

# *A Tribute to Todd*

*... the Wisdoms & the Wonders  
that we all do smoothly gather,  
in the cool yet glowing memories  
of the ones we will always LOVE*

*through Scaughdt,*

*(originally penned in June of 2012,  
last edited November of 2014)*

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*In honor of &  
in loving memory for  
Todd A. Hilbers  
1971 – 2011*

*“Let children walk with Nature and witness the beautiful  
blendings and communions of death & life; their joyous  
inseparable unity, as taught by their woods & meadows,  
the plains & mountains & streams of our blessed star.  
And once they do so see, they will know that death is sting-  
less, and that it in fact is just as beautiful as life.”*  
~ inspired by John Muir

*“The Way of Love is not a subtle argument,  
but rather an utter devastation.  
Birds make great circles in the sky.  
And yet how do they do so?  
They fall ...  
... and in so falling,  
are given wings.”*  
~ Rumi

***On death & life & living ...***  
***(06/18/12)***

Grief can destroy you ... and grief can magnify you.

Once death's icy presence enters our circle of beloveds, each one of us has an all-important choice to make. We can either sink into sadness and decide that the lost relationship was "all for nothing", or we can come to realize that every moment of that lost togetherness had more meaning than we dared to recognize at the time. Indeed, we can choose to recognize that it held so much meaning, in fact, that it terrified us — that it frightened us so much that we chose instead to merely go through the motions of caring; that we often ended up taking for granted the love & the laughter we shared; that we mostly never allowed ourselves to deeply honor the sacredness of that Friendship while we still had the chance.

A deeply painful realization, this one is, and yet a critically important one as well. For after our friend (or our lover, or our partner, or our family member) does die — once it truly is over and we are left alone without them, there is another way of looking at their passing — a way that provides a portal to clarity and peace. Indeed, instead of pining for what has been lost, we can begin to see life more lucidly — we can begin to see that it wasn't just talking together or watching sunsets together or washing dishes together or playing games together or laughing together that was so precious; that it wasn't just celebrating life's successes together or supporting each other during life's tougher times ... No — if we pause long enough to step back from our self-centered sadness, we can see that it was literally everything; that our connection with the departed was the very *WHY* of life; the very magic that moves us steadily through the fog; the very fabric of all courage and wonder and joy and thankfulness. It is then & only then that we can come to understand that the answer to the very Mystery of our existence is the Love you shared with them while they were alive (even though sometimes imperfectly).

And once you allow yourself this view; once you allow your sense of loss to awaken you to the deeper Beauty of it all — to awaken you to the sanctity of Life and the raw Joy in being Alive, you can't help but let out a deep sigh; you can't help but feel a huge smile wash over your face as an amazing wave of Peace wells up from within.

And it is then that you will be driven to your knees, not by the weight of your loss, but by a deep & gentle gratitude for the times that preceded it ... It is in this moment that you will be inspired to stand up and go forth to honor this greatest of Gifts ... to honor their passing by renewing & embracing & cherishing the relationships you still have left.

(inspired by Dean Koontz)



***Remembering a Great Man***  
***(06/24/12)***

*“When a great life sets,  
it leaves an afterglow on the sky  
far into the night.” ~ Austin O’Malley*

On June 18<sup>th</sup> of 2012, when I originally wrote and posted this tribute’s opening chapter on grief & grieving, I had no idea that it was on that very day that medical examiners had finally been able to positively identify the body of my dear brother, Todd ... I actually found out about his death the next day.

Todd truly was, in the words of his father, “a mountain of a man and a gentle Soul”. If I were to make a list of all my “best friends” and all the people who have had the most profound influence on my own life, Todd would clearly reside at the very pinnacle of that accounting ... I still find myself missing him terribly at times, and still find myself saddened by humanity’s loss of yet another Great Soul.

That having been said, I believe fully in honoring lives as they pass, and Todd’s life was as majestic as they come — His Love for the planet and those around him was as immense as the heavens. He was, by all forms of reckoning, a truly *GREAT MAN*, and I would be remiss if I were not to share some of his life with you all.

I don’t know if there is an objective “meaning” to life and death. And yet I most certainly *do* know that we have all been given the great gift of being able to give life & death Meaning; in part by remembering the lessons that the departed have left behind, and by applying that Wisdom in our relationships that still remain.

As such, in honor of my dear departed brother, I will be sharing with all of you much of what Todd taught me — what he taught me while he was alive, and what he taught me in how (and possibly why) he chose to die.

And with that said, it is enough to start with the latter — his death ...

It is unclear exactly when he chose to take his own life (the medical examiners estimate that he passed on sometime between the end of 2010 and the mid-months of 2011), and yet that he did so is now seemingly beyond doubt. His skeletal remains were discovered in the Gomez Peak area of the Gila National Forest (located just north of Silver City, New Mexico) in January of 2012. He had apparently been living in the wilderness for a time before his death (his campsite-home was found roughly two miles from his remains), and it was clear that his decision to end his life was one that was well thought-through & conscious ... His body, along with the shotgun he had used to take his own life, was found in a part of the wilderness that was so beautiful that those who found him said they could do nothing at first but stand in silent awe.

*“There is no single best kind of death.  
A good death is one that is simply ‘right’.  
It is a death in which the hand of the way of dying  
slips easily into the glove of the act itself.  
It is somehow in character ...  
It, the death, somehow fits the person who has died.”  
~ inspired by E. Schneidman*

Whenever someone commits suicide, it is commonplace to hear the exclamation “What a waste”. And yet if you are tempted to utter this phrase now, please think again. This was no spontaneous choice that Todd made – it was obvious to those who found his body that he had picked the spot purposefully. And neither was his death some frivolously emotional response to a single bout of the blues. Todd had suffered from clinical depression (and later, bipolar schizophrenia, if not something akin to multiple-personality disorder) for over two decades before his passing. Not wanting to “turn into a zombie”, he had repeatedly refused medications that could have “helped” his plight. He fought valiantly against his demons — a fight that I was blessed to witness first-hand when we lived together on the Big Island of Hawaii for the first several months of 2008. As such, after waging a battle with “the Darkness” that can only be described as “epic”, I see his choice of departure from this world as what it probably was; as an act of courage, even though certainly not the act of courage for which I had hoped.

In his “real Todd” moments, he was and remains the Kindest human I have ever met — a true “gentle and jovial giant”. Indeed, I am certain, if the world were filled with “true Todds”, that there would be no more war, that hunger & poverty would cease to exist, and that our beautiful Earth would be cherished & revered in the gentle & Respect-full way it should.

In the following few pages of this memorial, I will be sharing some of my most precious memories of Todd with you. And as you read them, please know that — despite the pulsing sadness that still resides within me today, I am more resolved than ever to go forth and honor Todd’s great life by living a great and joyful life of my own — a life of Kindness ... a life of Caring ... a life of Service ... a life of Love.

And now this is all that is left — for me to know that Todd is within me still, and to go forth in his honor to be the change he so desperately wanted to See.

*“Death can only separate those who Love each other so far as their lower vehicles are concerned; the man living on earth, blinded by matter, feels separated from those who have passed onwards, but, in actuality, there is no such separation. Those who have passed on physically are with us still; all around us ... in everything we see.” ~ inspired by Annie Wood-Besant*



*“To live in hearts in hearts we leave behind,  
is not to die.” ~ Thomas Campbell*

*“The living is a passing traveler;  
The death, a man come Home.”  
~ Li Bai*

***The Early Years ...***  
***(06/25/12)***

*“Life is what you celebrate.  
All of it ... even its end.”  
~ Joanne Harris*

Frankly, I don't really know how to do this “right” — I don't really know how to tell the Tale of Todd in a way that will do him justice, or that will allow you all to have even the smallest glimpse of the Great Soul he was — and the Great Soul he remains.

So I'm just going to wing it ... I'm just going to start at “the beginning” and share some stories of our times together. Todd was a huge fan of simply “going with the flow”, so I think he'd like that.

*“You would know the secret of death,  
but how shall you find it,  
unless you seek in the heart of life?  
The owl whose night-bound eyes  
are blind unto the day  
cannot reveal the mystery of light.  
If you would indeed behold the spirit of death,  
then open your heart wide unto the body of life.  
For life and death are joined,  
even as the river and the sea are one.”  
~ Kahlil Gibran*

My memories of our childhood together are a bit foggy, of course, and yet I do remember, nonetheless ...

I remember that Todd always had two pacifiers in his mouth when he was a toddler, and that he never wore just one hat – sometimes tottering about wearing as many as five or six different ones at once.

***The Lesson:*** Avoid confining your dreams. Chart a many-plotted course, and then continuously make your life a bold and grand adventure.

I remember that we used to sit around the dinner table and say “Thank You's” before we ate, with each family member sharing one thing for which he or she was thankful that day. Todd always seemed to want to go first, and he often did so by booming out a loud, “I AM THANKFUL FOR ME!” ... Well I am thankful for you to, Todd — very thankful indeed.

***The Lesson:*** Keep reminding yourself how special you are ... and then keep acting accordingly.

I remember hanging out in our room as kids, building with Lego's or reading books for hours upon hours together ... I remember sitting with him on our screen-porch swing in Homewood, drinking milkshakes in silence while watching thunderstorms rage all around us.

