

Views of the Vision

The Ministry of Randy, Gay and Andrew Hongo

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CELEBRATION OF LIFE FOR RANDY HONGO



Andrew's then-fiancee (now wife), Meghan, and Randy's sister, Ruth Binyan, joined Andrew and Gay for a beautiful celebration of life service.

The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise him. ~Psalm 28.7

On December 23, 2017, just one week after Randy went home to be with the Lord, we held a celebration of life memorial service at Kalihi Union Church. We estimate between 1,200 and 1,400 people attended -- a testament not just to the loving, generous person Randy was, but to you all, our friends and family, who loved Randy so much.

Our vision for the service was clear: we wanted to give glory and honor to Jesus Christ in every way possible, knowing that's exactly what Randy would have wanted. We also wanted the service to be a reflection of who Randy was -- not too sad and somber, but rather, full of joy and hope. That's why we didn't call it a funeral; instead, we called it a celebration of life.

It really was a miracle that such a huge production came together in such a short time, and it certainly would not have been possible without the help of Kalihi Union Church under the leadership of Pastor Jonathan Steeper. Andrew, Randy's sister Ruthie, Andrew's then-fiancee (now wife) Meghan, and I greeted people for three hours before the service and two hours after -- and even then, the receiving line was so long many people could not stay and had to leave before seeing us. Dozens of Hawai'i's finest musicians and dancers participated, and people came from neighbor islands and the mainland to pay their respects. We want to thank all of you who came to honor Randy, even if we weren't able to greet you personally. Your presence meant so much to us. Thank you also for your donations, cards, notes, and gifts that you have been sending me. I regret that I am not able to write personal responses to each one, but please know they are much appreciated and have brought me much joy and comfort.

CELEBRATION OF LIFE (CONTINUED)

Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.
~ Nehemiah 8:10

Following the service, someone told us, "That was the most joyous funeral I ever went to!" People said they laughed and cried so much that they were emotionally exhausted afterward. For Randy and me, there was so much humor and joy in our relationship and in our walk with the Lord, that it just spilled over into the service. I know Randy would not have wanted a somber, depressing service. He would have wanted a huge party. (He loved parties.) So the service included singing, dancing, funny home videos Andrew had made, and testimonies about how Randy had reflected the love of Jesus so beautifully.

Pastor Jonathan gave the message. Beforehand he had asked Andrew and me, "Do you think it would be appropriate for me to give a Gospel message?" Andrew and I replied that Randy never missed an opportunity to preach the life-changing message of Jesus Christ, and certainly at his funeral he would want people to hear the Gospel. Pastor Jonathan's message was clear, simple, and full of Christ's love.

One of my friends came to the service and brought her husband, who was not yet a believer; she had been praying for his salvation for years, and in fact Randy had this man on his prayer list and prayed for him every morning. She later told me that her husband had made a decision for the Lord at Randy's service. Hallelujah!

I'm just so grateful to everyone who helped us put together such a beautiful celebration of life. I could not have imagined a more fitting party for my beloved husband, to bid him "a hui hou" -- until we meet again.

From Andrew: It was very difficult for me not just losing my father, but losing him just two weeks before my wedding. The week before Dad's celebration of life, I was jumping from phone calls arranging Dad's service to phone calls arranging last-minute wedding details. I confess several times I mistakenly called the funeral "the wedding," and worse yet, the wedding "my funeral."

I had, of course, loved Meaghan before that, but what she did for me that week after my dad passed forever sealed my undying loyalty to her. Under all the stress of wedding planning, while also in a very demanding medical residency, Meaghan moved heaven and earth to fly to Hawaii and be with me. She worked a 24-hour shift at the hospital, jumped on a flight from Alabama to Hawaii, and arrived late the night before the service. She stood with me as I gave the greeting to Dad's celebration of life, and when I introduced her, the audience let out a huge cheer! Her presence really was something to celebrate; my dad had prayed for me for so many years to find a beautiful, godly wife, and here she was. Meaghan's parents, Lloyd and Nina Keller, flew in from California to be with us as well, and we were so grateful to have our new family supporting us.

