrigued, the boy looked at the pencil.^{*} It didn't seem very special. ***Emphasis added (Vancio)**

'But it's just like any other pencil I've ever seen!'

'That depends on how you look at things. It has five qualities which, if you manage to hang on them, will make you a person who is always at peace with the world.'

'First quality: you are capable of great things, but you must never forget that there is a hand guiding your steps. We call that hand God, and He always guides us according to His will.'

'Second quality: now and then, I have to stop writing and use a sharpener. That makes the pencil suffer a little, but afterwards, he's much sharper. So you, too, must learn to bear certain pains and sorrows, because they will make you a better person.

'Third quality: the pencil always allows us to use an eraser to rub out any mistakes. This means that correcting something we did is not necessarily a bad thing; it helps to keep us on the road to justice.'

'Fourth quality: what really matters in a pencil is not its wooden exterior, but the graphite inside. So always pay attention to what is happening inside you.'

'Finally, the pencil's fifth quality: it always leaves a mark. in just the same way, you should know that everything you do in life will leave a mark, so try to be conscious of that in your every action'

Source: Like the Flowing River by Paulo Coelho

Gigi is the **pencil**, who with boundless goodness and inspiring creativity continues to write so fervently in the book of Life from his farm Ho'a'ina O Makaha* where his lives with his wife, Judy, and son, Kai, on the island of Oahu in Hawaii.

Please enjoy these pages and, above all, be inspired.

Joseph A. Vancio
March 5, 2010

*Ho'a'ina O Makaha, a not-for profit organization is a spiritually-based educational farm rooted in the relationship to Hawaiian culture and the land; working with children and adults, it is dedicated to establishing peace through education, equitable economic development, and social justice.
<http://www.hoainaomakaha.org/>

Introduction

I was twenty-two years old when I made my first trip to the Hawaiian Islands. A magical place! Ever since I was a young teenager, I was drawn to these exotic islands, especially, when I heard the accounts of other people's trips. The people who returned from Hawaii seemed changed—touched by a magic of a far-away land. I was fascinated and dreamed that one day I, too, would journey to those far-off jewels of the Pacific.

Eventually, years later, when I departed for Hawaii, I was only vaguely aware of the full impact that the trip would have on me. In Hawaii, I discovered more than a place—more than an island wonderland. I re-united with my cousin, Gigi Cocquio, a person whom I had not seen for many years. Meeting him again, knowing his family, and experiencing the work they were doing in Hawaii was completely transforming for me. A moment arrived in my life that I never expected to happen— my life changed forever! I came to know a man who has so much to give, a man who was my cousin, but now has become my friend, even a brother and a father to me. From the moment of my visit, I realized that just being in his presence, or following his advice, and being able to share in his experience is like coming upon a priceless treasure.

Upon my return to Italy, I felt compelled to write his story. I knew very well that trying to put into words all that Gigi has done and continues to do might, indeed, be a bold and reckless undertaking for me. However, I am convinced that the story of his life merits a hearing and much more, great admiration.

So, it is to you, Gigi, a sower of goodness and light, that I offer this work, this account of your life in order to thank you for all that you have done. You have allowed me to search your heart, and even to participate, in some small way, in the depths of your life. I feel compelled to share how you taught me to appreciate even the smallest things in life, to value life itself with all its lights and shadows. I want people to know how you have become an important point of reference in my life and in the lives of so many others.

Gigi, may this book of your life and work, please permit me, help readers to understand why you are called in Hawaiian, “Ahu’ulalokomaika’i” (the royal mantel that joins all in generosity). Because of your work and your outreach to others, so many people feel part of a great human family of goodwill that continues to grow each day. Please allow me, then, through these words to reciprocate your great gift of selflessness.

Dear reader, I share with you what I have learned. Moreover, I pray, that you take this opportunity to benefit from whatever lessons emerge from my writing. This is a story of hope and a strong commitment to the true values of life—family, faith, friendship, and love for others. A story that teaches us to never give up believing in ourselves and in our dreams for humanity. The lesson is to keep these true values steadfast in our hearts throughout life’s vicissitudes—even when we find the way difficult and trying.

This story is like the script for a play whose message is to unite people and, yet at the same time, it makes all of us the principal players or the protagonists!

I offer this account of Gigi’s life and work and dedicate it to all who may be able to open their hearts and allow this experience to enter and remain there. I beg that the reader accept this narrative, guard it as a precious gift in the depth of his /her heart, and, then, share it with as many others as possible. Then, my goal will have been achieved and my prayer granted.

Ku’uipo

Foreword

When Elisa (“Ku’uipo”), my cousin, informed me that, she had the idea to write a book about me, I was taken aback. I told her that it was not worth the effort because my life was not very interesting. I have encountered other people in my life with stories that are much more noteworthy. However, she insisted that there were many people who have known me for many years and yet, do not know much about my life. And they would benefit from learning more about me. I knew that I would not win this argument. So now, you have the result!

This story of my life and experiences is not really a “book” to be published, but I consider it a long letter between friends. It is a simple letter without the pretense to be a biography. Let us say, that this is a long ‘thank you’ letter to whoever has remained close to me in my life, especially close in those moments that were passed in joy and sorrow. My friends and family have always wished me well, especially because they know how crazy and stubborn I can be. Even if, at times, they did not understand what I was doing, yet, they always accepted and sustained me with patience and affection. They supported me especially in those decisions and moments that were life changing for me.

This, then, is the letter written solely to share experiences, feelings, and reflections and nothing more!

I express my gratitude to Elisa for all the work she has done. It certainly has not been easy for her to gather and make sense out of the often disconnected stories and facts that I haphazardly recounted. Yet, she persevered. I thank her for her kind and patient endurance. Moreover, I am grateful to Elisa for not only being my cousin, but for being a very special person in my life.

Gigi

Chapter One

The Hand Guiding your Steps

1.

The story begins in northern Italy, some few miles from the Swiss border, in the small hamlet of Ronco in the Province of Como. Two families were living there in two separate houses situated on the top of a small hill that dominates the countryside. The hill offers a spectacular view of the surrounding area. Beyond the hill extends an ample section of rich farmland where crops grow and animals are set out to pasture. A small wood, that brings cool breezes in the summer heat and supplies an abundance of firewood for the long winter nights, surrounds the land.

This is the home of Gigi's maternal grandparents and it was here that Gigi spent the major part of the summers of his youth. The long summer days were spent in the company of his older sister and his cousins as they helped working in the fields. There was more than enough chores for them to do: cutting the hay, feeding and taking care of the animals (rabbits, chickens, a cow and an ox), making butter and cheese, harvesting the grapes and helping to press the grapes to make wine. The usual farm chores were not always done voluntarily because the lure was strong (as it usually is in children) to roam and play at will!

Although Grandpa knew how to do everything on the farm, Grandma really took charge to see that the work was done correctly and all completed at the proper time. His grandfather impressed Gigi. Every Sunday afternoon, dressed in his 'Sunday best' suit, Grandpa would set out to walk the countryside where he enjoyed looking at the fields, plants and flowers—his gaze rested on everything that grew on the land. The expression on Grandpa's face was a look of pure pride, full of a contentment that expressed itself in a smile more eloquent than any words could ever describe. He never asked his grandfather why he preformed this Sunday ritual.

Gigi noticed that his own Dad used to take a similar walk after the seeds were sown, the fields planted, and the hay collected! Once these chores were completed, his Dad would stop to rest, and sitting on a small hill at the side of the fields overlooking the orchard, in silence, he smoked a cigarette peacefully. Gigi could notice a look of paternal pride and satisfaction in his father's gaze. Moreover, when times were not going so well, like moments after a storm when some plants would be destroyed—Gigi would see the pain reflected in his father's eyes. Along with the pain he noticed a look of determination—to plant again, to start over!

In the courtyard of the family house and barn where his grandmother would make her preparations for cooking there grew a sturdy tree—a walnut tree. From one of the thick limbs of the tree his grandfather hung a swing so that the grandchildren could enjoy themselves. This was a ‘sacred’ spot for Gigi, a place of refuge, the most desired of all spots on the farm where he would sit and listen to the faraway sounds of a train passing...and he would dream.

One day, during the summer in which his younger sister was born, Gigi was taken from his grandparents place in Ronco back to his parents’ home. He ‘d never forget the sight—there were a lot of people in his parents’ bedroom and Gigi thought that perhaps his mother was ill. Women shooed him away from the room without explaining what was happening. So he grabbed his bicycle and rushed angrily, while crying, all the way back to his grandparent’s house. He headed straight for the walnut tree to sit in the refuge of ‘his spot.’ There he burst into more tears thinking that his mother was very sick and he was not allowed to see her. Two neighbors found him there when they came to announce that a new little sister was born!

The walnut tree for years was always Gigi’s special place. Many more years passed and life took him far away from home. He was no longer able to sit in the shade and enjoy the closeness of his friend--the walnut tree. Some of Gigi’s friends, as a sign of affection and friendship, made a pilgrimage to the old walnut tree. They took a handful of soil from the land where Gigi lived far away and mixed it among the roots of the walnut tree. They held hands and gathered around the tree to honor their absent friend now living in a foreign land. Then, they recited some words Gigi had written in homage to his beloved tree.

And....the tree responded...

*I rest sleepily under a clear evening sky,
A sky streaked with bright stars*

*Such a marvelous night that my
branches reach out to gratefully
caress the moon for giving such a night.*

*Usually I quickly I fall asleep
But tonight is different from all other nights,
My dreams are filled with vivid, shining colors.*

*Today, I received a great gift.
And have been infused with a new life.*

*My roots, still anchored in this solid land of Ronco,
Have carried to me a thrilling newness of joy and grace!*

*Something has been added to the soil!
The roots are absorbing a new and fragrant morsel
--an exotic food from a far away land.*

*Friendly hands have left at my feet
handfuls of dark earth, new mango earth
Gently mixed with this land of Ronco.*

*Those kind hands have softly stroked
The wrinkles of my old bark,
And they uttered a name--long familiar NAME.*

*The name of that child, that youngster,
That one man—a name I recognize
from among the hundreds, thousands
Who have gathered round my trunk.*

*And, then, it happened, as if I heard his voice
calling out to me, seeking refuge, safety, and strength.*

*I, the old walnut tree, weighed down with age,
Immediately understood the love and the faith of that man...*

*I can see the light reflected in his face and feel
the tears that bathe this land and the land of the mango.*

*No one but he has ever bathed my earth with tears,
Nor stroked my roots,
Nor kissed my wrinkled bark.*

*No one has ever spoken to me as he did
Nor mingled a new soil in my earth.
Now, I am no longer the same old tree,
that man and I are one.*

*He never forgot me.
And, I, so firmly planted in the land of Ronco,
Always wait for him.*

*Every night I search for a sign of him.
I begged the sky and the clouds to speak his name to me;
To bless his coming and goings,
To give strength to his life.*

*I know that every night he also searched for me,
Especially when he reflected on his life,
When he loved, suffered, prayed, and smiled!*

*He thinks of me, the walnut tree of his childhood,
And I, of him, that young boy who brought
Much joy to my youth.*

*We grew together, Gigi and I,
Both strong and free,
Simple, yet ever faithful.*

*We grew together, Gigi and I,
Both in good times and bad,
Enjoying the days of sun and rain,
Along with the times of the bitter wind.*

*Many days, I sit here alone,
Surely, he too has been alone.*

*I extend my branches to embrace
his outstretched arms.*

*Yet, it is only now that I understand
those countless moments when we
touched, consoled, and embraced.*

*Come Gigi. Come to the shelter of my shade.
I will hold you and the embrace will bring me new life.*

*Come and listen to the voices of memories past.
Come and we will again, sing our songs.*

*Come and be renewed by the joy of being, once again,
together with me.*

*Come. My land and yours are the same.
I wait for you.....*

Gigi read the words slowly and allowed the message to enter into his heart. He received the photos of the walnut tree that friends brought to him. As he studied each picture, the tree came alive and the moment moved him deeply. Even his friends were touched just watching him enjoy the pictures. Gigi seemed overcome by the tenderness and affection of his friends—but it was in seeing the walnut tree again that moved him the most.

The tears flowed, and every tear became a lasting memorial to the closeness, the love, and the gratitude of friendship. He was thankful for having witnessed this gesture of friendship, for having believed in a dream that had already become true in their hearts. So it was that Ronco was not only a physical place, small village, but also a spiritual vision. Ronco was the realization of a dream and a love that bound them deeply together.

Who knows what the walnut tree would be saying every time it saw someone come close under its branches?

What would the tree be thinking each time someone would talk to it about the man who had spent so many hours in its shade?

