

Alternating Dilemma

By Steve Scafati

Early one morning, Peter was laying in bed, plagued by insomnia, indecision, should he continue with his job at the hotel? Or should he accept a professorship at a nearby prestigious university?

The manager at the hotel is not happy with Peter, he told Peter he talks too much. “Peter don’t fraternize with the guests, you’re too familiar with them. The fact was, guests were more satisfied with, and trusted Peter more than any other employee at the hotel.

Peter realizes that all the knowledge and understanding that he actually needed to be a good hotel clerk, amounts to *more* than all the little he achieved during his illustrious academic career, validated with a PhD certificate, a fools deed, bought and paid for in full, a worthless piece of paper. Peter knows too much, but Peter himself wonders if he really even knows anything. In his own grand scheme of life Peter found lecturing students one big brainwash. His conscience will no longer allow himself to give hypocritical morally corrupting lectures to self-serving spineless little buds only to accumulate his own self-serving benefits of tenure.

What Peter ultimately decided to do astonished his friends and family, at 38 years of age he was finally sure of what he wanted to do. And, he certainly wasn’t going to do it at the hotel.

The Friendly Islands, halfway around the world, and far far away. The next day Peter went straight to the nearest airline office and made his travel arrangements.

The last leg of Peter’s journey was made in an old German cargo boat. He and the rest of the passengers were packed like sardines. Peter coincidentally is from Munich,

Germany. He cursed the boat, the berth he was assigned was more like a slave galley. But, the Islanders.....they loved it! He wobbled up onto the deck and looked out over the stern where local fishermen were hauling up colorful flapping fish, the day was bright to his eyes, the ocean was wild, creating huge undulating waves, and his stomach was moving in unison. Peter was overwhelmed with seasickness, he only wanted to lye prostrate. The name of this ferry boat: the Olo’vaha, the palangees or foreigners referred to it as the Olo’vomit. Peter curled up in a small space next to a mooring and laid his head on a coil of rope shaded from the searing sun. Peter was so sick, as undignified as he may have looked to other passengers, he didn’t care.

Peter finally arrived, and with a sigh of relief he thanked God. The island, lush, green, and surrounded by white sandy beach and clear blue ocean was actually beautiful beyond description; life here should be no less than perfect, and simple.

Peter had read all the accounts and diaries describing visits, made over 200 years ago, to this veritable Paradise by legendary sailors such as Captain James Cook, Seaman Will Mariner and Captain William Bligh. And like these foreigners or “Palangees” as the natives would say Peter also even today received a warm welcome from the locals and was easily convinced at least initially that this group of islands truly deserves its nickname: “The Friendly Islands”

And so the story begins. Peter has found the ideal place to open up a small café and hopefully live content, at peace, and happily ever after.

Mr. Vee, a native Friendly Islander is Peter’s new landlord. He’s the head of a locally prominent extended family and adheres to a very strong cultural identity. Mr. Vee’s extended traditional family structure is so complicated that the family members themselves are not even quite sure when asked how one family member is related to another, specifics are not important. -----Example: Is he your brother? Or your father? To them the question is too profound, it’s a confusing interrogation, they become perplexed. He may seem to be the brother one day, the father the next ----- You’ll never

be too sure. Your favorite local shopkeeper you thought you knew well you discover that his daughter always there in the shop with him is actually his sister. The females in this culture are commodities and are happy to be subservient members of their family, don't be so sure that's the mother or the wife, she could very well be the grandmother or the sister, distinctions are unclear.

Mr. Vee has leased out to Peter a three room dwelling which Peter deems suitable for a nice Café. It's right on the beach and near the wharf. The thatched roof, a short bamboo fence and the rustle of palm trees overhead makes a perfect setting for a Café in the South Pacific. The whole scene is consistent with the traditional native style and natural beauty of the island.

Peter immediately prepaid the rent for one whole year and purchased necessary utilities and equipment, but the requirement that he will have to fulfill before he will be allowed to open the Café for business and become established is going to be a legal permit to operate the Café. This elusive permit will be the whole crux of Peter's odyssey in the South Pacific.