***The Lesson:*** Revel fully in your days ... Do so often in silence.

I remember playing Dungeons & Dragons with him. We didn't actually play the game, of course, as much as we developed unusually powerful characters and constructed unusually elaborate dungeons to challenge them. Todd, more often than not, developed Druids (he always did adore our amazing planet), while I tended to produce Paladins. And regardless of the characters we created, we marveled over each other's creativity and then fantasized about going forth and Doing Good — and always doing so together.

***The Lesson:*** Treasure your Loved Ones by spending lots of "quality time" together (watching TV together doesn't count) ... and always do so as members of "the same team".

And finally, I remember bugging the bajeezus out of Todd ...

I picked on him and teased him frequently (as siblings are wont to do), and I made fun of him, ignored him, and argued with him on occasion as well ... I often made him so mad. I would even race home from school in order to eat all the "good stuff" in the fridge before he could get to it. That I would have starved had I not done so is no excuse (Even up until 2008, Todd could polish off an amazing amount of food in a very short span of time).

And even though a result of this "brotherly love" was Todd often inflicting me with bodily injury (almost every scar on my body came from him — every one of them reasonable & justified, I might add), I still wish to apologize to him today.

Even though it all happened so long ago and we were "only kids", I still wish he were here to hear how sorry I am that I did those things. So I'll say it now ...

I'm sorry, Todd ...

I really am.

***The Lesson:*** it is never too late to apologize -- ever.



*“It is not desirable that we should live as if in the constant atmosphere and presence of death; that would unfit us for life. But it is well for us, now and then, to talk with death as friend talketh with friend, and to bathe in its strange seas ... These forethinkings are meant, not to make us discontent, but rather to bring us back into life with more strength, and a nobler purpose in living.” ~ Henry Ward Beecher*

*A Clearer Vision ...*  
(06/27/12)

*“No one wants to die. Even people who want to go to heaven don’t want to die to get there. And yet death is the destination we all share. No one has ever escaped it. And that is as it should be, because Death is very likely the single best invention of Life. It is Life’s ultimate agent of change.” ~ Steve Jobs*

Another thing I remember about Todd was how well he could see. I remember him as a small child often pointing to an airplane in the sky — an airplane that was completely invisible to the rest of the family at the time. And I remember that we all thought he was simply imagining things until, sure enough, that very plane would fly close enough for us to see it a few minutes later.

And whenever we would travel places together, I remember Todd often standing still and looking out towards the horizon. Whether it was the Grand Canyon or the coast of Hawaii or the Olympic Peninsula or Lookout Valley (near Chattanooga, pictured below), I remember him often pausing and being very still -- using that vision of his to really Look ... to really See.

I’m sure part of this silent gazing was that which is familiar to all of us — simply appreciating the grandness of it all; simply standing briefly in overwhelmed awe at the Beauty that surrounds us in every moment of our lives; simply looking in humble amazement upon that with which we have been so richly blessed ... simply looking, well, simply.

And yet sometimes I wonder if Todd’s Vision didn’t extend beyond the material in those moments ... Sometimes I wonder if he could actually See where we were heading as individuals – or as a society – or as a species – or as a planet.

You see, Todd cared deeply for the Earth. He loved nature with great passion and without condition, and he would always become moderately irate (even downright pissed off) whenever he would talk about the damage humanity was doing to it ... It was as though he could literally *SEE* us destroying it; and as though he could literally *FEEL* the Earth’s pain while we did so.

Maybe that kind of Clarity comes to all those who truly, profoundly Care ... Maybe we could all see those airplanes if we really paid attention to the heavens, and maybe we would all start living just a little more respectfully if we actually started Loving our planet the way Todd did.

I wonder ...

*“The call of death is a call of Love.  
Death can be sweet if we answer it in the affirmative,  
if we accept it as one of the great eternal forms  
of life and transformation.” ~ Hermann Hesse*



*“To be positive in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage and kindness ... The future is an infinite succession of present moments, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is painful or wrong around us, is itself a marvelous victory.” ~ inspired by Howard Zinn*

*Hitting the Target ...*  
*(06/28/12)*

*“On the day when Death will knock at thy door,  
what will you offer Him?  
As for me, I will set before my guest  
the full vessel of my life.  
I will never let him leave  
with empty hands ...”*  
*~ R. Tagore*

Todd had incredible aim.

You could put something in his hand, point to something else nearby, and tell him to hit it — and much more often than not, he could ... and he would!

I learned pretty quickly that this was not a talent to provoke with rude teasing when Todd was in the bunk above me holding a Hot Wheels car, as the scar on my scalp still attests to this day ... In fact, I very efficiently learned that it was not enough to pick on Todd and be far enough away to flee his fists when he got mad ... No, it was necessary to first make sure I was out of range of his perversely exact throwing arm.

In sports, his accuracy had its obvious advantages. I used to love to sit in the stands when Todd was pitching little league baseball. He had a pretty good fastball, but that was all he had ... No curve-ball, no splitter, no sinker and no change-up ... just a fastball. It was a pretty fast fastball, but he wasn't overpowering with it by any means.

What he was, of course, was pinpoint accurate. He could put the ball exactly where he wanted to, exactly when he wanted to ... which led to him striking out a phenomenal percentage of the batters he faced; something I never got tired of watching.

This talent carried over to other sports as well. In Ultimate Frisbee, Todd had a canon of a forehand — and, as with almost everything else he threw, it was extremely precise. Sometimes the disc arrived a bit too quickly for my tastes (Todd liked throwing the Frisbee very hard), and yet it was certainly on target when it got there. Often the choice was to either catch his throw or be bruised for life.

And my goodness, how many hours of Frisbee Golf we played over the years! Whenever we would take a trip together (something we were regularly blessed to do), we always brought at least two Frisbees with us, which allowed us to walk along whatever trail we were on or wander through whatever park we were visiting and start playing our version of disc golf. And here again, Todd could put it where he wanted to ... I like to think I beat him every now & then, but I don't really remember ever having done so.

While I was pondering these stories last night, I also realized something a bit profound about Todd — his accuracy of arm was mirrored in the accuracy with which he communicated.

He was very fond not only of speaking with precision himself, but in also demanding the same from others (certainly from me) ... How many times he reprimanded me for using absolutes (“Never use absolutes” became one of our favorite mantras), or exaggerating a story, or over-analyzing a theme. Sometimes he would come right out and tell me I was full of it, and other times he would just cock his head and smirk at me; knowing full well that I already knew that I had just blown a wispy haze over our conversation with words either cavernously hollow or thickly melodramatic.

Over time, I eventually adopted this mind-set as well, and came to know it as one of Todd’s greatest gifts to me; the awareness that both what we say and how we say it really matter — that it is wise to always pause before speaking to make sure that the words that flow forth from our mouths are as True as we can make them; to make sure that if we do “hit” anyone with those words, that we do so honestly ... and gently.



*“After a dear friend departs this life, the Love we shared never ends ... It simply passes back and forth through the veil.”*

*~ inspired by Patti Brown*

***Healing Homer ...***  
***(06/30/12)***

*“Death is but crossing the world, as friends do the seas;  
they may live apart, and yet remain in one another still.”*

*~ inspired by William Penn*

Frankly, the phrase “he’s a healer” gets tossed around far too lightly for my tastes these days ... It seems that almost every “New Age guru” out there is making claims about how he or she can bring us “lasting happiness” or “lasting health” or “lasting peace”; all in a world where nothing lasts — nothing at all — *ever*.

That having been said, there *are* a few people who seem to have “The Gift of Healing”; people who seem able to transcend the illusory boundaries of science, if not able to extend the mirage-like limits of circumstance to bring Peace to those in great pain.

I think Todd was one of those people ...

As much as I dislike using the term, I think Todd was a *HEALER*.

His more obvious healing talents were material ones. First of all, he was a gifted massage therapist. I’ve received a number of massages over the years, and rarely did I encounter anyone who had what Todd had — the ability to seek & find & soothe & free a body’s deeply hidden wounds ... He had what some like to call “the Touch”.

Todd also possessed a vast wealth of knowledge related to healing the body via herbs and healthy sustenance — a wealth of knowledge that he shared with others (sometimes quite vehemently) every chance he got. He was huge advocate of “power foods” -- especially those that cleanse the blood (ginger, cilantro & garlic were three of his favorites), and was a vocal champion of everything organic and Earth-friendly ... As one of our mutual friends put it, “Todd was green before it was cool to be green”.

Indeed, almost every time we were blessed to spend time together, he would get around to making me one or more of his “Power Smoothies”. It was always great fun watching him dance his “mad scientist” routine with a blender and whatever herbs & fruits & vegetables were available. Sometimes I would ask to know the identity and healing properties of a particular ingredient, but most of the time I just trusted him and drank up when he was done. They didn’t always taste fantastic (in fact, I seem to remember him getting great pleasure from watching me suffer through drinking his more unpleasant-tasting concoctions), and yet they did always leaving me feeling really Good & Strong after ingesting them.

