

Views of the Vision

The Ministry of Randy, Gay and Andrew Hongo
September 2012

Website: www.rghongo.com

Email: rghongo@hotmail.com



JOYFUL JOURNEY

It was on November 17, 2011 that I first heard my doctor's sobering words: "Mr. Hongo, you have multiple myeloma, cancer of the blood plasma in the bone marrow."

Shocked by his pronouncement, I left the doctor's office, went to the parking lot and called Gay, then Andrew. I told them the news, shed a few tears, prayed with both of them and ultimately praised the Lord for His goodness and faithfulness. We knew that God had a reason for this to happen and that He was going to sustain our family through this crisis and ultimately receive glory for all that was to happen in the days to come.

Now as I write this ten months later, I do praise God for I have seen His marvelous workings and His faithful presence throughout this challenging season. He has a plan for my life, He has helped and sustained Gay, Andrew and me through this difficult journey, He has brought wellness to my body, and He will receive glory as I testify and sing of His wondrous miracles in my life.

This journey has been filled with many lessons of trust, peace and joy as Gay, Andrew and I have grown deeper in our love relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. My body has been restored, my faith is strong, my gratitude to the Lord deep and ongoing. The pain and discomfort of the past year has all been worth it because of the ways my family and I have grown more in love with Jesus. Praise the Lord for working out His perfect plan for our lives.

A quick rundown of the past ten months.

November 17, 2011 – I first received my diagnosis of multiple myeloma

November-December 2011 – Gay and I did research on which cancer center I should enter: Mayo Clinic (Arizona, Wisconsin), Stanford (Palo Alto, California), Fred Hutchinson (Seattle, Washington), MD Anderson (Houston, Texas), Sloan-Kettering (New York), City Of Hope (Duarte, California). After two weeks of searching, during which time the Lord brought many people into our lives who had positive experiences at City Of Hope, we felt God was leading us to the southern California center and told my doctor we had decided on City Of Hope.

December 20, 2011 – Gay and I flew to Los Angeles, Andrew flew from New York to meet us there, we spent the night at a hotel near City Of Hope.

December 21, 2011 – I had my first appointment with Dr. Michael Rosenzweig. He went over my case, explained the extent of my cancer, estimated a treatment period of about seven months and suggested that chemotherapy be started immediately.

December 28, 2011 – I started my first Velcade chemotherapy treatment, five hours of receiving the chemo intra-venously.

January 8, 2012 – Gay and I moved into our Village studio apartment, #144. The space was a little crowded for three so Andrew chose to stay at the home of his friend Ryan Furuya in the nearby town of Glassell Park. Thank you, Ryan, for accommodating Andrew.

January to May 2012 – I continued with my weekly Velcade chemotherapy treatments. The first month, the drug was administered by IV. From February on, Dr. Rosenzweig tried a new technique, having the nurses give me Velcade through subcutaneous injections (in the stomach) weekly. What a blessing, no five hour infusions, just a short shot in the tummy. I praise God throughout the five months for sparing me from nausea – I did not get sick one day! I did endure bouts with headaches, increased blood pressure, fatigue, insomnia and one week-end of an upset stomach, but I never

dealt with nausea which I expected to have from what others had told me.

February 16, 2012 – Because my kidneys were continuing to fail (a condition I had been dealing with for the past two years), my doctor here said that I had to start dialysis. I had a quinton catheter put into my upper right chest and started dialysis the next day. It was tough to deal with two physical challenges but God sustained me with His Word and power.

June 2012 – This was a month for assorted tests and preparation for the transplant, injections of neupogen to increase my stem cell production, a four-day collection of stem cells from my body, cleaning and freezing of the stem cells, waiting for transplant approval from my medical insurer, Blue Cross Blue Shield/Hawaii Medical Service Association.

July 3, 2012 – Receiving approval from my medical insurer, I entered Helford Hospital for the stem cell transplant.

July 4, 2012 – I took a strong dose chemo in advance of receiving transplant.

July 5, 2012 – Transplant Day! Although sleepy, I made sure to stay awake so that I could watch the cleaned, liquid-like stem cells being infused from their clear plastic bag back into my body through the intra-venous tubes. God was healing me through this breakthrough medical process and I wanted to watch it with my own eyes. The whole procedure took about 35 minutes.

