Guam But Not Forgotten

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1980 most Marylanders in the Asian Division if notified that their next assignment in the barrel was Guam would blink and swallow hard: "My god! *Terra Incognita*!" For some lecturers, the dire inscription "There be dragons" inscribed over the forbidding, unknown region of what was eventually to be known as the "Western Pacific" on at least one famous globe from early in The Great Age of Discovery certainly would have fed their unease even in the current age. Well, in Term V of 1980 when Julian Jones in Yokota called me in the PI and offered me a half-time teaching/half-time Area Director position for Guam and the PI I didn't know really what the hell I was facing. I was to be based in Guam with frequent TDY's to Subic Bay, and I would be pretty much figuratively and literally winging it, winging it in all directions. For instance, Maryland was not authorized its own Autovon line on Guam, and Yokota was an entire long morning away by commercial flight through Narita, so the "You're on your own" admonition always would hang over me, heavy as Joe Btfspik's cloud. Yet I eventually realized I had the opportunity to prove the validity of the question all Overseas Programs administrators had to ask themselves when evaluating teaching and administrative applicants: "Is this a person I would not hesitate to assign to help start a new Maryland program in likely new and difficult circumstances?" A very good question indeed, as Marylanders in Europe most recently proved in pioneering places much more demanding than Guam: The Middle East, the blood-feuding Balkans, perhaps even secret places which are generally acknowledged officially to not even exist.

Today it has been almost forty years since I left Guam for a position at Yokota . . . the Asian Division headquarters in suburban Tokyo . . . and, eventually back to the "real world" in Maryland and beyond. Regarding my time on Guam, I cannot completely share Hunter Thompson's observation on life – "What a long, strange trip it has been" – but I can say that life there was often unique, never dull, and surprisingly "foreign" while still being very "American." So when I left Guam after four years I did not really know it as "the sad little island," as one Maryland senior administrator characterized it, or as the upbeat, swinging tropical isle of the Chamber of Commerce motto, "Where America's Day Begins." Accordingly, to this day, Guam is in some ways still *terra incognita* both to me and to most Americans. A great, recent contemporary example: a back-bencher in the United States House of Representatives, a man of soaring intellect and piercing insight, without apparent irony shared the following observation regarding Uncle Sam possibly assigning an additional 8,000 U.S Marines to Guam: "My fear is that the whole island will become so overly populated that it will tip over and capsize." So even for people who should know better, still "there be dragons. . . ."

One help to understanding the history of the Guam "dragon" is to recognize that this little island in 1980 was a schizophrenic merging of a Honolulu-like contemporary America and a third-world culture with folkways and a social infrastructure seemingly immune to modern "ugly American" influences. For jaded Marylanders often used to teaching, even living, in ratty

Quonsets on isolated, nervous outposts a few clicks south of unfriendly DMZ's, teaching in classrooms on Guam bases such as Naval Air Station and Andersen AB was a throwback to teaching Stateside. And life off-base was American suburbia magically set down on a western Pacific paradise: Kinko's was a quick, viable option when the ED center or Maryland office ran out of paper. Blockbuster was going great guns. ESPN and The Playboy Channel were the most popular cable options. A large, new supermarket sat smack in the middle of Agana and boasted individually frozen fruit bats next to the Tombstone pizzas and Everest-sized stacks of Spam occasionally blocking the cashier checkout. Booze wasn't rationed. Electric wires conveniently hung everywhere on the island, although snakes had a tendency to immolate themselves between them, thus shorting out and darkening all of civilian Guam. And finally, alone of all the core lecturers in the entire Wide World of Maryland, the Guam "paladins" ("Have Lecture Notes, Will Travel") were provided free BOQ's and "Guam Bomb" rust-bucket Mitsubishis courtesy of Mother Maryland. In short, life for Marylanders was at the very least pleasant and often familiar, sometimes. . . .

And interesting as hell . . . for native, civilian Guam in 1980 was an entire Third World unto itself. Actually, this "organized, unincorporated territory of the United States" was a cultural anomaly, an American "backwater" in the Far Pacific over five thousand miles from *doppelganger* L.A. beaches in Venice and Malibu. And Margaret Mead herself likely would have found Guam superficially familiar but anthropologically puzzling.

