

Cal's Eulogy (II)

August 14, 2009

Calvin Hiromu Sakata was born on October 11, 1952 to Satoru and Patricia Sakata. Dean later joined the Sakata family. Cal grew up in Wahiawa and attended Hanalani School which was then known as King School during his elementary school years, Wahiawa Intermediate and then Leilehua High School. Cal went on to graduate from Fresno Pacific University and got his masters degree in special education from Pepperdine University.

Cal, or Mr. Sakata as many of you knew him, was a great friend to me for nearly the last 10 years. We taught together in the resource room at Mililani Mauka Elementary then at Mililani 'Ike Elementary. During this time, we laughed and cried together, fought with each other and on the behalf of our students.

When I think of Mr. Sakata, I think of the words: teacher, advocate, passionate. Mr. Sakata was a one in a million kind of teacher. He taught from his heart. His students were more than just pupils; they were his children. He taught beyond language arts and math. Mr. Sakata taught his students appropriate behaviors by using the phrases "time and place" and "play the game". It was okay to make a mistake in our class. "Rewind the video" was a fun way to erase a mistake and practice the better way of doing or saying something. Developing positive relationships was very important. Mr. Sakata taught our students the "Bag test": Look at your parent's face or your teacher's face. If they got bags under their eyes, you better behave. If you act up when they got bags, you'll get into trouble because they're tired. Every year our class had a theme that we focused upon. One year our theme was "You can't stop the waves, but you can

learn to surf.” Basically, you can’t stop things from happening to you, but you can make the best of it. That’s exactly what Mr. Sakata did his whole life.

Every student of his and their parents knew that Mr. Sakata was in their corner; he was their advocate. He fought for the underdog, especially for those with a learning disability like himself. Growing up, he knew he was different. In his own words, “I hated school. I was sad, embarrassed, and miserable.” He loved stories, but the symbols in a book made no sense to him. Math was a foreign language and PE was a nightmare because he wasn’t sure of his own left or right and he was convinced that any ball (baseball, basketball, tennis ball, etc.) had a personal vendetta against him. Learning turned around for him, however, when a caring teacher recognized his love for stories. She tirelessly worked with him until he read his first novel cover to cover at age 16. From this moment on, he knew he wanted to be a teacher for those with learning disabilities to help them know that despite their disability they, too, can learn. Mr. Sakata was no longer sad, embarrassed, or miserable about being dyslexic. He surfed that wave of dyslexia to great heights.

His own experiences and feelings of inadequacy stemming from his early years fueled his passion to be the best teacher and advocate for his students that he could be. He was a board member of HIDA – the Hawaii Branch of the International Dyslexia Association from 1996-2001 and again from 2003-2007. He loved being a part of HIDA. He planned the annual Teen Conferences, helped with symposiums and workshops, and gave many speeches. October was dyslexic awareness month and he thrived on helping with the activities. In 2001, he was

named DOE Teacher of the Year from Mililani Mauka Elementary and the following year he was named Volunteer of the Year from HIDA.

Mr. Sakata shared his heroes with the class as well. As you can tell, he liked Mickey Mouse, especially the pie eye Mickey of 1929. However, his idol was Walt Disney, a fellow dyslexic who learned to surf the waves of difficulties, disappointment and devastating failure before reaching success. One of Walt Disney's quotes became his motto: "If you can dream it, you can do it!" Another hero was misunderstood as a child because he was slow in learning how to speak yet he grew up to be a deep thinker. This hero was Albert Einstein. Mr. Sakata and I bought a life size poster of Albert Einstein and laminated it. Mr. Sakata put Albert up in one of our teacher's bathrooms so that anyone who went in there could do some deep thinking. One of Albert Einstein's quotes reflected Mr. Sakata's philosophy on life: "Not everything that can be counted counts and not everything that counts can be counted."

Being a passionate teacher and advocate went beyond the classroom and intertwined with his personal life. Mr. Sakata personally picked up students and transported them to soccer practice or games when they had no other way to get there. He went out of his way to secured scholarship money for students needing tutoring. He welcomed students and their parents into his home when they needed a listening ear. He attended birthday parties, graduation ceremonies and parties, weddings, and when his former students started their own families, he attended their baby lu'au. He visited students in the hospital or other health agencies to provide emotional and moral support to them and their families. This he did throughout the years including as recently as some short months ago

despite his own health concerns and excruciating pain. He was always giving and putting others before himself.

