

Views of the Vision

The Ministry of Gay and Andrew Hongo

June 2019

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The God Who Helps Me

"I am the Lord your God, who upholds your right hand, who says to you, 'Do not fear, I will help you.'" Isaiah 41:13

The April 15th devotional from Our Daily Bread really spoke to my heart. It told the story of a man who remembered how as a little boy, he just loved holding hands with his father – whether they were out walking, or just talking together. When that man's father passed, he realized how much he missed that consolation he found with his father, how much he valued his companionship. I wept as I read that devotion because I miss holding hands with Randy, and I miss his companionship.

The devotion also talked about how Jesus calls us His friends (John 15:15). Jesus even showed His disciples the marks of His friendship in His nail-pierced hands. I thought about how even though Randy is gone, Jesus is still my companion for life. He walks with me, and knows my desires, and is with me in my heartache. I trust that when I'm lonely and downhearted, Jesus keeps company with me. He holds my hand. And as I obey Him and His commands, I will bear fruit that lasts.

In the past several months, I have experienced God holding my hand as I continue the ministry of Christian Vision on my own, in how He provides people to help me and minister with me.

EXCEL CHURCH

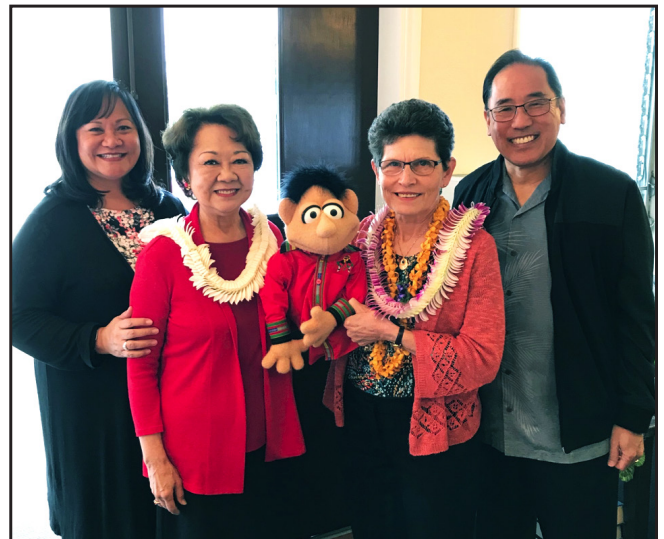
One such experience happened when I went to Excel Church (formerly Mililani Missionary), longtime supporters of our ministry. This was actually the church we were scheduled to sing at on Sunday, December 17, 2017. But Randy had a heart attack and went home to be with the Lord the day before. After Randy's sudden passing, one of the first things I thought was that I had to call Pastor Daryl Yamada at Excel to cancel our concert. I felt so bad cancelling with less than 24 hours notice. Randy and I rarely cancelled an appearance; if one of us got sick the other would step up to the plate and cover for the other. But this was the one time I knew I would not be able to handle this physically or emotionally.

It wasn't until this past February 10, 2019, more than a year after Randy's passing, that I was finally able to return to Excel Church and make up for that cancelled service. I felt so lonely going to minister without Randy, so I asked the Lord, "Please send me someone to go with me." Lois Pannabecker (whose

late husband David was the music minister at Kalihi Union Church) was the answer to my prayer.

Lois is an excellent pianist. The first time I asked her to accompany me she said, "Well, I can't play like Randy... backwards, sideways, and upside-down. But I will do my best!" She is also an inspiration to me in the way she cared for her husband David through many months of his struggle with cancer. After his passing she continued their worldwide puppet ministry. In fact, the day after our service she was leaving to minister in Africa.

It was especially touching to go to Excel Church with Lois because her father had been the pastor of that church back in the 1970s. It was a joy watching her reunion with old friends who had been such a big part of her parents' lives. I thanked the church for their prayers and support for Randy and me for so many years, and Lois was able to share her puppet ministry – she even brought a special puppet friend, "JoJo," for the congregation to enjoy. At the end of the service, the pastor and elders laid hands on and prayed for both Lois and me. Then, as we stood by the exit to shake hands and say goodbye, all the children pushed me aside and ran to take photos with JoJo!