The last time he saw his tree it was on a cold winter day. The branches were bare without any leaves. He placed a small angel statue at the base of his tree so the tree would have some company. He thought that, perhaps, even trees could be lonely.

Gigi really loves Ronco-- that land and all that it represents for him. He has strong bonds to the place that marked his growth and formed his character. Since he was a boy, he always wondered if he would ever be able to look upon a land with the same depth of gaze that his parents and grandparents had.

2.

Gigi's mother, a tailor, was originally from Ronco and his father, a bread baker, lived in nearby town. Everyday his father, in horse drawn cart, delivered bread to Ronco and the surrounding villages.

Usually, Gigi's mother, before she was married, would go down the hill to get the bread. It was one of her daily chores. Therefore, the two young people met, became acquainted, and began to like each other. Each day, as a little gift of friendship, he would slip an additional roll or two into her bread bag. Not long after, they were married on December 26th, St. Stephen's Day, because each year it was the only vacation day that Gigi's father could take off from work.

Gigi is the second of three children—he is the middle child between two sisters, one older by four years and the other younger by ten years. There was another child, a small brother who died at a few months of age—he was always called the family's little angel in heaven. Early one morning the baby began to cry incessantly as Gigi was preparing to go to school. When Gigi returned home, the little angel was not there. His mother explained that the baby had gone to heaven and would be watching over him to protect him throughout his life. While Gigi was in school, the baby had been brought to the hospital, where he later died. His mother carried the baby home in her arms by bus as if he was still alive and buried him the following day.

Only after many years did Gigi's mother ever mention what had happened—she was so deeply stricken.

Let me tell you a few stories about Gigi's childhood:

One time, after a heated quarrel with his older sister who wanted to get into the bathroom first to get dressed—he seemed to give up and let her pass. But just as she was passing him as he stood at the bathroom door, he launched a nasty bite to her arm (which she remembers to this day)!

Another time in kindergarten, the rambunctious Gigi bit the nose of a classmate who, in addition to his own, had gulped down Gigi's portion of soup.

Then, also in kindergarten, at the student presentations during the last class of the year, Gigi set the parents and audience to tears of rolling laughter when he gave a rendition of his grandfather taking snuff! Gigi really sniffed a pinch of tobacco, but inhaled it so deeply that his eyes teared over and he broke out into uncontrollable sneezing. More surprised than anyone, Gigi could not locate his handkerchief, as he pulled wildly at his pockets; he ended up flailing his arms with fits of sneezing.

When Gigi was eleven years old, he made an important decision that would change the course of his whole life; he decided to enter the diocesan seminary to study for the priesthood.

3.

Life in the seminary of Sant'Abbondio in Como was not easy.

Gigi's decision to enter the diocesan seminary of Como was inspired by the example of the assistant-parish priest at the local parish. This young priest was very active with the youngsters in the area, a great role model of dedication, generosity, and joy. Above all, he had a terrific motorcycle that roared as he sped to and from the parish church—a delight to all the young boys, but a nuisance to the women who gathered outside the church!

Gigi liked the idea of helping others and it appeared to him that the best way to do this was to become a priest like the assistant pastor.

This was a difficult decision for his family to accept—financially the parents were making only enough for a basic living with little to spare. It would be a great sacrifice for the family, but they were willing to do it to help their son fulfill his dream. Life in the seminary curtailed home visits and contact with his parents to a minimum of only a few times a year. His mother came to pick up his laundry about every ten days so had a chance to see him more often, but his father saw him only twice a year when Gigi had vacation (the week after Easter and a month in the summer).

Seminary life brought a lot of studying, rules, daily Mass, meditation, the Grand Silence in the evenings, and scheduling throughout the day; there was little room for spontaneity and the practical pursuits that he loved so much. Above all, the studies—the hours spent in studying seemed interminable. Schoolwork was not Gigi's passion, but he persevered because it was the way to achieve his goal of reaching priesthood.

At vacation time, Gigi would seek out his old friends and ride his bike to Ronco—the place where he would be revived. There were times that he was almost expelled from the seminary. Not only did Gigi have a very lively (let us say, implacable) personality, but he was always using the Comasco dialect (verboten in the seminary), was noisy during the lunchtime silence, and frequently playing his guitar!

Gigi's love for music (composing and playing) -- a passion that began since his days in the seminary --continues to the present.

The rector of the seminary at Como did not look too kindly on guitar playing, since he considered the guitar a secular instrument unsuitable for seminarians. During the evening periods of recreation, Gigi was obliged to play the church organ—he unflinchingly acquiesced, but--to the consternation of seminary superiors-- many famous Italian children's songs found their way to the organ keys!

Many years later Gigi would begin to compose and sing his own songs such as, 'Millions of People', 'The Story of a Good Christian', and 'Return, O Lord' among many others. Gigi's most popular composition is the song, 'Leave Your Land' based on the theme of leaving one's homeland to go where Jesus calls. This song has been sung in churches and chapels all over Italy, translated into many languages, and sung by many professional singers.

*Leave your land and go where I show you
Leave your land and go where I show you*

***Abraham, don't leave, don't go!
Do not abandon your home
What do you hope to find?***

***The road is always the same
The people strange and even foes
Where do you hope to arrive?***

***You know what you are leaving
What will God give you?
A people, a land, a promise: Word of Yahweh***

*Leave your land, and go where I show you
Leave your land and go where I show you*

*The fishermen abandoned nets on the beach,
And went along with Jesus*

*All the people praising him, gone too,
The silence puzzles the twelve*

*You know what you are leaving,
What will God give you?
A hundredfold here and eternity there: Word of Jesus*

*Leave your land and go where I show you
Leave your land and go where I show you*

*To depart certainly isn't all.
Some people leave and give nothing,
Seeking only sun and the sand.*

*But to leave, with a faith in the Lord,
And love open to all, can change everything.*

*You know what you are leaving,
What you are bringing is more important
Go then and live my Good news: Word of Jesus*

*Leave your land and go where I show you
Leave your land, and go, I am always with you*

Every summer the diocesan seminarians from Como would spend some days at Arnoga, in Valtellina. (Valtellina, northern Italy near the Swiss border, is called the heart of the Alps! A divine, panoramic, magnificent ski and resort area high in the Alps about 90 km. north of Milan). Often the seminarians would hike to Isolaccia (another Alpine village) to meet their fellow-seminarians of PIME. At Isolaccia, PIME used the local school building as a vacation place for its seminarians and priests.

PIME, the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions, is the earliest or first missionary institute in Italy founded jointly, in 1850, by Bl. Msgr. Angelo Ramazotti and the Bishops of Lombardy region of north Italy. PIME has both priest and lay members and is present in Algeria, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Brazil, Camerons, Philippines, Japan, Guinea-Bissau (a republic on northwest coast of Africa), Hong Kong, India, Papua New Guinea, and the United States.

Because of his frequent contact and acquaintance with the PIME seminarians at Isolaccia, Gigi eventually made a decision to transfer into the PIME seminary. At the time, he was twenty years of age and had been in the diocesan seminary for almost ten years. He set himself on a new path to be a missionary priest.

4.

When Gigi told the rector of his seminary that he intended to transfer to the PIME seminary, the rector almost embraced him with joy. Externally, the rector seemed pleased for Gigi and the missionary choice he made. However, internally he may have been more relieved (and happy) to have one less headache!

Gigi's parents were at first taken by surprise by his choice of entering the missionary institute. His father, at first, seemed a bit brusque to whole idea. While, Gigi's mother assured him that his father did understand and would eventually accept, but to give him a little time. That is how it finally turned out.

Eventually, Gigi went to Milan for an appointment with the PIME Regional Superior. The first thing that Father Bonaldo, the Regional Superior said was: "Son, sit down and let's have a good glass of wine." That was a sign that PIME was the right place for him!

Gigi expected a total change from the seminary formation that he had experienced at Como. The first year in PIME, he spent as a year of formation in the PIME House at Villa Grugana in Brianza. After three days, he asked the rector that he wanted to return home. The rector encouraged him to give himself a few more days to make up his mind. Therefore, with the passage of time, he was able to endure the strict rules of the novitiate. He along with other seminarians found amusing pastimes to get around the rules. Of course, all-unbeknownst to the rector, things like chasing the chickens into the nearby cemetery, or secretly singing popular and folk songs, even removing the clapper from the morning bell in order to sleep longer. The best of all -- greasing the doorknobs of the dormitory doors! The rector reprimanded and punished them, while laughing, of course, sotto voce.

After the year of formation, he was promoted to the study of theology at the PIME Major Seminary on Via Monterosa in Milan. Life in the seminary was not all study...he never really took to 'serious studies' anyway, but he managed and finished the courses required. All the while, the jokes, tricks, and the songs made the 'serious' life easier and cemented strong and true friendships with his companions. They even formed a band called 'The Black Devils' (*black* because of the color of the cassock that they wore).

During the summer of his second year at the seminary, he went to Lourdes and stayed at the Cite' Secour (the village for poor pilgrims). He worked in the kitchen, cleaned rooms, and was a guide for visitors. In addition, a sort of miracle even happened...among a group of students from Como there was a girl called Mariella...and she began to call him 'GIGI'. The name stuck and so it remains to this day.

On December 23, 1967 he was ordained a Subdeacon and the following February 18, 1968 in the PIME Church of St. Francis Xavier in Milan, he received the diaconate from the hands of Bishop Aristide Pirovano, PIME. His parents, younger sister, and relatives were present. After the ceremony, he played the guitar and sang. Among the newly ordained, he was considered the singer and an amusing comedian.

The ordination to the priesthood at Uggiate on June 22, 1968, was a very moving event for all concerned. The church was packed and unable to accommodate all who wanted to participate in the ceremony. The church was decorated with flowers and banners filled the streets of the town itself. A long procession of neighbors, friends, and family accompanied him on foot all the way to the doors of the church. All were united in prayer and friendship in order to pray for and with him. The elementary school teachers could not imagine that one of their own pupils was able to become a priest!

On June 23rd, the day he celebrated his First Mass in the parish church there was again a full house. His special Sponsors for the day, his friends Henrico and Joseph also accompanied him along with his Ordination sponsors, his cousins Romeo and Pierluigi. His good friend, Sandro Bordignon, also a PIME missionary who later died in a fatal accident in Thailand, wrote a letter to Gigi for the occasion:

On this special day in your life, it is important to think about all the circumstances of joy and suffering, and all the people whom you have met along the way and brought you to this moment.

God is, indeed, found in all the 'moments' of life, and your life is none other than an encounter with God.

Today, the memory of all the good things that have happened ceases to be an empty promise and becomes a rich contemplation of all that God has accomplished for you.

For this to happen, I feel, that it is necessary for you to become the person that you have always known to be since your childhood. Perhaps, only your parents could be able to help you realize this aspect of God's plan for yourself.

Therefore, I simply recall what it is about you in this past year that has impressed me and what I have learned from the young people whom you have helped. You have a special openness to others, a need to give of yourself in service, to allow others to participate in that same joy that fills your soul—it is a beautiful expression of Christian love.

You have been able to arrive at the same level as the young people you have met in an expression of friendship that has the amazing ability to assume their problems. You are able to share with them the depths of your own life and your own struggles in a way that encourages them to have the same type of faith in God as yours.

You are not interested in long discourses, or beautiful words, nor even in grand ideas, but only to be able live concretely in direct communion with the other person. You seek a unity with the other person, even though it is difficult. For you it is the best way to arrive at the essence of the person-- to begin a fraternal and respectful dialogue.

Your happiness is born of the desire that the other person whom you encounter should share in the same joy and the same security that help you to overcome any of life's delusions.

I recall how the young people who attended your musical presentations always admired your capacity to move from important speech to 'noisy joy!'

I will always remember the songs we used to sing on our trips going here and there especially in winter, when we would stop by the side of the road to do exercise in order to warm ourselves!

I can only imagine what passersby when they saw us most have thought about those two crazy people. However, your only thought was to allow others to have the same joy in their hearts that you had.

I believe that the goodness in your heart for others is not like a small door but rather a grand arch of triumph through which thousands would be able to stream through toward God.

Your heart wants to embrace all of us! Therefore, we gather around you to hold onto your hand firmly because holding on will be life changing.

5.

After his ordination to the priesthood, Gigi expressed the desire to go as a missionary to the Amazon in Brazil. However, the appointment to Brazil never happened and the superiors in Milan never explained the reasons. His first assignment was to remain in Italy for three years in order to work as a Director of Vocations for PIME. The central office for his work was in Lecco because he would be focusing in particular on the youth in dioceses of Milan and Como.