Of course, as is often the case with any true Healer, Todd’s real gifts were often not quite so obvious, and there is an interesting story that wonderfully illustrates this point ...

My folks used to have a dog named Homer (pictured below), a cocker-spaniel who was as tall on Heart as he was short on brains. At some point in the late 1990's it became clear that Homer wasn't doing so well, and my Mom took him to the vet, where he was diagnosed with cancer. The tumor was apparently pretty big and he wasn't supposed to live much longer.

It would have been fine to simply love on Homer and help him be as comfortable as possible until he passed (after all, death is not a bad thing, per se), and yet Todd decided to do something different ... Todd healed Homer.

Now it's not exactly clear how this occurred, and I think Todd even stated that it was Homer who did the actual Healing (a profound humility that is common to all true Healers), and what *is* clear is that Todd sat with Homer for days & days on end; feeding him raw Pau D'arco root, petting him gently, talking with him — just Loving on him. Not the wispy “luv ya, buddy — hope you're doing ok” love that most folks give whenever someone else is in pain. Todd, a true empathy at heart, really *Cared* that Homer was in pain, and he really, really, really wanted that pain to stop. And he kept at it — Loving on Homer day after day after day ... until the tumor simply went away.

I don't know how many “bonus years” Homer got from that act of Love ... It doesn't really matter. And it doesn't really matter whether or not any of us possess a similar “Gift of Healing”. What I take with me from this memory is the knowledge that Love — real LOVE; the kind of Love where you open up completely & unreservedly to another being in their time of need — always brings Peace ...

... and sometimes even brings a Healing.

*“Death is the dropping of the flower, that the fruit may swell.”  
~ Henry Ward Beecher*

*“Death can come at any moment. You could die this afternoon; you could die tomorrow morning; you could die on your way to work; you could die in your sleep. Most of us try to avoid the sense that death can come at any time, but its timing is unknown to us. Can we live each day as if it were our last? Can we relate to one another as if there were no tomorrow?” ~ Joan Halifax*



**Psalm 23 ...**  
**(07/01/12)**

*“We must die alone. To the very verge of the stream our friends may accompany us; they may bend over us, they may cling to us there; but that one long ocean wave of eternity eventually washes up to our lips, sweeps us from the shore, and we sets us forth, alone ... And in that untried and utter solitude, there remains for us the pulsation of the greatest of assurances: that we are in fact not alone, because we are One with it all, and the Father is within & all around us still.” ~ inspired by E. H. Chapin*

My maternal grandmother passed away in November of 2004. Todd & I were both living on the same side of the Big Island of Hawaii at the time, though we weren't seeing much of each other in those days. Todd had come to the Big Island in early 2003 to do some deep Soul-searching, and was devoutly distancing himself from everything & everyone from his past in order to do so; a choice I fully and actively respected.

He had come to visit me a few times in the early months of 2004 — joyous reunions of which I might share another time, and yet he had grown increasingly reclusive and withdrawn as the year had progressed. By the time we were scheduled to fly to grandmother's memorial service together in December of that year, I didn't know where he was and hadn't seen him for quite some time. I knew he was in a very sad and “dark” place personally, and I also knew that he was extremely uncomfortable being around family members, so I simply assumed that I would be making the trip alone.

And yet, to his great credit, Todd set aside his immense discomfort and profound angst. He showed up a few weeks before our scheduled flight and did indeed accompany me to the mainland. As far as I was concerned, just getting on the plane was an act of selfless courage that was more than enough to qualify as purely Loving ... and yet there was a moment thereafter that proved to be even more powerful.

During the service itself, held in the United Methodist Church in Shalimar, Florida, there was a time when the four oldest grandchildren were asked to stand before the gathering and each read one of grandmother's favorite passages from the Bible. When it came time for my dear cousin Emily to read the 23rd Psalm, she simply couldn't do it. I remember standing there next to the pulpit while she fought through her tears, sending her immense Compassion while gently waiting for her to collect herself enough to get through the Psalm.

And yet she just couldn't do it ... The emotion of the moment and the loss of her dear grandmother was simply too much for her. If Emily & I had been alone up there in front of everyone, I like to think that I would have done what Todd then actually did ...

Todd stepped calmly forward and read the Psalm for her.

Even though he didn't even want to be at the ceremony at all, much less to be standing up in front of everyone there, Todd read Psalm 23 for all of us.

And how he read it! We've all heard voices that are "dialed in to Spirit" — every one of us innately knows when someone is speaking from the Heart; when someone truly *FEELS* every syllable they are uttering. I still get goose-bumps to this day when I remember how Todd boomed out that Psalm; and how it reverberated throughout the entire church for several moments after he was done.

My dear brother, *that* act was nothing short of awesome, and it only seems right for me to Peace-fully BOOM that beautiful Psalm right back to you ... to you, with Love ... to you, for all of us:

*"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.  
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.  
He leadeth me beside the still waters.  
He restoreth my soul, and leadeth me in the paths of righteousness ...  
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil:  
For thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.  
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies ...  
Thou anointest my head with oil, and my cup runneth over.  
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:  
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."  
~ Psalm 23 (KJV)*



***Pushing the River ...***  
***(07/03/12)***

*“Impermanence is not just of philosophical interest. It’s very personal. Until we accept and deeply understand in our very being that things change from moment to moment, and never stop changing even for one instant, only then can we truly let go and accept them as they are. And when we really do let go, the relief that wells up within us is enormous. And ironically, this gives release to a whole new dimension of Love ... It’s like a dance. We have to give everything space to dance its dance ... And yet that doesn’t mean giving up relationships; it doesn’t mean giving up one’s profession, or one’s family, or one’s home. It has nothing to do with that; it’s not an external change. It’s an internal change. It’s a shift from holding tightly to embracing lightly.” ~ Tenzin Palmo*

Back in the summer of 2006, Todd and I lived on a farm together for a few months. For those of you who knew Todd during this time, you know that he was already deep in the throes of his depression, and that he was looking for stints of solace anywhere he could find them. We had often discussed selfless service as an alternative form of treatment for his depression (we had both read “A Man’s Search for Meaning”, and were both admirers of Victor Frankl’s rediscoveries in this regard), and yet never was the truism “easier said than done” more applicable ... Knowing what to do to break free of clinical depression is one thing; actually doing so while depressed is quite another.

And yet, at least for that spring, Todd actually managed to walk that talk ... and while he did so, it really did seem to work. There were many days when it even became obvious that he was actually headed back to the world of emotional Happiness & “mental health”. Alas, if only he had chosen a service-project that had a chance of success ...

You see, Todd was a man of “Great Vision” — He knew how things “should be” between nations (that there should be no war), he knew how things “should be” between people (that there should be no hunger or poverty), and he also felt he knew how things “should be” in Nature. In this particular case, Todd knew that the spring-fed stream on this particular farm needed waterfalls ... and so he went to work building them.

Hour after hour, and day after day, Todd would dredge the stream — only to have it steadily fill itself back in with silt & mud. Hour after hour, and day after day, Todd would sink large slabs of marble to dam the stream and make truly beautiful waterfalls — only to wake the next day and find that the water had found a way under or around those dams. Every day he would rejoice in finally creating a new wonder, and every morning he would awake to find that Nature had taken that wonder away from him.

Most of us metaphorically “push the river” more than once during our lifetimes (maybe striving for an outcome that is less than feasible, or clinging to a relationship that has long-since disappeared) ... That spring, Todd found himself pushing a river as well -- literally.

To his credit, through sheer strength and determination, he actually succeeded in building a gorgeous succession of waterfalls that endured for a few weeks.

And yet, as is always ultimately the case, Nature had her way in the end ... The water began to flow under and around his dams, the waterfalls ceased to make their beautiful music, and he perceived his efforts to have been a failure.

There are some pretty obvious lessons for us all in this tale that don't need to be mentioned directly — *and* there is a more subtle wisdom that is just as important to realize. You see, even though Todd was indeed futilely “pushing the river” — even though he was indeed striving against the “will” of a force far more powerful than he was, his efforts *did* make a lasting impact on that stream. And even though he considered his work to be a failure because it didn't end up the way he knew to be “better”, his efforts were not at all in vain.

“Todd's Grotto” (as I privately call the place) is to this day a place of deep Peace and immense Wonder — in no small part due to “ill-fated” efforts of the summer of 2006. True, his waterfalls can no longer be seen or heard, and yet the hundreds of mossy stones he placed, the dozens of ferns he planted, and even the marble slabs he sunk into the landscape all remain to this day — and all combine to make the place truly Beauty-full. Todd worked on that spring for free and he worked on it for Love — and even though the river refused to be pushed, the Love in his pushing will remain there forever.

There is certainly no failure in that.