Left to right: Claudie Yamada, Gay Hongo, JoJo, Lois Pannabecker, and Pastor Daryl Yamada.

Just before leaving, Pastor Daryl said to me “I’ll never forget that call from you on December 16. What absolutely blew my mind was that you were so calm and apologetic, asking, ‘Would it be okay if I cancelled out from coming to your church tomorrow?’” When Pastor Daryl said that to me, I realized that it was God’s grace that kept me strong even on the day I had to say goodbye to my husband.

That day in church brought closure to me. It also marked a new beginning as I was encouraged by Pastor Daryl to continue my ministry, knowing that Excel Church would faithfully support me and keep me in their prayers.

VALENTINE LUNCHEON

God also brought a wonderful team to surround me when I performed for the Pau Hana Valentine Luncheon at Olivet Baptist Church on February 12, 2019.

Because Randy attended Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky (this was back in the 70s), whenever we came home to Hawaii we would often connect with local Baptist churches, and it was through Hawaii Kai Baptist Church that we met Pastor Ken Newman and his wife, Alice. She was the president of the Women’s Missionary Union and would often invite Randy and me to minister at various events.

In January, Alice called me to ask if I could do the program for Pau Hana (a fellowship of retired pastors and their wives) for their Valentine’s Day luncheon. I thought to myself, “How in the world can I do a Valentine’s program without Randy?” But I stepped out in faith and said yes to the opportunity God was giving me.

And God was faithful to provide help. Master’s Touch, a Christian hula ministry led by Ethel Kubo, came to dance to the wedding song Randy wrote many years ago, When Two Become One. I had a karaoke track made so that I could sing the first two verses live, and then Randy’s voice would come in for the chorus on the track. It was like having Randy right there with me, singing our favorite love song, and of course there were many tears.



Master’s Touch hula ministry at the Pau Hana Valentine Luncheon.

God also provided the Sanders family to attend and minister with me. Our friends, Pastor Bill Sanders and his wife, Annie, also used to be a part of this group, but they both went to be home with the Lord. However, their children, Matt and Chey Sanders, came to share testimonies and sing with me. My niece Cheryl (married to Matt) also came to play piano for me.

It was also very special to have some dear friends in the audience that day. Longtime Kalihi Union Church friend Rosemarie Chun was visiting from Camus, Washington, and attended. Stan and Joan Togikawa were also there – faithful supporters of our ministry who took us on missions trips with them to Southeast Asia.



A special Valentine’s Day with friends. (Left to right) Faith McFatrige, Alice and Ken Newman, Stan Togikawa (seated), Gay Hongo, and Joan Togikawa.

WEST O’AHU CHRISTIAN CHURCH

It was emotionally difficult for me to return to the last church Randy and I ministered at before he passed, which was West O’ahu Christian Church. But just like in so many other cases, the Lord sent the people that I needed to make it a big celebration when I ministered there on February 24, 2019. I felt so much love and support that I forgot my sadness and was filled with joy.

God provided many hula dancers that morning to dance as Daniel Miyamoto (Christian Vision’s treasurer) and I sang Kanaka Waiwai. Taylor, Kendyl, Bailey, and Reagan Pagaragan, daughters of Jeff and Kelly (Kawazoe) Pagaragan, came with me to dance hula, sing praise songs, and share testimonies. (The Pagaragans are missionaries in Japan, and I am so humbled that they credit Randy and me as being their inspiration to go into full-time ministry.) Liliko Iizuka Yano happened to be visiting from Japan; she is a beautiful hula dancer and ministered with Randy and me on many missions trips. It was just God’s timing that she was able to be there to dance that day. Elayne Shiohama, who danced in a California halau under Darin Yamada, also happened to be there and came up to dance. Finally, Debbie Rutkowski also came and brought several of her hula students to dance, including Teri, Trish, Kat, and Audrey

Adachi (Randy's cousin). Debbie was one of the pioneers of Christian hula with her ministry, Spirit of Joy, and worked with Randy and me from the very earliest days of our ministry. With almost a dozen dancers from different halau, it was like a Christian Merrie Monarch!



