

Chapter 4

A Summer on Oahu

Steve was in intensive care for three days. He recovered from the overdose and was diagnosed as being severely depressed. He was transferred to Wasatch Canyon for observation and additional diagnostic testing. His family was shocked and surprised by the entire episode. Everything seemed so inconsistent with Steve's character. Only a few people in their Sandy neighborhood knew anything about the Stokoes' problems. They confided in Steve's priesthood leader, their home teacher, Diane's sister and her family and a few of his close friends. Steve was at Wasatch Canyon for over two weeks. Diagnostic tests revealed that Steve suffered from attention deficit disorder and some learning disabilities. Tom and Diane worried about bringing him home. In reviewing their options, the best plan seemed to be to get Steve out of the area and away, at least for the time being.

The day Steve was released from Wasatch Canyon he boarded a flight for Hawaii. The original plan was that he would stay there throughout the summer and perhaps into the next school year. On Oahu, Steve lived with the Makaiaus' Tom's sister, her husband and their four sons who are near Steve's age. His father stayed a block away, at the home of his brother Leo and his wife, Laura. Diane, David and Neil remained in Sandy. Steve's parents wrote frequently.

My Dear Wife Diane:

Aloha! I was very pleased to receive your letter and photos. . . Darol and Lilian and all the Makaiaus have been real good for Stephen. He has taken his rotation in the family washing dishes and mowing the lawn. . Last Sunday Kaimana and Stephen blessed the sacrament. Kaimana did the bread and Stephen the water. I believe that was the first time I have seen Stephen bless the sacrament. It was quite touching in a way to see the two cousins up there. Laura wept to see them do that. It was very special. . . .

Steve loved everything about Hawaii. He told his father and other relatives about what occurred in his government class, a class of about thirty-five Polynesian kids. Steve was the only white looking or "haole" kid in the class. The class was discussing immigration to the Hawaiian Islands. She said: "Let's see the hands of all those of Tahitian descent." and those kids raised their hands.

"All those of Tongan descent." and they raised their hands.

"Let's see the hands of all those of Samoan descent." So Stephen raised his

hand, the red headed boy with white skin, as white as the lightest Caucasian. All the kids in the class laughed and laughed to think that this Caucasian kid had raised his hand to claim that he was a Samoan.

So Steve explained that his grandmother was Bella Stokoe from Western Samoa, that he was a cousin of the Makaiau family. He said that the kids were really friendly to him after that. They gave him cheeseburgers and french fries and he didn't even know them. They said, "just take it." They welcomed him, accepted him, and gave unconditional love.

Steve began patterning his behavior after his Polynesian cousins. Along with discovering his roots, he adopted some of the characteristics of the new social group. He was humble, polite and respectful. He went everywhere with his cousins and their friends. When he first arrived in Hawaii he had difficulty understanding pidgin English. By the time he left he too was speaking with an island accent.

Dear Wife:

Hello. We're doing okay here. Stephen seems to be enjoying Hawaii, staying with the Makaiaus and associating with Kaimana's friends. He seems relaxed and has gained ten pounds since his arrival. He was 145 in the hospital and is now 155 lbs. He enjoys lifting weights with Kaimana and friends. He has been playing volleyball and basketball at Kahuka High in the evening and going to the beach almost every day. . .

Now for the bad news. I'm sorry my Dear but today Stephen received his final grade for Algebra. It was an "F" for the course. I am sorry but I really couldn't help him. Academically he is no different than how he was in Salt Lake. I spoke with the teacher in person on four separate occasions. There were 22 students in his class--21 of them were Polynesians. Stephen was the only one who failed the course. The teacher opened his book and showed me everything and went over Stephen's work with me.

Steven averaged 1/5th on all quizzes and flunked all tests. He got 45/100 on the final. Out of 20 small assignments he completed seven and failed to hand in 13. The night after he took the final test I asked Stephen how he did and he said he thought he got a "B." When the teacher told him his final grade today he said he was shocked. He really thought he would get a B for the course. . .

It is kind of embarrassing that he is the only white boy in Algebra; he's in with students from Tonga, Samoa and

Tahiti, some who can hardly speak English and yet he is the only one in the class to fail, everybody else passed. . .