*“Death is a natural part of life. Rejoice for those around you who transform into the Force.” ~ Yoda*

*Meeting Life Head-On ...*  
(07/05/12)

*“What is the Soul?  
I cannot stop asking ...  
If I could taste but one sip of an answer,  
I could break out of this prison for drunks.  
I didn’t come here of my own accord  
and I can’t leave that way ...  
Whoever brought me here,  
will have to take me home.”*  
~ J. Rumi

Though I didn’t have much contact with Todd over the last ten years of his life, the manner & circumstances of his death seem to indicate that at least a few of my favorite “Todd traits” remained with him until the end — his immense Strength and his indomitable Courage being two of them. It feels odd to mention these two traits in relation to a suicide, and yet by the end of this chapter you might very well understand what I intend to share — that Todd was, up until his dying breath, a man of great Power and a man of great Bravery.

His strength in the traditional sense was always very easy to see. He was indeed a “mountain of a man”. With a body that was 6’5”, tan, lean & muscular, it really did appear as if Poseidon himself was rising from the surf whenever Todd would come in from a swim in the ocean.

He also had the ability to lift, move & accurately place *very* heavy stones. In 2006, we built a sandstone table, a massive rock garden (that Todd christened “Ithilian”, after a scene in J.R.R. Tolkien’s “Two Towers”), and a number of large stone meditation benches. Please note that even though I say “we” here, it was Todd who did by far the majority of the lifting and the moving and the placing of those stones. Frankly, to this day whenever I visit those sacred places, I still don’t know how “we” managed to do any of it.

On top of his amazing physical, “external” strength, Todd possessed an immense mental, “internal” Strength as well — a deep-seated bravery that was just as astounding ... The man simply seemed to know no fear.

He rafted the wildest of waters (literally drowning once -- and being resuscitated on the adjacent shoreline, when his raft capsized in a monstrous Colorado white-water rapid that he knew was “beyond classification” before he rode it) ... He body-surfed huge waves in Hawaii ... He even braved “double black diamond” ski slopes — the first day after having taught himself to snowboard in only a few hours!

My parents have affirmed that this was typical Todd-behavior from a very early age. While I was always a somewhat timid child (I think “careful” is the polite euphemism), Todd would simply see a challenge and leap right into it.

While Todd was alive, he seemed to live life fully. He was a man who met his life head-on, and by all indications, he was a man who met his death head-on as well. What little evidence we have shows that Todd, after struggling mightily with an extremely powerful psycho-spiritual foe for over two-decades, chose his departure from this world very Care-fully.

On the day in question, he apparently left his campsite and hiked over two miles to a peaceful mountain overlook — a location so beautiful that those who eventually found his remains simply *knew* without a doubt that his death had been no accident. Todd only took one shotgun shell along for that last walk. His final act was carefully planned ... It was conscious and it was deliberate ... It was an act of great Strength, & it was an act of great Courage.

Todd faced the largest “wave” any of us will ever face. Todd faced Death head-on, and he didn’t shy away. He picked his time and he picked his place, and then he calmly walked out into the surf — and met that Great Wave head-on. He met that Wave, and he dove into it. He became one with it ...

... and thereby, became ONE with all of us.

*“For what is it to die, but to stand naked in the wind and to melt into the sun? And what is it to cease breathing, but to free the breath from its restless tides, that it may rise and expand... and seek God unencumbered.” ~ Kahlil Gibran*



***A Final Fare-Well ...***  
***(07/07/12)***

*“It is a curious thing, the death of a loved one. We all know that our time in this world is limited, and that eventually all of us will end up underneath some sheet, never to wake up. And yet it is always a surprise when it happens to someone we know. It is like walking up the stairs to your bedroom in the dark, and thinking there is one more stair than there is. Your foot falls down through the air, and there is a sickly moment of dark surprise as you readjust the way you had previously thought of things.” ~ D. Handler*

It has been an honor to share my memories of Todd with you all, and I could very well go on doing so for many more pages ... And yet there is a space of time allotted for everything in life, and it is wise to sense the boundaries of those moments — to avoid striving to stretch them beyond where they are best left to be.

After any loss, there is a time for remembering the one who has passed. And, after that time of remembering, there is a time for moving on ... After we honor those who have passed with our thoughts & our words, there comes a time to honor their lives by re-channeling those energies into joyously living our own.

And so today I write a final farewell to Todd. I will continue to think on him often, of course, and I will probably make mention of him occasionally in future writings, and yet the days of mourning his passing by remembering his past will soon be behind us ... Today, our days of **LIVING** begin anew.

As such, I am left with quite the great challenge: if this is to be my final chapter of openly remembering the life of my brother, which of the many amazing stories about him that remain am I to share?

\*I could write about the time we hiked the Na Pali Trail on the island of Kauai with our mother – how, after Mom decided to take a boat back, Todd & I decided to run the entire length of the return. I remember how we would push each other as far as we dared before stopping for brief water breaks. I remember taking a “short cut” through the underbrush with him and getting lost. I remember how happy we were when we found the trail again ... I remember how proud we were of the amazing time we made traversing – at least according to the Sierra Club at the time — one of the world’s ten most difficult trails. [Lesson learned: short-cuts are rarely worth it]

\*I could write about the summer that Todd oh-so-patiently taught me to throw a Frisbee forehand. I was such a slow student! I remember how his kind patience paid off (it always does) in the hundreds of hours we would huck the disc together in the years thereafter. I still find myself teaching children & adults alike to throw that same forehand these days, and I still try to emulate Todd’s kind patience when I do so. [Lesson learned: Kindness is always Right Action]

\*I could write about the trip we took to the Hoh Rainforest on Washington's Olympic Peninsula – how we sat together by a fantastic campfire (Todd was very good at building bonfires of all sizes), eating avocado sandwiches and sipping cold Pete's Wicked Ale (back in the day when Pete's was still a small brewery and their beer still tasted like it). I remember how we walked away from the campground afterwards and lay down on the ground for hours – mostly in silence — and watched shooting stars and satellites dance across a perfectly clear sky. [Lesson learned: remember to regularly pause and appreciate the Heavens]

\*I could write about our numerous, overly-athletic footbag sessions (we always seemed to have a hackey-sack with us, and we played ever chance we got – even once “illegally” at the Acropolis in Athens) – how it wasn't ever enough to merely keep the sack in the air; we had to do so using the craziest of moves that often had it flying far & wide, with us chasing it far and wide as well. We didn't play in a “hacky-sack circle” like most folks – Todd and I always seemed to require an entire “hacky-sack arena”. [Lesson learned: play BIG, or don't play at all]

\*I could write about our travels through Europe in the spring of 1994 – how Todd was so sick the whole trip and how we only encountered two days of sunshine the entire five weeks (and oh, how my brother *LOVED* to bask in the sun!) ... and yet Todd never complained once. He always seemed to have a smile on his face then, and he was always game for the next adventure. [Lesson learned: it is a great service to others to keep your pain to yourself]

\*I could write about visiting Todd and hiking with him & a girlfriend up Byers Peak near Fraser, Colorado – how Todd was so patient with us as we gasped for air and needed to rest every few steps as we neared the 12,084 summit (his lungs had long since acclimated to Fraser's high elevation). And I remember how he brought fresh pineapple to share with us once we reached the top (to this day one of the most refreshing repasts I have ever enjoyed) – how we felt truly “on top of the world” as we soaked up the 360-degree, cloud-draped panorama – how we gazed in amazement as an airplane flew by *below* us. [Lesson learned: immersion into Big Nature can be strenuous, and yet it is always worth it]

\*I could write about joining Todd on stage to sing karaoke at my cousin Emily's wedding – how I was fully prepared to courageously help him belt out Prince's classic “Kiss”, and yet how I was left almost speechless by how good Todd was. He really did sound just like Prince – so much so that I remember standing there next to him, half the time with my mouth agape in awe and half the time laughing hysterically with joy. [Lesson learned: remember to sing, and when you do, remember to sing all out]

\*I could write about Todd coming to visit me at the Borders bookstore where I was living in Kailua-Kona back in 2004 – how he put me in his truck and drove me to Kealahou Bay and swam with me out into “the Deep Blue”. There is something magically different about water that is over a mile deep – it takes on a silvery translucence and embodies a velvety softness that I haven’t seen or felt anywhere else in the world. Back then I was deathly afraid of swimming in water where I couldn’t see the bottom, and without Todd’s encouragement that day, it is quite possible that I would never have experienced that Bliss. [Lesson learned: it is a great service to hold another’s hand while they face their fears]

\* And I could write about the time we borrowed a friend’s 4×4 truck and drove to the Green Sands Beach near the southern-most point of the Big Island – how we were the only ones there that morning – how we both took off all our clothes and buried ourselves in the green sand (which is comprised almost completely of the gemstone called peridot) – how we thoroughly soaked up the warmth and the Love that are so fully alive in that place. [Lesson learned: go to places of immense Beauty – and then have both the humility & the courage to become One with them]

Yes, I could write about all those memories, and indeed many more, and yet I think the most fitting final tribute to Todd must somehow involve telling the tale of the last time I saw him – and the last time we parted ways ...

*“I cannot explain it beyond your willingness to understand it.” ~ Todd*

In the late fall of 2007, I had been asked to house-sit for some friends who were heading to Ireland for an extended visit (and possibly a permanent move) thereto. They had two amazing dogs who needed to be cared for while they were away, and I joyfully agreed to do so. The house in question was located on a mountain slope at the end of a road in the “jungly” southwestern region of the Big Island of Hawaii. I was given no money (though my friends did graciously buy me enough food for the first few months) and I had no transportation down the mountain. While I could hear my neighbors on occasion, I only actually saw one other human being (a UPS driver) one time for the first two+ months of my stay. I wrote every morning & every evening, and cared for the dogs and tended the land during each day. It was one of the more Peace-full times of my life – a time I still recall with great fondness.