Liliko Iizuka Yano was visiting from Japan with her daughter, Makana. Liliko danced with us on missions trips to Japan, Vietnam, and the mainland U.S.

Another blessing that morning was seeing Meiko Nakano, whose husband is Pastor Yuuichiro Nakano. She suffered a stroke, but even with her health in such a fragile state, she told her daughter, Sayaka, that she wanted to come hear me sing. It was so wonderful having Meiko there, since she and her husband were the ones who opened doors for us to minister in Japan and around the world. Meiko has taught hundreds of hula students in Japan to dance to our songs.

I also showed the video of Randy's Celebration of Life service, and everyone laughed and cried. The service was one blessing after another. Pastor Stan Miyamoto summed it up beautifully with **John 1:16: "From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another."**

West O'ahu Christian Church holds a dear place in my heart because it is in my hometown, Waipahu. I shared my testimony about growing up in Waipahu, because I want them to know that I'm a Waipahu girl. (They all know where the old Shinsato store was, which my family owned). I shared how I grew up not knowing the Lord, never going to church, but heard the Gospel in college and gave my life to Jesus Christ.

I'm so thankful for all of these opportunities to continue to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. My greatest joy is having that assurance that Randy is now in heaven, because he put his faith in the death, shed blood, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. I know that someday, not only will I see Randy again, but I will see Jesus face to face, too! This is the Good News I will continue to share wherever I go.

Be of Good Cheer

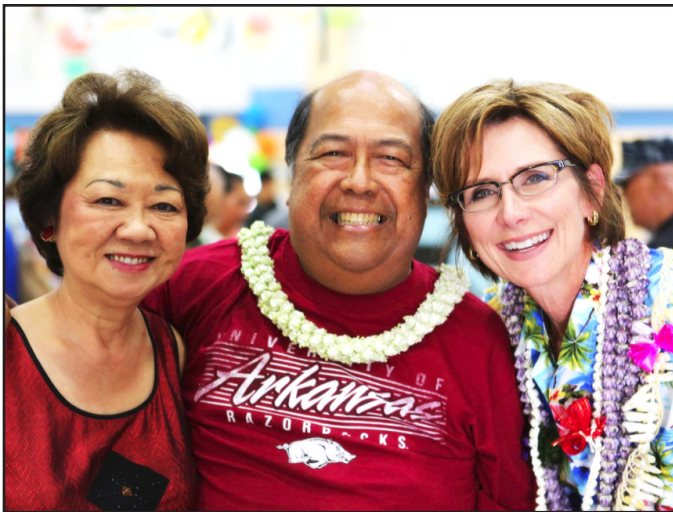
Right up until Randy passed, he was still making plans for different missions trips and concert tours that he wanted to do. In fact, the month before he passed, we were in Alabama visiting Andrew for Thanksgiving. I heard him talking on the phone with a dear friend, Donna McCoy Evans, who lives in Arkansas. He said, "Oh, Donna, we're so close to you! Next time we're in Alabama we have to make a trip to come and see you." Unfortunately, Randy went to heaven before he could make it to Arkansas.

Let me tell you how Randy and I first met Donna. Back in the 70s, Randy and I were at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. The seminary sent us to various Baptist universities to give concerts to recruit students for our seminary. One of those was Ouachita Baptist University in Arkadelphia, Arkansas. They had a wonderful female vocal ensemble called the Ouachitones, who had a vivacious, musically gifted accompanist named Donna McCoy Evans. We struck up a friendship, and several years later, Donna came to Hawaii as a summer missionary. She served with Kalihi Union Church's Summer Fun program as a first-grade teacher and musical director, and she became lifelong friends with many of our church members.



Donna McCoy Evans was a summer missionary in Hawaii in 1982. That started a lifelong friendship with the Hongos.