For starters, the Spanish heritage was ever-present. The United States picked up Guam as a flip of *lagniappe* after victory in the Spanish-American War, almost as an afterthought to the Philippines, the immensely larger and more coveted excursion into empire. This heritage showed up in place names throughout the island and in the huge role of the Roman Catholic Church, Guamanian version. The aging faithful today must still remember the unprecedented visit in 1981 of the Pope who stirred and blessed the crowds in Chamorro, the native language. The mildly syncretic Guam Catholic and traditional folk faith was just one way in which local culture and history not only appeared but dominated life on the island. Perhaps the major, inescapable fact of life was the native Chamorro reliance on, and identity with, "FAMILY." Since the late 'sixties Guamanians have elected their own Governor and basically created and run their own "home rule" experiment. Yet the Guamanian Republican and Democrat parties in the 1980's were virtually indistinguishable and dominated by major families running their own unique versions of a political spoils system. Even the appointment of a President for The University of Guam virtually dripped with "politics" and was generally accepted as simply the way Island things work.

Not surprisingly, then, native Chamorro family/clan connections were often the major factor in hiring/appointment decisions for both government jobs and those "on the economy." At the University of Guam and Guam CC, for instance, the dominance of certain families was an imposing residue of traditional Chamorro culture. Similarly, if family names such as "Kim," "Park," "Lee," etc. are historical residue of a family-clan-based culture dominant throughout the entire Korean peninsula, north and south, Guamanian counterparts certainly are "Cruz," "Flores," and "Perez." This reliance on family was further complicated ("enriched," in contemporary "woke" parlance") by the melting pot elements of Guamanian life. The

traditional dominance of the family in the Chamorro scheme of things was diluted by thousands of non-native American military personnel and family members ("haoles"), mixed Chamorro/old haole settler families, and a steady stream of immigrants from the Philippines, Korea, Japan, Samoa and other Pacific islands.

So history, "the past" – both obvious and "disguised" – was a living, everyday presence in Guam. Unfortunately, though, the most cataclysmic example of this presence, inescapable even after over eighty years, was the indelibly tragic Japanese invasion of the thinly-defended island one day after the attack on Pearl Harbor. That day the Japanese made short work of the U.S. Army and Marine defenders who were forced to surrender to the overwhelming Japanese force. From 1941 until 1945 in the name of the Emperor the Japanese killed and executed over a thousand Guamanians – civilians – interning and forcing many thousands more into slave labor. Near the end of the Pacific War when the U.S. Marines and Army "re-invaded" the island, over eighteen *THOUSAND* Japanese soldiers were slain and perhaps five thousand more initially refused to surrender, hiding out and resisting in the jungles that largely covered southern Guam. By the end of the Pacific War, in August 1945 after "The Bomb," only a hundred or so still held out. Even so, they too soon were captured or surrendered, accepting the inevitable.

Except for SERGEANT SHOICHI YOKOI. Long before his capture in 1972 he had become a tropical *yeti,* legendary, invisible, a boogie-man dangled by parents to threaten and frighten disobedient children . . . He became a jungle wraith still grasping *bushido* . . . surviving by stealing from clotheslines, "borrowing" free-ranging chickens, and lifting food from open kitchens and windows. He made worldwide headlines when caught, becoming a Japanese national hero and a legend on Guam long since forgiven, solitarily melding into the island mythos. When I left Guam in 1984 there were recurring rumors that at least one Japanese holdout still lived alone, silent, hunted, haunted in the southern jungles.

As the years have passed, Sergeant Yokoi has had his "revenge." The American military still is the most important economic and outside social force on Guam, but irony of ironies: Japanese tourists and investors are right up there in second place. In 1980, and evidently continuing into the present, it is as if all of Guam is shouting toward Japan 1500+ miles to the north: "Come on home, Honey! All is forgiven!"

And why not? World War II was THEN! The 20th and 21st Centuries are NOW! In 1980, as now, after Hawaii, Guam was the second-most popular destination for Japanese honeymooners, and the infrastructure necessary to guarantee a big time to the happy couples was immense: famous-name hotels, overpriced *faux haute* eateries and quaint little holes-in-the–wall ethnic joints, golf courses, auto sales and rentals, battlefield tours with invasion beach pillboxes and photo ops . . . you name it. Not to mention foreign construction companies, government contracts, heavy equipment, branches of Japanese-based banks and companies. You're talking jobs, massive infusions of consumer goods, MONEY! And all this, unfortunately, banged up against these defining facts of life on Guam vs the U.S. mainland: On Guam the cost of living and incidences of poverty/unemployment were high, salaries were relatively low, and the percentage of the population on welfare was high. Combined, these and other elements

such as extremely strong family/clan identification and public corruption (c.a. 1980, at least) gave Guam a severe "rust belt" or third-world feel.

