

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

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"Directions for the 21st Century"

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and the
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of the
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By the most morbid of coincidences, I was in the early stages of thinking about my talk for this conference while sitting down there beside the beach a few weeks ago, when there was a commotion over at the Outrigger Canoe Club. It turned out that a seven year-old girl, attending a friend's birthday party, had drowned. Right there. In front of everyone. The awful coincidence was too chilling for me, and I had to put my notes down for some time before I could return to them.

But I have an even more personal interest in you guys, and in the subject of this conference. My father drowned about three months after I was born. I don't know what my life would have been like if that had not happened, but I can assure you I would not be here now, talking with you. His drowning set me on a trajectory totally unlike the one I was on during the brief time he was present in my life.

I suspect that is true of the lives of everyone you save, and of the lives of those left living when you do not warn or save someone, and they drown. Few people have the power and influence over the future that you do.

I notice that lifeguards often strive to equate themselves with police and fire fighters. It is good you do. In Hawaii especially, the three often have overlapping responsibilities. But there is something extra special about water--about swimming and playing in it, and about drowning and dying in it.

We humans are both irresistibly drawn towards the sea, and terrified by it. Like all land-dwelling creatures, our ancestors once lived in the sea. The fact that we still blink our eyes to keep them moist with our own salty tears is a continual reminder of our aquatic origins.

On the other hand, our ancestors did leave the oceans to live on the land, and thus we return to it at our peril. Most of us never venture very far away from the shore. We try to keep our feet firmly on the sandy bottom, and only jump the waves if we assume we can return safely again to old *terra firma*.

Humans are of course similarly confounded by fire. But fire was our own invention; indeed, one of our very first. According to Greek mythology, so angry were the gods with Prometheus, who stole fire from them and brought it to humans, that the gods chained Prometheus to a rock where birds peck out his eyes for all eternity.

The name, "*Prometheus*" actually means "*foresight*"--looking ahead, planning and scheming for the future. The Greek myth warns us that looking into the future is always dangerous, and that trying to control nature for human purposes is forever fraught with tragedy and disaster.

We humans thought we could tame the wildfires for our own benefit and pleasure. It is impossible to imagine even the most primitive of human life without controlled fire. But what humans tame we must forever mind, and we are not very good at paying attention to things. Every devastating forest fire and every charred and smoking home reveals again how difficult it is for humans to mind anything adequately forever. We always slip up, goof off, get drunk, get angry, regret our negligence and stupidity, but continue being negligent and stupid.

What police deal with is the most naturally human of all three groups. They cope with the conflicts and clashes among humans, and between humans and their machines. Fundamental though it may be, there is much less basic in what police deal with than in what you do. Police encounter the dark beast within us all. You wrestle with the fundamental duality of life itself.

As a teacher, I get to touch many lives in many ways. Almost every day, I encounter someone who took one of my classes. Indeed, it is a former student you must blame for the fact that I am your speaker today. Having been a professor at UH for more than 30 years, I have seen a lot of students come and go in my time, and often marveled, and sometimes cringed, at what they have later become, in spite of (or because of) what I tried to do for them.

But my influence is nothing compared to yours. And so I truly salute you and urge you to continue to do your duty with all the diligence, courage, and intelligence you can muster. What you do truly matters. Most people recover from taking a class with me with minimal brain damage. An encounter with you is something one either never forgets, or never remembers.

My older son is a very avid surfer. He learned there, at *The Wall*, many years ago, and surfs wherever he can whenever he can. I don't think he has had need of your services yet, and I pray he never will, but I rest easier knowing you are there to guide or help him if necessary.

For me, I paddled for many years for Healani Canoe Club, in the days of kind, loveable, articulate Sword Murakami. I sat number five in several of his crews and basked in the warmth of his ever-encouraging, highly-scientific remarks about by paddling abilities, such as: " Poooll you lazy f**ka, POOOL!"

Nothing beats being on the ocean in an outrigger canoe (koa, of course. None of this fiberglass crap), at sunset--or in the early morning, when a school of flying fish fling themselves across an entire flotilla of canoes waiting, paddles up, for the start of a long-distance race. Or riding the waves in during the McFarlane regatta on a particularly turbulent July 4. Nothing beats it--except drinking the beer with the crew afterwards, that is.