We kept in touch over the years, and in 2015, Donna and her church, Woodland Heights Baptist, sent a youth choir of 60 people to do a missions trip to Hawaii. It took them nearly two years of fundraising, but they did it! In Hawaii, they sang at various local churches (including Olivet Baptist and Mililani Baptist) and did community service projects (like re-paving Kalihi Union Church's parking lot). They capped it all off by doing a fundraising concert for Christian Vision, with all proceeds going to the Hongo Music Center. One of the highlights of that concert was that Randy had written a choral arrangement for his original composition, Be of Good Cheer, and the choir joined Randy and me as we sang it all together. We were so blessed by the enthusiasm and servanthood of Donna and her youth.



Donna and her youth choir ministered to many in the Honolulu community.

This is why Randy so wanted to visit Donna's church in Arkansas, to thank them for all they did for us. So when I went to visit Andrew and Meaghan this past May, I made sure to arrange a visit to Donna in Arkansas, too. The church graciously allowed us to sing a couple of songs and share testimonies in their morning service. I made sure to thank the church for blessing us with their youth choir back in 2015. After the service, many people came up to us to tell us how our singing ministered to them.

To our great delight, the youth choir then hosted a luncheon for us. It was a wonderful reunion, and as many of the young people came to greet me, I found myself tearing up as I remembered what a wonderful time we all had with Randy. Many of the kids were just in middle school when they came to Hawaii, and it was such an encouragement to see them grown up and still faithfully serving the Lord.

(From Andrew) Of all my dad's compositions, Be of Good Cheer has always been one of my favorites. When I'm going through a difficult time or struggling with anxiety, the lyrics always minister to me. The chorus says:

***Be of good cheer
For He has overcome the world
Overcome the enemy and won
The battle's done
And we stand firm in victory
Confident always that He is Lord***

I wasn't in Hawaii when Auntie Donna's group came in 2015, so I had never heard the choral arrangement. But I knew the song, and so in typical Hongo fashion, at the luncheon we decided to try it all together without any rehearsal! I sang the verse as a solo, and when the choir came in to back me up on the chorus, their singing was just so beautiful, so anointed by

the Holy Spirit, I had to choke back the tears so I could keep singing. Music is such a gift from God, one that can bring healing to us when we are in grief or sorrow or fear, and to hear those young people singing the harmonies that my dad had written ministered to me so deeply. It was as if all the things I struggle with – the Lord was reminding me that He has overcome them all, that I stand firm in His victory, that He is Lord of all.



Andrew and Gay enjoyed a sweet reunion with the youth choir from Woodland Heights Baptist Church in Conway, Arkansas.

I stand firm on John 16:33, which says, ***"In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."***



Left to right: Lillian Yajima, Gay Hongo, and Kazuko Love at the Japanese American Society of Hawaii's Christmas luncheon. Kazuko's daughter, Nikki, and Andrew grew up at Punahou together. Lillian is well-known for her community service work, and danced hula while Gay sang.

A Nice Surprise

When we held Randy's Celebration of Life memorial at Kalihi Union Church, I was overwhelmed by the outpouring of love and support for my husband. I received literally thousands of letters from friends, family, and loved ones. Recently, as I pored over some of those letters, I came across a few that really touched my heart.

One was from a dear friend of ours, Helene Kiyono, who recently moved to Las Vegas with her husband, Mel. She is the leader of a hula ministry that danced in many of our concerts. Helene wrote:

On our last Sunday at Calvary Chapel Pearl Harbor I danced Aloha Ke Akua at both services. It was so emotional for me I couldn't help but just cried as I danced... It was such a joy when I danced with you and Randy especially at the Christmas concerts... Mel and I reminisce all the concerts we shared with you but especially the one that brought Mel's mother to the Lord.

Mel's mother, Takiye, came to a concert in 1994, where I shared my mother's testimony. My mother came to know Jesus at age 82, after a lifetime of being a Buddhist. I was so grateful for this reminder from Helene of how God used our ministry to bring Takiye into His kingdom.

