



My life of  
**EXILE**  
in Kalaupapa

I t is now almost fifteen years since the first publication of this book. I am getting to the age where every day is a blessing and thoughts of the past surround me. Thoughts of the future, too. If I've learned anything in all these years of turmoil and despair it is that with each day comes another chance to make life better, not just for myself, but for others as well.

Photo courtesy Olivia Robello Breitha

It amazes me every time someone writes to me or visits my home after reading my life story. So many people from all over the world have told me how grateful they are that I put my experiences down on paper. They say it brings them strength in their own lives to hear about the struggles of another person, to observe how someone else has managed the cards dealt to them and remained in the game. One lady told me how she hated her parents all her life because they gave her away when she was a baby. She learned later on that they were Hansen's Disease patients here in Kalaupapa. "After I read your book," she said, "I realized for the first time what their lives must have been like and that the State gave them no choice but to give me up. Thank you for helping me to understand."

Maybe this is the only thing we can really give to other people that ends up meaning anything at all, our honest story. It was never my intention to share so many intimate and disturbing aspects of my life with total strangers. Many times I wanted to quit the whole business and keep all my pain inside, where it belonged, hidden away from the world. *Why bother? People have their own problems. Who cares what I've been through anyway?* It took many years and the patient help of family and friends to

convince me that it was only by opening up that I could come to some kind of peace with myself, with our fearful society, and with the generations of government and health care authorities that helped to institutionalize that fear. I think that expressing myself through this book has helped make me a more caring and understanding person. I know I'm less angry than I was before, which is a

an uncertain future, of budget cuts and a dwindling patient population, this is the place where, God willing, I hope to remain. I have lived on this remote peninsula since the S.S. *Hawaii* delivered me here on June 30, 1937. I was a number then, #3306. This is my patient identification number to this day. But I am not just a number now. I have finally regained the sense of dignity that was taken

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good thing.

These past few years, as things have started to change for people with leprosy, I began to travel. I have visited Blessed Father Damien's grave in Belgium, participated in the World Health Organization's "Leprosy Awareness Month" at the United Nations in New York, even gone on a cruise to Alaska for my 85th birthday. And yet, it's a funny thing. However long I am away I yearn to get back to this world of mine, this Kalaupapa.

What once was a prison is a paradise to me now. Despite the threat of

from me when I was just a child. It's taken a long time for me to feel this way again. I'm glad I stuck it out.

**-Olivia Robello Breitha**

KALAUPAPA, MOLOKAI  
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*Olivia Robello Breitha's book "My Life of Exile in Kalaupapa" was recently re-published by the Arizona Memorial Museum Association (AMMA) and is available at the AMMA bookstores in Kalaupapa, the USS Arizona Memorial Visitor Center, and online at [arizonamemorial.org/bookstore](http://arizonamemorial.org/bookstore).*



The natural beauty of the rugged Kalaupapa coastline belies the heartache and loneliness that have occurred there over the past 100 years.

Photo by Ray Sandla