

HO'IKE

VISIONS OF PARADISE

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Erik VanDenburgh
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Trust Him and Go Forward!

As I look back over my life, I have so many fond memories growing up in the Pacific Northwest. One of my favorite things was going to my best friend Seth's house in the Blue Mountains of Washington. When you were at Seth's house, there were so many fun things to do outside. We would go swimming in his pool, ride dirt bikes on the logging roads, and build forts in the woods.

During one visit, we decided to explore a new coyote trail Seth had found. The start of the trail was a small opening in the brush just big enough for us to crawl through. This trail led us halfway down the mountainside to a huge pine tree. As we looked around, we found a small animal den that appeared to be abandoned. This was the perfect place to build a fort.

We started by clearing out the twigs and brush and digging a little hole for a fire pit before collecting big tree limbs to *Continued on page 2*

Continued from page 1 build our shelter. We were having the best time until one of us heard the sound only a wild animal could make. Our happiness quickly turned into fear as we heard something approaching through the woods.

We raced for the big pine tree and scrambled up it like wild cats. Our imaginations ran wild with images of bears and cougars stalking us throughout the forest. We brainstormed elaborate plans on how we might escape, but finally agreed that our best course of action was to remain quiet and stay where we were.

After what seemed like hours, we heard a familiar sound. It was the voice of Seth's mother calling us. At last, someone was there who could rescue us! We yelled to her and explained our predicament while strongly encouraging her to get a gun and come save us. This, of course, was not going to happen, and she eventually convinced us to climb down out of the tree to go home.

When situations arise today that seem impossible, sometimes all we need is a voice to encourage us to move forward. I'm reminded of the story of the Children of Israel. They had just left Egypt and were camping at the base of the mountains by the Red Sea when someone heard Pharaoh's army with chariots coming after them. Panic set in, and they cried out. Then Moses said to the people, "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent" (Exodus 14:13-14, ESV). Then in verse 15, God asks Moses, "Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward." The following scenes are not only ones of deliverance but have become a source of encouragement throughout the ages for all God's people.

Retelling the "Boys and the Bear" story reminds me that God is up in the pine tree with us and isn't afraid of any bear. I have reflected on this story a lot over the past year. Sometimes it seems the Hawaii Conference is up a big pine tree, hiding from bears as we look at the challenges facing us: inflation, cost of living increases, deficit budgets, low working capital, deferred housing maintenance, personnel challenges, pastoral downsizing, church redistricting, Maui wildfires—and the list goes on. Then I hear the words of Jesus say, "Move forward. I will fight the battles for you." And I have seen Him do just that!

I have seen our committees work overtime to find solutions to difficult problems while seeking the Lord in prayer; churches without a pastor being gracious and understanding while we go through the redistricting process; pastors rallying to pick up the slack with extra church assignments without complaining; tithes gains due to our members being faithful with their stewardship; and members coming together to support communities in times of disaster. Truly, salvation is ours!

It resonates with what Ellen G. White wrote in 1892: "We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us" (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 10). Throughout history, God has shown us He is faithful and He can be trusted. I truly believe that no matter how dark it can seem at times, God indeed has a bright future waiting for us. He only asks that we trust Him and "Go forward!"

By Erik VanDenburgh

LEIS

Women's Ministry Group

Holds Conference

The women's ministry group Ladies Encircled in Service (LEIS) began hosting an annual women's ministry conference with the group's formation in 1992.

The gatherings were paused by covid. The restart in 2022 brought the women together again. LEIS' current leader, Janice Andres, said that the beautiful night sky over that event symbolizes for her the gathering of the Trinity up above as we came out of the pandemic's dark period.

This year's gathering at the beautiful Honokaa church on the island of Hawaii was themed "Walking on Water with Jesus." Cool island breezes greeted the women filling the sanctuary for Women's Retreat/ Recharge Day on Sabbath, September 23. The dynamic and





engaging speaker, Sharon Ferguson-Quick, gave inspirational examples of Jesus “blessing us in the storm.” A key point of her presentation was that Jesus will do impossible things for us in a storm. Charity Espina said, “Jesus’ walking on water experience gave us a higher standard of trusting in Him while getting to Him. Jesus saying, ‘Come. Step out in faith!’ applies to us all—from then and still, now.”