In addition to being Mr. Sakata to me and many others of you, he was Cal: a friend, Christian, and survivor. Things did not come easily for Cal, yet he persevered and did his best to overcome his challenges. He loved attending Calvary Chapel. He especially enjoyed the music. Cal was very observant. He noticed that at church women clapped one way and men clapped another yet his own clapping was always off. He bought several worship CD's so I could help him practice clapping in rhythm for his church services. He was encouraged by Phillipians 4:13 "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Whenever Cal spoke at a workshop or event, he always brought his podium with him and his ruler. This scripture is on his ruler that he used to keep his place while reading his script. Speaking in front of a crowd, large or small, believe or not, was not easy for him. Yet he persevered through Christ who strengthened him. He had many other challenges. When he was a teenager, he had to take the permit test repeatedly before he could pass it to get his driver's permit. Did you know that Cal applied to over 20 colleges and universities before he was finally accepted to one? Even after he graduated from college, he couldn't get a teaching job. Imagine what your life would have been like he gave up. "If you dream it, you can do it." "Not everything that can be counted counts and not everything that counts can be counted."

Cal always stood up for everyone. He argued and fought ferociously if he perceived you picking on one of his kids or if he thought you treated someone with a disability unjustly. Or, he fought with you if he thought he was saving you

from yourself. In his own words Cal always said, "I only fight with people I care about." Sometimes I wish he didn't care so much about me. If he was on a war path, he didn't hold back. Still, he was compassionate and humble. When he finally realized he was wrong, he apologized in his Cal way. This is just one example of many: Leandra, I guess I do have the dinosaur syndrome, Big Body, small brains. I can't argue with you especially with my past of misunderstanding and miscues. I know in my heart, you did the right thing but you know me, I always have to put my two cents in. I'm just sorry.

May 2004 started Cal on what he called his Cancer Journey. Cal always needed to be unique, even in cancer, he was unique. He had an extremely rare type of aggressive prostate cancer. Even with this news he put others first. He scheduled all of his appointments, surgeries, and treatments around the school schedule so he could teach and attend his meetings. At first the greatest side affect that he suffered from was severe fatigue. Still, he visited others in the hospital, including former students, and volunteered to feed the homeless and did many selfless acts of kindness.

Since December 2007, however, his cancer metastasized throughout his body including his bones. He also suffered from numerous, painful canker sores for over a year. These caused intense pain all the time. Yet, he didn't let the pain stop him. He loved life and teaching. Cal reflected upon 1 Chronicles 16:11-12, "Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always. Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and judgments he pronounced." This scripture brought him comfort during the times when the pain was unbearable.

Less than a year later, Cal had to start radiation treatment which he was to originally miss two weeks of school. That leave, however, was extended through the end of the first quarter. After his treatments, he was disappointed because the radiation relieved some pain for a short period of time. During this trial, he focused on Psalms 46:10, "Be still and know that I am God." He found joy, beauty, and peace in the sunsets, watching Naaman sleep, and in seeing the full moon. "Not everything that can be counted counts and not everything that counts can be counted."

I was with Cal at his doctor's appointment during which he was told that he most likely had 6 months left. That was a difficult appointment because I could tell that the news didn't sink in. While waiting for his medication, he asked me what the doctor meant by six months. I explained it to him. He said, "Oh." WE repeated this scenario two more times before we headed to my car. The fourth time Cal asked me again while we were sitting in the car. This time it sank in and he cried. As tears slid down my face, he told me, "I'm not crying for myself. I've lived a great life. I couldn't have asked for more. I'm crying because I have been so blessed with friends like you who have helped me throughout my life. Thank you." That was Cal, my great friend; always thankful and seeing things differently.

During the last weeks, he told me quietly that he was ready to return to his heavenly home, but he worried about me. Till the very end, he thought of others. He originally asked me to give his eulogy five years ago when he was first diagnosed with cancer. He reminded me of my promise to do this a couple of months ago. Recently when he asked me again to give his eulogy, he gave me a very specific task which is extremely difficult for me, but I will do my best for Cal.

These are Cal's/Mr. Sakata's last words: To HIDA and my fellow teachers and friends - thank you for all of your support, and, especially, for believing in me, a dyslexic adult. To Calvary Church - thank you for allowing me to share my testimony and love for God. To my kids, my students and their families – always remember “If you can dream it, you can do it!” To the Moores, Bear, Devin, and Hulali – I love you. Thank you for being my family. To my cousins and family – Don't fight. Stay together. Family is everything. To my Mom, Dad, and Dean – God is a loving God. This cancer journey has brought us back together. I love you. Please take care of Naaman.

I have fulfilled Cal's request. Now, I want you to know some things that may help you in your healing process. Towards his last few weeks, Cal expressed 3 desires in regards to his passing: first, he wanted to return to his heavenly home before the start of this school year. Secondly, he didn't want to be in pain, and, thirdly, he wanted to pass in his sleep. Cal gave so much to so many people that God in his grace and wisdom gave Cal what he wanted. He had the necessary medication to provide comfort, he slipped away while sleeping, and he returned to his heavenly home the night before teachers returned to work.

An Ernie Banks' quote is fitting of Cal, our Mr. Sakata: “The measure of a man is in the lives he's touched.” Cal, you don't have to worry about me. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Sometimes God calms the storm...Sometimes He lets the storm rage and calms His child. Cal, you have left us a great legacy. We love you. Aloha.