Mom and I closed the service by singing "Never Far from Home," a family trio my dad wrote when I was a little boy. But now it was a duet, without Dad. He had written it thinking of the day I would go

off to college and leave Hawaii. But without even knowing it, he had written the lyrics that would allow Mom and me to express what was in our hearts as we grieved having to say goodbye for now, but also worshiped the God who made the way for a glorious reunion someday.

***But very soon, we will be going separate ways
 To serve the Lord in new and different ways
 But now and always
 We will love as family
 And with our love
 We're never far from home***

Dad, we love you and miss you so much. We thank God every single day for you, because every single moment we had together was a precious gift. We praise Him that because of the love of Jesus, we are never far from each other, and never far from home. See you soon.

If you would like to watch the celebration of life, please go to www.rghongo.com and view the entire funeral. If you would like a copy of the DVD, please write to us at PO Box 31124. A donation of any amount would be appreciated to cover shipping.

LUNCHEON WITH PRAYER TEAM



Left to right: Geri Young, Evelyn Lee, Alma Ro, and Dorothy Tong

This prayer team has prayed for our ministry for more than 30 years. They were happy that one of their prayers for Andrew to find a wife has finally been answered. They are now praying for me, that, without Randy, I will depend more on the Lord, and have a closer walk with Him.



GLORY IN HIS SOUL



The cast and crew of Glory in His Soul.

This past February, a long-time vision of Randy's came to fruition as Kalihi Union Church presented the musical drama *Glory in His Soul*, the life story of Henry Opukaha'ia, the first Hawaiian to come to faith in Christ. Although Randy passed into the presence of the Lord just two months before the show opened, members of KUC rallied together, knowing "the show must go on." It was a beautiful production featuring a cast and crew of nearly 100 volunteers, presented over five nights, drawing total crowds of 1,500 people.

Randy's greatest desire for *Glory in His Soul* was that it honor the Lord Jesus Christ and allow audiences to hear the Gospel message. We were privileged to have evangelist Danny Yamashiro give an anointed message at

the conclusion of each show. Over the run of the show, 60 people responded to Pastor Danny's message to commit or re-dedicate their lives to the Lord, and 60 people received prayer from the ministry team.

Randy had long been drawn to the story of Henry Opukaha'ia, whose dramatic conversion to Christianity inspired the missionary movement to Hawai'i. In 1992, he wrote the first version of *Glory in His Soul*, which was staged at Kalihi Union Church, First Presbyterian Church, and Haili Congregational Church in Hilo, Hawai'i. Henry's casket was present at Haili Church during the performance in August 1993. In April 2016, Kalihi Union presented the play again with additional songs composed by Randy; soon after, he composed even more songs, got four co-directors (Jody Chun, Corinne Uehara, Aileen Chinen, and Jon Leong), and began rehearsing for the 2018 show, to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Henry's passing. Randy said, "If anything happens to me, don't cancel the show. I have four capable co-directors who can do the show without me."



Left to right: Avery Matsumoto, Kainoa "Kaikai" Kaneshiro (Gay's grand-nephew), and Kristie Kawazoe Quevido as the Opukaha'ia family.

We know that on December 16, 2017, when Randy passed into glory, he got to meet his fellow Hawaiian and brother in Christ who had inspired him so deeply. We miss Randy dearly but are grateful for the many volunteers who carried on this work. Only through the grace and power of the Holy Spirit was all this made possible, and we give God all the glory!



Left to right: Cindy Fujiwara, Nelson Kanemoto, Milton Yoshida, and Gay Hongo sing to Jon Leong as Josiah.