Then, in early January of 2008, I received an email from Todd, wondering where I was and how I was doing. After emailing him my location and asking him where he happened to be, he informed me that he was temporarily staying just a few miles away! I hadn’t seen Todd in over a year at that point, and had lost track of his whereabouts, so I was thrilled at the prospect of seeing him again. I invited him to come visit, and – after receiving permission from the homeowners – he moved in with me shortly thereafter.

Now for anyone who knew Todd from roughly 2002 to 2010, what I am about to share will be no surprise. For others, it might prove to be a bit shocking ... When Todd came to live with me, I knew he had been suffering from clinical depression and alcoholism for many years previously. What I didn't know was that he had also developed a mental challenge labeled by some "psychological professionals" as "bipolar schizophrenia" (bordering on multiple-personality disorder). Essentially, in response to an immense trauma that he had suffered (I believe sometime in the summer of 2004, though possibly earlier than that), Todd had developed two distinctly different personalities – one of which was kind & gentle & funny & fun-loving; the other of which was "dark" & morose & negative & Machiavellian. And unsurprisingly, whenever Todd would drink alcohol, the latter personality would surface (something which happens to quite a few folks I know when they drink, actually, albeit to a lesser degree).

Even though I was not aware of the severity of his condition when he came to live with me then, I knew generally of his troubles, so he & I had established some general behavioral guidelines for his stay. Basically, while he was living there with me, he was not to drink at all. I made it clear that I would keep Loving him unconditionally if he did choose to drink, but that he would have to do so away from the house and that he could return only after having sobered up. He agreed to this proposal, and moved in ...

And to my jubilant surprise, Todd didn't drink at all for the first 59 days of our time together. Even though he obviously suffered physically as a consequence of that withdrawal, he stayed completely sober for almost two full months! And in that time, the strong-yet-playful, fun-loving & gentle "real Todd" was back in full force.

I had done some work clearing the land before his arrival, but with his help we turned an overgrown jungle into a place of stunning Wonder. In the 1000+ hours of labor we invested together, we pruned and burned tons of Brazilian Pepper Tree branches – dead growth that had completely obscured a number of hidden treasures; including fruit trees, ancient Hawaiian rock walls, beautiful mossy stones and long-untended flower gardens. Every day we would wake up, eat breakfast, and get to work. And every late-afternoon we would marvel at the ever-more-stunning Beauty of the land we had cleansed ... Our evenings were filled with music and good talks and laughter, and upon waking the next morning, we would simply get up do it all over again ...

Needless to say, those were truly very Good Days.

I won't go into too much detail regarding what happened next, though it is by far the most important thing I have to share. Essentially, Todd's demons were very strong ones – much stronger than I had originally thought, and even stronger than he chose to admit. And by early March, after roughly 60 days of fully functional living, these demons were tired of being pushed into the background of Todd's life. I left for a speaking engagement on the mainland that month, and returned to find Todd a changed man ... I think partly because he was so alone there, and partly because we had done almost all the work on the land there was to be done, he had begun drinking again. And as a consequence, his "alter ego" had returned in all its dark potency.

And it was here that I didn't know exactly what to do, and it was here that I made some very big mistakes ... mistakes I do not necessarily regret (after all, I really did try hard to "do right" by Todd), and yet mistakes I would definitely correct were I to be given the chance.

In essence, to battle his growing wave of shadow, I tried to funnel Todd's energies into additional acts of Kindness for the homeowners. Unfortunately, Todd's idea of what was "best" for their belongings were often not in harmony with how they wanted their possessions to be handled. For example, after receiving permission to remove a moldy carpet while I was away, Todd decided to also repaint the entire room in some truly funky colors (sincerely believing that he had received permission to do so) ... Or, after receiving permission to cleanse a few crystals in the living room, Todd also decided to rearrange all the furniture.

Sometimes he would do these things when I was away, and yet even when I was present, I didn't really know how best to respond. Admittedly, in the first few weeks of recognizing this shift in Todd, I treated him with "kid gloves". I was afraid that I would push him further into depression if I was firm & consequent with his more destructive behaviors. I focused on the joyful in him when it surfaced (which is always good thing to do), and yet I also chose to ignore the manipulative in him when it returned. I simply refused to address it – hoping that his "darkness" would just go away; a passiveness which enabled that shadow-self to grow that much stronger. And then, when I did finally have the courage to address his dysfunction, I did so in a somewhat critical, somewhat judgmental manner – a choice that made matters even worse.

Eventually, word got back to the homeowners (through their daughters, who occasionally brought fresh food for the dogs) about not only how beautiful their gardens now looked, but also what was happening to the inside of their home. I tried to enlist Todd's help in putting things back in order, and yet he took the suggestion personally, and angrily refused. This dysfunction continued to escalate until he was ordered by my friends to leave the premises in mid-April of that year.

I still remember sitting on the porch and watching him walk away. I still remember watching him walk down that road and me calling out to him and telling him I loved him and wishing him well. I still remember how he turned to me after I did so – how he looked back and gave me kind of a half-wave with the saddest eyes ...

I still remember wishing I had done things differently ...

I still remember wishing I could have done more to help him help himself ...

I still remember wishing I had just Loved him even more.



*“I carry you with me into the world, my Friend ...  
into the smell of rain, and the words that dance between people.  
And for me, it will always be this way, walking in the light ...  
remembering being alive together” ~ Brian Andreas*

***Epilogue: Departing for Heaven ...***  
***(07/27/12)***

In our happier times, I remember often uttering the humble mantra “You never know” when talking about anything related to the future (and even some things related to the present). And I remember Todd, with his impeccable wit, often turning to me after I had done so and responding with a smile and a, “Sometimes you do” ...

Even though this life is essentially a Great Mystery (another favorite Todd-ism), there are some things we innately *know* to be True – and these are often the things that we conveniently forget, because they are either very difficult to engage or very frightening to face. And whenever I think of my final days with Todd, I remember a few of those things; things that are applicable to every one of our relationships, every day of our lives. In essence, even though Todd’s life is over, our own lives continue onward ... Even though he is no longer with us, the life he led speaks to us still. As such, as a final honoring of the truly Great Man that was Todd Andrew Hilbers (a.k.a. Thor), I offer the following Truths for you all to remember today – and hopefully for you to re-enliven tomorrow:

***Truth #1) Actively cherish your Loved Ones ...*** Do so regularly & do so continually (and do so today). You might think that you have lots of time left with the special people in your life, but you do not. You are only guaranteed today ... Please act accordingly.

***Truth #2) See through the behaviors of your “enemies” ...*** Forgive them actively & forgive them openly (and forgive them today). People who might seem to be “evil” or “crazy” or “inconsiderate” or “dishonest” are not so. They are simply people in a great deal of pain ... Please act accordingly.

***Truth #3) The only way to truly honor the dead is to Be courageously Caring*** towards the living. This is especially true for the living who are most difficult to Love ... Please act accordingly.

Thank you all so much for allowing me to honor my brother in this way ...

I now look forward to going forth & continuing to do so, with my deeds more than my words.

*Never say about anything, “I have lost it,” but only: “I have given it back.”  
Is your child dead? ... “It has been given back.” Is your wife dead?  
... She has been returned. Is your brother gone? ... He has gone Home.  
~ Epictetus*



*“If someone is tired and has gone to lie down, we do not pursue him with grief and tears. He whom I have lost has lain down to sleep for a while in the Great Inner Room. To break in upon his rest with the noise of lamentation would but show that I knew nothing of nature’s Great Law. That is why I cease to mourn.” ~ Chuang Tzu*



*“From these shadows depart towards Heaven ... May your Soul be happy and may it journey Peace-fully. Rejoice! You have departed from the city of fear and trembling. If the doors of repose have been barred to you, then depart gently by way of the roof and the ladder. If your body’s image is gone, awaken the image-maker and join Him for tea. If you are alone & far from friends, take God’s hand and become a Child of Harmony once more. Though you are separated from the water and bread of the material, you have now become the very food and drink for the Souls of others. While you can no longer receive sustenance from the known, you will forever nourish the world in gentle silence with your LOVE.” ~ anonymous*



*The Final Chapter: RETURNING to a PLACE of PEACE*  
... Bringing Todd back to the Big Island



A descriptive accounting of the April 2014 Big Island tributes,  
held in honor of Todd A. Hilbers (1971 – 2011)

writing principally via Scaughdt  
photography principally by Vanessa

*"If someone is tired  
and has gone to lie down,  
we do not pursue him  
with grief and tears.  
He whom I have lost  
has but lain down to sleep  
for a while in the Great Room.  
To break in upon his rest  
with the calamity of lamentation  
would but show that I knew nothing  
of nature's Great Law ...  
This is why I cease to mourn."  
~ Chuang Tzu*

## A Final Epilogue's Preamble ... an Introduction to the End

*"Despite the medical norms and legal imperatives  
that attempt to give death a specific date and an exact hour,  
it is a gradual process ... not a singular event."  
~ inspired by James W. Green*

I took a little trip in April of 2014, a most important Journey that proved to be quite remarkable -- a Journey filled with emotion & wonderment & insight -- a Journey I am honored to share with you now ...