July 6-24, 2012 – These were the most agonizing days of my life as my body received the stem cells, first reacting negatively against the new cells as my white blood cells plummeted and I lost almost all immunity and as fatigue, body aches and upset stomach settled in. The doctors, nurses, Gay and Andrew and my Lord Jesus were my daily encouragement during this time, comforting and reassuring me that things would improve as my body naturally adjusted to the new stem cells. The 14th day after the transplant, I woke up well-rested from a good sleep and felt like having some breakfast. From that day on, my taste buds slowly returned and things started to approach near normalcy. The doctor was pleased with my improvement and he released me on July 24, the 19th day after my transplant.

July 24-August 28 – I was recovering very well in my Village apartment from the stem cell transplant. Dr. Rosenzweig was pleased with my blood results and gave the okay to return to Hawaii. We are looking to leave in a few weeks if we can get our household here in order for departure.

August 29 – Gay and I flew home to our beloved Hawaii nei!

Praise the Lord! As I look back on my time in Duarte, I am grateful for several blessings:

1) for God's love, sustenance, power, peace and ultimate joy through every moment of my experience here. He has been an ever-present source of strength and comfort in my time of need. Yes, there were moments when I was anxious about a procedure or medical problem, but I was always knew Jesus was there to help and strengthen me.

2) for God's miraculous provision for my every need: for the kindness and excellence of the doctors and staff at City Of Hope and for the superior medical treatment that has been afforded me every step of the way; for the graciousness of City Of Hope in providing for my many needs and especially in giving me free housing here at the Village apartment; for family and friends who have telephoned or sent letters, cards, emails, gifts, offerings and have been such an encouragement; for family and friends who have traveled the many miles to Duarte to visit me in person; for Gay and Andrew and their sacrifices and labors to be my faithful, loving, always hard-working caregivers.

3) for my renewed health after a long and painstaking treatment time. I am thankful that my body has responded positively to the months of chemotherapy and the stem cell transplant and that I can someday return to my work and music ministry, although with a less intense schedule. I know there are other patients who did not respond well and will die from their disease, so I am thankful that God has lovingly blessed me with extended life.

4) for being able to return to Hawaii. I have been away from home for eight months! That is just a very long time away from my beloved islands. I thank God that I can go home and know that the environment there will help me heal even faster.



December 21, our first day at City of Hope



My sugar plantation look: under doctor's orders, I have to guard against direct sunlight by wearing sunscreen, a wide-brimmed hat, long-sleeved shirt or jacket and long pants.

There are so many people to thank that I will not list all of your names here. I will thank and have thanked all of you in person, by telephone or through correspondence. Please know how much I have appreciated your every act of kindness, love and generosity. When I was emotionally miserable and physically suffering, you came to me with words of friendship and kindness or with gifts that brightened my day or with a hug and embrace that showed how much you cared for me. I can never say thank you enough for what I feel in my heart. You have loved me and I will always be grateful.

As I consider all that God has done for us here in Duarte, I thank the Lord for several opportunities we have had to minister to others.

1) Through Caring Bridge. The online website turned out to be an effective way to keep in touch with loved ones and to let them know my weekly progress. As I shared struggles as well as victories along the way and referred to different Scriptures that were relevant to my situations, people were blessed and thanked me for inspiring them in their own life situations. They began sharing my journal entries with others and the website became an unexpected ministry opportunity for me to be a witness to others. Over the 8 months of being on Caring Bridge, I have had nearly 40,000 hits which is a commendably sizeable following. I thank the Lord for being able to inspire others on this site.

2) Through singing for others. We had a few opportunities to bless people with our music while in treatment here. The day after my transplant, Dr. Rosenzweig's wife and parents were visiting him on the sixth floor where my hospital room was. We were able to go to a lounge where there was a piano and we sang for his family. They were thankful for our songs, especially Dr. Rosenzweig who said his parents always ask about us. We also were able to do a program for the transplant patients and have sung for different patients like

Mrs. Jin, Mr. Nagareda and Mr. Minor.