Another letter was from Shiho Fuyuki, whose father, Tom, is a good friend of ours and pastor of International Japanese Christian Church. Shiho wrote:

Your ministry changed my life back in 2011 when you had a concert in Seattle. Through your concert and those in attendance, I was connected to a Japanese student ministry in the Seattle area where I am still serving to this day. I am forever grateful to you both for connecting me with the Japanese Christian community in Seattle. Mahalo!

I knew Shiho from the time she was a baby, but I never knew that God used us in this way in her life. I was so grateful to the Lord, and to Shiho, for letting me know about the fruit that our ministry had borne in her life.

One last letter – this one from Sheryl Yogi Takahashi:

I know Randy is with all the angels by Jesus, singing and playing the piano. He will truly be missed but I know we will all see him again with open arms, hugs & kisses! All my love during this time and thank you for helping me receive Jesus those many years ago so I can see Randy again!

Sheryl was in our youth choir back in the 80s. Randy had such a passion and gift for working with young people and teaching them to sing for the Lord. I never knew the impact that our ministry had on Sheryl all those years ago.

We will never know all the ways God uses us to minister to others – but I'm so grateful to these glimpses that He's given me that are such an encouragement. I write this to thank you, our supporters, for making all this possible. All glory be to God for the great things He has done.



Gay ministering with Nardo hula ministry at Makiki Christian Church.



Gay sang at a retirement party for Suzuko Schaefer, who founded the Nardo hula ministry. Suzuko was instrumental in using the Hongos' music for evangelistic ministry in Hawaii and Japan.



Andrew, Meaghan, and Boaz in Fairhope, Alabama.

Aloha to
Elizabeth “Libby” Steeper
 April 28, 1928 ~ April 19, 2019



Libby Steeper's six children flew to Ontario from all over the world to celebrate her 90th birthday. Libby's husband, Bill, was a former pastor of Kalihi Union Church and her son, Jonathan, is the current senior pastor. Libby went home to be with the Lord this past Good Friday as Jonathan was reading Romans 8:11 to her: ***“And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.”***

Thank you Lord for having blessed us with Libby. She was a wonderful mentor and a mighty prayer warrior for our family.



Gay was thrilled to meet actress and comedian Amy Hill at Nike'u Awai's annual Christmas fashion show.



Andrew and Gay sang a special song for communion at Covenant Presbyterian Church in Mobile, Alabama on Mother's Day. Covenant is Meghan and Andrew's home church.



Gay directed the Hawaiian choir at Kalihi Union Church on Hawaiian Sunday, also known as Henry Opukaha'ia Sunday (February 17). Randy wrote a musical drama titled "Glory in His Soul" about Opukaha'ia, who inspired the Christian missionary movement to Hawaii.



Gay enjoyed directing the 35-member Easter choir at Kalihi Union Church.



Gay sang Koko Ni Sachiari at the Pau Hana Valentine Luncheon with Reverend Bob Gierhart, Kats Taura, and Chaplain Kiyo Itokazu.



Gay's annual visit to Honolulu Christian Church. Gay was joined by the church's hula ministry, led by Sueko Valles.



One of the last concerts Randy did before he passed was a Christmas program at The Plaza at Moanalua. We returned again this past Christmas and hope to make it an annual tradition. Joining Gay are members of Kalihi Union Church's hula ministry, Japanese fellowship, adult choir, and children's ministry.



Pastor John Barrow of Kalihi Union Church's Japanese congregation commissioned the Pagaragan family before they returned to Japan.



Singing a duet with bass player Rowan Young at Kalihi Union Church.

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Congratulations !



Andrew won an Emmy Award for his work as a field producer on Dateline NBC's special report, "Barack Obama: Reality of Hope." Andrew is now teaching journalism at the University of South Alabama.

Upcoming Events:

June 23 & June 30 – 7:15am service at Kalihi Union Church (Gay leads worship)

July 14 - 9:30am Service at Kuhio Chapel (144 Desha Avenue, Hilo), 11am Service at Haili Congregational Church (211 Haili St, Hilo)
Gay and Andrew sing and share

August 25 - 8:00am Service at Pearl City Community Church, Hawaiian Sunday (933 Lehua Ave, Pearl City) Gay sings and shares

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