

## Holiday Pukahead

Bonnie Friedman

So, I'm on my way to hula practice on Thursday, December 19 and I'm a little early. I have a bunch of stuff in my car that needs to be taken to the recycling bins so I think, "I'll do that on my way." Even though it isn't EXACTLY on my way. So I reach the recycling bins in "upper" Pukalani. I dump the newspapers, which I accumulate in plastic grocery sacks, and one of the plastic grocery sacks accidentally falls into the "Newspapers Only" bin. So, trying to do the right thing, I climb onto the ledge of the bin and bend over to retrieve the plastic bag. And on my way up from leaning down into the bin, my head hits the metal hook which is used to secure the panel to the bin when it's full. Quite shocking, that is. I put my finger up to my head and it goes INTO a puka in my head from which blood is now exiting. I get back in my car, looking for something to hold against the hole in my head and the first thing I see is my favorite Hawaiian Force sweatshirt. "No way I'm gettin' that sweatshirt full of blood," I say to myself. So I find an old towel—pink—which, by the way, sometime on the day of this accident mysteriously disappears off the face of the Earth. When I have applied sufficient pressure to stop the bleeding, I call my friend Dan in Kula. This, by the way, is one of the reasons God invented car phones. I have no idea why I call him except maybe because he lives the closest to where I am and I am pretty sure he'll be home. I tell him what happened and then I ask if he thinks I should maybe go to the emergency room. "Do you want me to come and get you? Are you sure you can drive?" he asks with great concern. "Maybe you should go to Kula Hospital or a doctor's office upcountry," he continues. I look at my watch. "Well, I'm thinking that the emergency room at Maui Memorial is on my way to hula practice," I say. "It would probably be a good idea to get it looked at SOMEWHERE," he responds. "Okay, that's what I'll do then," I say. "Would you do me a favor?" I ask. "Of course. What?" "Please call my *kumu hula*, tell her what happened and tell her I'm really going to try to make it to practice but I'm pretty sure I'm going to be late." "Are you sure you're okay to drive?" he asks again. "Yes, yes, I'm

sure. Please just call *kumu*." So, I drive down the hill, in my car with the standard shift with one hand holding the old pink towel to the puka in my head. I get to the emergency room, which is incredibly quiet for the week before Christmas. The triage guy takes me into the office, looks at my head, asks a few questions and takes me into one of those curtained cubicles where, eventually, the doctor will see me. "I have hula practice in 20 minutes," I tell him. "Trust me, it's not going to happen," he responds. The nurse comes right in, cleans the wound, gives me a tetanus shot and a very attractive ice pack (which is re-usable and, she tells me, I may take home with me!), and tells me to wait for the doctor. I wait patiently for about 15 minutes. Then I get up and ask if this doctor is going to look at my head anytime soon. "I have hula practice," I say. The doctor—a very nice-looking doctor, I might add—looks at the puka in my head, cleans it out again and tells me that, yes, he will have to close it up and I have two choices. "I can do two or three stitches, but that means anesthesia and waiting for it to work and stitching you up and you're going to be here for a while. Or I can put in one staple which will take about three seconds." No contest, I think. Except. "Do you have to cut my hair for either or both of these procedures?" I ask, holding my breath. "Not for the staple, maybe a tiny bit for the stitches." "Staple, please." Did I mention I am also suffering from the remnants of the flu and a very bad case of laryngitis? So, I figure, I've got nothing to lose. "So, Doctor. While I'm here, can you do something about my voice?" "There's no nice way to say this," he says. "You just have to stop talking." He staples shut the puka in my head—yes, with a stapler very similar to the one on your desk—before I even know it. "Okay, you're done," he says brightly. "NOW can I go to hula practice?" "I don't see why not," he answers. So the nurse comes back, signs me out, reads me my rights, gives me some ointment to use to keep my wound clean, tells me to have the staple taken out by my own doctor in seven days and I am out of there. So I get to hula practice 50 minutes late. But *kumu* feels sorry for me so I don't have to *oli* to get in to class. I tell the VERY short version of this story. All my hula sisters say, "Poo' ting, you." And we barely miss an *ipu* beat.

So then, I'm at my friends Sydney and Maurice's house on Christmas Day showing off my stapled head and explaining that I have to go to Dr. Greg the very next day to have the staple removed. "Hang

on there just a minute," says Maurice. And he comes back a minute later with a pair of pliers from his tool box. "I'll take it out for you right now." "No, thanks," I say thinking that he is even stranger than I already know he is. So the next day there I am in Dr. Greg's waiting room with a whole bunch of other patients. (I didn't think that doctors even WENT to their offices on the day after Christmas.) Then, this nice young man, a nurse, I think, comes to get me and my chart, and guides me to the scale. "Okay, we'll just get your weight," he says cheerfully. "What? You want to weigh me the day after Christmas? I don't think so." "Well, it's just part of the procedure." "Getting weighed is just part of the procedure to get one staple removed from my head?" Not only is getting weighed part of the procedure (needless to say, I cover my eyes for that part of the procedure), but so is measuring my blood pressure, taking my temperature and reviewing my medical history back to my mother's womb. And then, I wait. And wait. And wait. Finally, Dr. Greg comes in, looks at my chart and says, "You've been waiting all this time to get one staple removed from your head? You're kidding." "Not my choice, Dr. Greg. Just did what your staff said to do." "I'm so sorry," he says. "If I'd only known," he continues as he gets a pair of pliers from HIS tool box. "Now, you're kidding," I say. "No. How did you think we were going to get that thing out, with a staple remover?" as he pulls once and out it comes, painlessly, I might add. "I feel so bad that you had to wait so long," Dr. Greg says. "Let's just chat for a while." So we do, for a few minutes. Then he sees to his other patients and I return to my office. And all that remains is a tiny dent where the puka used to be and a true, "headfelt" holiday story.