3) God inspired me to write twenty-two songs. During a three week period in June, God inspired me to write about twenty songs. It was an unusually productive time for me as a composer, rare that it came at a time when I was physically weary and in pain. As I leaned on the Lord for relief from the physical hardship, He blessed my spirit as well as my body and gave me new melodies and lyrics. I later put these songs on YouTube and on Caring Bridge and many have been blessed by hearing them.

What lies ahead in Hawaii? Dr. Rosenzweig wants me to rest for several months and not return to full-time work until he gives me the okay. The stem cell transplant takes time to heal and I need to be cautious. I will not be able to go into public places to guard against infection from others.

I also will have dietary restrictions, both for the transplant and for the renal condition. Gay has been a careful cook and knows what I need to watch for. Everything I eat must be carefully prepared and eaten within an hour of preparation. Left-overs longer than 24 hours must be discarded. Fresh vegetables must be thoroughly washed. Fruits may be eaten but the skin must be peeled.

I cannot go out in direct sunlight for a year. I must wear a wide-brimmed hat, a long sleeved shirt or jacket, long pants, and I must wear sunscreen on the exposed skin. This is to guard against the sun's rays interacting with the medications that I am taking to support the stem cell transplant.

I will have to return for check-ups at City Of Hope several times during the year. I will also be assigned to a doctor in Hawaii who has City Of Hope ties.

As I return to Hawaii, my vow to myself is not to get caught in the busyness that characterizes many of our daily lives. I have tasted the peace of totally resting in Jesus here in Duarte and know He values that daily communion time with Him, even above the work and service that I give in His name. Jesus wants me to love Him, to trust daily in His plan for my life and not to worry about my own plans or agenda. In our eight months here in Duarte, I have learned to hear that still, small voice of Jesus and I don't want to lose that intimacy with my Lord when I return to Hawaii. I don't want to settle into old ways of frenzied activity but want to trust in Him alone for my every need.

Yes, I realize I have a responsibility to return to work when I am well again and pray that Jesus will help me find the balance between adoration and service.

Thank you all for your prayers and support as I have traveled this long, arduous but ultimately joyful journey. I am a different man from a year ago – a changed, more peaceful, more thankful son of God who wants to grow even more in His love and, as He presents opportunities, to serve Jesus by sharing His love with others. Please pray that I will be able to do this for His glory alone.

FROM OUR PHOTO FILES....

Here are pictures of some of the family and friends who came to visit at the City of Hope during our eight months there. Mahalo to all these and many others who came to share God's aloha with our family.

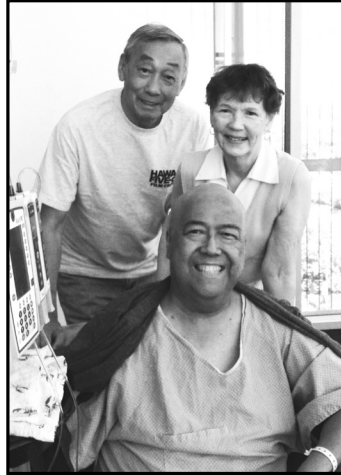


Aunty Haleaka Martin of Kalihi and Moanalua Church, Honolulu with her granddaughter Taylor.



Aunty Dottie Chang of Kalihi Union Church

Leonard and Rosemarie Chun of Camas, Washington



Pastor Rick Lazor of Ola Hou Baptist Church in Honolulu with his wife Iris and daughter Bethany.



Kalihi Union friends Janet and Jim Ohta, and Christy Lau and her boyfriend Trevor Fay.



Aileen and Joel Shibuya of First Baptist Church of Pearl City. Joel and Randy are childhood friends from Hilo, Hawaii.



Gregg and Jill Toyama of Aiea, Hawaii with their children, Matt, Jodie and Christine.



Lynn Tsunekawa and her mom Nancy Ogomori of North Coast Church in Vista, California



Kris & John Robillard of San Diego, California.



Pastor Daryl Yamada and his wife Claudie of Mililani Missionary Church.



Driving all the way from Foster City, California to see us were Len and Nan Hirahara, friends of ours from University of Hawaii days.