What those three doctors said about Stephen in the hospital is true. I have NO DOUBT WHAT-SO-EVER. When he can't even match these Polynesian kids at Kahuka High, a high school that had only two students go on to college (from Sean's graduating class) something is definitely wrong with Stephen. Academically I am extremely disappointed in Stephen. The teacher looked for every excuse in the world to pass him but it just wasn't there. . .

Well enough said about Stephen. I am bringing him home on the 19th of August. He is no better off at Kahuka than Skyline. He is our problem and I'm not going to pawn him off on Darol and Lilian. . . When we get back, he is just going to have to follow the straight and narrow, follow definite family rules, and stay away from those friends who would lead his astray and bring him down. .

Previously, Tom and Diane had both questioned the accuracy of Steve's psychological tests. The young man profiled in the medical reports seemed so different from the son they had known just a few months earlier. The medical report stated that Steve was easily angered and becomes aggressive when frustrated. It also pointed out that Steve is a follower who is likely to engage in inappropriate or dangerous activity in order to be accepted, has difficulty reading social cues. . . defiant of authority. . impulsive and easily bored. . .emotionally distant. He escapes family stress by withdrawing, is at risk for using drugs and alcohol and easily victimized. All of that seemed quite unlike the youth they had known just a few months earlier.

Steve's parents began to believe drugs and alcohol had altered Steve's personality. They felt that by placing him in a warm, loving Polynesian environment he would once again become the great kid he had been just a few months earlier. Then they received another blow. Their district insurance policy contained a drug and alcohol use exclusion clause. The provider refused to pay the Alta Canyon bill for Steve Stokoe's emergency care. So his parents appealed:

My husband I are appealing the decision Blue Cross Blue Shield made not to pay for Stephen's emergency care at Alta View Hospital. The claim was denied because hospitalization was the result of drug abuse. Recent psychological evaluations indicates severe depression was the underlying cause. Drug involvement seems to have

been a symptom of this larger problem. . . Extensive testing has verified the fact that Stephen suffers from attention deficit disorder and other major learning disabilities. . . . Until test results were explained to us, we had no idea he could perform as expected. Steve's excellent vocabulary had masked his disabilities and learning problems for years. . . .

The appeal was denied . . . Because both parents worked for Granite school district, the Stokoes had always enjoyed double medical coverage. A drug and alcohol exclusion clause was adopted in 1992. Although the clause was discontinued the next year, Tom and Diane discovered they were responsible for a \$5,000 medical bill. The nature of problem prevented them from shopping for discount air line tickets. Suddenly the Stokoe's were seven thousand dollars in debt. All this added to their growing frustration.

Tom and Steve returned to Salt Lake on August 20th, 1993. Steve had gained weight and looked great but the biggest surprise was his Hawaiian accent and a big change in behavior. Steve came home a Polynesian. He spoke and acted exactly like his Polynesian cousins. He was polite, humble and helpful. He stayed home at night and did everything he was asked to do. He mirrored the culture and modeled the behavior he had learned in Hawaii. His parents were delighted with this change which lasted through the visit of the Makaiau family to Utah. They came for a football game with Kahuka High school and Provo High at B.Y.U. Stadium.

Then school started, Steve's Makaiu cousins returned to Hawaii and the neighborhood drug buddies began stopping by. Within a few weeks he was back into the same pattern of anger, defiance, truancy and drugs. Steve's parents were disappointed that he was unable to continue the behavior he adopted in Hawaii. His mother was angry with his father for bringing him home. However they both agreed that Steve was going to have to learn to make correct choices on his home turf.

Classes at Skyline were as difficult as they had been the previous year. Playing football was no longer an option as Steve had missed all of the summer practices. Diane decided not to tell Steve about his learning disabilities fearing he would simply give up and stop trying. One day he said, ***"Mom, do you think something happened to my brain when I overdosed and was at Alta View hospital. I just do not understand my English assignment?"***

It was then that Diane explained the Wasatch Canyon diagnosis. "Steve, you never will do well in regular classes. But we will help you and I am sure you will be able to graduate."

Diane took the test results from Wasatch Canyon to the counseling center at Skyline. Steve's counselor went over all the paperwork. Everyone agreed that Steve qualified for resource classes. When Diane suggested that he transfer into that

program, Steve flatly refused. He was a junior. He had never been in a resource class and would not even consider that option. Diane had known John S., one of the Skyline counselors, since 1970. She talked with John about Steve's problems. John asked if Steve had attention deficit disorder.

"Yes, he does."

"You are in for hell," John warned.