



Aloha

Twilight approached with each crash of the waves, like a clock ticking off the seconds in his mind. He'd waited all day, perhaps all his life, for this moment. He was going to do something that he believed should only be done at night.

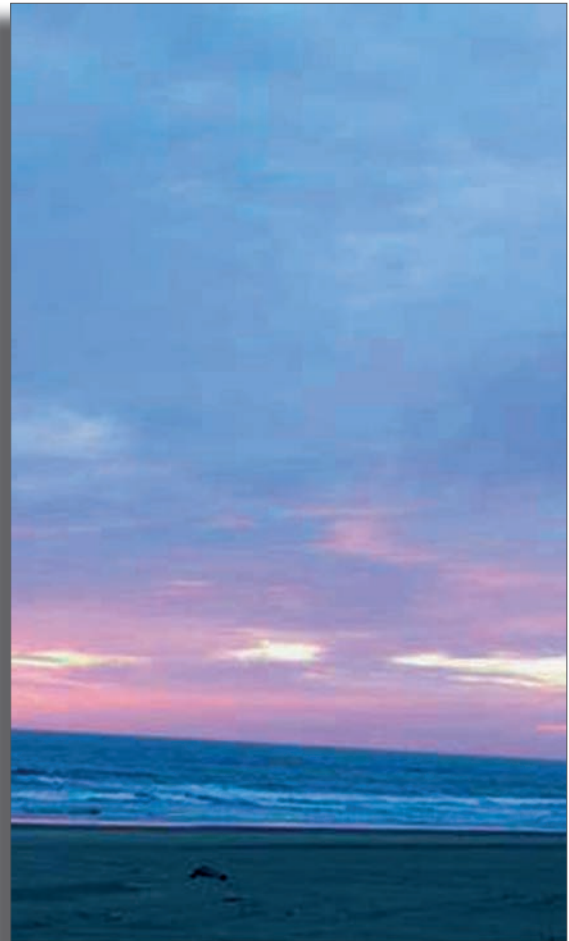
The Pacific Ocean lay directly in front of him. From the porch of his beach house, Rick watched the water shimmer. The tide must be coming in, he reflected. He leaned against the wall, his arms akimbo. The island air was warm and smelled like the ocean, fresh and yet as old as time.

He could hear the live band from the outdoor patio bar. He knew his high-rise hotel well enough to imagine the tall palm fronds swaying in the breeze, the wait staff in their khaki walking shorts and matching Hawaiian shirts carrying trays of frosty drinks, and the teams of undercover security officers mingling with the guests.

This had been his wife, Ellie's, favorite place, second only to their mountain home in Taos.

He struggled to breathe, thinking of Ellie. She'd walked into his life a dozen years ago, infusing so much joy into ordinary daily events, that he'd forgotten how he'd ever managed without her. He still couldn't believe she was dead. It wasn't fair. Drug addicts, alcoholics, violent criminals, mentally insane people were still alive and Ellie was not. Even with all his money, they weren't able to prevent or stall the tenacious grip of her cancer. She devoutly believed the New Age promise that people with positive attitudes live longer, survive vicious diseases, leap tall buildings and defy gravity.

He now knew for certain that highly animated and energized people with positive attitudes did die and neither love nor money could prevent it. Rick didn't fault the New Agers for their affirmations and ideas; he only wished someone else had died



instead of his beloved Ellie. He also knew he didn't want to live without her.

He noticed a disruption in the sand in front of the porch step. What the heck?

He leaned forward to read a string of handwritten letters in the sand: **Your sand matters don't do it.** There was a small hourglass laid near the letters. Rick looked around but knew he was completely alone. He thought of how he and Ellie used to write coded messages of their love and affection in the sand. Often their messages referred to a website one of them had found and wanted to share.

He picked up the hourglass, turned it over and sat it on a stump by the corner of the porch. The sand fell steadily down. When all the sand had fallen, he went into the house, to his laptop. He'd left it



on the table with his last message to his staff and friends scrolling across the screen.

He Googled 'Sand Matters' and selected a possible website. When the home page opened, Rick was drawn to the hourglass and then to the question: Isn't it about time your sand matters? Curious, he clicked on the category of books and found the excerpt labeled 'Sam's Story: don't do it'.

He felt an electric current from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head; his entire being felt suddenly awake. His cursor hovered over the choice. Rick knew, as he'd known at every other

He deliberately took his hand off the mouse. The cursor blinked, patiently. He shot one last desperate look through the French doors, past the porch to the sand. His index finger settled on the mouse and he pressed down once.

A deep calmness penetrated his senses. He sat down and read the words on his monitor.

Don't Do It.