Randy wearing a lei of paper flowers filled with encouraging notes from Pastor Kekapa Lee and the ohana at the First Chinese Church of Christ in Honolulu



Pastor Stan Ponz and his wife Carol of International Baptist Church of Honolulu



Wayne & Judy Heaton, formerly of Maui, and now residing in Marietta, Georgia, flew to California to visit us.



Visiting from Leeward Oahu were niece Laurie Toma Libarios and her daughters Joy and Faith, and nephew Riki Toma with his wife Mandy and children Natalie and Eric. Laurie's husband Niki was taking the picture.

(from left) Gail Nagaoka, Sharon Kuroyama and Naomi Teal of Anaheim Free Methodist Church brought lunch



and many gifts on their visit. I'm holding a blue-and-white blanket with "Lord" on the pattern made for me by Gail.



Pastor Jim Sakurai of Santa Clara Valley Japanese Christian Church came to see me in January. It was his strong word that my Caring Bridge journal was God's ministry for

me during this season that made me diligent in my writing. Thank you for that encouragement, Sakurai-Sensei.

NOTES FROM GAY

Marsha Frederick, pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Bement, Illinois, sent me a book called *When God Winks at You* by Squire Rushnell. It is a book about how God speaks directly to you through the power of coincidence.

Author Rushnell explains the winks this way: “Every time you receive what some call a coincidence or an answered prayer, it’s a direct and personal message of reassurance from God to you—what I call a godwink.”

As I look back on the many months of this long journey, I recall so many “godwinks” that paved the way to a successful stem cell transplant for Randy.

Months ago, Faye Gibo, my hairdresser in Honolulu, introduced me to her client Taylor Reece. Taylor is a resource person specializing in helping people register for Medicare. Taylor advised that although Randy is eligible for Medicare to be his primary insurance when he turns 65, it would be wise to keep HMSA as primary as long as possible because of its superior coverage. We took her advice and asked Christian Vision to keep paying our monthly premiums so that we could keep HMSA as primary insurance.

Just as Randy was scheduled to have his stem cell transplant we got a letter from HMSA saying that Medicare, if it were our primary insurance, will not cover stem cell transplants in patients who have renal failure and are on dialysis. Therefore, HMSA as secondary will not cover transplant expenses.

These were the times when I was so grateful to have Andrew with me. Andrew said, “Don’t show this letter to Dad, let’s just pray.” Whenever a crisis occurred we put our trust in Jesus and had peace, knowing He had everything under control.

We called HMSA and found that the letter was sent in error because Medicare was not our primary but our secondary insurance as we had decided. HMSA then referred our case to its chief doctor in charge who was to contact our doctor here to discuss Randy’s case by conference call; HMSA had to make its own decision if it would cover Randy’s transplant because of his dialysis situation.

On July 2 the day Randy was to be admitted into the hospital for his transplant, we received a call from the office here saying admission will be delayed because City Of Hope did not yet receive clearance from HMSA.

Another godwink occurred. A vice-president at HMSA, a Christian brother whose wife is a good friend and informed her husband about our plight, called and stepped in to help our case. Within a few hours, the two doctors had spoken,

agreement was made, HMSA said it would cover the transplant expenses and Randy was admitted to the hospital the following day.

Later we learned that two years ago, City Of Hope did not do stem cell transplants on dialysis patients. Randy is only the third dialysis patient at City Of Hope – the other two were from the Kaiser program and Randy is the first HMSA/Blue Cross Blue Shield patient. If his diagnosis had been before 2011, he would have had to find another cancer center for treatment. All is in God’s time that Randy is able to be here at the wonderful City Of Hope, that his medical insurance covers our expenses and that his transplant has been successful and we are looking at going home very soon.

God’s “winks” and provisions are a constant cause for praise. We thank Jesus all the day long for the many ways He helps us and provides for our every need.



Harriet and Kenny Furuya, dear friends who loan us their Honda van the whole time we were in California. Whenever we would do concert tours in southern California, the Furuyas served as our hard-working coordinators and transportation committee.



Lynn Mori of Glendale, presenting us authentic Hawaiian lei for our birthdays in July. Lynn and her husband Mike graciously looked after us throughout our eight month stay in Duarte.