Peter is *not* so much like the few other Palangees on the Island, but is very popular with everyone... Tall and lanky, He sometimes dons a classic chapeau which lends him a gentlemanly look, but he has a stray eye, and when he lifts his hat a lock of hair hangs down over one side of his forehead, an ominous appearance and sinister look. His insight into island culture is engaging to the natives, but bordering on outright heresy. Peter frequents the native meeting houses, drinks "Kava" an intoxicating ceremonial grog derived from the roots of the Kava Plant, and goes to church every Sunday... there might very well be more churches on the island than there are houses.....he is welcomed into the community.

Peter inevitably meets Virginia, a retired former Vermont Inn Keeper who gave up her New England Yankee Heritage and moved to the South Pacific to spend the rest of her days counting sunsets and sipping Gin and Tonics, She is everybody's' adopted mother

or grandmother and is an expert in the Art of Gossip. She becomes Peter's trusted confidant. Virginia knows how to survive in this Island Paradise but she is more than a survivor, she has been in these Islands for several years and has special status among the natives. She is an accepted and well respected "Palangee" who has been able to maintain her Individuality and Independence while living in this Island Community despite the strict rules of conformity and the gregarious nature of the natives.

Virginia stays at the Guest House owned by LangiLangi who is the so called sister-in-law to Mr. Vee, Peter's landlord. LangiLangi's Guest House is only a 15 minute walk away from Peter's future Café.

Peter has now been on the Island for three months and is living in the three room dwelling that he was planning to have already opened as a Café. Acquiring a business permit in the Friendly Islands is not an easy task, there is talk that since Peter is not a citizen of this Friendly Island country, Peter must go into partnership with a native resident before he is granted a business permit. But, Peter is dead set against any partnership with any native, and so for Peter the gossip and the turmoil on this small Paradise like, but seemingly inescapable and isolated island, begins.

Peter hears that the Vee Family could actually be the cause of his difficulty in obtaining the permit. Virginia told Peter that LangiLangi was always curious about Peter's plans for a Café and that LangiLangi thought that a Café would be a good idea, but would have no knowledge for operating such a business.

So it might just be that the Vee Family sees a profitable business opportunity and without doing any work themselves lets Peter invest his own money and set up the Café, then convinces Peter that he must by law go into partnership with a native of the Island before he is granted the business permit. And, so of course, who more convenient a Partner than the Vee family.

Six months have elapsed and still no permit, and Peter is still dead set against going into partnership with the Vee family, or any other local. What makes matters worse is the Vee Family owns the only building on the Island that would be suitable for a Café and Peter has already invested all his money to no avail.

Almost a year has past and Peter is still hold up in the would be Café, still no permit and he's still dead set against partnership. It's gone beyond the issue of the Permit. The Locals are beginning to forget that he's even there, sitting in the dark, alone and practically destitute.

It's been over a year since Peter arrived in "The Friendly Islands". Virginia still comes once in a while to check up on him. But he's become very suspicious with her too.

Professor Futu, a native also to the "Friendly Islands" is Director of a sort of alternative institute of education on the Main Island. Professor Futu ironically an Einstein look-alike, and his thinking is not consistent with the philosophical mentality of his own native culture. He has received letters from Peter inquiring about possible teaching positions at his institute. Professor Futu thinks favorably of Peter because Peter is a PH.D. , and such individuals are rare in the "Friendly Islands". So Professor Futu is hoping that Peter will decide to come to his Institute on the Main Island and Teach Philosophy.

The days continue to pass uneventfully, nothing has changed, and once again Peter is lying in bed plagued by insomnia and indecision. Should he continue to pursue his Dream of opening up this Café? And living happily ever after or should he accept Professor Futu's sure offer of a teaching position on the main Island.

Peter stands to lose face if he gives up his fight for the Café Permit and if he returns to Germany he will be admitting failure, a dream chaser who never learned anything, or if he takes Professor Futu's offer of a simple teaching position on the main island it might appear that he is foolish not to just return to Germany and accept his original lucrative

offer of a Professorship at a prestigious university. What Peter ultimately did decide surprised the local natives and the Palangee community.....

-TO BE CONTINUED-