It has been almost two years since my family learned of the passing of my dear brother, Todd ... and it has been roughly three years since his actual death. For those of you already privy to this news, I will spare repeating the specific details of the event. As far as this epistle is concerned, it is enough to know that I received a small portion of Todd's ashes back in the Fall of 2012, and that I had been keeping them safe since then; safe & honored until they could be returned to the place I felt Todd loved above all others: the wild & wonder-filled Big Island of Hawaii.

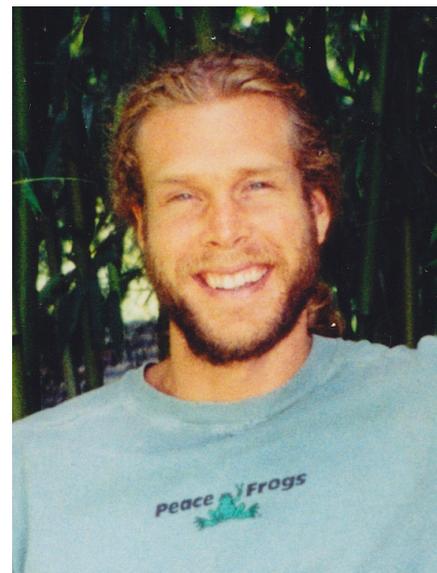
I was prepared to wait quite awhile for this trip to materialize (Hawaii is, after all, quite a ways away from Germany, where I was living at the time), and yet to my most pleasant surprise I didn't have to wait long at all. Thanks in very large part to my dear Friend, Vanessa (who had also known Todd before his death) -- we were able in April of 2014 to not only lay the last bit of my brother to rest, but were also able to visually document the doing so thereof. The pictures made of the memorials we held for Todd while in Hawaii were originally intended to be shared solely with his parents, his immediate relatives and his closest friends, and yet they proved to be so Beauty-full and so profound that I have decided to share them here with all of you as well.

After all, there can be no real "tragedy" in death if we use our recallings of a departed Love to inspire in our own lives heretofore unknown heights of Peace & Meaning & Joy ...

After all, there can be no life truly "wasted" if we choose to cradle its warmer memories next to our hearts each morning, and then choose to carry them gently with us into each new day's dawn.

Amen ... Let it be so.

*Scaughdt*  
(June 2014)



Todd ... Summer 2000

## *Tribute 01 ... Kealakekua Bay*

When I first arrived on the Big Island back in November of 2003, Todd was already there, having journeyed to the Island himself for his own spiritual reasons earlier that year. It wasn't that difficult to find him, and we were indeed able to briefly meet shortly after my arrival.

And yet, even though our reunion was a warm one, it was pretty obvious to us both that we each had "things to do", and that those things were not going to involve each other's company – at least for awhile. So I gave him a big hug and left his presence, eventually setting up shop about 30 miles north of him in the town of Kailua-Kona. I knew where he was living, and he, me, and yet we never saw or heard from each other for the first several months of my stay.

Then, in early February of 2004, I was wandering the aisles of the local Borders bookstore (where I essentially lived during my 2 year "home-free" Hawaiian adventure) and had just located the book for which I was searching, when I turned and saw Todd standing right next to me -- just as large & as radiant as ever, beaming me that beautiful smile of his. To summarize what happened next (and to more quickly get to the point), Todd picked me up that day and took me south to hang out with him, eventually bringing me to one of his favorite places -- Kealakekua Bay.

Now at the time, I was not the biggest fan of swimming in water where I could see the bottom (understatement), and yet Todd calmly assured me that all would be well, and we swam out together that day into the Great Deep Blue. It was truly an experience beyond phenomenal for me -- not only because the water was so clear & the sky so warm, or because we could hear dolphins nearby when we put our heads underwater, but rather because Todd's calm yet powerful presence that day allowed me to face & (at least temporarily) conquer one of my greatest fears. It was so Peace-full gliding through the water next to him out into the Bay, and that feeling remains one of the greatest gifts I have ever received.

*"Farewell to you, my brother,  
and the youth I have spent with you.  
It was but yesterday that we met in a dream,  
when you sung to me in my aloneness,  
and I, of your longings, built a tower in the sky.  
And yet now our sleep has fled and our dream has ended.  
It is no longer dawn. Our half-waking has turned  
into a fuller day, and now we must part ...  
And so, in the twilight of memory when we will meet once more,  
we shall speak again together, and walk again hand in hand,  
And you shall sing to me a deeper song.  
And, if our hands may one day meet again in another dream,  
we shall build yet another tower together in the sky."*

*(inspired by Rumi)*



## *Tribute 02 ... The Place of Refuge*

Just down the road from Kealahou Bay is Pu'uuhonua O Honaunau, (otherwise known as "The Place of Refuge") -- one of the more peaceful sites on the Big Island, and the place where we held our second tribute to Todd ...

Hundreds of years ago, indigenous Hawaiians who violated one or more of their culture's sacred laws were often sentenced to death, and that sentence was invariably carried out -- *unless* the offenders could somehow make it to one of the island's "Places of Refuge" (or Pu'uuhonua) beforehand. There, these pre-judged "criminals" would be absolved by a Hawaiian priest and thereafter allowed to reenter society. Also, during times of war, defeated warriors and noncombatants were safe from harm at these sacred locations.

During the last years of Todd's life, he was often a "troubled Soul" who ended up (mostly unintentionally) offending quite a few folks. He was also a warrior of sorts -- especially when it came to defending the sanctity of the Earth. As such, it seemed more than fitting that a portion of his ashes would be laid to rest at the Honaunau Place of Refuge, one of the more powerful Hawaiian sanctuaries of atonement and forgiveness, just as it seems more than fitting that I use this time to dispel a few myths that still surround the act of suicide ...

### **Resolving Myth #01:**

Suicide is *not* an act of cowardice.

The fear of death is the fear of all fears, and every fear any of us has ever had or ever will have is essentially founded in an ever-present subconscious fear of death & dying. Indeed, every sentient being on our planet is subtly-yet-pervasively programmed to fear death above all else. As such, choosing to consciously face death's portal and then purposefully cross its threshold is the greatest act of courage any being can ever embody.

So, while I most certainly do *not* advocate suicide as a solution to one's traumas or depressions or personal problems, I most certainly *do* admire those with the resolve and the courage to choose such an innately terrifying path. As I mentioned in the original "Tribute to Todd" that I penned back in the Summer of 2012 (specifically, the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter -- the one entitled "Meeting Life Head-On"), Todd was one of the most courageous men I have ever met ... and his choice to face death directly, to stare it boldly down and then to take his own life anyway, affirms this fact all the more.

*"When your time comes to die, be not like those who weep in terror  
or pray for a little more time to live ... No, when your times comes,  
sing your death song loudly, and die like a hero going home."*

*~ inspired by Tecumseh*

**Resolving Myth #02:**  
Suicide is *not* "sinful" or "bad" (or even "wrong").

Now I will grant you, sometimes suicide is indeed a selfish act. And yet this does not make suicide "wrong" -- merely selfish. And I will grant as well that many times suicide does indeed cause others great pain. And yet this does not make suicide "bad" -- merely painful. And indeed, while suicide -- depending upon one's religious beliefs -- might indeed count as a "sin", there is no doubt whatsoever that the only person qualified to make such a judgment is the one doing the dying. After all, who are we to judge another's deed merely because it does not match our own desires or merely because it makes us uncomfortable? Who are we to condemn another as a "sinner" just because they might make choices that do not resonate with our own personal beliefs?

Actually, the case can be made that some suicides are actually Noble Deeds, for it is almost certainly true that at least some suicides are committed in order to *lessen* the pain & suffering of others, if not even to save their lives. Is not the man who dives in front of a bus to save a child committing suicide? Is not the woman killed while laying her body down in protest before trucks carrying pigs to needless slaughter committing suicide? Were not Jesus & Gandhi & Peace Pilgrim committing suicide when they gave up everything of ease & comfort and then literally sacrificed their lives for humanity?

And this then begs the question: is it not possible that my brother committed suicide nobly as well? Isn't it possible that he ended his own life because he became acutely aware of the very real danger his alternate personality posed to others? Is it not possible that he committed suicide because he was afraid he would otherwise harm another sentient being? As such, isn't it possible that his too, was a sacrifice most Noble? After all, we have no evidence to the contrary ... Indeed, seeing as how Todd had successfully battled his depression for 20+ years beforehand *without* taking his own life, there seems to be actually quite a bit of evidence to show that his ultimate act was *not* driven by selfish depression; that it was an act of selflessness instead -- if not at the very least an act that was Purpose-full & well-intended.