If any of you have ever heard me speak before (and I assume none of you ever have, or you wouldn't be here now), you may know that I use a surfing analogy a lot whenever I talk about the futures: "*Surfing the Tsunamis of Change.*"

I see the future as coming towards us in the form of sets of mighty waves. Most of us are totally unaware and unconcerned, being wholly consumed by our petty problems of the present. We are sitting on the beach, with our back to the ocean, arguing about who forgot to bring the *laulau* and complaining about the sand in our food and the ants in our pants.

Meanwhile at our backs, there is a mounting roar of oncoming waves.

I think it is high time we stand up, turn around, and do what surfers do, which is not immediately to jump in to the ocean, but rather to observe; to discuss with other surfers about the conditions of the waves and tides, find where the sharks are trolling. Study the waves carefully, wax your board well, make your decision, and then paddle out to surf those tsunamis of change. Climb up on your board and enjoy the ride of your life.

Though you wipe out at the end.

At least you will have tried to use the power of those waves to go where you want to go, and to enjoy it. You cannot avoid the waves, you can not run away from them. You must either try to surf them, or be swept away by them.

Now, of course, it is probably not possible to surf a tsunami and it is best not to try. Indeed, perhaps one reason I am drawn to the "surfing tsunamis" metaphor is because my mother-in-law, Marsue McShane, was one of the school teachers swept off the roof of the elementary school in Laupahoehoe by the Big Island tsunami of 1946. Although she was battered by the waves, and had all of her clothes ripped off of her, Marsue was a survivor. She was eventually rescued by Leabert Fernandez. Being the proper, though naked, woman that she was, she did the only honorable thing she could do under the circumstances: she married Leabert. I am sure some of you know their children, especially Linda and Holly Fernandez.

It is my intention in using the tsunami metaphor to indicate the magnitude, power, and rapidity of the change lying ahead, and to ask you to spend some time preparing for it so you can make the most of these mighty forces sweeping towards us all from the future.

At one level, the existence of tsunamis racing from the future that you have had to learn to ride is not entirely new. You and your predecessors have already surfed successfully the very impressive tsunamis which led to the creation of the Hawaiian Lifeguard Association, the Ocean Safety and Lifeguard Services Division of Honolulu, and the Emergency Services Department of the City and County of Honolulu.

Ralph Goto did a very good job of trying to inform me about your history and current situation. So think backwards with me for a few minutes. What was life like here before these water safety organizations were created, and why and when did they come into existence anyway? What lessons from the past might we learn in order better to anticipate our futures?

Because of its remote location far from any other major land masses, Hawaii was one of the last places on Earth to be discovered and occupied by humans. And only certain rare types of humans visited Hawaii for the first 2000 years after its initial discovery. The ocean-going Polynesians who first came here were absolutely unique in many ways: in their high tech sailing vessels; in the superb software that enabled them to navigate across vast distances; and in the will and courage that compelled them to set sail into the abyss, often without any clear idea of where they were going, or only with enormous trust in the knowledge and abilities of those who had gone before, and safely returned to lead them on.

For almost two thousand years, no other humans on the face of the Earth had that combination of voyaging hardware, navigating software, and visionary *orgware* that the early Polynesians had.

But eventually, certain people on the shores of Europe developed their own vessels, navigation techniques, and ideologies that caused them to venture forth in search of new lands and people.

And eventually, as you know, some of them stumbled upon these blessed isles.

For over one hundred years, that was it. While these few western men and women in their tiny ships were, by virtue of their ideas and technologies--especially their ability to read and write--able to cause enormous social and environmental change here, Hawaii was still a very remote part of the world, difficult to get to for almost anyone.

Then, a hundred or so years ago, with the steamship, a few wealthy or lazy people were able to come to Hawaii for no other purpose than a kind of leisure tourism. Most of them brought considerable money with them, and stayed for several months until the steamships carried them back home again. They were very few in number, and, for the most part, resided in one of three small hotels huddled together along the shore at Waikiki where enterprising beach boys provided for their exotic and diverse needs.