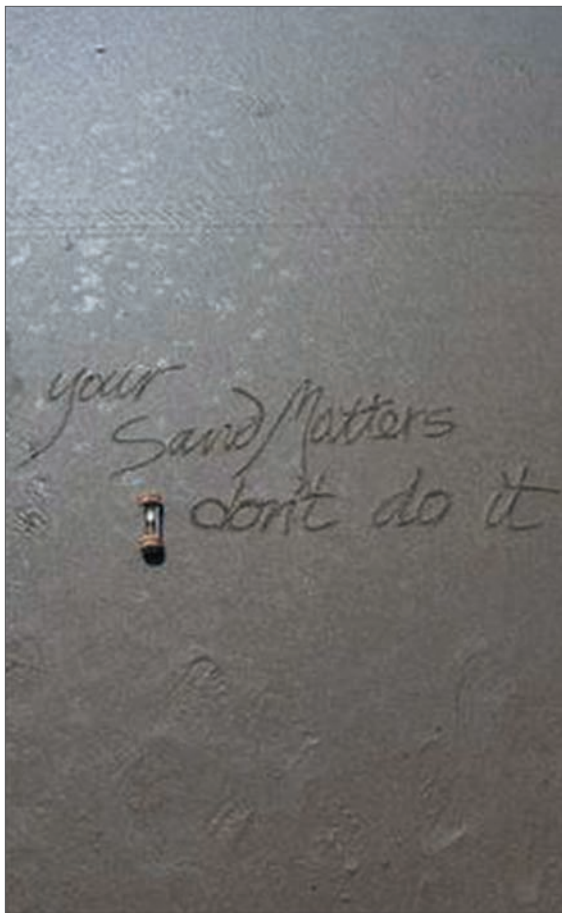
If you are reading this special story, you have been given a gift from a tiny angel we named Elizabeth. Very few people are invited to hear this story. It is my sacred journey and I trust that you will honor it. My name is Sam.

It was a dark and stormy night. Really, it was. But it wasn't the weather conditions that threw me off my Harley Softail Deluxe into a cement wall at 100 miles an hour. It was my own desire to die. I thought I was at the bottom of my life, despite my abundant checking account, my houses, cars and investments. I hadn't even been drinking, just remembering. In one pretentious moment, I decided to end it.

Unbeknownst to me, my best friend rounded the corner on his bike a fraction of a second after I hit the wall. Lucky for me, my buddy was a paramedic. Even though at the time he had no idea the crumpled, bleeding body was me; he spun his bike around and had his cell phone out of his pocket probably before I even lost consciousness.

I never heard the sirens, never felt the ER cardiac paddles and to this day I don't remember the first few weeks in ICU. They told me it was probably better that way.

The ensuing days were unmitigated misery. I resented the niceness of the complete strangers who encouraged me as I struggled to push my wheelchair. I endured overwhelming nausea when they parked the hospital food cart outside my door. I detested the young, cheery volunteers offering



turning point in his life that, if he clicked on the story, his life as he knew it right now would be over. He ached to go back out to the sand; he knew it was Ellie's spirit in the message.



books and magazines. I never wanted to see another person wearing scrubs ever again.

The days were bad but the nights were worse. Hallway lights were dimmed, staff whispered, patient room doors were closed, and yet there was an internal vibratory hospital hum that set my teeth on edge.

During those dark nights, I obsessively replayed my suicide attempt over and over with a different concrete wall and with a different bike. I prevented all other drivers from being on the road. There were no sirens, no cardiac paddles, and no compassionate, worried nurses' faces bending over me with pain killers.

Despite my nightly visions, I woke up every morning in the same hospital, with the same nurses and the same pain. I was so deeply submerged in my personal hellhole that I should have suffered intensely from 'the bends' the night I was jerked into reality.

I heard a voice from deep inside me asking questions. There was an infinite gentleness to the voice, a caressing demand for honesty and trust.

The voice was all around me, filling me up as if none of my other senses were needed. I could not escape the compassion and absolute completeness of the voice and by morning, I did not want to. All I wanted was to feel embraced by that voice for the rest of my life.

It was the food cart outside my room smelling like bacon, pancakes and eggs that offered a safe passage for my re-entry into the physical reality of my hospital room, my wheelchair and my paralyzed legs.

Later that same morning, I was in the embarrassing process of failing Hospital Bed-making 101, when my Physical Therapist walked in. I was halfway out of my chair stretching for an elusive pillow between the night stand and the wall when she asked if I needed help with anything.



She took in the disorganized state of my room with its mound of sheets, blankets, pillows, and the tangled TV remote and nurse's call button cords. She turned my chin to the right and then to the left, assessing my freshly shaved face.