It thus bears pondering, the following conundrum: in such moments when the evidence could lead either way, isn't it always preferable to adopt the more uplifting account of events? Whenever such an explanation is available, isn't it always preferable - indeed isn't it always "right" -- to judge another in the best light possible? Suicide or not, isn't it always preferable to humble ourselves in the face of all things "tragic" or "cruel" or even "evil" -- to take a calm step back, place ourselves within the shoes of the other, and have gentle compassion for their choices, regardless?

*“Many that live seemingly deserve death, and some that die seem to have merited an extended stay . And yet it is not for us to make such determinations. Indeed, we have neither the faculties nor the objective information to know one way or the other. And as such, we would be wise to avoid eagerness when dealing out death or judgment ... For even the very wise cannot see all ends.” ~ inspired by J.R.R. Tolkien*

In all likelihood, we will never know what was going through Todd's mind while he was walking his final two miles, from his wilderness campsite to the beautiful overlook where he ultimately took his own life ... And we almost certainly will never know what was passing through his mind shortly before he pulled the trigger.

What we *do* know -- each of us to varying degrees -- is that Todd was a Good Man striving to be better; that he was a Good Man trying to make his way through a life that was often filled with pain & trouble; that he was a Good Man, period ... And we can know as well that this remains True whether his final act was a Noble one or not, and that these statements hold True as well for each and every person each of us will ever encounter, every day, for the rest of our lives.

Let us all have the humility to carry this important Wisdom into all our dealings with all those around us – especially those who might be choosing to be "mean", or "dishonest", or “selfish” ... or even "cruel". May we each reawaken such humility, and then may we each have the courage to act accordingly.

Amen ... Let it be so.

*“It is not seen as insane when a fighter, under an attack  
that will inevitably lead to his death, chooses to take his own life first.  
In fact, this act has been encouraged for centuries,  
and is accepted even now as an honorable reason to do the deed.  
How is it any different when you are under attack by your own mind?”  
~ Emilie Autumn*

*"Cowardice is nothing to do with it -- suicide takes considerable courage ...  
No, what's selfish is to demand another to endure an intolerable existence,  
just to spare their families, friends, and enemies a bit of soul-searching."  
~ David Mitchell*

*"Despite how most of us pretend to know otherwise,  
all of life remains a Great Mystery." ~ Todd*



## *Tribute 03 ... The Green Sands Beach*

The Green Sands Beach (actually named Papakolea) is quite the remarkable location. One of only four green sand beaches in the world, it gets its unique color from its sand, which is comprised almost entirely of peridot, a semi-precious stone (the gem-quality variant of the mineral olivine).

Back in early spring of 2008, when Todd and I were living together on the Big Island, we took an early-morning trip to this beach -- a Peace-full adventure I remember quite fondly. We were the only two people there that morning, and we both took off all our clothes and sunbathed for a time on the soft, green sand.



sand from the Green Sands Beach ...

And as he was wont to do, Todd then took a dip in the then-gentle surf, and we both enjoyed exploring the crumbling cliffs from which the green sand is steadily "mined" by the wind and the waves (though I will admit that Todd was the one doing most of the climbing). I remember watching him clamber about as he got to a very steep portion of the caldera. I could tell where he wanted to go -- and I could tell that it was not going to be possible for him to get there. He was already so high up the cliff face, and he so wanted to go higher, and yet the rock of which the cliffs are composed is so brittle that he couldn't find the necessary purchase, and returned to me wearing a slight frown -- slide-striding down the steep slope much the same way his ashes tumbled down that same face several years later after we brought him back.

Todd loved gemstones & crystals of all kinds, and even though he was not a fan of things ostentatious, he did always seem to have at least one piece of stone-jewelry on his person during the final ten years or so of his life. He knew a lot about the traditional healing properties of stones & minerals as well, and whenever he did wear them, he wore them purposefully.

I guess that makes it somewhat ironic that peridot happens to be a mineral traditionally recognized as being quite useful in easing chronic depression -- a condition under which Todd suffered mightily for the last several years of his life. I knew this about peridot at the time of our visit, and even though I did not fully subscribe to the theory, I *did* have a faint hope that Todd would somehow be helped -- if not completely cured -- by soaking up the mineral emanations of this most sacred space.

Of course, this did not prove to be the case. Indeed, I seem to remember that Todd was just as depressed as ever at the end of this particular day. And in retrospect, this makes complete sense, for even if peridot did emit frequencies that could have assisted in soothing his depression, Todd would still have had to have *chosen* to harness those energies in order to be healed by them.

And this is just as true for all of us as well. The fleshly machines in which we live our lives are designed to repair themselves. They are designed to return to a state of harmony whenever they slip into discord via injury or illness or mental dis-ease ... Essentially, though they do not always succeed in their mission, our bodies and our minds are engineered to heal. And yet they cannot effectively do so unless we *choose* to align both our ideals & our actions with that ultimate purpose.

Similarly, and far more importantly, we must also realize that our *LOVE* for others cannot "heal" them either. Indeed, despite what we have been taught in school or in church or in movie theaters or at home, our calling is *not* to fix others ... It is *not* to repair them, or correct them, or heal them, or even help them. Our job -- indeed, our greatest honor -- is simply to *LOVE* them ... and thereby give them the best environment possible in which to then possibly -- just maybe -- choose to heal themselves.

And this is true in all cases & under all circumstances; no matter how many times others might disregard our advice, or reject our help, or ignore our pleas, or even ridicule our efforts ... Unconditional *LOVE* is our Calling & our Purpose, and this is true no matter how many times another has come to us asking for Love; and this is true no matter how many times they might have failed us, or used us, or manipulated us, or even harmed us thereby. Whenever asked, the correct response is always some form of a gentle, "Yes"; some form of a warm, "Of course".

Indeed, if there is one thing I learned from my experience living with Todd near the end of his life, it is that our job on this planet is not to "have faith" in others to "get better", or even to hope that they use our Love to eventually do so. No, my Friends, our job is simply to *LOVE* them -- without goal; without expectation; without hope; and without condition ...

And it is our privilege to be able to do so over & over & over again.

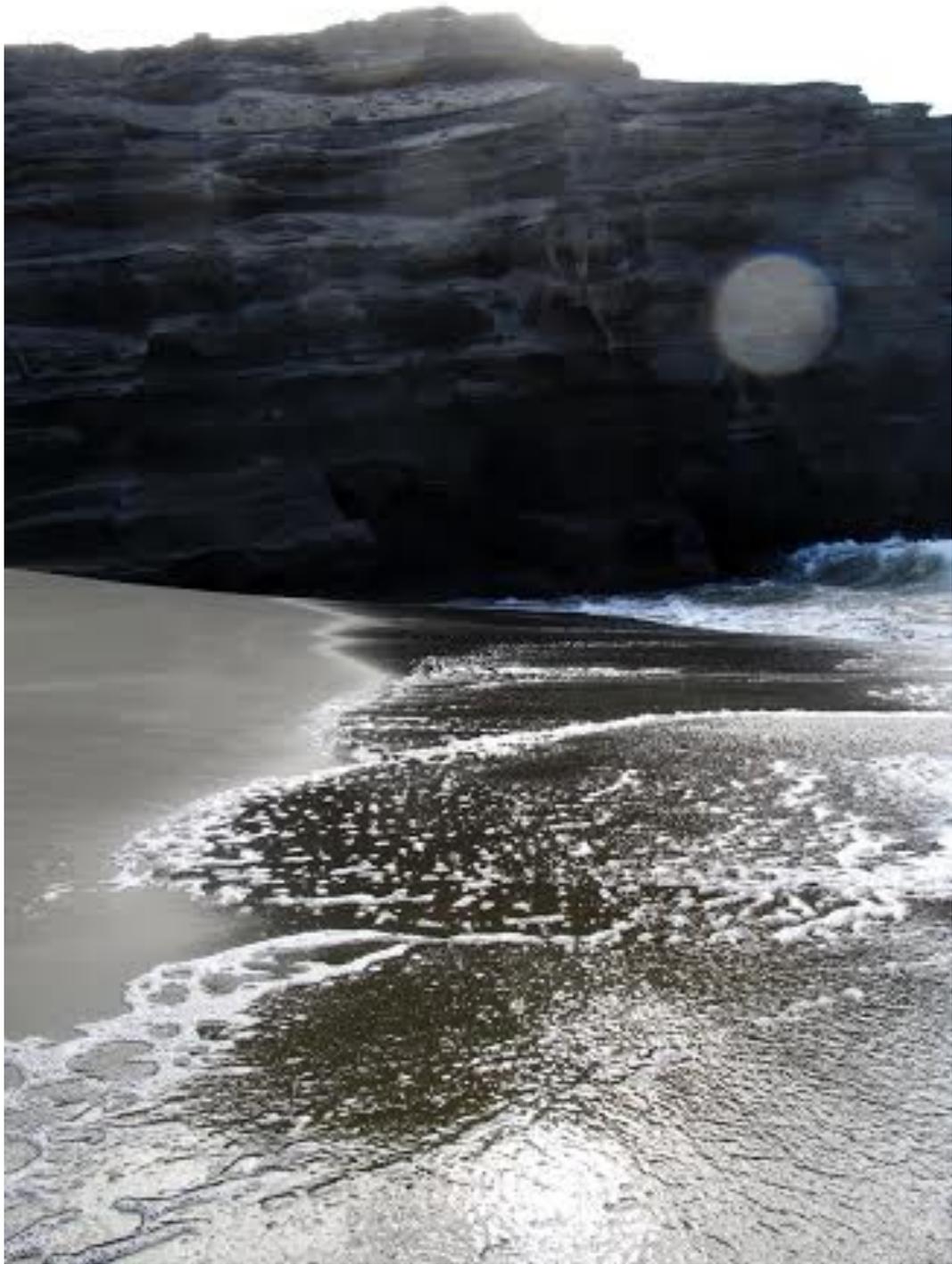
Amen ... Let it be so.