What then do I remember most vividly of my time on Guam, a unique American outpost in the Asian Maryland world of the early 1980's? Vladimir Nabokov commanded "Speak, Memory," so I am going to let three incidents that I was a part of speak for all the lessons, gifts, and knowledge I earned in four years there. All these things happened over forty years ago, I am an old man now, and inevitably my memory plays tricks. Facts elide into fiction. I forget things, and my once sharp recall fails me at times. These things really happened, however.

The meaning of this first incident has required a long search for a context that I am still looking to fill in completely. Most flights departing Guam for distant locations were "long hauls" departing late at night or in the early morning darkness around "oh-dark-thirty" because of Guam's isolation in the western Pacific. For example, on this particular morning my Continental flight to Narita left around 3 a.m. with a scheduled arrival around 6 a.m. Tokyo time. The open departure lounge, redolent with flowers and the smell of the tropics, was packed, thunderous as a World Cup Soccer final. The crowd was "dressed up," Guamanian style: *barong tagalogs*, bright dresses with ruffles that could have come from Spain, traditional Guamanian "formal" outfits, even a few Samoan *puletasi* dresses and (gasp) coats and ties. At least one band was playing full-bore like a south-of-the-border-*mariachi tradicional* noisily lubricated, as were all the crowd sloshing and spilling tikis and margaritas and happily screaming *Adios! Adios!* (a remnant of Guam's Spanish past) at a quite flushed and cheery couple off on their honeymoon to Hawaii . . . definitely a "coals to Newcastle" thing, for in 1980 Guam was a more pristine, lovelier version of Hawaii. Amidst all this chaos I was sitting on one of the only two airport chairs that did not support at least two well-wishers sitting or standing -- balanced precariously -- tossing back their rums-and-whatever and hoisting blessings toward the lucky couple. But then with no warning the little bride, now suddenly aware of her new, inescapable fate, collapsed into a cascade of tears and *Nana! Nana!* Resisting frantically and reaching helplessly toward the crowd and her sobbing mother, she was being man-handled by her now stern and sweating new husband into the boarding tunnel. Even a casual observer could see that the young groom too was experiencing a sudden brief glimpse of what life was going to be like from now on.

Eventually the din in the lounge subsided to a mere rock concert level, and the young couple and their mutual epiphany were on their way. Then it happened. Through the suddenly parting waves of the crowd a figure lurched drunkenly and elbowed his way to the only vacant chair in the room, directly in front of me. He flopped heavily into it and splayed out his legs. His head lolled back, but then snapped sharply upright. His leaden eyes were trying to focus on me. Only then did I recognize: *DAMN!! IT'S LEE EFFIN MARVIN!!!!!!* Lee Marvin the pathetic, self-delusional Hickey of *The Iceman Cometh*? Or the horribly miscast, sympathetic Old West miner in *Paint Your Wagon* breaking into song with an equally miscast Clint Eastwood? No . . . try LIBERTY GODDAMN VALANCE!! The pissed-off drunk psychopath! Still slouching, his dull eyes firmly fixed on me, his words matter-of-fact from some dead recess deep within him: "WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU LOOKIN' AT? I AM GOIN' TO WHIP YOUR ASS."

Duke Wayne unfortunately wasn't available to dispose of the venomous Liberty, so, staring him in the face as if I were trying to freeze a suddenly disturbed Doberman, I slowly stood up and backed carefully into the celebratory and ebullient crowd. And when I turned away, fighting for camouflage and insignificance like a little native gecko, I could still feel his unblinking eyes following me. I was no-foolin' scared. Finally, I was able to blend and make my escape into the throng.

The surreality of my one and only, ever, face-to-face with a *REAL* Hollywood star, drunk on his ass in the middle of a Guamanian wedding and threatening to violently thump my precious body became somewhat explainable only much later after I had researched Lee's life separate from the serious alcoholism, the fistfights, the painful "Palimony" scandal. I knew Lee Marvin had been a U.S. Marine in WWII, but I did not know he had been in the battle for Saipan, an island even smaller than Guam and only around a hundred miles to the north. The Marines' landings and subsequent vicious battles on Guam and Saipan were part of the larger battle for the Marianas islands, a stepping-stone for the expected American invasion of Japan. The fighting on Saipan was especially bloody. Many Japanese settlers, men and women, committed a sort of civilian *"seppuku"* at what became known as "Suicide Cliffs," throwing themselves from the heights down to the rocks and "pacific" surf many feet below. A grainy film clip of a lone Japanese mother, kimono clad, clasping her child to her breast, glancing a last hopeless look over her shoulder, seemingly toward the camera and a pleading American G.I.. . . and then leaping, falling really, into emptiness can still startle and eviscerate, even if you know it is coming now, eighty years later.