The goal of the conference was to re-energize, encourage, and strengthen the women in attendance through a connection on a heart level with their sisters in Christ. As the women lifted their voices in song, their weights and cares seemed to fall away. There were small group sessions for discussion, sharing, and Bible study.

The wonderful lunch was one of the highlights of the day. The meal was prepared in such abundance that the overflow headed home with attendees. There was fun and laughter through games and a first-time conference event: a visit to the white elephant gift shop, filled with attendee-provided, gently used items. Everyone took home at least one gift. Denise Ferro shared, “Sometimes we are engulfed in our day-to-day life, and

we forget to breathe. This weekend was a breath of fresh air!”

As the women came together for the afternoon session, the speaker asked them to remember what they are capable of doing if they keep their eyes on Jesus when He calls. The women left buoyed by the words of Ellen White, “Nothing but an eye firmly fixed upon the Saviour will enable us to tread the stormy billows of the world” (*The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 2, p. 270). Attendee Mae John shared at the end of the program, “I needed the recharge for my spiritual growth. I’m leaving fully charged and ready to conquer.”





By Sara Baroro

HMA Students Attend Student Leadership Conference

Students from Hawaiian Mission Academy (HMA) were among those from many Adventist academies across the Pacific Union who gathered in late September at Leoni Meadows in Northern California for the annual Leadership Camp. This is a special trip because our student leadership team, being from Hawaii, gets to meet other student leaders from across the union. The training and effort put into this event show how important our youth leaders are for the future of the church. Here are a few examples of what our student leaders at HMA had to say about their experience at Leadership Camp this year.

“Leadership Camp with Hawaiian Mission Academy taught me the importance of opportunity, courage, and sincerity. It has taught me many other things and that it’s not easy. However, my younger self would have never imagined being a ‘leader.’ I believe nothing is impossible when a person is determined and strives for growth.” Ellie Yook, HMA ASHMA president

“Being at Leadership Camp has taught me how to help others grow in their skills and become leaders themselves. It has given me an opportunity to exercise teamwork from a leader’s perspective and work on communication skills that would be necessary in a normal workplace environment. Along with the physical responsibilities and duties placed on me, my leadership positions have also affected my social responsibilities and duties by holding me accountable for my words and actions, therefore causing me to become a respectful and self-aware individual.” Schylan Safotu, HMA ASHMA religious vice president

“I met the most amazing people at Leadership Camp! Through meeting new people, I was able to come out of my shell and connect with others who were like me—people who had ideas but were afraid to share them due to the worry of what others around them would think. These individuals taught me the importance of communication in making a team work. It can’t be just one person trying to lead everything; we have to

work together. Since returning from Leadership Camp, I have been more open to sharing my ideas with my school student leadership team so that we can effectively help our school friends and community.” Sophia Nelson, HMA ASHMA social vice president

“My experience at Leoni Meadows 2023 Leadership Camp was wonderful! As senior class president, I was able to meet other presidents across the Pacific Union Conference and exchange ideas while brainstorming for the upcoming year. I was able to meet at least one person from every school, and I have shared ongoing connections with many people after the camp. Leadership camp helped me prepare for the school year early while having many supportive presidents to guide me along the way. My favorite part about camp was getting into our T-shirt groups and doing many relay rotations such as the rock wall, go-kart racing, and the leap of faith. All in all, I personally loved this wonderful experience and would encourage many people to take this amazing opportunity and assume an office position in their school.” Elena Freitas, HMA senior class president

Our leaders came back with a sense of purpose and service for their school. They are looking at ways to implement some of the ideas they learned from other student leaders and have been reenergized to keep serving their fellow classmates. Not only did they experience leadership growth, they also experienced personal growth. Being challenged to step out of their comfort zones was a recurring theme from all the leaders who attended.

We are blessed that the Pacific Union trains the next generation of leaders.