Then came the propeller-driven airplane, enabling more people to come to Hawaii. But not too many more: The airplane trip was still long and expensive. Few people had the money or the time

to come to Hawaii by plane or ship.

It was indeed the jet plane that finally made mass tourism possible here. But the jet plane was far from enough to make it happen. Indeed, you need to think of all the other things that made mass tourism feasible, and your services necessary. Without them all, you would not be here today, concerned about the future as you are.

It still takes at least five hours to fly to Hawaii, and the trip is really not all that pleasant. But people come here in enormous, and, amazingly enough, growing numbers.

Why? The jet plane is one reason. But of tremendous importance is the myth that has been manufactured about Hawaii--the mystique, the mystery, the belief in Hawaii and Waikiki as a very special place. That myth was created first of all by the tales of the South Pacific told by early western travelers. More recently, it was widely spread by the invention and diffusion of the radio--the Honolulu airport once had a monument to Arthur "Buy 'um By the Carton" Godfrey whose influence in mythologizing Hawaii via his radio programs was enormous. Hawaii Calls. The Kodak Hula Show, Hapa hula music. Hollywood films. Elvis Presley's "Blue Hawaii". TV, "Hawaiian Eye," "Adventures in Paradise," "Hawaii 5-0"; the Surfing Music of those other Beach Boys. All of those, and many more, helped build the myth of Hawaii.

And of course it *IS* nice here. No doubt about that. But no where near as alluring as the myth makes tourists believe.

Without the myth, all the jet planes in the world would not lure a single tourist here. Without the myth, the jet planes would be empty. Technology is important--crucial--but not sufficient. Vision and enabling social inventions are also required.

There were other technologies that made Hawaii attractive to vast numbers of tourists too. Consider the changing technology of surfboards themselves, from huge, heavy, wooden tankers to light, short, boards of epoxy, fiber, and glue in the late 50s and 60s. Jim Richardson now is developing some even newer, lighter, stronger composites.

Consider also the technologies which led to the development of boogie boards and fins. And to parasailing, windsurfing, jet skis, now sail surfing--each bringing new thrills, new conflicts, and new dangers along with new opportunities for marketing, selling, repairing, and stealing.

The invention of the automobile and of paved roads, and all the other supporting technologies and systems (helicopters included) along with the increase in leisure time for the huge middle class, made it possible easily to get to places that were once remote and inaccessible, spreading and expanding the thrills, conflicts, and dangers from Waikiki throughout all parts of all of the islands.

Among the most important social inventions of all was consumer credit. I can assure you, in spite of all the other technological and social changes that happened over the past decades, none is more important than the invention of the globally-useful credit card that enables you to go anywhere with nothing but pieces of plastic in your pocket or purse--linked electronically, via satellites, along with your airline and hotel reservations, giving you the ability to buy anything anywhere.

Well, not really "buy" since you never really pay off your debt--just the service charge is all that is wanted. That is the key feature of consumer credit. You can acquire what you could never buy. But you are forever deeper and deeper in debt, which keeps the economy going and you chained to it, happily singing each morning

I owe, I owe, so it is off to work I go.

Frequent flyer points. That is another great social invention as far as Hawaii is concerned. The only reason most commercial airlines still fly to Hawaii at all any more is because they are jammed with people, impelled by the myth, and enabled by their mileage, and not paying a single penny for the flight they are actually on.

How much longer do you think THAT is going to last, especially when the price of oil rises steeply, as it will. When in the future will it finally cost as much to fly to Hawaii as it does to fly to Samoa, for example? That day will come, and when it does, the tourists will stop swarming.

And who will fly here anyway if the weather here becomes like that of Samoa? Or if the social conditions here become like Mexico, which does, after all, have some pretty nice beaches as well?

Or if protective ozone continues to fall, and skin cancer continues to rise so that people decide to go to the artificial attractions of Las Vegas rather than the equally artificial, but outdoor, dangers of Waikiki?

I am sure you get the point: you and your job would have been absolutely impossible without the hardware, the software and the *orgware* of the past half-century.

So what about the futures?

Some of the tsunamis which may be of special relevance to you are these:

One is the probability of significant global warming, climate change, and sea level rise.