The decade of the seventies was unfolding, a time in the Church when many people were searching for new ways to live their faith. People were eager to form together in small groups, often outside the official parish structures, in order to strive to live a deeper and much more personally spiritual life. Gigi began to contact these groups—often principally university students—and began to work with them.

Together with the students, Gigi began to organize shows along with entertainment as a means to raise awareness and Christian action with a focus on the problems of countries in the Third World. He would travel to many parishes and diocesan centers, churches, schools, and even factories to present these shows with slides, readings, prayers, and songs. The purpose of this work was to bring new vocations for PIME. However, after two intense years and many miles covered it all came to naught – not one new vocation entered PIME. So, the superiors approached Gigi and asked him to make a decision and choose a mission where he would like to be assigned.

Gigi and the Rector of the PIME house in Lecco, Father Cesar Colombo, had become good and close friends during the two years of his residence there. Father Colombo was a veteran of the PIME mission in Kentung, Myanmar (Burma) where he was famous for having built a hospital for people with Hansen's disease or leprosy—giving them the dignity to lead normal lives. Gigi was inspired and wanted to experience this type of missionary work, so he requested to go to the PIME mission leprosarium in Cameroon, Africa. Instead, his superiors assigned him to the newly opened PIME mission in the Philippines.

Within days, he saw his assignment suddenly posted at the PIME motherhouse in Milan and was puzzled at the haste. At first, he was not even sure as to where this country of the Philippines was located! He bought a map and brought it home to his surprised and incredulous parents and friends. His former-rector at the major seminary said to him, “*Gigi, don’t think that this quick assignment was in any way a punishment...*” Well...Gigi had his doubts, but he was excited to begin his missionary assignment.

He interrupted his scheduled summer assignments with parishes and youth groups...and quickly departed for England. PIME had a house in London where missionaries assigned to English-speaking countries could live and attend language classes. Gigi felt that he was not learning fast-enough so, he went to the local parish school and sat in with the fourth grade class. Here he overcame all difficulties and learned the language. A fellow PIME member and housemate taught him to make Grappa (a wine-based brandy)—one speaks a foreign language better after a shot (or two) of brandy!

On August 20, 1970, with a guitar and a suitcase tucked under each arm, Gigi departed his homeland for the Philippines.

Chapter Two

**The Pencil - in order to be sharpened-
needs to suffer**

6.

The superiors in the Philippines assigned Gigi to the PIME parish of San Pablo Apostol in Magsaysay Village, a shantytown for about 45,000 shack dwellers on the outskirts of Tondo, Manila bordering on Manila Bay. Magsaysay Village was part of the main squatter area of Tondo, also called '*Manila's hell*' one of the largest squatter areas in Southeast Asia with over 300,000 inhabitants. The area was separated from Manila by a polluted river. The people living there were from all over the country and had come to the city seeking a better life, but either had no job or had fallen on hard times.

Life was very difficult in the squatter village—no running water or electricity, dirt paths instead of streets, and no sewage. Malnourished children were everywhere and a lot of sickness and death. There was much disease and little money for doctors or medicine. Most of the shanties were shoddy wooden shacks with corrugated sheet roofing. Gangs and criminals were mixed among the good, poor people. And, there were the children -- everywhere many, many children!

The land and ownership of land by the people was one of the main social problems of the Philippines in the 1960's. The majority of the population was still considered peasants—working the land that was not their own. Only 3 percent of the population controlled 75 percent of the wealth of the country, while 90 percent of the people were poor and only about 7 percent were middle class. The country was in transition from an agriculture-based economy to one based more on services and manufacturing.

Poverty in the Philippines was extreme. There were large plantations (some owned by Dole and Del Monte) on many of the islands with thousands of acres of land that paid meager wages to the peasant workers. Farmers worked for wealthy landowners and there was little private ownership of land. People from all over the islands flocked to Manila looking for work—but not much work was available. Moreover, most of the newcomers would end up living in a squatter area. Many young girls and boys worked for middle class and wealthy Filipinos as domestic servants--drivers, house cleaners, and laundry women, etc. Their wages were next to

nothing. Most Filipinos wanted to go abroad and the lure of the United States was strong.

The last years of the 1960s and the first two years of the 1970s witnessed the radicalization of the country's student population. Students in various colleges and universities held massive rallies and demonstrations to express their frustrations and resentments. The country experienced the emergence of several mass organizations, among them most notably, a reorganized Communist Party and the NPA (New People's Army).

The Philippines was in a climate of increasing opposition and civil unrest—there was an economic crisis brought on by external and internal forces, a restive and radicalized student population demanding reforms in the educational system, a rising tide of criminality, and a movement for secession in Mindanao (the southernmost and largest Muslim-dominated Island).

Amidst a rising wave of lawlessness and the threat of Communist insurgency, President Ferdinand E. Marcos declared martial law on September 21, 1972--Proclamation No. 1081. Marcos, ruling by decree, curtailed press freedoms and other civil liberties. He closed down Congress and media establishments, and ordered the arrest of opposition leaders and militant activists. Ferdinand Marcos was in power from 1965 until 1986.

In that climate, Magsaysay Village and Tondo came under the surveillance of the military, often undercover, and even attending Masses and religious celebrations. The PIME missionaries were organizing the squatters to speak out for their rights for water, electricity, better wages, and housing that is more decent. Parish leaders were formed and a parish council set-up along with community organizations to not only deepen the spiritual life and their faith but, also to approach the city and the government for their basic human needs (based on the process of conscientization of Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*). Marches were organized to the Mayor's Office and to Manila city officials. Awakening the poor to realize their oppression and teaching for social justice were not very welcome actions in a dictatorship.

Many people in the squatter area began to be arrested and the work of Gigi and his PIME fellow-priests at San Pablo Apostol Parish came under suspicion. Not only were the priests foreigners (American and Italian) but, in addition to preaching the

Gospel, they were training organizers to found community organizations--all in an effort to seek new ways to allow the poor and powerless to lift themselves up. In a time of martial law, organizing the people was indeed suspect!

One of the songs that the people in the Tondo parish loved to sing, most often in the groups organized by Gigi and his companions, was *Ang Bayan Ko* (My Country) one of the most popular patriotic songs of the Philippines. The song was written as a protest song during the American occupation of the Philippines (1898 -1946) and was often sung in protest rallies and demonstrations. Due to the song being used against the Marcos dictatorship, during the Martial Law era (1972-1981), the Marcos government banned public performances of the piece; anyone who dared to sing or play it in public was deemed a dissident and could potentially have been incarcerated.

Ang Bayan Ko (My Country)

My country, the Philippines,
Land of gold and flowers
With love in her palms
She offered beauty and splendor.
And for her refinement and beauty,
Foreigners were enticed.
Country mine, you were enslaved
Mired in suffering.

Chorus:

Even birds that are free to fly
Cage them and they shall cry,
How much more for country so beautiful
Would She not yearn to be free?
Philippines mine that I treasure,
Cradle of my tears and poverty,
My aspiration is,
To see you truly free!

In Tondo—small successes were happening—more and more people were coming to the parish, attendance at the Masses and liturgies increased, more children in religious education, more people received the sacraments, and small Christian community groups flourished. Gigi and groups from the parish marched to the mayor's office to demand that the city install some public water faucets and spray the

area for mosquito control. The result was successful! However, Gigi and PIME in Tondo paid a bitter price—coming to the displeased attention of government officials.

The San Pablo Apostol parish groups began to organize a coalition of all the squatters from the wider Manila area. Many priests and religious sisters from around Manila joined them in order to show Church solidarity and to protect the people from the military.

One evening, after one of these meetings, a group of military and police were outside the San Pablo Apostol parish church and began to arrest some of the participants. Some people fled and others hurried into the PIME priests' rectory residence. A group of officers asked to enter the PIME residence to pursue the people, but they were not given permission.

A large group of people gathered outside the rectory and began to sing in order to confuse the military. The leaders in the house were able to come out, hide among the singers, and slowly move out of the area. Later that evening, a colonel accompanied by the Philippine Military Chaplain came to the rectory—they wanted to enter because they said Gigi was hiding some people inside. Gigi allowed them to enter and told them they could arrest anyone they found there. Of course, they did not find anyone for the people were long gone.

Two days later, Saturday, January 24, 1976 a group of officers accompanied by the Military Chaplain returned. Father Francis Alessi, the PIME Regional Superior, who happened to be visiting, opened the door to find the officers there. Gigi and Alessi were questioned and asked to show their passports.

At that moment, the soldiers displayed an order of arrest for both Gigi and Alessi—both priests were accused of violating General Order # 2 –that is, subversive actions of protests and demonstrations against the government.

7.

What occurred next seemed to have happened in a whirlwind, and would return hundreds of times to Gigi's mind. He would analyze the events and replay each moment repeatedly. Both priests were arrested immediately, put into separate cars, and taken to the Office of Immigration and Deportation where Commissioner Edmondo Reyes questioned them. They were interrogated about their presence in the Philippines, their missionary work and participation in marches and protests against the government. The Italian embassy was not allowed to intervene on their behalf. About four o'clock in the afternoon both priests were driven to the airport and read a list of accusations against them:

- to have organized and participated in mass demonstrations against the government with the purpose to subvert the state;
- to have favored the formation of young people to join the NPA revolutionary movement;
- to have enjoined in a clear political action by a house-to-house campaign soliciting signatures for a petition requesting the release of Senator Aquino;
- to have supervised and controlled the printing of materials to incite people against their government;
- to have sent followers to the ecclesiastical provinces of Negros and Isabela to disseminate these seditious materials;
- to have organized a demonstration of workers.

Both Gigi and Francis Alessi were given a light jacket and some money because they had nothing but the shirts on their back when they were arrested. They were instructed to write a short farewell note to their fellow missionaries and a letter of thanks to Msgr. Jaime Sin, Archbishop of Manila. As soon as they completed the notes, they were taken to the airport and placed on the next flight – an Air France flight to Rome. Two Filipino military guards accompanied them on the trip.

The Philippine Customs never exit stamped their passports. However, Gigi's heart would be forever marked by this forced expulsion from the work that he

believed in and loved. He began his missionary work to help others, now he was the one who needed to be helped. It was Gigi's belief that it is not so important how much one does for another, but how much one grows in a deep and profound way with the other.

The people of Tondo may have never read the whole Bible, but they knew parts by memory and lived it in practice every day of their lives spent in poverty and deprivation. Their life was like an unfolding of the events in Sacred Scripture, as they would have never been able to understand from a study of schoolbooks. Gigi had walked with the people of Tondo on a deep spiritual journey without once having intended to go against neither the institutions of government nor any doctrines.

And, this was now a bitter pill--to be accused of being a Communist. He barely knew what to say! He was thrown out of the country without the possibility to respond and he had to leave behind all those who were close to him on this journey of love and learning.

Many tears began to flow during the flight to Italy. Alessi said, "Okay Gigi, let's cry for a few minutes and, then, think about what we are going to do." They cried for more than 'a few minutes' and decided to try to escape wherever the plane first touched down before Rome. But that never happened! The plane landed in Rome and, then, the two guards handed them their passports. At the International exit, a PIME superior from Rome met them and asked where their baggage was. They stared at him without saying a word—all they had was what they were wearing!

It was winter in Italy and cold, and their hearts were further chilled by the icy reception they received from a few of the PIME fathers in Rome. Nevertheless, Gigi knew that the story was not yet over—neither his nor that of Tondo, because the sun shines on both good and bad.

The shepherd was stricken but the sheep would not be lost.

Chapter Three

**Use an Eraser to rub out any
Mistakes**

8.

The return home to Italy was very difficult.

The Church in Italy reacted mostly against Gigi and Alessi since the newspapers reported the deportation in a sensational manner by headlining: ‘*Communist-leaning priests deported from a Catholic country!*’ Gigi and Alessi began to hold many interviews with the media in order to tell the truth about what actually happened. In February, a short time after their expulsion, the PIME Superior General removed Father Alessi from his position as the Regional Superior of PIME Philippines.

While in Italy, the more Gigi discovered about the deportation, the tenser were his relations with the Church. The churchmen, like the Superior General of PIME, Bishop Aristides Pirovano, and the Archbishop of Manila, Most Rev. Jaime Sin, in whom he had placed great respect and confidence, seemed to have turned their backs on him and betrayed him. He discovered that both Pirovano and Archbishop Sin knew about the deportation plans a few days before it occurred, yet neither of them intervened in his defense. It was indeed sad to think that both chose to linger in the shadows as watchdogs instead of having the courage to stand up to defend him and the work that was accomplished in Tondo.