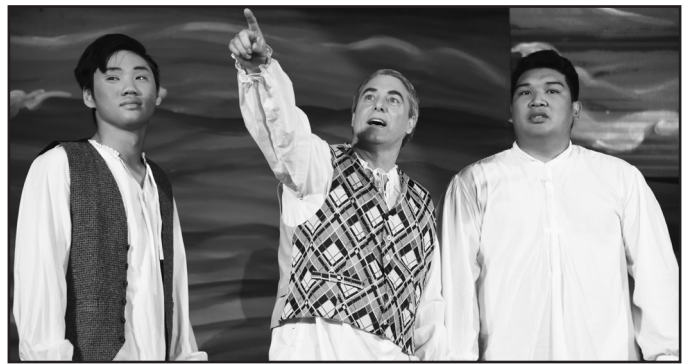
Although God gifted me as a singer, He did not gift me as a theater director. After Randy passed, I knew I needed someone to take over as creative director of the show. God answered my prayers by bringing us Chey Sanders, an incredibly talented director with 30 years professional experience directing, coaching, and teaching actors. We know Chey because she is the



Gay Hongo introduces Pastor Danny Yamashiro to give the closing message and invitation.

sister-in-law of my niece, Cheryl Toma-Sanders. Chey took what Randy had created and took it to a whole new level with her expertise. Cheryl was also able to step in as musical director, not just playing piano and keyboard in rehearsals and performances, but also helping the actors learn their parts and overseeing all the music for the performance. Chey and Cheryl are collaborating on another musical, *Seussical*, which will be presented at Waialae Baptist Church June 28th and 29th at 6:30pm and June 30th at 2pm and 6:30pm.

I'm also grateful for God providing me a wonderful technical director in Chris Ali'ipule. Chris oversaw all technical aspects of the show as well as production of the DVD. Chris always went above and beyond what was required, always motivated by a desire to honor the Lord. **If you would like to order the DVD of *Glory in His Soul*, please go to www.rghongo.com to order online. Or, you can mail a check to Christian Vision, PO Box 31124, Honolulu, HI 96820. DVDs are \$15 each, plus a shipping fee of \$5 (you can avoid the shipping fee if you pick up the DVD from Kalihi Union Church).**



Left to right: Rian Lau as Thomas Hopu, Pastor Jonathan Steeper as Captain Brintnall, and Chester Centino as Henry Opuakaha'ia.

LILLIE KNAULS

Gospel singer Lillie Knauls ministered at Kalihi Union Church on Sunday, May 27th. She is 80 years old and still ministering full time!

I said to her, "You are such an inspiration to me. Most people would retire at your age." She said to me, "If you ain't dead, you ain't done!"



Gospel Singer Lillie Knauls with Gay Hongo



THOUGHTS FROM ANDREW

This past New Years' Eve, that which so many of you had prayed for finally came to pass: I got married to a beautiful, funny, caring woman who loves the Lord with all her heart. I had prayed for a wife who had a heart for missions, who would be strong in areas where I am weak, who would challenge me to love Jesus more. The Lord did exceedingly above all I could have ever asked or imagined and brought me Meaghan Kingsley-Teem... who is now Meaghan Hongo!

We had a small wedding in Northern California, and afterward only had time for a brief honeymoon in Big Sur, on the coast. I couldn't have asked for a better honeymoon; we spent time hiking, walking on the beach, watching the stars. I have to admit -- one of my fears of the honeymoon (and of marriage) was that we'd run out of things to talk about. I guess I've discovered that one of the great things of marriage is that you can sit together in silence, and still enjoy each other. It was absolutely perfect.

Right after that, we returned to our new home in Mobile, AL. Meaghan had been living there for about six months already; she moved there in June of 2017 to start a medical residency in pediatrics. I had landed a position teaching broadcast journalism at the University of South Alabama, and had my first class just a week after the wedding. I've really enjoyed this first semester -- basically I'm teaching my students exactly what I did professionally for the past five years at NBC News, so it's been a lot of fun.

I'm also adjusting to life in the South, which has been great. We're only a few minutes from Mobile Bay, a beautiful body of water, and Mobile itself is filled with beautiful, historic homes. The people here are friendly (that old Southern hospitality), the city is small enough to be manageable but large enough to have good shops and restaurants, and the cost of living is very affordable. We've also found a wonderful church, Covenant Presbyterian, where I'm part of the worship team.