It was in this horror on Saipan that Lee Marvin was severely wounded as he and his brother Marines climbed through deadly fire to secure the savage heights of Mt. Topucharu, the highest point on the island. When the Japanese were finally "eliminated' and the Marines firmly in control of the 1500 foot high summit, Lee's unit had lost a majority of its members, wounded and dead. Lee had been wounded twice. He convalesced in hospital with severe back and leg wounds for a year before finally being discharged back into "the real world." Perhaps even God does not know how to explain this man sitting drunk and menacing in the middle of a riotous Guam wedding, over thirty-five years after he left almost everything on that shitty little island to the north, now less than an hour away, an airplane up-and-down. As I think on it now, I wonder was he going back to Saipan to see if all he remembered was true? Or was he was on his way back to Hollywood from Saipan to act out his and others' nightmares in an attempt to expiate them, then forget? Or was it something else? All I know is the central image in my memory of the incident that dark, fragrant morning in the lively airport departure lounge is this famous man, drunk, deadly and looking accusingly at me. It is as though he had just discovered I (I!) was the *REAL* screw-up in his past, that FUBAR he was looking to destroy finally, or at the very least to expiate. I've thought many times about my "meeting" with Lee and tried to put it in context . . . in context with what? I guess in this latest attempt to understand Lee, poor drunk and emotionally-wracked Lee, I am now realizing that somehow down all the years he will never leave me alone. . . . He has indeed "whipped my ass." . . .

Guam can do that to you.

And other things. Good things:

In 1983, my wife Barbara and I convinced my Father and Mother to visit us on Guam for a week, and then the four of us would do a "Grand Tour" of places in Japan they had always heard about but had only dreamt of seeing. My Air Force father had won an all-expenses paid tour to Viet Nam in the middle of that deadly shit-show, but my Mom had only once briefly visited San Francisco and had never seen The World west of the Golden Gate.

Her entire life, from beginning to end . . . my Mother was a little country girl from the Mississippi piney woods. People always made the mistake of underestimating her, mistaking her innate shyness and diffidence for superficiality. From the first time she met my Father in their small-town Southern high school until she lost the last inning to cancer sixty- two years later, she was his backstop, his quiet conscience. Daddy was in many ways her opposite: outgoing, garrulous, both inwardly and outwardly comfortable with the world as he met it. For instance, on the bullet train to Hiroshima on our "Grand Tour" in Japan the distinguished businessman engrossed in the contents of a giant briefcase and seated next to Daddy turned out to be the President of Mikasa China Dinnerware. Within minutes here was this ol' Mississippi boy, serious as Hiroshima, loudly regaling one of the most important men in the Japanese business world with *exactly* what worked and what *didn't* work in the country they were gliding through on the *shinkansen*. And they were both laughing like hell, brothers under their skins, friends for only four hours, glad they had not met somewhere in the Pacific forty years before.

Daddy was an avid reader, but Mother was *voracious.* I have three graduate degrees – two in English – and she read more than I ever did. She had attended a little jakeleg, small-town junior college in 1940, but my Grandfather, her father, in her second semester pulled her out to become his office manager. He had just been elected county Chancery Clerk, and nepotism laws in Mississippi being what they were then – non-existent -- at age *nineteen* she became bureaucrat-in-chief in charge of all the county court records, real property deeds and transactions, and tax assessments. She ran the whole goddamn zoo without being one of the animals. If something is purring smoothly, you never notice the noise. That was Mother.

And she was silently fearless, too. She may have been small-town and country at heart and fearful that she couldn't shine among the crowds of the sophisticated, but she was one of the bravest people I have ever known. Once, in 1943, she had negotiated the wartime American railroad maze and beat the system to yankee New Jersey to see my father off on his way to kill Hermann Goering and his pissant *Luftwaffe*, but that was the extent of her travels to, and first-hand knowledge of, the world outside the South. Until Stalin showed his fat behind in 1948-49 with his blockade of Berlin. As a result, the post-WWII Air Force wanted Daddy to quit vainly trying to support his young wife and infant son in small-town, post-WWII, stagnant Mississippi and come back in and face down the Rooskies across the barbed wire at the Fulda Gap. And Daddy just wanted Mother to be there with him, to truly be his helpmeet (*wonderful* word, isn't it!), so I got to come along for the ride. It just seems natural then that one of my first memories -- perhaps *THE* first memory -- has Mother at its core:

Our first home when we arrived at Munich was a Hollywood-set hunting lodge floating on a hillside above the greenest meadow in the world. We had two rooms in the lodge and shared a bathroom and kitchen with four other enlisted families, all assigned to the Air Force

base south of Munich on *Rosenheimer Strasse*. One day, Mother grabbed my hand and we cut through the waving meadow grass to the road, the *Strasse*, where she flagged down a rickety old truck which had been retrofitted out as a "bus" to carry silent, grim Germans to wherever. We changed to a G.I. bus near the base and rode past warning signs, skulls of houses, occasional vehicles and piles of rubble all the way into Munich. We got off and walked past the detritus of broken German life still in piles years after V-E Day. Years later during a vacation visit to Munich I learned the names of the streets and wonders Mother and I had passed as we walked into the Old City. We eventually reached the Marienplatz, a busy place then as now, but then crowded with many silent people walking, vainly looking for things that were not there still . . . or there yet. We went into a large, hollowed out structure that probably had been a huge department store, now divided into shabby booths selling homegrown vegetables and new and used black market shit stolen from the various PX's around American–controlled Bavaria. Mother suddenly, surprisingly, said goodbye to her reticence and began bargaining firmly, gesturing along with the sellers in the booths. She bargained like a champ for potatoes and turnips, even trying her German on Germans who wanted to try their American on an American. Then suddenly loud accordion music exploded. Over in a large open corner space "DONKEYS!!!" sadly plodded, each tethered by a wooden pole to a central post, each walking gently in the circle . . . with kids on their backs! Then, by damn, there I was, riding my lil' sumbitch like Roy, or Gene, or Don "Red" Barry, or Lash LaRue, even! Mother and the patched *Mutter* of the little girl clinging desperately to the donkey ahead of me were smiling like old friends, heads together, but still watching, protecting us both. I can only guess now that Mother and the frumpy German mother with the old tatty dress were quietly celebrating in different languages, giving thanks that each of their children now had a childhood, a life ahead to grab and hold.

And then by damn there she was on Guam thirty-something years later, still quietly back-stopping Daddy and making me proud. Their second day on island, Daddy driving my old "Guam Bomb" with its last-gasp rust wounds and unpredictable manual choke, they had seemingly discovered every road and barefoot path. As always, Mother seemed to cheerfully absorb everything she saw and let Daddy do most of the talking, but something was different this time. She did love all the strange and exotic liveliness and history, the southern jungles, the ridiculously turquoise crystalline waters, the sculpted beaches and graffitied, moldering Japanese pillboxes that still whispered *Bushido!* if you listened hard enough . . . and the friendly Guamanians and Filipinos and Koreans and yes, Japanese in their little eateries and shops holding their own against the large Hiltons, Japanese and American chains, and "Duty Free" signs insistent and inviting in *kanji*. But at one point, though, her smile disappeared and she whispered, almost to herself, a pressing, telling truth about all that she had seen that day: "You know, it almost feels like that Indian reservation we saw in South Dakota, with the men standing around that old gas station and drinking from those paper bags. Or like back home those colored shacks with the old cars in the front yard covered up with weeds. Some of those folks today, y'know, they just seemed . . . y'know, PORE." With that unplanned observation Mother had caught a sad truth about Guam in the early 1980's: For all the flag-waving about Guam being "American," it was also "Third World" and all that entailed.

And "Third World" to an American always means, if not "strange," then at least something "different." And against form, my conservative and outwardly acquiescent Mother loved "different" ethnic food, although she always deferred to Daddy's endless train of meat 'n potatoes at home and when they splurged out in the real world. Except when they ate at my house back in the States or when I was treating for the "eating out," like that first dinner "on the town" in Guam. Guam menus were definitely Asian/Pacific multicultural, representing a near-glut of "native" Guamanian, Philippine, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Islander cuisines, along with the inevitable spread of typical "American-Anglo" (Italian, Mexican, 'Cue, etc.) franchises. In some ways, then, my choice for dinner that night represented a uniquely Guam dining experience: we went "Mexican" . . . "Guam Mexican."

Barbara and I had eaten at "Pepe's" before. The food was great: authentic, freshly prepared Mexican and Tex-Mex with nary a hint of "franchise" hanging hidden among the kitchen smells and sounds. We have lived in San Antonio now for over fifteen years, so we know damn well what a real *tamale* should taste like. Pepe's were the real deal, worthy of mention in the same breath as San Antonio's best. As a bonus, Pepe would often pour a free shot of Jose Cuervo if he saw that you were enjoying yourself, and then pour himself a shot so you wouldn't have to drink alone.

