Voices of Sisters
Religious Life



Waimea Canyon on the island of Kauai, Hawaii (Wikimedia Commons/Aaronbernstein)



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I had just celebrated my 25th anniversary of religious profession. It was time to fly back to Hawaii and visit my parents, relatives and friends.

I had asked that Emily, one of my friends in our religious community, be invited to travel to Hawaii with me. I wanted her to meet my family and introduce her to my culture. She was from the "mainland" (i.e., the continental United States) and would be taking her first trip to Hawaii.

Was "Lee" excited! She informed me, while we waited to board the plane, that she was going to look for "petroglyphs" while we were in Hawaii.

I knew next to nothing about petroglyphs. Not wanting to hurt her feelings, I responded, "Sure!" But I envisioned dark caves and climbing over craggy rocks, sliding on slippery grass and mud, and mosquitoes. Spelunking was not on my list of hobbies and interests. I tried to look excited.

This plane trip experience occurred many years ago, so services by the attendants during the plane ride were very different from what we experience today. First, each of us was served a generous chef salad, topped with a beautiful magenta-colored orchid.

My friend picked up the orchid between her thumb and finger, took half a second to examine it, and started to put it into her mouth. My limited experience with orchids did not label them for human consumption. I quickly reached for her hand holding the orchid. Too late. She ate it. She lived.

Upon arriving on "topside" Molokai (not to be confused with Kalaupapa, the colony of people who had Hansen's disease located on an isolated peninsula of the island), my father told us that we were going to attend a real luau.

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Dressed for the occasion, we sat at one of the tables and were served real seafood salads consisting of seaweed, other vegetation, crab, clams and other bits of seafood, seasoning and special dressing.

Suddenly, to Lee's surprise, there was *movement* in her salad! She spotted, at the bottom of the bowl, a tiny live crab crawling in her salad. She was told that having a

live baby crab is an OK ingredient in these salads.

"No *maka'u*" the hostess said gently. "No be scared," she interpreted in friendly pidgin, with the intention of allaying Lee's fears. Lee nervously declined to eat it.

After a few days, Lee and I went to the island's public library. Lee managed to find, with the help of a friendly librarian, maps where we could find petroglyphs on the island. Using these maps, we drove and hiked to find these primitive drawings, describing life in ancient Hawaii, etched in stone.

What an experience this was! We "read" about catching fish, raising cattle and pigs, dancing, praying, and having skirmishes with people of other villages.

A week went by. My mother suggested that we take a trip to another island: Maui. My parents' neighbor knew of a way to get "local" people on a boat to Maui without paying for the ride.

Because Molokai's economy was diminishing, many of the people traveled every day to and from Maui to work. So free passage was provided to these people. The only problem was that Lee was not local and certainly not local-looking. This did not seem to concern Lee. She said, ''That's all right. I'll just keep my mouth shut and look dark." Guess what? It worked! We got a free ride to Maui.

We went looking for petroglyphs on Maui. They were more plentiful on this island than they were on Molokai. Lee and I joked about Maui having more storytellers than Molokai. Either that or Molokai's people were working too hard to have leisure time for telling stories.



Olowalu petroglyphs on Maui, Hawaii (Wikimedia Commons/Tom Walsh)

We returned to Molokai in a speedboat. I don't remember how we got into this arrangement for transportation. The other passengers were the typical tourists taking this trip across the dangerous Molokai Channel. Apparently, they were also anxious because they consumed a good amount of alcohol to keep happy and calm. All I remember is that Lee and I got layers of tan and sea salt on our skin.

Off to the island of Kauai! I was determined that Lee was going to see as many aspects of Hawaii as possible with what money we had allotted ourselves for this Hawaiian experience.

If you've ever been on Kauai, you'll agree that it has beautiful flowers and lush foliage. We managed to find the well-known Waimea Canyon. We really couldn't have gotten lost trying to find it, since there was only one main road on Kauai and simple signs led us to a wondrous vision.

The miles of red lava rock formations reminded us of a smaller version of the Grand Canyon. Despite its many steep slopes, visitors can still climb and find convenient niches in the rock to take pictures, have a picnic lunch, or just enjoy the scenery.

Lee and I decided to have a simple lunch. First, though, I wanted to take a picture of her with the canyon in the background. She posed patiently, while I kept urging her to move back in order for me to get a better view in my camera. It was a divine act that had us both realize that another step back would have resulted in her plummeting to the lower parts of the canyon!

Back to Molokai. Sigh. Maybe there'd be some quiet time before returning to the mainland.