She leaned against the counter and, I swear to God this is true; asked me out on a date. We only went as far as the hospital cafeteria for dinner but I might as well have been seventeen and escorting her to the prom, I was so nervous. The short version: we were married 8 months later and Elizabeth arrived not long after that.

This is the good part: I met God on my way to hell. He asked why I thought I would be more successful at taking my life than I was at living it, how I dared to think that He wouldn't notice if I were gone. Had I even considered that He had a greater plan for me than I could ever imagine?



We talked all night. I valiantly argued my sad points. I'd never been a believer in God, never attended a church service and scoffed at friends when they said they felt His presence in the wind. I did not bargain; we did not negotiate. We struck no deal that night. I simply took everything He offered.

It was the first time in my adult life I felt completely loved for who I was: a broken, fragile man with an attitude.

My advice to you: only do what you are planning to do if you are absolutely, utterly, entirely, positively certain it is God's will that you die or you might end up in a wheelchair like me or like a guy I met in rehab who survived his self-inflicted gunshot through his mouth.

Here's the difficult part: you'll never know if you should live your life as you are now or as whom you might become if you survive your suicide. Even if you don't believe in a God, if you know for a fact that you know more than He does, go ahead and take your life.

If you think for one moment that there might be a single mystery to life you don't understand, give yourself one more night to talk it out.

In other words, don't do it.

I have no idea if my unsuccessful suicide was God's plan or if I disrupted His plan for me, but I do know that I met the love of my life in my hospital room and from there, came Elizabeth. Between my broken bones, the surgeries, the skin grafts, the paralysis, the infections, and the drugs, my team of physicians seriously doubted that we'd conceive.

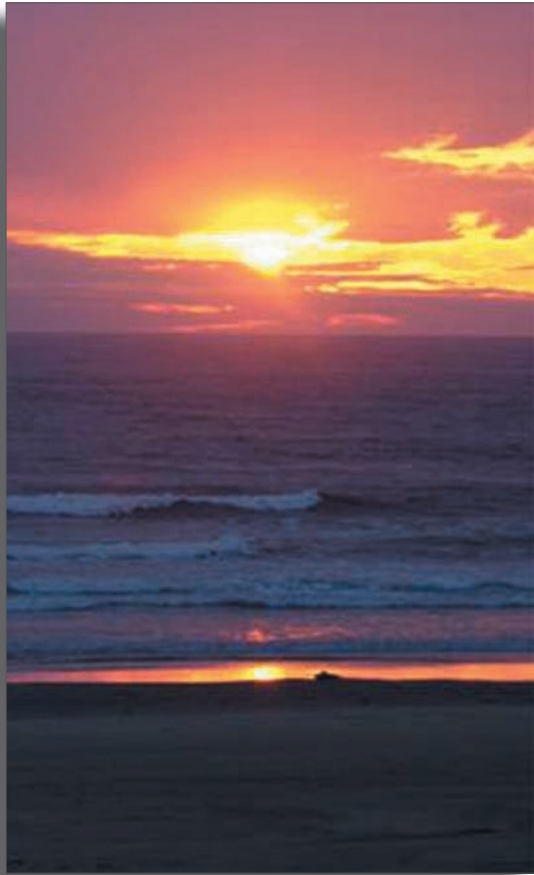
We were reckless with no expectations. Elizabeth is a living miracle. Had I succeeded in killing myself that fateful night, she would not be here. When they handed her to me in the delivery room and her little fingers wrapped themselves around my big one, I experienced the rapture of pure gratitude to be alive. I knew He heard me.

I agreed to share the essence of my sacred experience in this story only because I am in total agreement with the concept that one's sand matters. There was more, much more, that crossed between God and me that night. I hold my hourglass, my life, as my commitment to God to live fully engaged and on purpose.

Live on,

Sam





Stunned by Sam's story, Rick read it a second time. It never occurred to him that he might survive his suicide. He wanted to die, didn't he? Or did he? He closed his laptop and slowly walked outside. The twilight had thickened to a night sky with glittering summer stars.

He stepped off the porch and knelt to touch the tracings in the sand. Silence enveloped him. He felt Ellie's presence and her absence at the same time as if the past and the present were suspended in the same grain of sand. A simple hourglass, with its double mounds of sand, linked him to a complete stranger who had the courage to love and live again.

Rick looked up to see that the tide had turned and was on its way out. The eternally crashing waves and the sandy beach were outlined in front of him. Even at this late hour, couples strolled arm in arm, blissed out and happy. He stood up, stretched out his arms and said, "Mahola, Sam. Mahola, Ellie."

To live is so startling it leaves little time for anything else.

~ *Emily Dickinson* ~