This is something Americans don't like to talk about. We are in profound denial that this even might be a problem, let alone admitting that it is. I am absolutely stunned that a nation which eagerly spent trillions of dollars and twisted millions of lives in preparation for a Cold War which did not turn hot with an adversary which does not exist should choose entirely to ignore the far greater security threat of global change.

The most recent edition of Science, the official journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, asked, "Is the planet getting warmer? Is the hydrologic cycle changing? Are weather and climate becoming more extreme or variable? The short answer to all of those questions, taking into account an admittedly incomplete data set is, 'yes'" (25 August 2000, p. 1257).

Why we, on these tiny, fragile islands, with our thin protective reefs, low-lying lands, and shallow freshwater lens, are not hysterical with concern about global change is beyond me. But no. Instead we have a Governor who proudly announced recently that he had "traded in [his] Lincoln Town Car for a new shiny black Lincoln Navigator," which you will recognize is one mother of a SUV. "The car is leased from Lincoln Mercury as part of a national program to offer new Lincolns to all 50 governors. Cayetano was one of 17 governors who opted for the Navigator instead of a Town Car." "The Cayetanos are something of an official SUV family, as first lady Vicky Cayetano just turned in a state-rented Oldsmobile for a new Chevrolet Blazer."

Everything I just said was quoted verbatim from page one of the *Star-Bulletin* for Saturday, May 27, 2000. However, also on very same page one of the same edition of the *Star-Bulletin* was yet another article about the fact that SUV's not only are extraordinarily dangerous, but also are unmerciful gas-guzzlers and environmental polluters.

Talk about great timing and placement! I immediately emailed Diane Chang, editor of the *Star-*

Bulletin, asking if it was only a coincidence that the two items appeared together on the first page, and also asking if she intended to comment on it in an editorial. She replied that it *WAS* a coincidence, and that, while she was not going to write an editorial about it, did I want to write something. I replied that, "as a futurist, I can look into the future and see that that comment would get me into more trouble than it is worth." I mean I am very stupid, I am not THAT stupid.

She emailed back to me, "Oh pooh. You're no fun!" Which, I admit, I am not.

So the event passed without further notice, until now and here. So our Governor--and, indeed, all of us--continue to do our bit to contribute to global warming by the way we choose to live our lives.

Significant climate change might very well mark the end of mass tourism in Hawaii, and significant sea level rise will erode our lovely beaches even faster than they are eroding and being replaced now.

I cannot imagine anyone who should be more personally and professionally concerned about this, and thus should be more active in creating public policy in anticipation of it, than you. It is your future that is directly at stake. If you continue to do nothing, then you are indeed violating the first law of ocean safety--don't turn your back on the ocean. It is rising, and that ain't good. So, let's face it.

A second, related tsunami which I have already alluded to is the potential end of sun-based tourism and the widespread preference for safe, virtual, entirely indoors and artificial experiences.

While it might be hard to see it here in Hawaii now, research clearly shows that more and more humans everywhere on the planet are spending less and less time outdoors. We are becoming cave dwellers once again, being certain that our homes, our offices, our malls, our transportation and everything connecting them to each other are fully insulated from the real outdoors.

As "nature" everywhere gives way to managed gardens and then to entirely artificial environments with only simulated threats and dangers, easily reprogrammable and with the off-switch and reset-button never far from hand, just what will a water safety professional have to do?

Of course we are well on the way, aren't we? I mean, just what is "natural" here about our beaches and shore lines anyway. The entire island is basically just another Disneyland designed to look like the Polynesian myth we have encouraged our tourists to want. Ole Uncle Ben was not far off-base some years ago when he suggested building a real Disneyland inside Diamond Head Crater. I mean, why not?

But the problem of immediate concern to you should be the fact that lying out in the sun and getting skin cancer faster might soon turn out to be about as popular as smoking cigarettes has become. Americans are becoming extremely risk-averse in more and more ways, and at some point in the not-too-distant-future, I anticipate it is going to become very popular again (as it was in my grandmother's day) to be as white as you can be--to cover up every millimeter of your body to be certain that the sun doesn't get to any of it.

