

STORY
INDEX
[News]
[Business]
[Features]
[Sports]
[Editorial]



Monday, August 8, 2005



CINDY ELLEN RUSSELL / CRUSSELL@STARBULLETIN.COM

Geneva Rivera of the Iona Contemporary Dance Theatre performed yesterday during the Hawaii International Forgiveness Day held at Central Union Church.

Forgiveness hailed as path to healing

By Mary Vorsino
mvorsino@starbulletin.com

The hospital staff whose mistake killed her mother; the father who was never there; the foster parents who couldn't love; the social workers who didn't seem to care.

For years, Jennifer Ah Chong held onto her anger for the people who took away her childhood and had her and her four siblings bouncing from foster home to foster home -- six in all -- until they were no longer minors.

But once she forgave, she was able to move on. Then, she was able to make a difference.

The foster parent, adoptive mother and youth services consultant was one of four honorees yesterday at the third annual Hawaii International Forgiveness Day conference, which highlighted the importance of forgiving as a way of achieving peace.

More than 100 people attended the gathering, which also included speakers, music, theater, dance and free activities, like games for the children and massages for the adults.

The event was one of about 300 held around the world yesterday in commemoration of International Forgiveness Day, which was founded in 1997 and champions the philosophies of Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi and other world-renowned peace advocates.

"It's really important to forgive, just so you can put a closure to the hardships," said Ah Chong, of Hilo. "I had to forgive. It was just where I thought, 'I'll kind of let go of the bad things.'"

A four-person panel, which included Kumu John Keola Lake, discussed the meaning of forgiveness at the conference, urging attendees to think about forgiveness as a pathway to spiritual peace in their lives and a way of coming to terms with a bad situation.



CINDY ELLEN RUSSELL / CRUSSELL@STARBULLETIN.COM

Wally Amos kissed artist Peggy Chun, who received the Hawaii Forgiveness Hero award.



CINDY ELLEN RUSSELL / CRUSSELL@STARBULLETIN.COM

Aaron Mahi played the piano as Robin Stephens Rohr and twin sisters Nohea Leopoldo and Imiola Gora-Aina of No Hoahanau sang a "Prelude Na Mele."

"Forgiveness isn't always about the person you're forgiving," said Jon Osorio, director of the University of Hawaii Center for Hawaiian Studies. "When you forgive, you fulfill your wholeness. If you don't forgive because of misunderstandings or mishaps, you suffer the burden."

And, said Lake, forgiving is not about forgetting. "If we forget, we tend to repeat the same error again," he said with a laugh.

Organizers and attendees alike said there is no better time to believe in the power of forgiveness, with wars and famines raging the world round.

"I think forgiveness is extremely important in these trying times," said Dorothy Hayden, who came to the event out of curiosity. "But I feel that it's

a slow process."

And many times, it does not come easy. "You've got to learn how to forgive," said Marcia Bower, a retired schoolteacher. "You've got to look within yourself."

Besides Ah Chong, other honorees at the conference were artist Peggy Chun, who suffers from Lou Gehrig's disease; Lorenn Walker, who was nearly killed in an attack in Waikiki in her early 20s, a wake-up call for her to do more with her life and what brought her to go to school to become a lawyer; and Charles Clark, who was sent with occupation forces to Nagasaki just days after the atomic bomb fell on Aug. 9, 1945.

Clark was 18 and in the Navy when he pulled into Nagasaki's harbor with some 4,000 fellow sailors and Marines. He still remembers the flattened skyline and the strange silence -- no noise, but an eerie, whistling wind in what was a bustling city. When they came ashore, the stench of rotting flesh overwhelmed him.

"When we came into the harbor, there was no life," he said.

Rather than giving forgiveness yesterday, Clark asked for it. He said he wants the people of Nagasaki to forgive the American military for dropping a nuclear bomb on their hometown 60 years ago on Tuesday. Hiroshima was the first city to be nuclear-bombed, on Aug. 5, 1945.

"They were innocent," Clark said, his eyes welling up with tears.

[E-MAIL THIS ARTICLE](#) | [PRINTER-FRIENDLY](#)

[E-mail to City Desk](#)

[BACK TO TOP](#)

Text Site Directory:

[\[News\]](#) [\[Business\]](#) [\[Features\]](#) [\[Sports\]](#) [\[Editorial\]](#) [\[Do It Electric!\]](#)

[\[Classified Ads\]](#) [\[Search\]](#) [\[Subscribe\]](#) [\[Info\]](#) [\[Letter to Editor\]](#)

[\[Feedback\]](#)