

Waimea's Gift



On the island of Kaua'i, there is a beautiful state park known as the Grand Canyon of the Pacific. It is called Waimea Canyon State Park and it is 10 miles long and over 3000 feet deep, encompassing a total of 1866 acres. If you haven't been there, put it on your bucket list because it is breathtaking.

My husband, Danny, and I love Kaua'i and have made a point to spend as much time as possible there in the past 10 years. On a trip this year, we decided to make a trip up into the canyon. Danny rented a bicycle to get his workout riding to the top and I made plans to drive up the hill to join him for a hike and picnic.

As is my habit when I'm in Kaua'i, I was in a kind of blissful reverie as I drove along the winding road, sneaking peeks at the stunning vistas along the way. So it's a little bit surprising that I noticed the big, brown eyes on the tiny, emaciated creature sitting by the side of the road. She blended in perfectly with the foliage and she wasn't moving. But I did see her and I felt a kind of tractor beam pull my car over to the side of the road.

You should know I had my first awakening to unity consciousness in my 20's, so it is not new to me to regard other species as my brothers and sisters. And you should know I am especially fond of dogs. So

this wouldn't be the first time I was compelled to help a stray dog. But I have learned that not all strays are brave enough to take help from a stranger. Most will run away, overwhelmed by the fear they are feeling from being lost. So I stopped, and squatted a good distance from the starving doggy and asked her if she wanted help. She got up from where she was sitting and walked toward me.

I could see her ribs and hip bones sticking out and I felt sure she wouldn't survive much longer on her own. It took another 30 minutes of singing to her, praying to the goddess of the islands for help, sharing my sandwich with her and getting her a drink of water before she let me lift her into the car. But she did, all the while fighting back her fear. Once in the car, she curled up on the passenger seat and fell asleep. I commended her for her bravery and I promised her she was safe now and no further harm could come to her.



When I met Danny at our appointed meeting place, I could only wave him over to the car, afraid to leave her alone. He walked up to the car, peeked in, and said, "Oh you found her. I told her I would come back and help her on the way back down the mountain."

As Danny loaded up his bicycle, she woke up and showed no signs of concern. She was quite content to be with both of us. She wouldn't give up her passenger seat, so Danny climbed into the back. We proceeded to drive around the beautiful area, taking turns to look at the vistas. We finally found a quiet side road and stopped to have our picnic. About this time, we started calling our new friend, Waimea.

The food and water had already started to make her feel better and her personality began to show itself. She liked being petted and she liked looking out the windows. She has one ear that likes to stand up straight and one that likes to fold over and she likes to give kisses. It was impossible not to love her.

By now, we'd had Waimea with us for about 3 hours and it was time to drive down the mountain and to make a plan to care for her since we were staying at a resort that didn't permit animals. We thought we might find a veterinarian's office or take her to the humane society. About half way down the mountain, we saw what looked like a park ranger so we pulled over to ask if he had any ideas of where to take her.

The man said he worked for the park but wasn't a ranger. When we showed him Waimea, he immediately opened the car door and reached in to grab her. She tried to bite him and became a ball of fury. He dropped her and she ran off. I jumped out of the car and went to her; but she was so scared. All the time, this man is saying that she is a hunting dog and to put her in the kennels they had there. He kept saying, how did you get her in the car? But of course, she was not even slightly aggressive with me.

She finally did come to me again and we walked over to the kennels. She seemed to recognize them and went inside. The man was yelling at me to get out of the kennel, and insisting on closing her in there. I was horrified and kept trying to ask if she would have food and water and he kept putting me off. There was a seriously strange vibe in what he was telling me, but at this point I didn't know anything about Waimea's world and he was VERY insistent, bordering on hostile. I finally left the kennel and shut her in.

He calmed down a little bit then and told me they had a system for finding hunting dogs and that if no one claimed her, he would call the humane society to come pick her up. Everything in me was screaming to take her with me, but in the end, he wouldn't have it and we drove away leaving her there.

We had a long trip home that afternoon. I cried. Danny stopped and thought of turning back every few miles. But we kept thinking the man must know what he was talking about. But I knew I had made a promise to Waimea and I had broken it.

The Humane Society on Kaua'i is located about mid-way between the Canyon and where we were staying. We stopped in and told our story to the attendant at the counter. She, of course, knew all about the plight of the hunting dogs. She told us that hunters often keep them very nearly starved so they would hunt more aggressively. She also told us that hunters keep 20-40 dogs for hunting and turn them all loose at once to find the wild pigs in Waimea Canyon. If a dog doesn't hunt well or doesn't find its way back at the end of the day, it is left there.

We told her about the park employee and she said he should have let us bring the dog in and that they would send a truck up to pick her up the next day. We gave her all Waimea's information and ours and a donation to the Humane Society and somberly drove home.