Later in the spring of 1976, the Pope Paul VI named 19 new cardinals and Archbishop Sin of Manila was among the newly appointed. Gigi felt compelled to write a letter to the new Cardinal. However, the letter would have a very different tone from the gracious letter he wrote before departing from the Philippines on the day of his expulsion. He realized that writing the letter may cause him some problems and would even probably be used against him—still he felt, at this point, there was nothing to lose. At the time of the consistory, Gigi met Cardinal Sin at the Filipino College in Rome and they greeted each other with an embrace. However, the embrace felt cold and lacking in any sincerity, on the part of the new Cardinal. They did not exchange any words in the encounter. Gigi felt deeply wounded by the Cardinal’s role in his expulsion and he could not understand the contradiction--at one moment praise and appreciation for the work in Tondo and, then, inaction on his deportation.

In the letter to Cardinal Sin, Gigi expressed his congratulations to the new Cardinal, but said that there was probably no one in Tondo who would have placed the Cardinal's hat on the Archbishop's head. Because, in the eyes of the poor, the Cardinal's hat signified another symbol of oppression—a prize sought only by one who wanted to be on the side of the just and the powerful. The shepherd was honored and elevated, while the flock was suffering and dying. Moreover, those in the government who were praising the Cardinal were the same ones who were inflicting harm on his sheep! Many good people were arrested by the dictatorship and the Filipino prisons had become slaughterhouses—people were compelled to hide themselves or escape to the mountains.

Gigi wrote further: the red color of the cardinal's cape symbolizes his willingness to shed his blood for the faith, but that willingness does not seem to transfer to a commitment for the service to the poor. It seems that the cardinalite is a pedestal for one to become grand or to assume a great honor. Who among the poor would have put the cardinal's hat on your head? Where was the reception held and who took part in it—were any of the poor present? Jesus, I am sure, would not have come from the cross to take part in the reception dinner—he would have never been allowed to enter the reception. Jesus, in the person of the poor, would not have had the '*proper festive clothing*' nor even been allowed to get near the newly honored. Jesus (the poor) would be considered an intruder!

To the great dismay of Cardinal Sin, the letter from Gigi was copied and distributed throughout the Philippines.

The Superior General of PIME, Bishop Pirovano, accused Gigi of allowing himself to be manipulated by the wiles of Father Francis Alessi. Gigi knew that this was not true, since he always considered himself to have the capacity to judge and to choose his own actions. Besides, he was very close to Alessi and appreciated him for the strong loyalty that Francis always showed for the members of the PIME Philippine Region. Francis never turned his back on any of them, was always very 'sincere, and expressed himself openly—not very common traits in a person in authority.

The return home to Italy brought months of bewilderment, and, at times, outright shock at not being able to find some friendly and human comfort from the part of the Church authorities. His friends, however, were extraordinary in giving him their support.

A group of Gigi's friends proposed to travel with him to the various parishes and towns of Como, Lecco, and Varese in order to recount his experience among the squatters in Manila. At first, it seemed like a joke --a challenge, and then it became a good idea. They would put on a musical presentation centered on the problems of Tondo, squatters, and poverty in a Third World country like the Philippines. The task proved arduous because his friends had to learn how to sing Tagalog songs.

One Sunday in Milan, they presented the missionary musical to many Filipino immigrants who were working as domestics in Italian homes. The Filipinos began to sing along with them! On one side, the Filipinos were amazed to hear songs in their own language, but then they broke out in laughter to hear the mistaken pronunciations that erupted now and then from the Italians. The presentations that began as shows in parish halls gathered wide public interest in the Italian press--focusing on situations of exploitation and injustices to the poor and the squatters of Tondo. People began to prepare petitions for the freedom of political prisoners—whom they knew little about.

The gatherings were wonderful as the Italians began to ask many questions and wanted to learn more about the Philippines. During that time, for about a year and a half, Gigi was able to make the acquaintance of many new friends.

9.

Gigi wanted to continue his priestly work with Filipinos. He felt as if it was a duty, but he was the only one to think so. The deportation had not cut off the relationship he had established with the Filipino people; on the contrary, the commitment was stronger. He would often think about those whom he had encountered during the years he worked in the Philippines and he believed that it was not right to try to find another country in which to work. He would have to begin from zero in another place knowing that his former parishioners continued to suffer in the Philippines.

So there began a long series of meetings between Gigi and the PIME superiors about his future. He asked to be able to go and work in Hong Kong among a community of Filipinos living there. The Bishop of Hong Kong and the PIME Hong Kong Regional Superior rejected his request even though his PIME missionary companions assigned in Hong Kong supported it. The reasons given were all the untoward publicity given to his story and to his actions in Tondo had caused demonstrations by students and priests of PIME on his behalf at the Philippine consulate in Hong Kong. Added to that, was the publication of his ‘*infamous*’ letter written to Cardinal Sin which had caused a media sensation of its own.

PIME superiors in Rome offered him the possibility to work in either of three places: Manaus-- Brazil, in Africa, or in India. The superiors asked him immediately to present a written request for all three posts and to accept the assignment as soon as he received a response. It seemed like he had ‘three unwanted fiancées’, and in desperation, he was constrained to ask for the hand of all three. Then, he would have to ‘marry’ the first who accepted the proposal!

Gigi was still determined to continue along the journey he had already chosen in Asia, so he made a request to join the PIME mission in Japan. He had sought the support and had received the backing of the Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Church in Japan. PIME Rome denied this request for the same reasons given for Hong Kong. He was informed that Japan was not a place suitable for him and the Bishops did not want to have any problems of a political nature—he had to consider

the broader interests of PIME and not only his own interests. The superiors prohibited any attempt to visit Japan.

In the meantime, the original proposal for a PIME mission assignment was reduced now to only one place: India. First, he would have to go to school for a special six month nursing course to care for patients with Hansen's disease. Once the course was completed, then, he would be able to get a visa to enter India.

At the same time, Gigi wrote to a Filipino Bishop whom he had known about in the Philippines: Bishop Francisco X. Claver, S.J., who was the Ordinary of the diocese of Malaybalay, in the Province of Bukidnon on the island of Mindanao. He explained to Bishop Claver the situation and proposed that he wanted to be incardinated into the diocese of Malaybalay in order to work there. The letter arrived during the diocesan reunion of priests and religious sisters, so the Bishop posed the question to the group. There was unanimous approval.

Gigi informed the PIME superiors about the diocesan proposal of Malaybalay, but the reaction was negative: the superiors could not understand this stubborn position to commit his missionary life solely for Filipinos. The superiors felt that Gigi was betraying his vocation for secondary motives and it was a great mistake to focus on Malaybalay. He needed to rethink more seriously about this choice and not to submit to the emotions of the moment. The perpetual oath that he made to PIME was not made to individual persons or to Filipinos, but it was an oath to God. It was a love that should not be allowed to suffer interruptions and never be abandoned.

However, Gigi had already chosen his course and he knew what he now had to do.

10.

In the spring of 1977, Gigi wrote a letter formally requesting a dispensation from the perpetual oath to PIME in order to be incardinated in the Diocese of Bishop Claver. He did not feel that he was betraying his missionary vocation because he was leaving an institute, such as PIME, or that he had any secondary motives involved. To be a missionary was to begin and continue on a journey with a people in search of the truth as expressed by the Gospel: a search that leads to the deliverance of the oppressed, not only spiritually, but also from exploitation, poverty, and injustice. This missionary journey allows one to be identified with this people in everything and for everything.

After all these vicissitudes and unexpected changes, Gigi became more closed-minded and less at ease with himself in regards to PIME and others. He felt as if he was being rejected outright, and not given the chance to explain his feelings and ideas. The superiors established the solutions and proposals, and imposed the choices on him with no leeway. He had become a priest to serve the poorest of the poor, to help them to defend their rights, to live the Gospel with them in expectation of liberation toward justice and peace. Moreover, the superiors who every day preached this same Gospel of love condemned him.

Gigi tried, on an institutional level, to avoid causing nuisances with the Vatican, with governments and above all, not to enter into so-called 'political' situations. However, if others called '*political situations*' the defending the rights of squatters, the rights of workers, and peasants against the interest of oppressors (civil or ecclesiastical)—then, it would be an Evangelical duty to carry on 'these so-called' *politics*! Superiors and others in the church accused him of following communist values or standards. However, that would mean only communists valued justice for the poor! He had a deep and serious question he needed to ask. Instead of all of us Christians trying to strip away (and give-up) all our privileges and riches -- Why do we not work harder to cooperate with the poor to establish a more equitable and just society?

11.

In July 1977, he flew from Milan to New York in order to visit the American Missionary Society of Maryknoll where he hoped to find support and to meet-up with his friend, Father Ed Gerlock, MM. President Marcos had also deported Father Ed Gerlock from the Philippines in the past year for the same reasons that Gigi and Alessi were deported. When the plane departed from Milan, Gigi tried not to think too much about the past. Unfortunately, he was not very successful –about trying to clear his mind— given all that had occurred over the last months and how deeply it had affected him. He really was not happy to depart Italy, even if he may not have shown it. However, he was convinced that, at times, a sure way to allow friendship to grow is to attempt to be sincere.

In the last encounter with his friends before departure, he had wanted to say so many things, but he feared he might fall into banalities or be too melodramatic. He wanted to thank them for all the goodness extended to him, the friendship, and the understanding in the midst of his often-strange attitudes. He had so many thoughts to express from his heart, but was unable to put the thoughts into words. Even at the airport, the moment of departure, he realized that the only thing he could say was, “Ciao!”

The flight was excellent—eight hours of uninterrupted rest. Upon arrival in New York, there was some initial confusion at customs since he did not have a visa. Then, he was granted a visitors visa for three months. Ed Gerlock and two Filipina nuns were waiting for him and took him to Maryknoll. He had a wonderful visit at Maryknoll. After a few days, Ed took him to Manhattan to visit to the city and, he went to visit the PIME house in New Jersey.

Gigi was living a new experience—he observed, listened, thought, and prayed. For his part--there was a lot of silence and listening which also limited his mistakes in English. It may seem hard to believe, but all of this weighed heavily. It was as if he had to start all over again from scratch, and this time he was very much alone. However, he also felt a surge of new energy and strength. Even if there were no

verbal promises exchanged, it was clear to him that at home there would always be someone to support him.

12.

On a cold winter day before Christmas in December of 1977, while Gigi was sitting on a park bench in New York, he asked himself, “Who is my neighbor?” He was trying to understand an article in English about goodwill and service to others and was thinking to send it as a gift to his friends in Italy. He remembered that he had read this article to the youth in Tondo and the reading had inspired his work among the squatters.

Now he found himself in a park in New York, a meeting place for those who sold drugs. There was a young woman, clearly under the effect of some drug, who was singing, a man, hardly able to stand, was walking toward him, and, then, a couple holding themselves up were trying to walk away...at a certain point someone asked him for fifty cents in order to buy some food. He stared at them not uttering a word. There were some other people hunting through the garbage cans for who knows what! He saw an older man who having found a bag of French fries began eating them and searching again through other cans.

He noticed that the park was full of people—and there were many people of color. He tried to continue with the translation of the book, but often interrupted himself with that question of who was his neighbor. As he looked around and asked himself, if all of this was the result of our highly developed world—Europe and the United States — a world founded on egoism and greed, skyscrapers, banks, and wealthy churches with golden vessels. He could envision again the shacks of Tondo and his friends in prison: Trinig tortured, Puring murdered-strangled by the soldiers, Rusty insane after being tortured, Bong found buried with seven others after having disappeared for months, and Linda and her husband in prison, their children taken away from them. More and more the message of the article was becoming clearer:

‘There is no greater love than to give one’s own life for his friends.’

The words were transforming before his eyes into the figures of friends, people, and the events of Tondo--scenes that he had lived. The meaning of this approaching Christmas “*and the Word was made flesh*” became clearer.

The words of the article had become alive for those who had decided to give their lives to change the world and eliminate injustices. Only those persons were truly able to understand why Christ was born in a stable!

Who knows if one day many more may be able to enjoy and understand the same awareness? This was the Christmas greeting to send to his friends.

So forgetting the scene around him, he began to write...

Chapter Four

**What really matters in
A pencil is the graphite inside.**

13.

At some point, his friend Ed Gerlock proposed the possibility that they work together with Filipinos in Hawaii. He gladly accepted and departed for Hawaii with the hope for a new future. Unfortunately, their fame preceded them. Both the local Bishop and the superior of Maryknoll did not want to accept them in the Diocese of Honolulu, saying that there was no place for them. They arrived in Hawaii on February 8, 1978 and, at one point, it seemed that diocese would accept them, and then it all changed. They were not even welcome to stay at the Maryknoll Fathers House. For a month, they were guests of a Filipino family in Honolulu. The bishop refused to grant them permission either to celebrate Mass or to hear confessions—they could not exercise their priestly ministry. The Bishop never explained the reason for this refusal.

