

# *Waiting*

Gail Balden

December, 2011

**A**S we hurtle into the Christmas season, amid the myriad tasks of going and doing, I make an effort to remember the meaning of Advent, the period of preparation observed in Western Christian churches that extends over four Sundays before Christmas. Advent originates from the Latin word *adventus*, which means “coming.” It’s a time of expectant waiting and anticipation. During this darkest time of the year, as we wait for the Winter Solstice, I like to focus on hope. As our nights shorten and days become longer, the return of light also seems to lighten our hearts.

Earlier this month I returned from a visit to one of the Hawaiian Islands where the slow pace of island life lightened my heart. Maybe it was the sound of rhythmic waves crashing on sandy shores, or maybe the peach sunrises and sunsets framed by palm trees. It could have been the shimmer of sun on water, the caressing trade winds, even the lift of curtains as they floated up and back to the window on tropical night breezes. Or perhaps it was the constant warmth of the sun that made one lackadaisical even in the midst of soft rain showers. I especially noticed the spirit of island life in the patience people displayed while waiting to cross multiple one-lane bridges to get to the north shore of the island. No one seemed to be in a hurry, all were courteous and calm, waiting their turn.

Lackadaisical or not, we all know that nothing stays the same. Life is about change, and it can change in an instant. Upon returning to my non-island life, I was distraught to learn of Sally Vanebo’s accident in a November storm that left her with horrific injuries. I was also touched by the way this community rallied around this dear friend and teacher with kindness, prayers and

support.

A video of memorable, striking images from 2011 reminded me how hard, yet inspiring, even in the face of tragedy, life can be. Images like that of Gabby Giffords who continues to astound us with her remarkable recovery after being shot in the head. Images like the one of Hawkeye, beloved dog of Navy SEAL Jon Tumilson lying beneath Tumilson's casket, refusing to leave his master after he was killed in Afghanistan. Then there are the grateful faces of soldiers and families united upon a safe return home from war. There's the image of a father, on bended knee, reaching out to touch the name of his lost loved one at a 9/11 memorial. The last flight out for NASA takes place and onlookers keep their gaze on the sky, knowing they are witnessing the end of an era. Their faces reflect our lives--sorrow mixed with joy.

We touch each other's lives, sometimes just briefly. All the same, we brush up against each other and leave an imprint in the soft clay of one another. We may feel alone, but we're not. Though each of us must find our own truth, despite everything, we carry on in this life knowing in our hearts that despair steals hope. Whatever happens, whatever life brings us, we choose hope. It's a form of love, and it's what we're made of.

During this season of Advent, my wish for all of us is that we continue to choose hope and look for inspiration wherever we find it. Whether revealed in the glory of a sunrise over a tropical island or Neahkahnie Mountain or in the eyes of our smallest, most innocent grandchild, or in the connections we forge and maintain here in our little towns along the Oregon coast where we each become life rafts that shore each other up in life's tumultuous sea, we need to hold on to hope. Recognizing patience as its own virtue, we wait patiently with hopeful hearts--for our turn, for a second chance, for things to get better, for a job, for a reprieve from the bank, for retirement. Some wait for Santa to bring warm clothes or enough food for tomorrow. We wait for dreams to come true, for healing, for a cure, for peace.