Pepe was a jovial, middle-aged KOREAN who spoke minimal English, never even attempting butchered menu-Spanish, and evidently was a sort of early trans-Mexican. Somehow, he didn't seem out of place on Guam.

Pepe paid special attention to Mother. Hovering over her, he pointed directly to the menu saying "Good! Good!" so for once she stood on her hind legs and did NOT ask Daddy what he was having . . . and did not say "I'll have that too." We were reliving Daddy and Mother's lively circumnavigation of the island and were on our second round of iced San Miguels when suddenly Pepe appeared with a tray and a new bottle of Jose's best. He began loudly, gesturing to each of us and patting his chest: "One shot! One shot!" My parents were laughing, but dubious. They were beer and occasional wine folks . . . I almost never saw them drink hard liquor and NEVER straight. "One shot! One shot!" He poured four shots, one for each of us, then one for himself. Then, as if to show us how a true *jefe* leads from the front, he went silent, snapped his head back, then shouted a piercing *GONBAI!!!*, tossed the tequila down his throat, and raised his hand high above his shoulder before SLAMMING the empty shot glass down on the table WHAM!!!! "One shot! One shot!"

Daddy, lurched, startled. But Mother . . . my Mother. . . .Her face cut a deep grin, and I swear her eyeballs were swirling in their sockets like (don't laugh!) Mr. Toad's in the old Disney cartoon of *The Wind in the Willows* when he falls in love with the wonderful automobile and life and all life's new possibilities. Mother suddenly gathered herself straight, grabbed the shot in front of her, gulped it down, then defiantly yelled her own *GONBAI!!!* as she smashed the shot glass like a mortar round into the table. I think at that moment her life entered a new dimension. Daddy stared at her, not knowing what to make of her newly expressed capacity for asserting herself loudly, drawing attention, deserting the background.

And she pounded *GONBAI* and Jose twice more. At the last one I looked across the dining room, full of folks now, toward the kitchen. Pepe's wife who obviously ran the whole

operation, was peering out at her husband and his performance that now involved ALL his customers. He had given each of them at least a shot, then matched it. She had that disgusted look that long-suffering Asian wives seem to give their happily drunken husbands, florid-faced and unredeemable, cheerfully embracing all of humanity, "One Shot" at a time.

When we got back to the apartment that night I kept the party going on our balcony by pouring ice-cold (not sissy frozen) crystalline margaritas until Daddy, bless his heart, suddenly stood up, stared straight into the darkness, and wordlessly went inside and to bed. Our apartment was on the ninth floor of one of Guam's tallest buildings in the early 1980's, and the balcony overlooked the American landing beach in the 1945 battle to retake Guam. Down below the ocean was a palette, serene and moonlit, and the white sand of the beach was almost too beautiful to bear. A patch of jungle intervened between the beach and our apartment and we could hear the soft sounds of a girl singing popular Chamorro music from somewhere in the intervening patch of jungle. Mother sat gently, almost laughing out loud, licking her margarita glass and, believe it or not, uncharacteristically making slightly off-color remarks, joking about the name "Two Lovers Point" where a boy and girl during old Spanish times supposedly jumped together from a cliff on the northern end of the island. She thought it was foolish for them to have done that. Mother was talking a lot. She said she liked Guam.

Mother would have been 102 years old last month, and I talk with her every day. She no longer hides her light from anyone. . . .

Finally, I must face the stark reality of reaching that age where I will suddenly recall a person – sometimes only a face or a name – I haven't conjured up in years. I also live in an era of technological miracles: for instance, I can type that person's name into a desktop computing machine and discover all kinds of interesting things she has accomplished in her life, beginning to end. That was what happened when I began purposefully thinking about a Guam memoir, my experiences and the people I knew there.

I last saw Loretta Cornett in 1987, and I suppose I last thought of her in the mid-'90's around the time I left Mother Maryland. Yesterday I typed her name into the machine which spat out that she died on June 20, 2013 in Honolulu, four days after her 81st birthday. Knowing Loretta, I don't think she would be upset at me for bringing her to life here. She was one of those people you never thought to put in the same sentence with anything but "life." In fact, I suspect she is laughing like hell at the prospect of having fun again. Loretta was a great friend of Maryland, whether on Guam or later on the Navy installations in Tokyo. I first met her when she was the education officer for the Navy on Guam and I was the mustang area director for the brand-new Maryland program. She was one of the people most important in bringing Maryland on board, and I learned how to do much of my new job by observing and listening to her.