Gigi was confused, disappointed, and even angry. Many times, he felt like just giving up, but then he decided to keep going and try again. He became a priest because he believed that the priority was to serve others and not to be served. But his experience as priest always seemed to be privileged. He believed to be sincere and to serve the poor and never expected, perhaps naively, that injustices prevailed within the Church itself. He expected to find love and understanding, and a capacity for openness among those who profess themselves men of God. Experience brought a hard and different lesson.

He had seen babies die, thousands of people living in shacks and shanties, young people destroyed on drugs, people depressed and suicidal, friends tortured and killed because they believed in a Gospel of liberation and salvation., And when he spoke about all of this with tears in his eyes and a great sorrow in his heart, he stood accused. All because he believed that, the Church had to divest itself of the grand palaces and beautiful riches, and strip away all its material security and possessions, in order to fight for the poor. He felt that he was always sincere as a priest also if he recognized to have made many mistakes.

Gigi believed strongly that before being a priest, he had to be a Christian, before being a Christian he had to be an upright human being. From his youth he learned that belief in Christianity was not to 'perform' devotions, but consisted in a manner of life that put into practice the Jesus' command 'to love one another as I have loved you.'

He understood that the true Christians are those who perhaps do not speak about Christ in many words, but they accept you into their homes when you have been thrown out from your own. They feed you when you are hungry and they are not afraid to call you a friend!

14.

A week after his arrival in Hawaii, he met Jim Albertini, a Peace Activist* of the Center for Non-Violent Education and Action, who was involved in the movement for a nuclear-free and independent Pacific region. Gigi joined the work and activities of the group. Later, he began to work with patients with Hansen's disease at the Hale Mohalu (House of Rest) at Pearl City, Honolulu on Oahu. Hansen's disease (Leprosy) was unknown in Hawaii before the 1800's and the coming of westerners. Foreigners brought Hansen's disease to Hawaii. The disease decimated the Hawaiians.

A bit of history:

On January 6, 1866, the first group of nine men and three women leprosy patients were dropped off at the mouth of Waikoloa Valley, the closest accessible point to Kalawao on the southeast side of the peninsula on Molokai Island. By October, 101 men and 41 women had been left in an isolation settlement surrounded by controversy and concern from the beginning. St. Damien de Veuster arrived and worked in Molokai from 1873 until his death in 1889. During the years 1888 to 1902, the isolation laws in Hawaii were strictly enforced and the population at Kalawao on Molokai swelled to over 1,100.

Later the Bishop Home for girls opened in Kalaupapa** (managed by Bl. Mother Marianne Cope, OSF and Sisters of St. Francis, see footnote p. 47), and the Baldwin Home for boys opened in Kalawao (managed by Brother Joseph Dutton and Brothers of the Sacred Heart). During this time, the leprosy patients began gradually moving to west side of the peninsula to the Hawaiian fishing village of Kalaupapa, Molokai.

***Malu 'Aina** (Land of Peace) is the Hawaiian name given to the Center for Non-Violent Education and Action located ten miles south of the city of Hilo on the Big Island of Hawai'i. Malu 'Aina is a spiritual community based on peace, justice and sustainable organic farming. **The seed** to establish Malu 'Aina was a donation of 22 acres of land in 1980. The Center works cooperatively, seeking through **aloha 'aina** (love for the land) a deeper understanding of non-violence as a way of life.

****Kalaupapa National Historical Park established in 1980 on Molokai.** Within its boundaries are the historic Hansen's disease settlements of Kalaupapa and Kalawao. The community of Kalaupapa, on the leeward side of Kalaupapa Peninsula, is still home for many surviving Hansen's disease patients, whose memories and experiences are cherished values. In Kalawao on the windward side of the peninsula are the churches of Siloama, established in 1866, and Saint Philomena Parish, associated with the work of St. Damien De Veuster.

Pope Benedict XVI canonized Father Damien on October 11, 2009. His feast Day is celebrated on May 10. In Hawaii, the feast of St. Damien is on the day of his death, April 15.

From 1978 to 1983, the last few surviving Hansen's disease patients struggled mightily with the assistance of many others from the United States and even Italy against the state of Hawaii in order to remain on Molokai. The state wanted to abolish the hospital and declare the area a National Park and Museum. The state finally won and the patients, along with other citizens involved in the protest, were arrested and removed from the hospital. The patients were transferred to the hospital on Oahu and the Molokai building was demolished.

For Gigi the opportunity to work alongside of Hansen's disease patients was indeed a life-altering experience—even though the disease disfigured their body, they were beautiful people. They did not allow the disease to overpower them, but they lived and developed their human and artistic talents to the fullest. Despite the cruel sufferings and disfigurements, each patient retained a wonderful sense of humor. Gigi remembers with great affection: Bernard Punikaia, a poet, musician, and composer, Clarence Naia, a former-boxer, Mary and Frank Duarte, she with the sweet personality and her husband a mechanic, Francis, who played the piano with the stumps of his hands and who, having only one leg, cleaned the entire Leprosarium, then, there was also Bernice and so many others.

Bl. Mother Mary Ann Cope, OSF of the Sisters of St. Francis of Syracuse, NY was declared "Blessed" in May 2005; her beatification is the second step in the canonization process. Pope John Paul II set Jan. 23, her birthday, as her feast day in the Catholic liturgical calendar.

15.

In August of 1979, the Bishop finally assigned Gigi and Ed Gerlock to serve as assistant priests at the Parish Church of Sacred Heart in Waianae, Honolulu. The parish is situated about 35 miles from Honolulu along the southwest coast of Oahu. The area is not heavily populated and the ocean, deep off the coast, is rich with fish and porpoises, and its long sandy beaches are among the most beautiful on the island.

Waianae is one of the largest rural areas on the entire island of Oahu where a large number of native Hawaiians live. The local population is among the poorest economically. Paradoxically, toward the inland part of the valley leading to the Waianae Mountain range, one can find some of the most expensive homes costing into the millions of dollars. The Waianae Range is warmer and drier than the eastern part of the island and does not have the lush tropical vegetation. The Mountains are especially dry and susceptible to forest fires during the summer. The earth on this part of the island is red.

On the 11 of August 1979, Gigi preached at the Saturday evening Mass for the first time in the parish of the Sacred Heart. Early that morning he had gone with Jim Albertini and many other volunteers to a Prayer Vigil in front of one of the many American Military Base's in Hawaii. The prayer vigil was a memorial for the dead and against nuclear weapons—it was the anniversary of the dropping of the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima in 1945. The sermon touched on many points: about peace, injustices inflicted on civilians during the war, the horrors of war and weapons of destruction. He also spoke about the injustices visited upon the Hansen's disease patients of Hale Mohalu and the discrimination against local Hawaiians in Waianae. He noticed some people getting up and leaving during the course of the sermon.

After the Mass, he received some telephone calls and anonymous letters from parishioners who said that they would never again attend Mass in that church. The next day, he repeated the same sermon three times and raised the level of the tone. He knew that something was going to happen. And it did—on Monday morning the Maryknoll superior called and told him that the Bishop was very angry.

Ever since Gigi arrived in Hawaii, the bishop had never spoken to him directly so Gigi decided to call the bishop by phone. Once the bishop was on the phone, he told Gigi that his sermon was embarrassing for America, for the Church, and for the Maryknoll fathers. Gigi requested to be able to confront the persons who had accused him. The Bishop refused and warned him, for the second time, that he would take away his diocesan permission to celebrate the sacraments. The conversation ended very badly.

In the next few days, a member of the US Department of Immigration visited Gigi at the rectory of Sacred Heart. He referred to having received letters that accused him of speaking badly about the United States of America and that this would probably make it difficult for him to become an American citizen.

Gigi's response was, God willing, he did not have any intention to apply for American citizenship. And so it was.

16.

Ed and Gigi learned that there was an abandoned tract of land, over five acres, situated adjacent to the Makaha Valley in Waianae. The diocese in the 1950's had planned to construct a parish church on the land, but the construction had not materialized. The land was dotted with three large rundown military Quonset huts, was overgrown with weeds and bushes, and scattered with dumped junk. Sister Anna McAnany, MM,* who had become Gigi's friend since his arrival, told him about the land and asked him to come up with some ideas as to what can be done there. She wanted him to work out a project for the land.

The parish church was never built there. Sister Anna always had the hope that the land could be put to use for the benefit of the parishioners who for the most part were native Hawaiians. Therefore, Ed and Gigi transferred to live in Waianae on that parcel of land. In the beginning, they had the idea to start a small garden. With the help of some friends, they began to clear a portion of the land to plant a variety of vegetables. Others saw what was happening and came to help and the farm developed.

After a few months, Gigi decided to attempt a return to the Philippines, given that his Bishop in the Philippines, who came to visit him in Hawaii, had promised to accompany him. Unfortunately, when Gigi arrived in Italy to meet the Bishop the situation had changed. The promise was withdrawn. Gigi did not know what to do because when he left Honolulu, Bishop Scanlon had sent word that he thanked him for the work he did but would not welcome him back. In spite of the displeasure of the Bishop, Gigi returned to Hawaii and found other work. One of his friends, a local Hawaiian, Eric Enos, who worked at the Waianae Youth Alternative Education Center had founded the Cultural Center a Ka'ala where they were cultivating some tracts of land for taro (a traditional staple used for making *poi*** see page 50). Gigi worked with Eric on the Ka'ala Farm for two years and then he returned to Makaha.

Sister Anna McAnany, MM - died at 92 years of age in the year 2000 in New York; a member of the Maryknoll Sisters religious order for 72 years, she had worked in Hawaii for 60 years. The diminutive nun, taught for 40 years in island Catholic schools. After gaining an advanced degree at

Notre Dame University, she began a new direction of outreach and activism. She helped organize the Citizens Against Nuclear Armament and spoke out against the Vietnam War and the proliferation of nuclear weaponry. She founded the Waianae Women's Support Group and the creation of a peace education program, a two-week course launched on the Leeward Coast of Oahu. She attended the 1984 Nuclear Freeze Global Conference in Japan, and joined non-violent protests against military target bombing in Makaha Valley and Kahoolawe.

"Sister Anna was small, like a pebble of sand, and strong like a mountain," said Gigi Cocquio. In addition, at Hoa Aina O Makaha, a building is named in honor of Sister Anna.

One day, as Gigi was working on the Ka'ala farm and putting in water pipes, Eric began to tell him about one of their local Hawaiian '*heiau*' (temples) in the Makaha Valley. Hawaiians were not permitted access to the temple in order to practice the rituals of their ancient religion. Gigi mentioned that they should hold demonstrations and protest. Eric responded that they were already doing that, but in another way: by laying water pipes in order to plant they were beginning to use the land that is sacred for Hawaiians, thus, keeping the land from being desecrated for tourism or commercialism. Gigi, then, understood that he should perhaps change his way of responding and/or acting against injustices. If in the Philippines, he organized demonstrations and protests, in Hawaii, according to the culture and manner of Hawaiians, there was another way to respond.

A new people—a different culture—and he knew that he needed to accept a new vision for achieving the desired goals -- no matter how long it would take to accomplish them!

**Poi – mashed with paste-like texture, has a delicate flavor and is eaten by itself or with other food. A bowl of poi was considered an important and sacred part of Hawaiian daily life.

Gigi decided to leave the formal Roman Catholic priesthood. Although he knew, by his personal choice, he would always be a priest; he felt he could not remain as a priest according to the expectations of the Catholic Church and his superiors. There was no simple answer—it was a whole complex of issues and occurrences: disillusioned by the behavior of many church authorities toward him and their lack of compassion and willingness to listen, having been often prejudged with little opportunity to appeal, being abandoned, as it were, and being considered a ‘subversive and outside the law.’ He knew that he could not be the priest that Church authorities expected. He also knew, once he made the decision, it would be incomprehensible to and cause suffering for those whom he held most dear: his family and friends. In spite of the consequences for others, he had to do what he considered just and right for himself. Therefore, he proceeded with the petition to the PIME superiors for the dispensation.

On October 13, 1980, Gigi received the news that his friend Father Cesar Colombo, PIME died (see above p. 24) in Italy. They were very close and Colombo had always encouraged and supported Gigi, especially, during the more difficult moments in his life. This was a great loss and, at once, he felt all alone.

A few years later, Gigi learned that on the same day that the news of Father Colombo’s death reached him, that was the day he met the person who in his life would teach him how to love and to be loved, and how to grow in that love. The person, who would accept him for who he was and, since that moment, enables him to accomplish his full potential in life. That person was Judy, who later became his wife.