In spite of a lot of international talk and even a bit of action, the hole in the protective ozone layer over Antarctica was recently proclaimed to be bigger this year, sooner, and for a longer time, than ever before. While ozone depletion itself is probably not going to be a big threat here in Hawaii for a while, the general perception that a deep sun tan is simply a pit stop on the race with carcinoma for more and more people will eventually spread, and sun-based tourism here and everywhere will die--or at least be drastically curtailed.

Of course, just as some people still smoke cigarettes, all indications of their certain lethality to the contrary notwithstanding, so also may some people continue to suntan on the beach. But I am not sure the public will pay you to watch them fry and die.

A third tsunami which will hit Hawaii and the rest of the world concerns demographics.

This means first of all that global population will continue to soar over the 21st Century. This is also something we Americans have been lulled into ignoring. But it is not clear to me that the Malthusian race between population growth and agricultural productivity will continue to be won by the farmers--or by agribusiness, more truthfully. Most of the optimistic estimates about future food production have been based on the assumption of the rapid use of genetically engineered plants and animals. But it turns out that a lot of the world is opposed to genetically-engineered plants, and so famine might have a bright future after all. I don't see how conventional methods can feed 12 billion people.

Why is that a concern to us here in Hawaii? Because we import almost all of our food. If food is plentiful, and Hawaii has the money to buy it, as has been true recently, then we have no problem. But if the one billion people in China, for example, or another billion in Europe were to decide they need the food for themselves, and can pay for it, there is little hope that we few people here in far off Hawaii will be able to steer enough food in our direction.

However, if we assume that global population growth and the ability to feed, house, and employ it is not a problem, we are still faced with the fact that the relative size of cultures as we have known it in the past will be quite different in the future.

One of my favorite statistics is to remind everyone that one hundred years ago, the population of the world was, for the first time, roughly balanced between whites and nonwhites--fifty percent each--however those categories might be defined. Because birth rates among nonwhite nations has been much higher than in Europe and North America, the white proportion of the world population is now down to less than 20%, while nonwhites are over 80%. If fertility trends continue, as they almost certainly will, then by the mid-point of the 21st century, whites will be around only two or three percent of the world's population.

Speak of an endangered species! Time to organize a walk for *Whitey*. Take a white person home for Christmas. Or do what we usually do here in Hawaii: make sure your children are not white.

On the other hand, if avoiding a sun tan and being as lily white as you can be is also a trend of the future, as I suggested before, then those few white folks who do exist by the end of this century might be even more privileged and pampered than they are now. Which is something else for OHA to think about, I suppose.

Specifically here in Hawaii, whatever happens to sovereignty--and I for one think it *WILL* happen because it is just--the demographic mix of Hawaii over the 21st Century will be quite different from what it is now, or was in the past. And we need to understand the leisure time preferences of our future generations that might be markedly different from those who came or lived here over the past hundred years. Until one hundred years ago, few people in the world anywhere played in the ocean, and surfing was almost dead even here in Hawaii. We cannot be sure that people thirty, or fifty or one hundred years from now will have any interest in water sports whatsoever.

Related to the tsunami of demographic change is generational change.

The old "can do", "go for broke", hardworking, super patriotic "GI generation" which dominated the entire second half of the 20th Century is almost dead and soon will be gone. The small "Silent generation" which followed them is in the midst of retirement and are too few to worry about

anyway. The "Baby Boomers", who have contested with the GI's for dominance, are now firmly in control, and will be, because of their large numbers and outrageous hubris, dominant for the next several decades. If anything is certain, they will try to live active, tax-avoiding, death-defying lives, plunging headlong into the surf directly from their wheelchairs and walkers. Granny power has a long, bright future, I hate to tell you. And they intend to sit right up there in the tower with you.

You have all heard about "Generation X"--some of you ARE Generation X--that small group of discontents who came after the Boomers. Everywhere I go, managers complain about what a bunch of slackers the GenXers are. No body wants to hire them because they are so lazy and self-centered.

Well, be of good cheer, because immediately behind them, about to emerge from the high schools, are the first of the generation, born in the 1980s and 90s. which will rival the Boomers for dominance over the first half of the 21st Century. These are often called the "Millennials", and they are super educated, super obedient, super hardworking superkids. And they are "only" children. The single, pampered off-spring of two hardworking parents. Each child goes to Punahou, has her own nanny, her own violin teacher, her own soccer coach, her own Mandarin Chinese instructor. The Millennials have always been under adult supervision. They have always played by the rules--and they believe there are, and always will be, rules to play by, coaches to teach them, and referees to enforce them.