Loretta was *sui generis*. She was a combination of Scarlett O'Hara, Auntie Mame, and Margaret Thatcher (Q: "Why can't Maggie Thatcher wear miniskirts?" A: "Because her balls would show."), and she could flip a switch and kick start any of the three depending on her mood or on what the particular situation called for. Furthermore, Loretta was, as Maureen O'Hara's character was described by Barry Fitzgerald's in *The Quiet Man,* "a fine, healthy girl." Loretta dressed fashionably and expensively and loved classic sailboats and big ol' masculine

automobiles that went fast. A real Southern girl, she sounded everyday Kentucky-normal, but when she really wanted to charm you she could whisper "Cay-unt yew hay-up me?" and you were doomed. And she was afraid of nothing. By god, nothing. And all three of these facets of Loretta's personality were on display on one of my most memorable days on Guam.

As Navy education officer Loretta and her boss at Subic Bay had charmed the Navy brass into reopening – an informal "recommissioning" of sorts – an old junior officer boq slated for eventual destruction but then dedicated for use by Maryland instructors. Free BOQ's to Maryland faculty seldom happened in the Maryland Overseas World, and I was the first one to check them out when I arrived on Guam before the first term and teachers arrived. The Navy promised that each of the individual apartments would have a functioning bathroom and would be austerely but comfortably furnished. Also, maintenance crews would be assigned to visit and clean weekly. But of course, the Q's were an abject disaster: they were located near the top of Nimitz Hill in the jungle's edge and looked like some sort of an overgrown Mayan motel. The concrete block walls both outside and inside were beginning to crumble and were heavily dappled with lichens and black mildew. Interesting insects had laid claim to the entire structure. The water was mostly off, and the electricity was on only in my particular apartment. The outside lights were out; the whole ruin was enveloped and lost in complete stygian darkness each day after the sun suddenly dropped into the Pacific. And on my first morning there I wasn't really surprised to see a crushed and flattened snake – his mouth gaping in death -- behind my rental car's front wheel on the driver's side. Odds were good I had stepped on him in his throes when I got out of the car the night before. And of course, cleaning and maintenance teams had never once shown the flag at Guam's Chichen Itza outpost.

On one of my first days on island Loretta stopped by my Q to pick me up to go with her to a COMNAVMAR ("Commander Naval Forces Marianas") commander's call/reception that she had been invited to attend at the O'Club on Naval Station. When I answered her knock on my door she was in the middle of a very obscene but entertaining rant about "this entire piece of s- -t" BOQ. I discovered no longer was I merely to be perfunctorily introduced to the Admiral at the reception as the first on-site "University of Maryland Director," (a promotion!) but she was going to make sure that the Admiral had not forgotten he had been the power authorizing the reopening of the BOQ, currently an embarrassment to the fleet. Indeed, the Admiral had authorized the actual formal invitation for the Asian Division to offer its program on Guam. In short, Maryland on Guam was the Admiral's baby, and he needed to take care of us, starting with making the BOQ's habitable.

In the car on the way to Naval Station Loretta said she was going to hit up the Admiral cold, directly as soon as we arrived and just before the reception kicked off. Surprised that she was going to confront the Admiral immediately I suggested that she might want to wait until the reception was well underway when everyone, including the Admiral, was informally socializing and more likely to be receptive. Alternatively, catching him after the cattle call formally ended might be her best chance at success. I didn't recall ever seeing any very senior officer of any military branch who tolerated an underling or civilian interrupting, without an introduction, especially in public. Loretta just snorted in response.

Anyone who is familiar with all the branches of the military knows that forty years ago – and likely still -- the Navy was the one most hierarchical and tradition-bound. For instance, the separation between officer and enlisted was extreme and inviolate, reminiscent of a European class system prior to the mid-twentieth century. And speaking as an "Air Force brat" --son of a 30 year chief master sergeant -- and as a former junior Army officer myself, I must admit that not only did the Navy have sharp, spanking uniforms, they and the Marines threw the best official celebrations and receptions. Thus the reception spread at the O'Club: a lovely, radiant *lechon* (whole roasted pig) likely prepared by a Filipino master cook; a huge chilled pan of *kelaguen* (the Chamorro "national dish" of marinated lime juice, coconut, hot peppers, and cubed fresh raw white fish), chicken and pork adobo, endless calamari and prawns, iced San Miquel, bottomless magic chardonnay, a giant ice swan frozen in the middle of the main table, etc. And Loretta -- swathed in white diaphanous swirls and a streaming pink scarf seemingly lifted from the cover of *Cosmo* -- ignored the food tables and cut toward the admiral, slicing through the gathering guests like a torpedo running silent and pitilessly toward its unwary target.