Judy’s family was of Filipino origin, but she was born in Honolulu. At the beginning of the last century, her grandparents arrived in Hawaii from the southern Philippines in order to work in the pineapple plantations. Many other immigrants, like her grandparents, also came to Hawaii from other countries like Japan, China, Portugal, and Puerto Rico to work in the plantation fields. Judy’s father became an American soldier and fought in the Philippines against the Japanese during the Second World War.

Judy was the eldest of seven children and from her youngest years learned to be responsible and care for her siblings. The early years of her life, she spent with her maternal grandmother on the island of Lanai and learned to speak the Filipino language of Visayan.

The US Army transferred Judy's father to a military base in Germany and the whole family moved with him and lived in Europe for five years. During the 1960's the family moved back to the USA, to the state of Georgia when, after Europe, her father was subsequently assigned to the United States. Judy entered high school in Georgia about the same time that the Civil Rights Movement was in full swing. The Civil Rights Law had been passed and the high school Judy attended had to admit people of color. It was a difficult year for Judy being of Filipino complexion. Soldiers were stationed outside the school. Meanwhile, once she thought she was safely inside the school, the white students often beat and taunted her because she was a Filipina. One of the teachers refused to teach as long as Judy was present in her class. She was even refused service in some restaurants. For many years, she would never speak about these painful experiences in Georgia.

Judy married young to an American soldier and had two sons. Her husband, after two years in Vietnam returned a changed man: violent and a drug addict. After many years of suffering grave physical and domestic abuse, she fled for her own and her children's safety. She returned to her parents' home in Hawaii. In the parish of Sacred Heart in Honolulu at Waianae, she met Sister Anna McAnany who helped her both economically and emotionally. She worked alongside Sister Anna reaching out to and assisting women who suffered domestic abuse. At that time, she met Gigi and joined him in his many activities: working with young drug addicts, with the Hansen's disease patients at Hale Mohalu, attending demonstrations with Filipinos against the Marcos dictatorship, assisting groups of elderly Filipinos in Chinatown, (Honolulu) and participating in the peace and anti-nuclear movements.

After Judy finished her college degree in psychology, she began to work with sexually abused young mothers and their children. By that time, Gigi had become very much a part of her life and the life of her two sons. Judy and Gigi married and had a child of their own; a son was born and they named him in Hawaiian,

Kapomaika'iokekaiameka'aina, that is, 'The Blessing that comes from the sky and the ocean.'

Their son is the most beautiful gift that life ever bestowed on them!

18.

The Waianae Mental Health Center contacted Gigi and asked if they could bring several troubled youth to the farm in order to cultivate a garden as therapy. In addition, the local elementary school of Makaha began to transport students to the farm in order to integrate class work with an experience of manual labor growing plants and vegetables.

The local community called the place Makaha Farm, but Gigi wanted to choose a special name for the land—a name that signified what it was actually becoming: a refuge, a safe place.

Puanani Burgess, a local Hawaiian poet, a woman with a great and kind heart and a special talent for bringing people together, suggested a name for the farm, *Hoa'Aina O Makaha* that is, *A Land shared in friendship in Makaha*. No other name could be more appropriate—the land as a place of friendship and unity where each person finds a renewed energy and a profound sense of significance for his or her life.

In 1987, the principal of the Makaha Elementary School proposed to Gigi if they could work with him to develop a program to bring the 1200 students to do gardening and work on the farm. They initiated the program, *Na Keiki O Ka'Aina*, or the Children of the Land. Each day of the week, a different grade level from Makaha Elementary comes to the farm for their science classes. Together they plant and care for the garden and the animals. Adults and students learn about the rhythms of nature, the cycles of their lives, and how the choices they make impact both.

On the farm, the children learn to care for the land and plant corn, beans, lettuce, Chinese cabbage, peanuts, taro, and a variety of herbs for kitchen and medicinal use. They also learn how to feed and care for various farm animals: goats, rabbits, ducks, and geese, chickens and fish, even honeybees. The farm has a carpentry shop where Gigi teaches the children to make tables and chairs, shelves, and other items to use in their homes and classrooms. The children even come with their parents to harvest the vegetables they had planted.

19.



The children learn to experience the sacredness of the land and according to Hawaiian culture—they ask permission to enter the garden on the farm. Before coming to do their work as a class group, the children stand at the entrance of the farm and intone a Hawaiian chant:

E ho mai ka 'ike mai luna mai e
O na mea huna no 'eau o ka' aina e
E homai, e ho mai, e ho mai e-

*Come to us from on high,
All you great secrets of our Mother the Earth.
Reveal yourselves and come to us! Come!*

And, from the garden comes the response:

E aloha kakou, e welina mai
Nani na maka o na pua
E kimo mai, malama 'aina
E komo mai, aloha 'aina
E komo mai ma Hoa 'aiona o Makaha
Aloha e , aloha e, aloha e!

*A warm welcome to each of you
Beautiful are the eyes of the children
Come and take care of the Earth!
Come and show your love for the land!
Come to Hoa 'aina O makaha
Come, Come, you all are welcome!*

There is a Hawaiian saying: *Take care of the land and the land will give you life*. It is beautiful to see the children as they walk in silence and enter the farm to do their work. The children sit in the *hale** where they gather for their lessons about the environment and the resources available from the land.

The land at Makaha reveals its own secrets to all who truly search.

*Gigi with the help of local Hawaiian neighbors built a traditional Hawaiian *hale* on the farm as a gathering place...see page 71.

Some of the programs taught on the farm are the following:

Ke Ala -- The Pathway

With the positive effects that the **Na Keiki** program had on Makaha Elementary students, in 1986, the Learning Center was created. Using the same principles as the Na Keiki program, the Learning Center was envisioned as a classroom without walls, and the students are encouraged to participate actively in the learning process by using all of their senses. The program makes it possible for students to experience their environment through practical farm activities. Activities on the farm include--caring for the animals, fish, learning about how honey is made with an on site apiary, hands-on planting and harvesting, learning about alternative energy and, above all, Hawaiian culture.

The program is outreached to other schools within the Wai'anae Coast and throughout the island of Oahu making it possible for other students to experience their environment through practical activities such as caring for the animals, learning about how honey is made from an onsite apiary, doing hands-on planting and harvesting, and discovering the Hawaiian culture. Presently, many schools have visited **Ke Ala** and the program serves over 6000 students and adults. The *General Curriculum* gives an overview of plants and animals, and the *Hawaiian* curriculum teaches about the migration of the Polynesians, their traditions and cultural practices and the uses of Hawaiian plants.

Every year there are 15-20 or more of schools on a waiting list that the program cannot accommodate because of limited days and personnel.

Malama Makaha Credit Work Program

Malama Makaha Credit work is a program designed to assist the 4th through 6th grade students of Makaha Elementary School by supplementing their school fundraising

activities toward their educational fieldtrip fees. Hoa’Aina O Makaha provides the students and their families the opportunity to earn credits while doing a variety of tasks on scheduled workdays on the farm and in the community. The credits that students and their families earn by participating in the workdays are later converted into a monetary amount allotted to each grade level.

Students earn one credit for each hour they participate in the workday (maximum is 3 hours per workday) which, in turn, is converted to \$5.00 per credit. Parent participation in the program earns \$10.00 worth credit per hour (3 hours maximum). The credit system has encouraged families to participate in the scheduled workdays for their child. An important component of this program is allowing the last hour of the workday towards the sharing of experiences, concerns, reflections, evaluation of the workday and the sharing of food

The program has strengthened the bonds between Makaha Elementary, Hoa’Aina O Makaha, and the community. With the participation of adults and youth in the program, parents have been able to spend quality time with their child/children.

Container Gardens

The container garden program was started in 2009 as a way to encourage children and their families to raise their own vegetables in containers at home. Many families do not have any land and thus do not have any gardening experience. Container Gardening is less threatening and, if successful, people will feel more comfortable to plant and produce vegetables. In one year, more than 90 families completed the training. Requests are high for container gardening training, even coming from social service groups for immigrants and homeless people. Workshops are available to families and groups on the Wai’anae Coast as long as funds are available.

Hale Ho'omaluhia (The Peace Center)



In 1995, the Hale Ho'omaluhia –Peace Center was completed and dedicated on the 50th anniversary of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Peace Center is a conference/retreat center that provides a place for people from different countries and diverse cultures to come and stay at the farm. Visitors/guests staying at the Peace

Center can begin to understand the traditional culture of Hawaii and learn to bridge the distances that separate people, whether that distance is physical miles, or racial, political, and socio-economic beliefs. By coming together, sharing, and learning from each other visitors begin to search for the common thread that will unify humanity in a quest for global peace.



Hale Mahi'ai (Demonstration Farm)

Some fresh vegetables, fresh and dried herbs, and honey from the farm are for sale in the community. The amount of produce has been limited because of the nature of the program that is primarily educational. Each Friday in the parking lot of the school, the farm produce is sold to parents and teachers. Other produce is sold house to house, to community and friends. The amount of produce has been limited because of the nature of the program that is primarily educational

The farm's famous spaghetti herb mix, herb salt, poultry mix and Ki`awe honey are prepared for a Christmas Fundraiser. The proceeds generated from the fundraising efforts are put back into the program for continuity.

Since 1979, over thirty thousand people have visited Hoa'Aina O Makaha.*

*Programs and information resources: cf. Hoa’Aina O Makaha website <http://www.hoa-aina.org/aloha.html>

21.

Gigi had originally gone to Hawaii with the intention to return to the Philippines. Finally, in 1987, after Marcos was overthrown and sent into exile, Gigi was able to make a return visit to the Philippines. On this first return trip, he visited Tondo and found many people whom he had known and lost contact with over the intervening ten years. The visit was a very emotional and memorable one and brought Gigi some internal peace.

He returned to the Philippines another two times, in 1988 and 1991, still trying to find a possibility to return to work there. However, he soon realized that many things in the Philippines had, indeed, changed—especially, the physical danger for foreigners. The majority of poor Filipinos remained oppressed and community organizations were under surveillance. Many people were imprisoned or killed, especially, those who worked for the Church and with the poor for social justice.

In 1988, Gigi was advised not to return to Tondo because of a strong military presence there. Many people in Tondo were arrested and some youth leaders had disappeared without a trace. Gigi had to meet with some of the squatter leaders at night and in secret.

The last time that he went to the Philippines, in 1991, he worked for a time with squatters in Payatas (the garbage dump of Manila where thousands of poor live and work scavenging through the garbage) to help them build gardens. He was there when the volcano, Pinatubo, erupted over a few hundred miles from Manila. Although distant from Manila, the volcano’s eruption covered Manila in layers of dust and ash. It was very painful to experience to see that thousands of people lost everything to the eruption—rice fields were destroyed and many Filipino homes were crushed under the weight of the ash.

He managed to visit Tondo on that trip in 1991, but found that much had changed. The small church, rectory, and parish center that PIME had built and where he lived and worked at San Pablo Apostol Parish had been demolished for a new

larger church and parish center with a residence for the priests. The squatter area was changing and many homes were being built and the streets paved. Life was moving on and he knew that so had he. He understood that the Philippines and Tondo had been an important experience in his life, but by now his place was in another part of the world—Hawaii.

Returning to Hawaii, he stopped in Japan to visit some Japanese friends who were collecting funds to construct the Peace Center at Hoa’Aina O Makaha. It was wonderful to see how this work had become so very important for these new friends and how central the project was to their lives. He had known them for only a short time and they did not have much in life, but they were very dedicated to the values of Peace and non-nuclear proliferation.

He also had to go to Washington, DC to accept an award-recognition from the American government. Hoa’Aina O Makaha was recognized as one of the better programs in the US aimed at youth and the prevention of drug abuse. The local Hawaiian media—newspapers and Television—covered the award to Gigi and his work on the farm. He became, much to his unease, a noted local figure. Usually, he would not approve of such notoriety, but given the local situation that the area along the Waianae coast was notorious for poverty, crime, and drug infested, he felt the good news was a godsend for the parents and the schools.

Honolulu and Hawaii needed to know that there were many good and positive things happening in Waianae, a new reality was unfolding in the area. Gradually, but surely, change was coming!

Chapter Five

**The Pencil always leaves
A mark**

The Center for Peace at Hoa’Aina O Makaha, was completed, and inaugurated on August 6, 1995, the 50th anniversary of dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima in World War II. Many visitors attended from Japan, the Philippines, the United States mainland, and Italy. The group from Italy came from Gigi’s hometown of Uggiate (close to Lake Como, north of Milan in the Lombardy Region). The visit of his town mates brought an important moment of grace for Gigi’s life and a strengthening of the bonds and closeness with his family and his Italian friends.