So don't fret about the GenXers. Hang in there for the Millenials, soon to come.

Just as technologies over the past fifty years have brought so much change to what you do--to your very reason for existing-- so is it certain that continuing and emerging new technologies will continue to change and alter this organization in the years to come.

I have already suggested that developments in virtual reality will be a challenge to you. As it becomes easier and easier, safer and safer, and cheaper and cheaper to simulate realities, the role of actual physical activities will change. Certainly they will not vanish, and for many people, the fact that everything can be simulated better than a real experience will make the real experience even more desirable. But not for most people. Thus the mass basis of water activities and water safety may be coming to an end.

The most potent new technologies will result from developments in *genetic engineering*. In spite of moral and ideological objections, and perhaps even laws, against genetically modified plants, animals, and humans, new intelligent, modified human and post human lifeforms will be emerging all around us over the 21st Century and beyond. They will have capabilities and limitations quite different from those of humans now. There might be some very interesting human adaptations to aquatic life that you might want to think about, including for example, not only organic fins but also wings and gills. Or developing a nice hard shell on your back might be just the thing to protect you from the ultraviolet rays of the ozone-depleted sun. I am working on that now. At least on the soft underbelly part. I have that down pretty well. Developing my hardshell back is my current project.

Oh it is a great time to be a lifeguard in Hawaii. Probably none better, past or future. But I am sure the moral of my little story is this: adapt or die. You have adapted wonderfully to changed situations in the past, and, with proper foresight and preparation you can adapt to the changes emerging in the futures.

But just as changing in the past meant becoming more scientific and professional and less emotional and voluntary, so also do I suspect you need to have a rare combination of increasingly high-tech capabilities as well as humane and compassionate predispositions. It is hard to be at the same time a nerd, an athlete, and a mother, but that is what you will probably need to be.

I wanted to end my talk with an inspiring poem about lifeguards. I spent several hours surfing the Internet looking for something. There was a famous poem by the major poet James Dickey called "The Lifeguard" but it used the term metaphorically, not as I intended. And there were a few maudlin poems written by kids. I didn't know what I wanted for sure, but I didn't find anything that stood out as just right. Do you know of any you would recommend?

There was one poem, however, that I found and will read to you. It certainly is not what I was looking for. But I suspect this poem will ring true to a lot of you, even though Ralph Goto may not want to post it on your website as your new official poem. It is by a woman, and would be more impressive if read by a woman, but here goes:

Lifeguard
By Patty Mooney

His mown-down hair
reminds you of someone else.
He brings slanted rain into your room
spends a night
months at sea,
every thought of a woman
tossing.
He showers in the morning
leaves all the lights on,
wet towels in the bathroom.
It's his summer months
enthralment with sun. Atlantic City lifeguard,
this bed his quarter-mile stretch
of sand. I'm the chick he pulled to safety
last night. I'll call you,
he yells, butterfly strokes
out the surging front door.

FZQ o SUMMER 1999

OK. That obviously won't do as your official poem. It seems to assume that all lifeguards are male, amateurs and womanizers. And we KNOW none of that isn't true, right? So, if you know of a poem--or song--you would prefer me to end with, let me know later.

Until then, I leave you with the lyrics of an old Jimmie Buffet song I often end my talks with. I mean it to show that it is up to you to evaluate what I have said, and either discard, adapt, or go well beyond my limited vision and imagination. It is your life, not mine, we are talking about. More importantly, it is the lives of all you seek to guard and save:

*"And all the changes keep on changing
And the good old days, they say are gone.
And only wisemen and some newborn fools
Say they know what's going on.
But I sometimes think the only change
Is in how I feel and see
And that the only changes going on
Are going on in me."*



Suggestions, comments and recommendations are welcomed. These pages are a project of the Hawaiian Lifeguard Association, a not for profit, professional association of Hawaii's lifeguards devoted to the advancement of lifesaving services and public education on beach and ocean safety.

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Aloha!

