

Growing up in Kalapana

By Stuart Baum



Dedicated to the residents of Kalapana, Hawaii.

I'm floating in the Pacific Ocean. This seems like the best place to start my story.

Ahead of me I see a black shoreline – all jagged rocks, but with a few coves where there are soft black sand beaches.

The tide edges me towards what looks to be a gap in the cliffs and then the waves take over. I am tumbling up and down, under water, above the frothy white water and then... bam! I hit the edge of the rocks. I seem to be okay. Good thing I have a heavy coat.

The frothy wave pulls me back and then forward... bam! That one was even harder. Again, I'm fine. My fear is that I will be cracked and I will start leaking. Then I won't be good for anything but food for the local birds, which are terns, loons and petrels.

And again, pulled back into the waves and then... I'm rolling up a beach. A beautiful black sand beach, more rocks than sand. It's all volcanic rocks and sand, so it's very sharp, like broken glass, but, again, my coat is heavy so I am not afraid. ... and then I'm rolling down the beach and back into the waves. I'm going out again and then tossing and tumbling in the frothy waves and... rolling back up the beach. Farther up this time. ... and then, Oh no!, I'm rolling back down again. If I go back out to sea, I might miss the beach and then it will be bam!, bam!, bam! against the cliffs again. I'm unsure even my heavy coat can take that much pounding.

Suddenly I stop rolling, wedged between two large pieces of lava rock that stick out of the sand. Phew!

Then the waves come back and push me farther up the beach.

Another wave and I am even farther up. Soon, the waves stop reaching me and I'm on the black sand, in the hot midday sun. It feels great!

Nothing is nicer than the midday Hawaiian sun. This is when I fell asleep. Wouldn't you if you were lying on the beach in the sun after such a long and exhausting journey?

I must have slept for a week ... or a month ... until I suddenly wake up. I'm being carried ... bounce, bounce, bounce ... similar to what it felt like at the beginning of this story, but without the fear of being smashed to pieces. I'm carried over a high slope, up the cliff and onto a larger black sand beach. And now I'm being pushed into the sand until I am half covered. Two large volcanic rocks are placed next to me to keep me in place.



This is so, so, *so* nice. Warm and safe. I can hear the waves as they hit the shore (very loud on stormy nights), but I have no fear they'll come all the way up here and drag me back out to sea.

I fall back to sleep ... and then I wake up in the pouring rain. I feel all funny. I can feel the sand beneath my toes, sharp sand. Wait... I have toes? My toes drink up the rain as it drains quickly from the surface ... I wiggle them, but they aren't toes. They're roots. I have roots! This all feels like a dream. It's a cold, wet, but very refreshing dream.

I fall asleep again and I wake up to feel the wind rushing through my arms... I have arms? I try moving them, but can't. Only the wind seems to be able to move them, but this feels great. Really great!

Around me are hundreds of others like me, but all are smaller. I wonder if they all made the journey around the island, out into the ocean, and then back onto the shore. I feel sad wondering how many of us didn't make it onto land, but were cracked open by the cliffs and eaten by the loons, terns and petrels.

I stop thinking that sad thought and start thinking happier ones about the hundreds, and hundreds of us who made it to shore, who were carried up by the nice residents and planted in the warm, volcanic sand waiting for our roots and leaves to sprout.



And now, here we are. It's the best day of my life!

It has been ten years since I arrived on the black sand beach and all around me are coconut palm trees. Some are nearly as big as I am, but since I was the first one here, I am still slightly taller than the rest.

I look down near my roots and see a few small coconut trees. These came from coconuts I produced. They fell from me and now, like me, they are growing on the black sand beach.

They had no risk of being smashed by rocky, volcanic cliffs. Just a gentle thud as they fall from my leaves and hit the black sand beach. And then their long, sleepy wait until their roots and leaves start to grow. Just like me, they are turning from a coconut into to palm tree. However, unlike me, they didn't have to brave the waters and the rocky cliffs to get here. And also unlike me, they were not the first to grow on this beach. There are now thousands and thousands of trees ... a whole forest of us!

This is not where the story ends, not nearly, but this is where I will end *my* story.

It's a good ending, since it's also a good beginning. Those are the best endings of all.

The End



Kalapana, Hawaii, was the site of a fishing village until 1990, when the volcano buried the village under 30 feet of lava. The residents have since started planting coconut trees in order to regrow the palm forest that was once there. This story is dedicated to that effort. We can only hope that this story, set ten years from now, comes true. You can read about Kalapana here: <http://www.hawaiiweb.com/hawaii/html/sites/kalapana.html>

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