Every time that Gigi returns home, even if he knows that he is accepted with great love and affection, he feels that there is still something missing. The visit seems to fill that emptiness, it is one of the beautiful gifts in itself, but also for his wife, for the family, and for all that, he has accomplished up to that moment. Finally, he is able to show the place from whence he came, and talk about what he did—it gives a sense of concrete reality to that which for some many years he was only able to talk about in the abstract and—in words.

The inauguration of the Peace Center was an extraordinary day, to hear the sounds of so many other languages, to appreciate the cultural dances and the Hawaiian songs, to share together and enjoy the food. To spend a relaxing and beautiful day together in friendship—what a joy! All of these friends together on the farm seemed to give a symbolic ‘hug’ and an embrace to the valley!

An amazing peace came over him to realize that this day was a step toward uniting the diverse races and peoples—to overcome the barriers that separate us. His prayer was that this step could be diffused to every part of the world.

The opening of the Peace Center was also a beginning of a new initiative for Hoa’Aina. Hopefully, the first visit of the Italians would open the way for many others to follow. Then, the circle would continue to grow and include ever more people in order to bring to this land the warmth and sacredness of friendship.

*We are all like the flowers in a beautiful Lei
Each bringing its own color and perfume
The flowers are one in their desire to bless the Land
And all who dwell therein.*

Every person who comes to Makaha, to Hoa Aina and the Peace Center, should feel at home because they are part of a grand family. The family will always be enriched by their love. Only then will Gigi have created a true Peace Center where the lives of each person finds the true and just meaning of humanity—to be united with others around the world.

Meanwhile, he will continue to take care of the land, to be a part of the neighboring community, and to wish everyone well. He will continue to believe that everything that happens on the farm, and thanks to the help of so many other people, happens as a sign of Hope.

23.

One day a delegation of Japanese visitors arrived at the farm. The group was visiting the Hawaiian Islands as part of a larger cultural tour to visit people of different cultures in the Pacific. The farm organized a demonstration of Hawaiian chants and hula for the visitors. Gigi could see that the dances were having an impact on the visitors. They were more than just observing the dances; it was as if they were trying to enter into the dances as an experience.

Then, an idea came into Gigi's head...and he turned to the teacher who was leading the dance group and suggested that they form a group to bring on tour in Italy. The group would introduce traditional Hawaiian culture and dance to Italians. From that moment, the group began to take shape.

It took two years to form and train a group to learn traditional dances and chants and to design and prepare the costumes. Then, they chose a name for the group *Me Ke aloha Pumehana Mai Hawaii* or in English: *With Love from Hawaii*.

In Italy, Gigi's friend and family were preparing a schedule and program for the dance troupe, and collecting money for the expenses and travel. Many Italian families offered to take in members of the group for room and board during their stay in Italy.

The group—thirteen adults and six children— arrived in Italy on July 3, 1997 and stayed for two weeks. It was a wonderful trip for the exchange of friendship, culture, music, and food. Beyond the experience itself, the great hospitality and generosity shared by the Italians and the Hawaiians was a success. In the piazza of Uggiate, more than a thousand people gathered for the presentation. The group was well received was invited to return for the Jubilee Year in 2000.

One of his friends approached him and said that the townspeople were all very moved to see the great pride on Gigi's face as he introduced his wife and son to the audience. All the past petty judgments and rumors disappeared.

For everyone involved these days were like a special holiday.

Gigi's friend the late Father Quirico, a missionary in Bangladesh, used to say that we have to find a way to transform our ordinary days into 'holidays' -- special festive days! If Festive days are truly, an occasion lived and experienced internally in our hearts, we should make the effort that our 'normal' 'ordinary' days become festive days. Days full of joy, creativity, and spirit that we celebrate and join in unity with our friends and with all whom we come into contact.

24.

After his return from Italy, there was a series of wonderful events that occurred at the farm —unexpected surprises!

- A group of friends from Uggiate came for the marriage celebration of Roger (one of the farm staff);
- Hoa ‘Aina celebrated the Twentieth anniversary of the founding of the farm project;
- A special visit of sixteen Japanese Buddhist priests who stayed for four days on the farm and gave him a sculpture made from the clay from the mountain behind the farm.

After three years of preparation, the dance group was ready to return to Italy in the year 2000. Uggiate had also invited groups from Togo, India, Bangladesh, Germany, and Croatia for presentations to the people. The main purpose of the presentation was not just to have dances and cultural exhibitions, but to create a sense of unity and build bonds of friendship that cross international barriers. It was a beautiful success for all.

Gigi and his group also made a brief but intense visit to Rome and the Vatican. They were fortunate to have a particularly memorable private meeting with the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II.

On the return to Hawaii, Gigi thought how important the trip had been both for the Hawaiians and for the townspeople of Uggiate. It was truly a historic moment for all to celebrate those days of friendship and fraternity. The trip demonstrated how with a bit of ‘heart’ one could profoundly change people’s lives toward goodness and unity.

Gigi began to think about how a rainbow of peace arising out of the town of Uggiate had reached across the farthest corners of the world to end in a pot of gold—gestures of love and fraternity with people—in Hawaii.

Some weeks later, he received the sad news that Sister Anna died at Maryknoll in New York. Sister Anna was like a small as a grain of sand, but she was a force that could move mountains. Gigi had worked with her for fifteen years before she retired to New York. She was over 70 years old when he first met her and he could hardly keep up with her!

Sister Anna McAnany was always involved in activities for social justice. She created the program of Peace Education on the farm that reached out to so many thousands of young people on the Waianae coast.

Gigi was sure that in heaven, Sr. Anna had already organized all the saints—she never sat on her hands doing nothing. He also knew that he would always have her protection and care for the success of the farm. Moreover, for this reason, he was sure that when any problems and difficulties arose in the ensuing years—like with the school program, a teachers' strike and other situations—everything worked out for the best for the farm and for the good of the children.

Sister Anna was sending her guiding light!

On Easter Sunday in 2001, the group from the farm and many friends and supporters went to celebrate The Resurrection at a sunrise ceremony in the Valley of Makua. The Valley had been used for years by the American military for maneuvers and bombardment exercises. The native Hawaiian movements had been successful for three years to stop the military from using the valley for maneuvers. However, the military wanted to resume firing shells. The people asked that the valley be returned to the Hawaiian people. Now that the military had allowed the Easter services-- that was a sign of hope.

On this Easter occasion, Gigi wanted to share some thoughts that came to him observing the land and the children:

In the book of Paolo Coelho, "The Pilgrimage" the exhausted pilgrim stops in a village on his way to Santiago de Compostela; he could not go on anymore. He was very tired both physically and spiritually. His guide invited him to do a strange thing—choose a tree from the woods in front of them, then take off his shirt and embrace the tree for a few minutes. The pilgrim did as suggested yet not really understanding the reason why he was doing it. After a few minutes, he realized that he was feeling better and ready to continue the pilgrimage journey.

Every tree has a special energy, an enormous energy coming from the sun. That is why we often feel very good to linger beneath trees. One feels refreshed, protected and one's strength renewed. Gigi remembered well how special was 'his' walnut tree at his grandparents home in Ronco and how refreshed he always felt being near that tree. Then, he thought about the two mango trees on the Hoa'Aina farm—he never planted those trees but they grew on their own and now were enormous. They were often a refuge for him and for many visitors.

During the Easter season, we are gathered around a Special Tree—the Cross. Truly, Christ, hanging on that Tree, had found the energy to give all that He had and to offer himself as redemption for the love of all humankind. We, too, need to take off our shirts, the symbol of our attachments to things and possessions that hold us

captive, and embrace the Cross in order to find new energy, to re-discover the meaning of every day life and to continue on our journey.

One day, Gigi's wife, Judy told him about a dream that she had:

As you were walking in the field, you passed by a rose bush in bloom, you did not hear the voice of the Lord who was calling out to you from the rose. You walked on to the herb garden and just thought about the need to weed the garden and collect herbs.

You passed in front of the taro plant and never saw it shedding tears for you. All you saw was the need to water the plants.

You passed among the trees as the leaves were gently being stirred by the voice of the Lord. But all you noticed was that leaves had fallen and needed to be raked and gathered.

Continuing to walk on, you saw only the work that needed to be done. Yes, there was indeed much to do and on your walk you asked the Lord to guide you and give you hope. But, you were not aware that He was already speaking to you.

The voice of the Lord, his words -- they were all around you, but you never stopped to listen!

Immediately, he understood that his wife had, once again, hit the mark!

This past year was full of many beautiful occurrences and experiences but also a year of many profound sufferings. In Italy, he had many days full of emotion, of joy, and international goodwill. Before and after the trip, he had to confront serious situations of injustice in Hawaii, these were difficult times which had left him depressed, and, as if, beaten down. There were months that passed and it seemed that there was nothing beautiful and all he had was deep sorrow.

He could not seem to recognize the Lord who was speaking to him in his friends, through the plants, the flowers, and the fields. His hope was that in the future he would always be able to hear the voice of the Lord who was near, speaking to him through the fields, the flowers, the mountains, the sky, and even in the smiles of children and in a hug from a caring person.

26.

The decision to build a Hawaiian house, *hale*, on the farm came during the course of the twentieth anniversary of the founding of Hoa’Aina O Makaha. The members of the community expressed the desire and the need to have a place to gather and tell stories in the Hawaiian tradition, a place where they could assemble. The choice became obvious to build a *hale*, a place that reflects the true Hawaiian cultural values.

Members of the community gathered the materials necessary for the building as required by Palani Senesi, who had arrived from the town of Hana on the island of Maui to help in the construction. Palani was a respected and famous Hawaiian *kumu kalai hale*, a teacher and master-builder of Hawaiian *hale*. A spot on the farm was chosen and specially dedicated to the building of the *hale*.

The spot was marked out six meters wide by nine meters long and would have 17 poles fixed into the short base of rocks—the roof would be covered with woven fronds of palm. There would be two traditional entrances in the long walls.



The Hawaiian hale at Hoa ‘Aina O Makaha

The supporting poles represent the Hawaiian values, such as, *aloha*, love; *hana*, work; *laule'a*, friendship, *kokua*, help; *aloha'aina*, love of the land; *malama'aina*, care of the land; *Malama*, attention and protection; *mana*, spiritual essence; *'ohana*, family; and *maluhia*, peace.

When the construction of the *hale* was completed, everyone gathered for a celebration. The inauguration was a blessing for the whole farm as a place of peace. Students, teachers, parents, friends, and benefactors often gather in the *hale* to reflect on their experiences. The farm holds important functions in the *hale* and for all who enter – the *hale* give a sense of peace and serenity.

However, as we all know, people can be cruel, especially when they are angry, jealous, or wounded. Perhaps, these might be the reasons for vandalism that struck the sacred *hale*. Three times in the past few years, the *hale* has been set afire and burned almost to the ground. However, each time the members of the community rallied and rebuilt the *hale* and healed the wounds to the heart committed by the senseless act of violence. Bonds were always strengthened and values renewed even though we felt violated, wounded, and angry. No one ever found out who the guilty parties were. But -- we and our friends from the children to the teachers— all offered forgiveness and a firm resolution to rebuild and to continue with new strength.

The *hale* was rebuilt with a very touching ceremony of inauguration. In addition, they installed a water sprinkler system for the palm leave roof to protect it in the future. The students had a special ceremony where they surrounded the *hale* with tealeaves for protection. The *hale* was given a name, *Hale Haumana* in Hawaiian, *the House of Learning*.

As soon as the *hale* was completed, Gigi sat alone inside and enjoyed the moment. He thought that there never was a palace constructed with such precious material as this *hale* – with the love of children. The *hale* was a symbol of the Hawaiian people who have been oppressed by foreigners for so many years. A symbol of a will to rediscover rich traditions of a profound spirituality and culture that had been denied and violated by those who came from abroad and who never understood much about the Hawaiian people. This *hale* was a symbol of hope, especially, in Waianae that the rest of the island looked on as a place of 'second class' citizens and poor locals of little value.

We need symbols to understand reality. In moments of silence and peace in the *hale*, Gigi reconnects to all whom he holds dear, those who are no longer with him in life, those who are still here and walking with him on the land, but also those who have never walked here. He feels the presence of all and it gives him the strength to keep going forward.

Gigi decided that he would bring the children to the *hale* every day, for a few minutes of silence, before they begin their work in the fields. The visit to the *hale* would give the opportunity to the children to appreciate the silence and the ‘sacredness’ of the space as Hawaiian tradition endorses.

