

## **A QUIET REVOLUTION ON THE MOUNTAIN BY FAY HOVEY**

In the small seaside town of Waimea on the West side of Hawaii's island of Kaua'i, you find the road to Waimea Canyon and begin to climb up the spine of a narrow ridge clad in low brush that springs from the rust-colored earth. The misty beginnings of a valley appear on your right while on your left, the land falls away and the ocean broadens beyond the mysterious island of Ni'ihau.

Soon the air is cooler, the trees taller: acacia koa, the gnarled 'ōhia. The road winds higher still through a thickening forest where tantalizing previews of Waimea Canyon flash through the branches, taking you to Koke'e State Park and to a lush green meadow at the 3000 ft. elevation where the air is brisk and the clouds hang close. A place of rare birds, it is a unique and fragile home to native trees and plants. You have reached the site of the Koke'e Natural History Museum and the Joseph M. Souza, Jr. Research Center and Field Station, directed by SGI-USA-member Marsha Erickson.

You have stepped into a quiet revolution where since 1987, Marsha has been using her Buddhist principles and training to create a vigorous organization that continues to serve the needs of Kaua'i's visitors and residents alike. With her hardworking staff of six people and devoted volunteers, the Koke'e Natural History Museum and its environs serves to interpret the wonders of this astonishing corner of the planet in a number of significant ways.

"I like to use my skills to make dreams come true," Marsha immediately responds when asked what keeps her here in so remote a place, where the State Park falls silent each evening at dusk as visitors leave the forest to a handful of people who live "on the mountain." When she arrived at the museum, originally established in 1952, she was beginning again after founding a major art center on the island of Hawai'i. In an isolated place where there is no television reception, she settled into her house and quiet evenings of reading, contemplation, writing and working for kosen rufu with her fellow SGI-USA members on Kaua'i.

For some it might be considered a lonely life, but for Marsha, it was an opportunity to solidify her practice of this Buddhism, which she had embraced the year before. It was there, chanting in front of her Gohonzon, that her dreams for the museum began to take shape.

"In 1989, I read an article by President Ikeda about Portugal's Prince Henry the Navigator and how, in the interest of science and knowledge, he brought together the great minds of his time to challenge the prevailing beliefs about the earth and its oceans. I understood that President Ikeda was urging us to use our minds, to use dialogue in focusing on important subjects and to challenge the fears that hold us back from doing great things. I determined that, one day, we would have an inspired science center, right here in these mountains. Through my continued practice and reading of President Ikeda's articles I began to think, 'Yes, we can do this!'"

Near the busy museum that serves over 150,000 visitors to Koke'e State Park, is the old 1930's Civilian Conservation Corps Camp abandoned in 1982 during Hurricane Ewa. It consists of a series of old wooden structures that include bunkhouses and a great old-fashioned camp-style mess hall and several small cabins arranged around a swath of green lawn, bordered by great shaggy cypress trees. A real office for the museum was established

Title: A Quiet Revolution On The Mountain

Subject: Living Buddhism 12/99 v.99 n.12 p.47 LB9912p47 Kaua'i, Hawaii

Author: Fay Hovey

Keywords: Career Difference Experiences Hawaii Hovey Kauai Making Mountain Quiet Revolution

in 1990 and the renovation work begun on the Research Center which would provide accommodations and library facilities for visiting scientists and forest volunteers. "We have a way to go yet," Marsha stresses. "We've begun our campaign to finish the two remaining barracks buildings. We need to raise \$500,000, which I have never done before. Without my practice and what I have learned in SGI, I don't think I would have developed the confidence for such an undertaking. I mean, a serious Science Center, way out here?" she laughs.

"The beauty of it all is that I can't do it all by myself," she continues. "We have to proceed with unity. We have to build partnerships with others in our island community, remembering that so many times it is the small things that inspire people. At the Museum's weekly staff meetings, the first item on the agenda is appreciation. Marsha shares, "We focus on what staff members have done, and who has done us a special service so that all of us can express our thanks to that person when we speak with them. The Daishonin always began his letters with words of appreciation. President Ikeda always does this at the beginning of his speeches. It's so important to notice the things people do."