MISSION TO NORTHERN JAPAN



December 20, 2011 had been set as departure date for Gay and me to travel to Tohoku, Japan to present concerts for the earthquake and tsunami victims in that area. When I found out about the multiple myeloma in November, we had to cancel the mission trip. Disappointed as we were, we trusted the Lord would eventually send others in our place.

We are thankful that mission endeavor came to pass - and grateful that Andrew was among the team members from Kalihi Union Church called by the Lord to spend August 20-30 ministering to the people of northern Japan.

Along with Andrew, team members included Pastor Yoshitaka Fujinami, Elder Dennis Kawamura, and from Kobe, Japan, former Kalihi Union member Liliko Iizuka and two of her hula students Emiko Shirasaki and Tomoko Waki.

The team partnered with Samaritan's Purse, a ministry led by Franklin Graham, that rebuilds houses in the city of Kesennuma. The Kalihi team stayed at the mission headquarters and visited different churches that work with Samaritan's Purse, ministering to pastors and church congregations through prayer and musical programs. They also participated in several home dedications. The major outreach effort in Kesennuma was a four-hour Hawaiian Festival that featured a musical program by the Kalihi team as well as a guest appearance by Christian surfer Bethany Hamilton.

The team then traveled to the cities of Sendai and Fukushima and presented music and testimonies in churches, nursing homes and pre-schools. In addition, Hawaiian cultural classes were offered to the people. Liliko taught hula, Dennis taught lei-making and Andrew taught ukulele. A big mahalo goes out to Christian brother Alvin Okami and the family at Koaloha Ukulele in Honolulu for donating twelve ukulele to take to the people of Japan. Alvin's prophetic vision is that the ukulele will be one of the instruments God will use in His musical army in the last days.

It's been a year and six months since the earthquake and tsunami. The tragedy is no longer front page news, but the fact remains that thousands of people remain displaced, their homes unrepaired, tons of debris uncleared, radiation from the damaged nuclear plants a constant threat and depression and hopelessness ongoing problems.

In the midst of this despair, many of the Lord's servants from the U.S. and other countries are helping the people with their physical needs as well as sharing with them spiritual hope and new life through Jesus Christ. Andrew and his team are grateful they were a part of that ministering army and they thank you for your prayers and support toward this mission. Kalihi Union will certainly be praying about continuing this work in years to come.

Kalihi Union mission team members (left to right) Dennis Kawamura, Pastor Yoshitaka Fujinami, Andrew Hongo and Liliko Iizuka were honored to meet Bethany Hamilton, the surfer from Hawaii whose arm was bitten by a shark. Bethany shared her powerful testimony during the Hawaiian Festival in Kesennuma and was very well received by the audience.



Andrew and his ukulele class of three ladies in the city of Sendai. They really enjoyed playing "Pearly Shells" and "Aloha Oe."



Liliko Iizuka (center) brought two of her dancers from Kobe, Tomoko and Emiko, to join the Kalihi team for the Kesennuma Festival. They brought beautiful colors and graceful motions to the team's presentation.



Pre-school children from the city of Fukushima pose for a picture with team members after a morning concert. Radiation levels in this city are very high so there is a need for funds to be raised to use to purchase water purifiers which will help children like these.



Christian Vision
P.O. Box 31124
Honolulu, HI 96820-1124
 return service requested

God's Ohana Visit Hongos At City Of Hope



Some of the many angels who blessed us during our stay in Duarte: Pastor Bill and Jean Hara, Susan Arita, Charles and Naomi Isara, Craig, Nika and Bijanna Isara, and Kenny and Harriet Furuya. We thank the Lord for all those who shared His love and kindness with us during our long season at City of Hope.



Members of the Holiness Conference council from Hawaii and northern and southern California were meeting in Pasadena in January. When Pastor Russell Higa of Honolulu told the group he was coming to visit me, they all wanted to come as well. What a blessing to have this army of God's servants praying over me, including Pastor Rod Yee and Pastor Sunao Shimada of San Lorenzo Japanese Christian Church, Pastor Shunji Mizoguchi of Los Angeles Holiness Church and Pastor Makoto Okura of San Diego Holiness Church.