The Admiral was holding forth to his XO and a gaggle of junior officers at the far end of the room. All the officers were in their dress whites. The Admiral had found his rhythm and all the young men stood clustered and receptive. The Admiral was NOT to be interrupted. Then abruptly there was Loretta, slashing her elbows through the officers like dual pirate cutlasses and slicing a path until she stood directly in front of the great man, "in his grill" as it were. Startled, he stared at her and then looked sharply at me attached to Loretta like a remora and at his XO who nearly had his hand amputated when he put it on Loretta's arm to deflect her ambush. Although I could not hear her clearly over the din, it was obvious that Loretta had ditched her Margaret Thatcher mode and become Scarlett O'Hara coyly flicking her fan at Rhett, smothering the Admiral with her wide smiles and a procession of "Ah DO de-cla-uhs," and "You ah jus' actin' SO sweet," and "Mair-e-lan heah NEEDS y-hep, Suh" and the like. After a minute or so, the XO managed to get in between the Admiral and the relentless Loretta. Eventually, they ignored me and clustered in the far corner with the Admiral still looking anxious and serious about making his escape, the XO frantically writing in his little notebook, and a satisfied Loretta obviously channeling her best southern belle "Iron Butterfly."

The admiral never knew what hit him. Or even that he had been hit. Watching Loretta operate was like watching Michelangelo paint the Sistine Chapel, specifically when God reaches down and touches pinkies with Adam, giving him life. Masterful. Just masterful.

After a few minutes Loretta and I made our way back to the groaning buffet. The crowd was much larger now and everyone was charging the spread big time. When I noted "Mission accomplished?" she just smiled, "Easy as pie, Hon. . . ." and shifted seamlessly into her Auntie Mame mode, laughing coquettishly and flitting from cluster to cluster of young ensigns and lieutenants, her pink scarf trailing like a contrail. The young men fought among themselves to bring her brimming glasses of chardonnay, one eager young Lochinvar even presenting her with an entire tray which she told me to hold at the ready and to follow her closely as she and I grazed on the ahi tuna and *lechon* with liver sauce.

When the reception finally lost its steam and the chardonnay station stood empty, Loretta and I had finished the last of our last glasses. She winked at me: "We've got a 2:15 with Captain Z at Naval Air Station. He doesn't know it yet, but he's gonna give you your Autovon line!" And so, blinking the way you always do when you drink some at midday and then hit the early afternoon sun, we gingerly made our way out to Loretta's ride, a big old Coupe De Ville? Or Olds 98? My memory here is not to be depended upon, for obvious reasons.

Before I could find both ends of my seatbelt, Loretta punched on the radio – loud to the max -- stomped on the gas, stood that Caddy on its hind legs and tail fins and by god we were OFF! And I was grabbing for the armrest and trying to brace on the dashboard and thinking "I am going to die . . . and I don't want to." We roared across that parking lot like we had a JATO bottle sticking out of our ass, spewing gravel like shrapnel. I was scared "switless" and suddenly Bonnie Tyler was singing that life, at least on the radio, is "nothing but a heartache." I gulped rank and chattering despair as we flew across the southbound lanes of Marine Drive making all the "Guam bombs" slam on brakes and stand on their hoods. Loretta had the engine on that Caddy thrumming like Robert Mitchum's death ride – a hopped-up '57 Ford fitted with moonshine tanks -- in *Thunder Road*. But by the time we soared into Agana I had started to feel like we might live. Against all odds, I realized Loretta – still in her bat-out-of-hell mode -- was good; I saw she knew what she was doing, like Pappy Boyington dodging flak blossoms.

Then for no reason, Loretta and I stared at each other and started laughing together, crazed, two dumb sumbitches, two conspirators who didn't know no better . . . having fun now, looking forward to life's possibilities, starting that afternoon and running on "full," rolling hard and too fast north on Marine Drive toward the rest of our lives.

Now, years later, thanks to Loretta and that big Caddy, windows down, churning up Marine Drive, alive again in my memory, I think I know the emotion, the exultation at experiencing all of life that James Dickey's young motorcyclist narrator was feeling in Dickey's great poem, "Cherrylog Road":

"Restored . . .

. . . [he] tore off

Up Highway 106, continually

Drunk on the wind in [his] mouth,

Wringing the handlebar for speed,

Wild to be wreckage forever."

So for Lee, Pepe, Mother, and Loretta . . . and Guam . . . and me: "How small the Cosmos . . . how paltry and puny in comparison to a single individual recollection and its expression in words!" –Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory*