

“Therefore, men of Polynesia and Boston and China and Mount Fuji and the barrios of the Philippines, do not come to these islands empty-handed, or craven in spirit, or afraid to starve. There is no food here. In these islands there is no certainty. Bring your own food, your own gods, your own flowers and fruits and concepts. For if you come without resources to these islands you will perish ... On these harsh terms the islands waited.”

James A. Michener
Hawaii

“The loveliest fleet of islands that lies anchored in any ocean.”

Mark Twain

This morning, as I was driving to get my haircut, I was listening to the 60s channel on *Sirius XM* radio and heard the song “Tiny Bubbles” by Don Ho. That song opened a floodgate of memories about Hawaii, specifically the island of Oahu.

I love Hawaii.
Still do.

One of the remaining bucket list items for Imogene and I is a week at the beautiful Turtle Bay Resort, on the scenic North Shore. We can’t wait.

Several of my favorite stories that I have told to my students over the years are set in Hawaii. For starters, my favorite eating place of all times is Chuck’s Steakhouse—although it has recently changed hands—with its fresh pineapple at the food bar, an affordable and tasty steak, and (especially if you score a seat on the veranda) a killer view of Waikiki Beach in one direction and Diamond Head in the other. Sunsets over the Pacific Ocean are breathtaking! The first time I was there, I made a promise to myself that I would share the meal and the view with Imogene. God is good: Ima and I have been there a handful of times over the years.

During those years, I made several work-related visits to Honolulu to meet with military authorities at Pearl Harbor and up on the hill at Camp Smith. If I was coming through when Ima wasn’t teaching, she would join me there. One of those times, Ima and I attended the Don Ho show. At the time, Donald Tai Loy Ho, a traditional singer, had a popular variety show in Honolulu. Ho would die shortly

afterward (in 2007), at 76 years-of-age, and one obituary described him as being of native Hawaiian, Chinese, Portuguese, Dutch and German descent.¹

I really didn't realize how interesting a character Don Ho was until I started writing this missive. Ho was born in Kane'ohe on the windward side of Oahu and briefly attended Springfield College² on a football scholarship after high school. He then returned home to earn a bachelor's degree in sociology from the University of Hawaii. Afterwards, Ho spent five years in the U.S. Air Force, leaving because of his mother's illness (even during his shows in later years, Ho would recognize U.S. veterans). Following the military years, Ho was called home to help his mother with a family bar business called "Honey's." That's where his singing career began. In 1962, he moved the club to Waikiki, and began a long career in musical entertainment in Hawaii and on the mainland (even hosting a short-lived morning variety show on ABC, *The Don Ho Show*, from late 1976 to 1977.)

At any rate, the Ho show was a memorable evening. Ho himself was very sick at the time (he had history of cardiac problems and probably a pacemaker when we saw him) and was mostly confined to a chair on the stage. Even singing "Tiny Bubbles" was a struggle. In fact, the show was bogging down and borderline boring. But Ho had a telephone by his chair and began calling in his markers during the show—Ho at the time was regarded as a Hawaiian musical national treasure—and soon, young talent (presumably from other musical shows around the island) began showing up. A steady parade of singers, ukulele players, guitarists and other musicians. They saved the show and turned a humdrum evening into a magical one (it sure wasn't the food that came with the show). In fact, somewhere among the piles of boxes and plastic tubs in storage, is a picture of Ima and Don Ho, as well as others in our group.

Our group included my oldest sister Vicki Sue (an accomplished musician in her own right) and our long-time friends Patty and Robert "Bubba" Elliott. I have told more Robert Elliott stories to my students over the years than about any other person.

Robert Elliott is a storyteller's dream.

Let me briefly tell three.

The first one is from our years in Washington D.C. and my first stint with the Agency. Robert and Patty came to visit and stay with us over the Fourth of July holiday weekend. They had four children. Patty—even as mother of four—was my best student at Alice Lloyd College. We all attended the fireworks show at the Mall—along with at least a million others. We had taken the Metro (D.C.'s

¹ Nate Chinen, "Don Ho, Hawaiian Musician, Dies at 76," *The New York Times*, Apr 15, 2007.

² Springfield College is a private college in Springfield, Massachusetts, best known as the birthplace of basketball because the sport was invented there in 1891, by Canadian-American instructor James Naismith.

subway) to get downtown. The fireworks were terrific, but afterwards there were huge crowds to catch the Metro back out of town. We were herded like cattle into the cars. It was extremely hot, and the air conditioning in our railcar didn't work. To make matters worse, we got stuck under the Potomac River due to a train failure on the tracks ahead of us.

Get the picture?

Well, Robert had bought a whoopie-cushion from one of the street vendors. He could not then—or now—resist a practical joke. Especially to a captive audience. He put the fart-like sounds of the whoopie cushion to good use; over-and-over again. Before our train car started moving again, everybody in our car was ready to strangle Bubba (me included).

The second story is from my law school years. At the time, Ima and I didn't have two nickels to rub together, and the Elliott's weren't much better off. Patty and Imogene taught in local schools and became very close friends (sharing banana splits to commensurate together.) Robert—whose heart was that of a pilot instead of running a grocery store in Eastern Kentucky—flew a corporate jet for Slush Puppy at the time. One afternoon, after class, Robert stopped by to pick me up at the apartment. “Where are we going?” I asked. “To get something for the girls,” he said with a smile on his face.

We stopped at the dumpster behind the local *7-11* convenience store. Robert climbed in the dumpster. “Com'on” he said. In short, after the moonies finished their daytime shift (in those days, they used to stand on traffic corners with bouquets of flowers to raise money) they would throw the flowers away. Robert and I put together impressive bouquets for Patty and Ima from the remains. I thought Ima would be happy to get the flowers. Instead, she got mad because she thought I had wasted money we didn't have!

My third Bubba story concerns Robert and his two oldest boys. Robert is a big man and his two oldest boys have followed suit. I would rather—so the old line goes—throw them a bale of hay than feed them. Both boys played high school football as linemen. After finishing high school, Ryan and Seth both participated in the Florida graduation trip with their classmates.

Bubba had a heart-to-heart with both boys before they left: “Boys, I don't care what you get into in Daytona Beach—just promise me one thing. Please don't get earrings: I can't stand it when boys wear earrings!” “Sure dad,” they both replied reassuringly.

After the talk, Robert talked to Patty. “Let's drive down to Florida, stay in the same hotel where they're staying, and surprise the boys.” “Robert, I don't think that's a good idea,” Patty said. But when Robert gets an idea in his mind, it is hard to convince him otherwise. So, they drove down, arriving later in the same day the school buses arrived. Robert was sitting in the hotel lobby late that night, hiding

behind a newspaper like a rotund James Bond. In the early morning hours, Ryan and Seth strolled into the lobby, both wearing newly purchased gold-stud earrings. Robert got so mad, he went straight back to the room, had Patty repack, checked out, and drove all the way back to Kentucky.

And that is only a sampler of Bubba stories.

Back to our time together in Hawaii. Bubba rented a car at the airport—he had to have a convertible—and with Bubba and my sister in the front seats, the other three of us were crammed like sardines in the back seat. We drove all over Oahu, seeing all the sights and eating at every opportunity. That evening we planned to have dinner at Chuck’s. (Robert flew for *Evergreen Airlines*—a global freight hauling airlines and was a frequent visitor to Hawaii; seemed like everyone knew “Bubba.”) As you have gathered by now, Robert just can’t resist pulling a practical joke. He had a local policeman ready to “arrest” me when I showed up in front of the hotel where the restaurant was located. We foiled his plan, however, by walking up the beach and coming in the back way!

Ima and I have many fond memories of our stays in Hawaii. We stayed a couple times at the *Hilton Hawaiian Waikiki Beach Resort* and, during our last couple visits, the *Ilikai Hotel* (the one featured in the opening scene of the old *Hawaii Five-O* (“book-em’ Danno”). We have seen fantastic shows, toured the North Shore (as part of a personal guided tour by my good friend Pete, a native Hawaiian), visited the *Hawaiian Cultural Village*, enjoyed the beaches ... I have climbed Diamond Head (two of my favorite personal artworks are of a small church viewed from Diamond Head and a rustic church on the coastal highway).

I can’t resist telling another Hawaii story. I was staying in the *Ilikai* and taking a morning stroll up the Ala Moana Boulevard toward the park, with its beautiful orange flowering trees, and the shopping mall. My route passed a marina full of sailboats, fishing boats and other waterborne craft of every description. At the same time, coming down the boulevard toward me was a Japanese tourist tram. I could hear the guide speaking in Japanese. I didn’t understand a word. But the tram passed me at the same time it was passing the marina, and I heard the words—with a thick Japanese accent—“Gilligan’s island,” followed by a collection of oriental “oohs” and “ahs” accompanied by the flashes of a hundred bulbs.

Of course, that was before smartphones.

I still wonder how many pictures I’m in.

The marina was the “tropical port” where the “fateful trip” was launched:

“The mate was a mighty sailing man,
The skipper brave and sure.
Five passengers set sail that day
For a three hour tour, a three hour tour.”

All prompting the eternal question: Ginger or Mary Ann?
My apologies to those of you too young to know what I’m talking about.

One final story. On one occasion, I was staying at the *Hilton Hawaiian Village* over the weekend. I love the place—especially the beachfront setting, Hawaiian music and curio shops filled with some of my favorite artworks (especially the moonlit wave settings of Hawaiian artist Roy Tabora). One of the blessings of my years of government service was being put up in nice hotels throughout Asia which I could not afford on my own. *The Hilton Hawaiian Village* certainly qualifies as one of those.

At any rate, as a brief background note for the rest of my story, in mid-January 1961, legendary hotelier Conrad Hilton agreed to buy the former *Kaiser’s Hawaiian Village* for \$21.5 million, at the time one of the biggest hotel transactions on record. Today, the resort consists of 22 acres of breathtaking waterfront property crowned by the famed Rainbow Tower with the world’s largest ceramic-tile mosaic, spanning 286 feet high and 26 feet wide on each end of the tower.³

An unknown, but very important part of the original purchase agreement, was that on Sunday mornings—for the benefit of tourists far away from home—there was to be a Christian service held on the grounds. A delightful Christian couple keeps Hilton’s commitment to the faith alive. (Hilton’s desire in this regard stands in stark contrast to today’s wealthy elites and their godless, greedy self-gratification.) At any rate, early one Sunday morning I participated in a delightful, but simple, church service including a wonderful praise and worship session—amidst the swaying palm trees, the fragrance of beautiful tropical flowers, and a delightful Pacific breeze—one of God’s most wonderful moments in my life.

I’m ready to go back

³ *Wikipedia* has an excellent article on the resort with several statistics and historical details.