All of the programs and festivals that the Museum presents are imbued with a spirit of sincere appreciation: programs that strive to demonstrate how humans are connected to their environment. Events such as the annual "Queen Emma Festival" (which focuses on the compassionate leadership qualities of Hawaii's beloved Queen Emma who lived a life of great value in spite of great personal and national tragedies) require focused planning work and the Museum's financial commitment. These principles are reflected in the upbeat and hands-on experience of basket making using alien plant pests that plague the upland forests at the yearly "Banana Poka Round-Up." They permeate the planning of lectures, volunteer training sessions and guided walks.

"Our mission is providing the information and setting where each person can have their own dialogue with nature. We want to allow people the respite and refreshment that a walk in such a forest can provide them.

"We want to open a door to the beautiful world of nature and encourage people to discover new perspectives here," Marsha shares quietly. Using the principles of meaningful dialogue, Marsha has fostered close ties of friendship with Hawaii's State Park leadership and employees. "We have to keep it positive, asking always, how can we help?" Recently the park's leaseholder association raised money and in-kind contributions with the Museum's help to re-roof the state park's aging pavilion near the museum building. It was a community event with everyone pitching in to create the new roof where there was no state funding to do so. "Everyone's face was so happy! People are happy when they are doing something good, it shows all over their faces!" she exclaims. "Instead of complaining about the state's lack of funding, we decided, 'We can do it!'"

Twelve years have gone by fast as Marsha and her staff have worked hard and enjoyed the pleasures of achieving together. They weathered the ravages of Hurricane Iniki in 1992, which closed down the Park for a number of months. Marsha is now a Trustee of the statewide Hawaii Museum Association and was asked by SGI to contribute her written comments at the beginning of President's Ikeda's exhibit of photographs, "Dialogues with Nature."

As a Vice Chapter Women's Division leader, Marsha makes many trips "off the mountain," driving up to ninety mile round-trips for meetings.

I use my driving time to conceptualize, to compose poetry, to think and to practice Russian. I have a deep connection to Russia in some way and plan soon to visit Moscow. I

Title: A Quiet Revolution On The Mountain

Subject: Living Buddhism 12/99 v.99 n.12 p.47 LB9912p47 Kaua'i, Hawaii

Author: Fay Hovey

Keywords: Career Difference Experiences Hawaii Hovey Kauai Making Mountain Quiet Revolution

really want to write a novel that will live on in its greatness like Tolstoy or Dostoevsky. President Ikeda tells us that we should dream great dreams. I think of my mentor here on the mountain, Joe Souza, who was a visionary and hard-working man who loved the forest. Before he died, I made a promise to him to continue on with his work here. It is from him and from President Ikeda that I have learned about the relationship of mentor and disciple.”

If you drive past the meadow with the Museum and the park pavilion with its brand-new roof, eventually you will come to the overlook onto the green-clad ramparts of Kalalau Valley. Small birds dart in the branches of the trees. Rolling mists play with the breezes, alternately clearing and obscuring the view. You can stand there and look down to the small crescent of white beach far below and hear the distant waterfalls singing.

In such a place, great dreams seem even more possible.

Marsha concludes, “What I am interested in these days is how to be effective. I find that the more I devote myself to kosen-rufu in every area of my life, what I think and say become so much clearer. I’m so grateful to my practice. I basically have a lazy nature but the more focused my mind becomes, the bigger my dreams are and I drop the fear. There’s so much to accomplish. What happens in a person’s mind is important, not their position in life. If being the director of this museum and center can help people’s dreams come true, including mine, that is what keeps me here: the incredible possibilities of living in so awesome a place.” □

Note: The Koke’e Natural History Museum is located in Koke’e State Park on the island of Kaua’i. e-mail: [kokee@aloha.net](mailto:kokee@aloha.net)