But, of course, the most wonderful part of being in Mobile is that I get to be with Meaghan, the love of my life. I've longed to be married for so many years, and I have to tell you, it's even better than I thought it would be. I think when I was single, I could hide (or at least attempt to hide) the less attractive parts of myself: my fears, my flaws, my anxieties, my regrets. In marriage, there's no hiding! But what has been so healing is that Meaghan sees all of me, and yet still loves me, still chooses me, still gives herself to me. What better picture is there of the unconditional, sacrificial love of Christ for us, His church?

Meaghan has also been a great comfort to me as I grieve my dad's passing. I doubt any young bride imagines she'll spend part of her honeymoon holding her new husband as he sobs into a pillow, but that is exactly what Meaghan did for me. Even now, months later, I miss my dad so much it sometimes feels like there's a hole in my heart. But I am so grateful for every moment I had with him. He was such a loving father -- one who so beautifully incarnated the love of our Heavenly Father. Never before have I been so grateful for the truth of Scripture:

"Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him." 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

I am so grateful that because we know the Lord Jesus, we have a joyful reunion with Dad to look forward to someday.



Andrew and Meaghan honeymooned in Big Sur, California.



Andrew and Gay had lunch with the missions committee and friends from Santa Clara Valley Japanese Christian Church after sharing at three morning services.

Since I was on the mainland visiting Andrew and Meaghan for Mother's Day, I thought it would be a good idea to swing by California on my way back to Hawai'i to visit two churches that have supported and prayed for our ministry for more than thirty years: San Lorenzo Japanese Christian Church and Santa Clara Valley Japanese Christian Church. Randy and I used to visit these churches almost every year, and so I wanted to go and see these dear friends.

This was my first time doing a concert tour (or at least a mini-tour) without Randy. Andrew's a good pianist, but by his own admission more limited than Randy, so we put together a shorter, simpler program. We shared briefly in three morning services at Santa Clara, and were so blessed by Pastor Lester Yamashita and Pastor Yoshinosuke Nakao praying for the Lord to strengthen and bless us. We also went out to a delicious lunch with the missions committee and some longtime friends and had a wonderful time talking story and remembering Randy. We were also blessed that our longtime friend and supporter Pastor Jim Sakurai was able to come to the service as well.



We were so happy to see Pastor Jim Sakurai, a long-time friend and supporter of our ministry.

Andrew drove us to San Lorenzo for an evening service hosted by Pastor Sunao Shimada and his Japanese congregation. Randy and I met Shimada Sensei years ago in Chiba, Japan through Pastor Yuuichiro Nakano. Now Shimada Sensei is in California, and it was just God's perfect timing that the Sunday we were there, his mother and niece were visiting from Okinawa. I am always so blessed when I hear Shimada Sensei leading worship; not only does he have a beautiful voice, but he has an anointing that just radiates the love of Jesus. I also loved ministering with a fellow Okinawan!



Andrew and Gay with Pastor Sunao Shimada and his family at San Lorenzo Japanese Christian Church.

Since we had time to do a longer program at San Lorenzo, we asked Alden Sanders to come play ukulele and sing "Kanaoka Waiwai" so that Andrew could dance hula. Alden is the brother of Pastor Matt Sanders, who is married to my niece, Cheryl Toma-Sanders. Everybody enjoyed Alden's ukulele playing and also Andrew's piano playing. They said, "Oh, Andrew sounds and plays just like his dad." It wasn't easy to do a concert without Randy, because he's the one who usually holds everything together, doing the playing, talking, singing and joking, but we asked the Lord to help us, and He did. And people were blessed.

One of our friends brought her friend who's not yet a Christian, and it was a wonderful encouragement to me to keep on doing this ministry, even without Randy.

MOTHER'S DAY IN ALABAMA

I gave myself a special present this Mother's Day: I flew to Alabama to visit Andrew and his beautiful new wife, Meaghan! It's a long flight, but it was worth it to see them. I stayed in their cozy little apartment in Mobile, and even though Meaghan has a very busy work schedule, she had some days off while I was there and made wonderful home-cooked meals for us. Andrew and Meaghan also took me shopping at some of my favorite stores, which is one of the ways I have learned to find joy even in the midst of grief: retail therapy!