The next day was Danny's day to travel back to the mainland on the red-eye but we decided to drive back to the Humane Society to see if they had brought Waimea in. What we found instead was that the attendant had found her outside of the kennel and too frightened to come to him. I knew how timid she was and how much gentleness it took me to gain her trust, so I knew the Human Society would never be able to retrieve her if she was outside of the kennel.

Bless my husband's heart forever and ever because he gave up his last day on the island to drive back up the Canyon to find Waimea without complaint; another hour's drive from the Humane Society in the direction away from the airport. We arrived at the kennels to find she was gone. My heart sank. We drove around the area and came back to the kennels. Whistling for her as we went, we saw no sign. Danny got back into the car, facing the inevitable. I walked to the road and stood staring to the other side, feeling an attraction there. I finally walked across the highway and whistled again. Shortly, I saw movement in the bushes and walked in that direction. I could see a doggy there, but it wasn't Waimea. Still I whistled and cooed and presently Waimea walked out of the jungle and recognized me.

Again it took the lure of food and lots of gentle patience before she let me put the leash on her that we had fashioned from my camera case strap. But just as we were running out of time to get Danny to the airport, she let me lift her into the car again. We were thrilled, all three of us!

Driving toward the airport it began to dawn on us what a miracle it was to find her again inside those miles and miles of wild park land. I am not one to take lightly the miracles of life, however small. I feel the magnitude of an infinite network of timing and events that must transpire just-so for anyone to cross my path. So this was no small event for me. And no small commitment. I think: When life offers you gifts, even in the form of a challenge, how can you say 'no'?

The Humane Society was closed by the time we arrived at that part of the island. So we drove on, stopped in town and bought dog food and a collar and treats, and then drove Danny to the airport to catch his 10:00 PM flight. He kissed us both goodbye and left with what I can only imagine was a need to practice enormous patience yet again with this bride of 34 years.

Waimea and I drove north into the night and the rain to find a way to spend the evening until I could take her back to the Humane Society. I thought I would just sleep in the car with her. But when we arrived at my condo, there was not a soul out in the rain. I gently lifted Waimea to the ground (she still seemed to have no understanding of getting in and out of vehicles) and we walked and walked in the rain until she realized it was time for bathroom duties. And then we quietly slipped upstairs to my room and quickly fell asleep, no one the wiser.

Waimea got me up once in the early morning to go outside but then curled back up into a tight ball and fell fast asleep. As daylight dawned, I had to wake her to feed her and take her back to the car. And together we drove the hour-long trip back to the Humane Society, basking in each other's company. She kissing my hand as I petted her and I telling her all was well. My heart was raw with emotion and the unknowingness of what would lie ahead for Waimea and for me.

We walked together into the Humane Society lobby and the same receptionist who had helped us the two prior days greeted us and was happy to see Waimea had found her way back to us. I felt like a mother giving her child up for adoption, but the attendants were kind to Waimea. And together we took her to a kennel in the back room to begin processing. I knew that "Waimea" was her spiritual or mystical name. So I gave her the name of Molly Mae for the attendants to use.

I spoke with the veterinary technician in charge of the strays and she was very blunt with me about their euthanasia policies. She could only keep Waimea for a week. And since she was so emaciated, and so timid, and half feral, she said her odds were not good. I gave them my contact information and promised I would find a home for her or take her myself. But I had a sense that their ability to track one dog among the many hundreds of dogs in their care was limited. I knew I needed to be Waimea's advocate if she was to survive. And this was Sunday, so the countdown began.

The next day, I drove back to the Humane Society to see how she was doing. They took me to her kennel and gave us a large outside kennel to spend time in. We spent two hours walking, talking, and cuddling. I wanted to help socialize her to humans and she let me pet her and rub her all over her body. She seemed much better already from the food, water and care at the Humane Society.

I spoke again with the Vet Tech and was so happy to learn that Molly had been good in letting her draw blood. The blood was negative for heartworm, which is a first screening they do for dogs in Hawaii since it is so common. They gave her heartworm medicine and began worming her as well to kill other



parasites. They also told me Molly was probably around 2 years old and had had a litter of puppies not long ago.

I noticed that the Vet Tech paid close attention to my concerns for Molly Mae. It occurred to me that having a dog at the pound is a lot like having a loved one at the hospital. The care they receive is greatly enhanced when the patient has an advocate present on a regular basis.

I drove back again on Tuesday and Wednesday, spending an hour or two with Molly and talking with the Humane Society attendants. They continued worming her because her stool continued

to show signs of parasites, but after 3 doses, she got the all-clear. On Thursday they decided to put Molly in surgery for her hysterectomy, micro-chipping, toenail trimming, and teeth cleaning. When I came back on Friday, Molly was overjoyed to see me, no doubt traumatized from her ordeals. But they said she did well in her surgery. And they moved her from quarantine to the boarding side of the building. And bless their hearts as well forever and ever, because they did not charge me their normal boarding fees. The Vet Tech told me, “we know you are trying to save a life and this is what we can do to help.”

At the same time I was spending half my day driving across and island and playing with Molly, I was spending the other half of my day posting flyers at local bulletin boards, asking everyone I met if they knew someone who could give her a good home, following up with phone calls, emails, craig’s list postings, and listing her needs on the local Heartbeat of Kauai website. I offered to pay her adoption fees and to provide holistic health care for Molly for life as incentives for her adoption. My local tai chi classmates were fabulous to help me, giving me e-mail distribution lists and talking to their own networks of friends. One of my classmates is the minister at Kaua’i’s Unity Church and she was so wonderful as to send Molly’s flyer to entire congregation and to offer to pay half of Molly’s adoption fees. Similarly, a local pet groomer also sent Molly’s information to her clientele. One of the employees at the resort where I was staying even offered to foster Molly if all else failed. The aloha overflowed from everyone I met.

But still my concern and worry for Molly’s wellbeing haunted me 24x7. I was having no leads on a home for her and I was learning from my time at the Humane Society, that there was zero hope of her being adopted from their system. I met so many young, healthy, well-adjusted, loving doggies up for

adoption that I knew Molly would never make that cut. Even though I knew her gifts and her heart and what a wise and loving companion she would be, she was not her own best advertisement.

Each day that passed was an enormous challenge for me to trust my spiritual practices, to keep a hopeful, positive expectation, and to see the gifts in the struggle. But it wasn't easy, and I can't say I managed with any amount of grace. But I did manage. By Saturday morning, I had no viable home for her and only one more day to retrieve her from the Human Society. I went to my morning tai chi class on the beach in Hanalei Bay and was invited to share breakfast with some classmates after going to the Saturday Farmer's market. I agreed and wandered over to the market to do my shopping.

There I found a woman offering Tarot card readings; she asked if I had any questions in my life that she could help with. I sat down at her table and showed her Molly's flyer. The cards told her that Molly had lived with a man and family that had been harsh to her. But that now, through the use of sound and song and the airwaves, Molly could find her new home. Her last card showed us: "Good Future." She encouraged me to use the radio stations to get the word out.

I went to breakfast and asked my friends about a radio station. It turned out the local public radio station was just a couple miles away, tucked into the jungle on some well-hidden dirt roads. I got the very specific directions and drove immediately there. Along the way, I was lost several times. At one point I had to park my car, get out and ask a back-hoe operator to move his machine so I could pass. Even when I arrived to the building, there was no signage and it was a bit of a leap of faith to guess which home in that clearing would house the radio station. But I was on a Mission from God and not to be deterred. You will see why I tell you all these details a bit later.

I walked into the place and began telling people about my mission. The station manager was there and was so kind as to ask the DJs that were on the air at that moment if they would put me on air. And they did! For about 10 minutes!! They were so kind and helpful; I had never been on air before, so didn't know what I was doing at all. If you can donate to public radio, please do: www.kkcr.org. By the time I got back to my car, I had many voicemail messages offering help.

Several women had called to say they didn't really have a good home for Molly but that they would foster her if all else failed. One woman did offer to foster her immediately because she thought she had a good home for her on another island. And. Molly's future mom heard me talking on the radio and she called.

So Sunday came and I drove back to the Humane Society to adopt Molly out. I had made arrangements to foster Molly later that night and to bring Molly by for a visit with the woman who would become her "mom." The people at the Humane Society were very happy for Molly and gave us food and collar and leash and filled out all her paperwork. They were having a sale in November, so all the health care that Molly received cost only \$32.00. I was shocked at the bargain. If you can donate to the Humane Society of Kaua'i, please do. www.kauaihumane.org

This meant that Molly and I had a whole day together. We went to the beach. We walked and walked. And we took a nap together, Molly resting her head on my arm and falling sound asleep. We made a

brief stop to meet Molly's future mom and sister. Our big accomplishment of the day was Molly's learning how to get in and out of the car by herself. This was no small matter for her and we were both ecstatic when she figured it out. Molly is smart, very smart. You can just look in her eyes and see for yourself. But when I looked into her eyes, I also saw a kind of transcendent wisdom and the strongest feeling that she did all this just for me. I know it sounds crazy, but there it is.

We finally met her foster mom just at dusk at her house. Molly had already met this woman and her sweet doggy that morning at the Humane Society, so it wasn't too hard for her to go into her house. Plus, they had a nicely fit-out kennel which Molly immediately claimed. She crawled in there and fell asleep while the two humans in the room chatted.

At some point, I knew I needed to leave. Molly and I had said our goodbyes before we went into her foster home, so I quietly and quickly slipped out the door. And that was the last time I saw Molly.

But our story doesn't end there. The next morning, her foster mom called to say Molly had a hard night – she had gotten on top of the kitchen counter and couldn't get down, she couldn't urinate without privacy, and she was chewing things up. Her foster knew that she wouldn't be able to keep her at her house. So we made arrangements for her to go to her new Mom's house.

Molly's mom already had a doggy named Molly in the house, so 'Molly' became 'Mae.'

Oh there were many phone calls flying back and forth between the three of us women, all intent on helping Mae. Mae's hysterectomy incision was quite swollen and her foster mom arranged to have a vet come examine her. And her foster mom got her a kennel so she could have that feeling of security that she loves in an enclosed space. And her mom got her special food and a special leash and special toys to help her begin a healthy transition. And I prayed and meditated and invoked all the angels of the universe to show Mae how to live with her new family. We were all so happy when Mae learned to urinate when and where she should. And when her new mom told me that Mae had slept in bed with her at night, I thought I would burst with joy. The intensity and beauty of the mothering that went on here is hard to describe. Thanks be to the Mother Goddess of all Mothers!

At about this time, I had to leave Kaua'i to return to Colorado. A couple weeks passed and I had a call from Mae's mom. Mae had started to gain weight and was well bonded with the other dog and cats in the house, and in general was very healthy. But. With the return of her health also came the return of her energy. Her mom was thinking that she needed to live in the country to be able to run. We talked about other ways to get her energy out and how this is just a phase for the first couple years of life. I agreed to look for help in the form of someone to take Mae running or maybe someone with an enclosed yard where she could run. Which I did. But without much luck.

So a week passed with both Mae's mom and I trying to think of ways to get her energy out. I am happy to report that Mae and her family have solved this problem, mostly by letting Mae run something like a horse does, round and round its pen. And by playing with one of the cats in the family until finally Mae is exhausted. This has solved all Mae's remaining issues of living with humans. Mae's sister, Molly, who

is also a rescued hunting dog, is teaching her the ropes of living in civilization. And her house-mate cats also teach her their rules. All is well!

The main reason I wanted to capture Waimea's story is not for all these details of the love and kindness and generosity of the people of Kaua'i – although that's not a bad reason of course. It was more because I wanted to capture, for my self, the lessons that Waimea taught me.

I had 10 days with Waimea. And I was essentially on vacation during those 10 days, so I had the time to devote to the challenge of rescuing her and getting her care and finding her a good home. So I know this is perhaps the first, biggest gift I received: the discrete time and space to realize the nature of a specific challenge or struggle in life. Often life is full to the brim with overlapping struggles and problems and traumas and it all just gets labeled "life." But this event had a specific beginning and end as you have seen.

And then Waimea herself. There was something in her eyes that held me to the promise I made to her



that first day. Something in the depth of her being-ness that called me to a place of full integrity. Many people that I met on the journey asked me why I was doing it. I just kept feeling that I had no choice. I said in reply over and over, "sometimes life puts something on our path that takes priority over the rest of the journey and this is one of those things."

So from this integrity in my promise to Waimea, I

had 10 days to bring to bear all the skills and beliefs and practices that my life has given me so far. I had 10 days in which to make 240 hours' worth of choices on her behalf. I had 10 days to advocate for her, to market for her, to teach her, to heal her, to speak for her. I had 10 days' worth of chances to see which choice I would make; would I park my car and go ask the stranger in the back-hoe to move aside or would I just go back to my room and eat some papaya or take a nap? Would I overcome my shyness and ask for help at the radio station or would I let her be put down? Would I trust the universe and allow it to show me what was needed or would I pinch off that information in worry and stress?

I don't think I've done a very good job of sharing the tone of these 10 days for me. It WAS a struggle and though there was some support, there was also a lot of energy of doubt and judgment coming from

other people and from me. I was tired. My body struggled to keep up the workload of driving and telephoning, and meeting with people and time on the computer. I cried and worried and didn't sleep at least as much as I prayed and trusted and believed in myself and the universe.

But here's the thing. Somewhere in the middle of it, I realized: In every struggle or hardship or problem, life gives us a blank canvas on which to paint the answer to this question with every choice we make: Who will I be?

I think I could see this truth more clearly because of the discrete nature of the 10-day challenge Waimea gave me. And I could see that this question is at the core of my existence.

Who will I be in every moment of every day of every year of this amazing life I have? Struggles and challenges are just a beautiful, concentrated framework to highlight the choices we make. Who will I be?

So you see. Waimea gave me far more than I gave her. And I can only trust that she is continuing to give gifts through me and her new family. And for this I will be eternally grateful .