*"The only way Love can last or be even partially potent  
is when it's truly unconditional. The truth is this:  
Love is not determined by the one being loved,  
but rather by the one choosing to Love."  
~ inspired by Stephen Kendrick*



*“Some birds are simply not meant to be caged by this world. Their feathers are too bright; their songs too wild or shrill. So we let them go, or rather, are forced to watch them fly free. And when this departure arises, the part of us that knows it was wrong to cling to them in the first place rejoices, even while the other parts of you realize that the lace you once lived together is that much more drab and dingy for their leaving.” ~ inspired by Stephen King*





## *Tribute 04 ... Ho'okena Beach*

The next-to-last Tribute took place at a beach where Todd apparently lived off & on in the years 2003 & 2004, so it seemed somehow fitting that part of his ashes be placed here as well.

These days, Ho'okena is part public beach and part tourist campground, and yet back in the early 2000's, it was also the location of a small "tent city" of home-free people. Interestingly enough, the very first hitchhiker we picked up on our April 2014 "Todd Tribute Tour" had known Todd, and had actually spent time with him and some mutual friends on this very beach back in the day ... a nice omen, that.

When we arrived, the beach was comfortably filled with tourists and beach-goers. It wasn't as though it were jam-packed with people, and yet there were more than enough folks around so that there seemed to be no suitable spot where our memorial could take place. Undaunted, after clambering over the first few boulders that form the beach's southern border, we quickly discovered the perfect "altar" for our ceremony -- a small rock promontory sheltering a miniature beach, with a large smooth stone in its center.

I found it especially fitting that our tribute could feel so private and so Peace-full even while children played in the surf just a few yards away ... I think Todd would have liked that.

Also intriguing on this day was the "surprise guest" who showed up near the end of the tribute -- a baby crab. While more modern archetypal language would judge the appearance of a black crab to be "ominous" or "foreboding", or even to represent deep sadness or mourning, more traditional meanings tell a quite different -- and in my opinion a much more fitting -- tale. For black is *not* the color of "evil", but is rather the shade of the new Beginning that resides within all endings; the reBirth that rests within all deaths. And even though crabs are indeed the scavengers of the deep -- and in that sense revel in death & the dying, they are also the "janitors of the deep"; representing the ability within each & every one of us to accept & embrace (and thereby transform & "clean up") all things in life that are unwanted, unorthodox or unpleasant. They symbolize our innate ability to "go with the flow" -- to deftly move sideways through all tragedy or crisis -- to choose to see the positive pregnant in every negative, and appreciate the Joy waiting patiently at the heart of every sadness.

Yes, Todd did indeed take a most circuitous route back to "The One" -- a route that, at least in its later years, was often filled with sadness & discord. And yet he has returned to the gentle arms of The Divine regardless ...

... and a hearty "Welcome Home" is in order nonetheless.



*“For death is but a passing phase of Life; a change of dress, a disrobing;  
A birth into the unborn again; a commencing where we ended;  
A starting where we stopped to rest; a crossroad of Eternity;  
A giving up of something ... to possess all things.”  
~ Edwin Leibfreed*

## *Tribute Fifth & Final ... Kua Bay*

I have been truly blessed to have been able to memorialize Todd many times since learning of his death, and it has been a great blessing to have been able to share some of those memorials with you all as well. Each Hawaiian tribute in particular had its own unique set of wonders & each emanated its own unique sense of Peace; each one called forth a unique set of warm memories, and each represented its own unique collection of lessons & wisdoms. And yet, even though I treasure each one of them deeply, the ceremony we held for Todd at Kua Bay was possibly my favorite ...

Why this was the case, I do not know for sure. Maybe it was because I knew that we had honored him over the course of the previous four days in ways that he would have cherished himself -- that he was in that sense finally & truly & fully "laid to rest" ... Maybe it was because of the awe-inspiring & pristine Beauty of our final tribute's setting -- with its miniature "lava arch" openly embracing each incoming wave, and its chartreuse seaweed glowing warmly in the light of the slowly setting sun ... And maybe it was because we had recently learned from mutual friends that Todd had lived happily on this very beach during his final visit to the Big Island in 2010.

Either way, that night was a very special evening commemorating the life & passing of a very special man ... an evening that will forever remind me of a Good Man who will forever remind me of why we are all here -- to *LOVE*. And when I say *LOVE* here, I don't mean the warm & fuzzy "butterflies inside" form of love that we feel in the throes of passion or romantic affection, and neither do I mean the deep sense of calm & comfort we feel when in the presence of good friends or lifelong partners. I don't even mean the glorious joy we all feel when we wake up to loving life itself -- when we pause long enough to simply be happy to be alive at all.

No, while these feelings & emotions & realizations are all fine & good, they are *not* why we are here -- they are *not* the *LOVE* that gives our life its ultimate Meaning, nor are they the *LOVE* that guides us unerringly towards our greatest Bliss & purest Purpose.

No, my Friends, while I indeed dearly loved my brother as a confidant and a friend -- even a "Soulmate", the Love for him that means by far the most to me -- the Love that I carry within me to this day, and the Love that I will take with me one day into eternity, is the **LOVE** I *showed* him ... the *Love* I gave him in silent deeds of Kindness; the *Love* I expressed whenever welcoming him back into my life; the *Love* I showered over him in those times he "least deserved it".

The *LOVE* I reference here -- the *LOVE* that Todd enlivened in me while he was alive, and the *LOVE* of which he reminds me still to this day, is not the warm emotion we feel in times of ease & comfort, but rather is the uncomfortable deed we engage in times of fear or dis-ease.

Yes, it is good to feel "love" for those who are good to us, and it is just as wonderful to revel in times of joy & happiness with those we hold most dear ... **AND**, real *LOVE* only comes to us when we are down or tired or scared or angry or hurt, and yet choose to reach out to Care anyway.

I will freely & humbly admit, there were times (not many, and yet still a few) when I did not give this pure *LOVE* to Todd. There were times when it wasn't "feasible" or convenient ... There were times when I was too tired or too busy or too preoccupied with "personal matters" ... There were times when I didn't think reaching out to him would do any good or make any difference ... There were times when I even took a few emotional steps back -- to allow him to "finally take care of himself".

I am not saying these choices were "bad" or "wrong", of course. They were always well intended and they were always made with Todd's "best interests" at heart. I always cared deeply for Todd, and I always wanted to act in such a way as to somehow help him help himself. And yet looking back now, I have a clearer understanding of the situation, and a much clearer understanding of *LOVE*. And what I now understand is this: Not Loving another person -- not opening up to their requests for help or kindness by offering a whole-being "Of course" -- not embracing them warmly, for whatever reason or rationalization ... is *always* a mistake.

There were times when Todd reached out to me in the last few years of his life when I chose not to fully open myself to him. It is true that these moments were few & far between, and yet they were there nonetheless ... And these are the moments that I would to this very day do almost anything to have back; to -- despite all doubt or reservation -- embrace him anyway; to open my arms one more time anyway ... to selflessly & unconditionally *LOVE* him (the verb) anyway.

And yet that is no longer possible ... That window has closed, and all I am left with is a solid determination to never make that same mistake again – to reach out to every person I encounter each day (even if only with a subtle smile) – to answer every call for help or company with a gentle & heartfelt, "Of course." And I also gently encourage as many of you as possible to do the same, and to do so not only with the ones you love or the ones who are easy to love ...

Indeed, it is important to remember that every single person in our lives sits at the Right Hand of God. This is true for every friend who comforts, and for every enemy who angers. This is true for every lover who soothes, and for every associate who annoys. This is true for every "saint" who inspires, and for every "demon" who frightens ... They are *all* worthy of our *LOVE*, and this no matter what they are professing to us, no matter what they believe about us, and no matter what they are doing to us.

After all, our job is not to fix other people -- or to correct them or to guide them or even to understand them. Our job is to *LOVE* them – to do so every chance we get, and to do so fully & completely; as though it is the last chance we will ever have ...  
... for one day it truly will be.





*"Before your own life flickers and fades to an end,  
use its precious gift to find that which never dies.  
Love is that immortality, for Love does not end when we die,  
but rather radiates outward into the forever ...  
brightening all it touches;  
warming all it comes near."  
~ anonymous*



*“And I will take one from a thousand  
and two from ten thousand,  
and they shall Become a single One.”  
~ Jesus (Gospel of Thomas 23)*