On Mother's Day, Meaghan made a special brunch for us at home -- the most delicious French toast. Then we went to church as a family at Covenant Presbyterian Church. I'm glad Andrew and Meaghan have found a wonderful church home with a good pastor. After church, Andrew took me to eat Vietnamese food. He said the Vietnamese food in Mobile is really good because there's a large Vietnamese population -- and he's the expert, having lived in Vietnam for two years.

I also had an opportunity to attend Andrew's GriefShare class. GriefShare is a Christian program that ministers to people who have lost a loved one. I had been attending Grief Share in Hawaii, at Leeward Community Church, so it was nice to be able to visit another Grief Share group with Andrew. He told me that the group has really helped him to trust in the Lord more deeply as he grieves Randy's passing.

At the end of the group, Andrew and I sang a couple songs: In His Time and Great is Thy Faithfulness. There were many tears, and we sensed the Lord's comfort in our midst. Afterward, some members shared that particular hymn had been sung at their loved one's funeral. It really was a God moment.

I'm so happy that my only son has found someone to love him and take care of him. I can see that he's a good husband -- very loving, attentive, and affectionate, which I know he learned from his father. Andrew also washes dishes without being asked, which is something Randy was not so good at.



Meaghan, Andrew, Pastor Alec Flynt, and Gay on Mother's Day at Covenant Presbyterian Church in Mobile, Alabama.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

People have been asking me now that Randy is gone, what the future of Christian Vision will be. I'm still adjusting to my "new normal," life without Randy, so it may take some time for me to figure out what exactly the future will look like. But I am committed to carrying on the ministry, with God's help. Christian Vision still relies on your support, and if you would like to give, you can use the enclosed envelope or give on our website at www.rghongo.com.

I am also continuing to work on the Hongo Music Center, which has been a vision of ours for many years. We are still raising funds for the center, and if you'd like to give specifically to that project, please mark it accordingly on the enclosed envelope or on our website, www.rghongo.com. We're also doing a tile campaign. For a gift of \$1,000 or more, you can purchase a tile inscribed however you choose; the tiles will form a mural in the shape of a grand piano once the center is completed.

We've also been blessed to have Kalihi Union Church come on as our partner in the Hongo Music Center. They've designated some land on the church campus to be used for the music center, which will be part of a larger building project they're doing.

Andrew is only able to join me occasionally for concerts, like he did in Northern California. But I'm able to sing on my own as well: I led worship and did special music for Maundy Thursday and Easter Sunday at Kalihi Union Church; and I lead worship for our traditional service once a month. I was blessed to be able to sing at the funeral of our dear friend and supporter Richard Kanno.

I also participated in the funeral for Sadako Nakahara, a member of Kalihi Union Church's Japanese Fellowship and Joy Fellowship (the ministry to senior adults). Sadako used to make leis for both groups, and her loving service was much appreciated. The members of Joy Fellowship wanted to sing a couple of songs in her memory, in Japanese and English, and they asked me to direct the choir. I was glad to be able to do that, and also to sing a special solo.

I am encouraged that the Lord has provided me so many opportunities to minister to others through my testimony -- of how the Lord was faithful to us through Randy's cancer and dialysis, and even now how He sustains me after Randy's passing. Praise God that we can comfort others with the comfort we ourselves have received (2 Corinthians 1:4).



Andrew and Gay taught Pearly Shells to some of Andrew's new friends in Mobile.

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A special reunion with Pastor Stan Johnson, who just celebrated his 90th birthday! We visited him in Los Gatos, California.



Uncle Masanori Hongo, 97 years old & Auntie Florence, 89 years old, Andrew and I visited them in San Mateo, California.

We are transitioning to an **e-newsletter**, which we will post on our website (www.rghongo.com) and also email periodically. **If you'd like to be on this e-newsletter list, please email us at rghongo@hotmail.com.**

If you want to continue receiving a hard copy of this newsletter in the mail, please write back to us using the enclosed envelope. A donation of any amount to help cover the cost of postage and printing would be appreciated.