Before Christmas, on December 12, 2003, Gigi's dear friend Bishop Joseph Ferrario of Honolulu died of cardiac arrest at the age of 77. Gigi and Judy went to the vigil in the Cathedral of Honolulu. Gigi found it difficult to respond to the prayers or to sing the songs, and was filled with a great sadness in his heart. He regretted not being able to see the Bishop before he died. The Bishop was a person with a grand heart and a gentle soul who understood the needs of the poor and the emarginated—he worked for a church that should give witness to a Christ who had compassion and love for the poor.

Gigi waited until almost all the people had left the cathedral; then, hand in hand with Judy he approached the funeral bier to offer one last prayer of farewell. He looked into the face so tranquil, and he touched the Bishop's hands for the last time—it was almost as if Ferrario smiled at him! Gigi felt the Bishop's absence acutely, even though he knew now that he had another strong ally in heaven. Every time Gigi would have felt a need for the farm—the Bishop always found a way to resolve it.

Gigi's thoughts went to January of 1986, when his father suddenly died. He was not able to return to Italy in order to be at his father's side. For Gigi, it was a year later that he realized he would not see his father again. It was on a trip back to Italy in 1987, and he had disembarked at Linate Airport -- his father was not there to meet him. He felt smitten at not being able to ask, "Where is Dad?" The last visit, before his father died, when Gigi was leaving for the airport, his father did not accompany him. Perhaps, his father knew that it would be the last time.

His mother, Angelina, died in May of 2004, on the same day in which many, many years before, the newborn baby brother had died. Gigi remembers that he was about to depart Hawaii for Italy with the Principal and vice-Principal of the Makaha Elementary School to bring them to Uggiate. He received an urgent call from his sister telling him that his mother was in a grave condition. He left immediately. All during the flight to Italy he thought of all times he had spent together with his mother

from childhood up to the last time he was at home. His prayer was to arrive in time so they might be able to see each other again. It was as if she heard his silent prayer and waited for him. She died, with all her family around her, a few days after Gigi arrived.

The day of his mother's funeral, Gigi wrote a letter to her saying many things he had not been able to express in person—perhaps now she would know them:

In memory of Momma,

In elementary school, I wrote a poem entitled, My Mother is like a tree. I remember that the teacher asked me to read my poem to the whole class; and I cried the whole time I was reading the poem. I cried because my mother was not there with me.

I wrote:

*'A mother is like a tree that gives all of itself,
She gives shade, fruit, wood, and keeps nothing back for herself,
She is always ready to give all of herself for her beloved children.'*

My sister phoned me from Italy, saying that Momma was suddenly stricken and not well. She said that like an old tree that was slowly collapsing on itself, that's what was happening to Momma.

Today the tree has gently collapsed to the ground, with some difficulty, but trees do not die. Fallen trees become one with the earth and give new energy to the soil so other plants and flowers might grow strong and beautiful.

Momma Angelina,

*You have been like a strong tree giving all to us:
You protected us in your shade,
You nourished us with your self,
You have enriched us with the fruit of your love,
Strong winds may have blown but you never wavered,
You gave us the example of a great faith,
And shared the fullness of your wisdom and goodness.*

*Now the Lord has transplanted you to His garden
Together with all those you loved and gone before you.
May your shade continue to protect us.
Your faith continues to guide us;
Your strength gives us courage,
And, may your love help us to follow your example.*

Thank you, Momma.

*When I read this poem, I cry, we all cry,
Although you are not here, you are never far!*

*Rest in peace, Momma, in the garden of our Lord's heart,
And send us your blessing!*

In a moment of such deep sorrow, I am comforted to see friends and family all around her, those whom she has known for a long time, and those who lately had come to know her.,

28.

In March of 2006, a strong storm hit Waianae and caused a lot of damage, roofs ripped off homes, and light poles were toppled. It rained for days and the farm became a mud flat. Gigi had to replant much of the crops because a flood of water had washed out the previous plantings.

As Easter drew close, Gigi organized the construction of a stone bread oven. He built the oven and it dried out to be ready for Holy Saturday. On Saturday afternoon, Gigi began to bake some bread—bread that they would share with their Italian, Hungarian, Russian, Hawaiian, and New Zealand friends. The bread of friendship for Easter Sunday.

In May, the farm held a great feast to celebrate the dedication of the ‘Hula mound.’ The mound was a platform for hula dances that was constructed with Hawaiian earth. More than six hundred people attended the dedication. It was a feast of songs, dances games, and food! The children brought their parents to see all the work and crops they had planted in the garden. A day of smiles and joy, and a lot of fun.

Among those present at the feast, was a famous American singer and his wife—Jack and Kim Johnson—he sang some songs, took many photos with the children and even signed some autographs. The Johnson’s are involved in *Kokua Hawaii*, a foundation for children’s education that supports educational and environmental issues, and food production policies. They learned that the Department of Education had cut some funds for the farm and that a teacher in charge of the children’s programs at the farm had to be terminated. Mr. and Mrs. Johnson donated funds for the program to continue for four years.

Judy would often say to Gigi, “Don’t get upset so quickly, everything has its place and happens in its own due time!” When the Johnson’s took Gigi aside and told him that they were making the sizeable donation for the children’s’ program, Gigi

broke out in tears. The donation was the sign of a new hope—in Greek the word for miracle is a *sign*, something wonderful. Indeed, this was a miracle!

In the last week of May, Gigi, Judy, and their son, Pumaikai attended a Buddhist ceremony that took place every year on Memorial Day on the beaches of Ala Moana in Honolulu. The celebration is called, the Lantern Floating Ceremony. More than a thousand lanterns are set on small floating boats. At sunset, each lantern is set afloat and commemorates those who gave their lives in conflict, or the memories of loved ones and dedicates prayers for a peaceful and harmonious future. Just as the waters of the Pacific merge with each ocean, the glowing lanterns carry the wishes for peace and happiness from Hawaii across the globe.

At the launching of the lanterns, everyone feels as one, united in spirit and prayer. The wonder, indeed, of the little things we can do and discover together. Gigi feels the same thing happens when he experiences so many people of different cultures, languages, religions, and life experiences passing through the farm.

A new and great gift arrived in his family: a wonderful baby granddaughter, Melanie. A true joy, she is always smiling and has such a tenderness in her big brown eyes. She is a handful, always moving and laughing. Gigi carries her around the farm with him as he checks the plants, opens and closes the irrigation faucets, and feeds the animals. Judy is overjoyed and ‘has the shivers’ when she holds the baby—her son says the baby is the beloved grandchild. The atmosphere in the house has changed completely with the baby present. The baby is God’s gift to the family.

An ancient Hawaiian story says:

*From the moment of birth, every child has in its hand a Bowl of perfect Light.
If it takes care of its Light, it will grow and he/she can do anything,
To swim with sharks, fly with the birds, to know and learn everything.*

*If instead, the child becomes jealous and envious, a stone will
Fall into its Bowl of Light and a bit of Light will disappear.
Stones and Light cannot be in the same place.
If he/she continues to put stones in the Bowl,
The Light will disappear completely and become stone.*

*A stone does not grow or move.
If at a certain point, it is tired of being a stone,
All it has to do is turn the Bowl upside down,
And the stones will roll away.
Then, the Light enters and grows ever brighter!*

When the children would go into the garden to care for the land and if Melanie were with them—the story would come true. There was a light that penetrated to the very heart and soul, and it became more serene and brilliant.

Every head of government or political or religious leader whenever they need to take an important decision should take a baby in their arms. Then, if they allow the

baby to invade the very center of their Light, they would never be able to declare a war where other babies would become the victims. If Herod had been able to hold the baby Jesus in his arms, perhaps he would not have been able to kill so many innocents.

To hold a baby in your arms is to allow his/her Light to enter your soul, penetrate your heart, and cause a grand smile to break out on your face.

Melanie's Bowl of Light is full and radiates a sparkling brilliance that illuminates all who come close to her. We realize that someday, perhaps, a small stone may fall inside the bowl and obscure the Light somewhat. However, with all our heart we hope that at the right moment Melanie will find the strength to upset her bowl, even at the cost of some suffering, so that with the stone removed, her Light can shine even more brilliantly.

30.

One day, as Gigi was inspecting the farm, he noticed part of the land was fallow. So later that day, with the help of the children from the Sixth Grade, he decided to transform that piece of land into a self-sufficient garden. The children worked on the project and designed it so there would be a couple small fishponds to have water to irrigate the plants interspersed among beds of vegetables and herbs. In addition, there were various piles of compost for a cultivation of worms, some solar panels to run the pumps for the fishponds, and solar pots to dry grass, vegetables, and fruit, and other solar pots to cook the fish, vegetables, and eggs.

In the morning before beginning to work in the fields, the children would have a small ceremony: sitting on the ground in a circle, they would sing

*With my two hands
I can change the world and make it better,
Make the world a better place and create peace!*

*I can clean the land and make it beautiful,
Make the world a safer place and help all people!*

*With my two hands
I can comfort and embrace others
And, more so, when you lend me your hands too!*

From the mountains, a light misty rain began to fall, and the children, in a gesture of benediction, took handfuls of soil and scattered it gently over the spot where their garden would grow. Thus, it was that ninety children would come every Wednesday to work on their garden project. It was not important to know whether these kids were good or naughty. What was important was that each child was able to learn how to cooperate together with the others in order to realize the garden project. Even during school vacation periods, some of the children decided to return and continue to work on the garden. They would work for three hours under the hot sun!

The garden was quickly finished and planted. On October 7 during the ‘Sustainability Summit’ held at the farm, there was an official inauguration of the garden. After two months when the garden was ready to be harvested- a group of 70 people belonging to diverse organizations from every part of the island came and listened to the story of the garden project. They also watched a video of the children

at work cultivating and preparing their garden. Moreover, at the end of the program all enjoyed the food produced by the children: fish, chicken, eggs, eggplants, and tapioca cooked in the solar ovens. Then, fresh fruit – papayas and bananas that had been gathered by the children, followed the meal.

The children were so proud of the creation and they could not stop talking about
“Our own garden made with our own two hands”!

In the fall, Gigi and Judy decided to take a couple of day's vacation away from the farm. On a Friday afternoon, they left for a hotel on Waikiki beach. In addition, they thought to be able to enjoy a few days rest and some time to sleep and do as they pleased!

On the first morning of their '*vacation*', there was a strange movement in the bed! Gigi thought that Judy was turning over in her sleep, but then realized that the whole room was in motion. It was an earthquake. He awakened Judy and they both ran out of the room and down the three flights of stairs from their room. The street was already filled with people who had fled from the hotels and restaurants. A strong rain was falling and soon the electricity went out. That was when they decided to return home!

The emergency station on the car radio announced that a 6.6 earthquake had struck the Big Island. There did not seem to be any damage and no one was hurt, but the airport was closed. If the quake had been a 6.9, there would have been a tsunami that could have been disastrous. As it was, thousands of people remained for hours on the streets of Honolulu not wanting to go back into the buildings. Electric power returned only later in the evening. Gigi and Judy remembered that when they were on their honeymoon on Maui some years earlier, they experienced a typhoon that destroyed areas of the island. Both, Gigi and Judy began to think that, perhaps, this was a sign that nature was telling them something ... *they had better understand their place!*

And the Story continues...

It is early morning in Hawaii....a new day is dawning in the Makaha Valley, and it is raining. For the majority of people clouds and rain bring a sense of sadness. For Gigi, rain brings serenity and a time to think about the many things that he wants to do. In Waianae, being on the leeward side of Oahu, rain is indeed a blessing, given that it occurs only rarely. The rain is light and descends softly as a gentle shower covering the body. A welcome rain!

In a short time, the clouds pass and they reveal the brilliant rays of the rising sun. Gigi is seated in the open-sided *hale* and takes in the sweep of the land of the farm and all that surrounds him: the fields, the mountain, the land, the nearby elementary school, and his house. He admires the colors of the mountain bathed in the early light—the various shades of deep green, purple and blue as if painted beautifully with a magic brush.

Everything around him becomes a symbol of the 29 years that have passed in this place: the scores of children, the teachers, the parents, the community and all the friends, all those who have invested something of themselves in this land and this work. All who have passed through this place have changed this land just as much as they have transformed themselves. Some have come here only once, others spent a few days. And there are those who continue to return. The sky, the land, the scents and the sounds remain and invite the new arrivals to invest themselves, to open their hearts and share their amazing gifts.

The gifts shared by so many people have created the lush garden at Hoa Aina O Makaha —and this garden has brought a great change to Gigi’s own life.

And for this, he is profoundly grateful.