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Three 'Heroes' Embody Forgiveness

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They will be honored for their work at an event by the Hawaii Forgiveness Project

By Pat Gee



Muthukumaru Sooriyakumar, a copper sculptor specializing in religious art, literally walked hundred of miles on the journey to finding forgiveness in his heart for the men who murdered his father more than 40 years ago.

He will be one of three people honored Aug. 5 with a Heroes of Forgiveness Award at the 10th annual Hawaii International Forgiveness Day from 4 to 7 p.m. at the state Capitol Auditorium.

Others to be recognized are Maryknoll Sister Joan Chatfield and Chuck Spezzano, a psychologist and author with a worldwide ministry of inner healing.

Joan Chatfield:
She has been involved
in reconciliation work
for more than 50 years



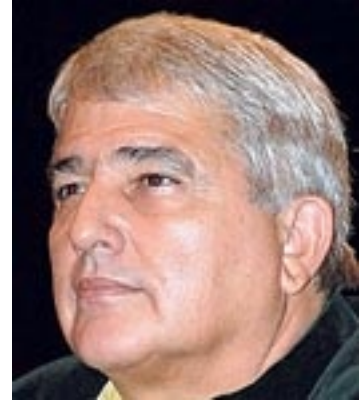
Some 300 people are expected to attend the Hawaii Forgiveness Project event, which features a family festival and arts awards presentation, according to co-hosts Roger Epstein and Michael North. Lyla Berg, former state representative, will speak on practical forgiveness in law and politics. Slack-key guitarist Keola Beamer will speak on forgiveness in the spirit of aloha.

Sooriyakumar said he was 21 when his father, the political leader of their village in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), was shot in the head in front of his mother at home. Forced to flee, "I ran away to India," he said. Sooriyakumar staggered on foot across India, so numb with grief and rage he was oblivious to hunger and other conditions. "I didn't have any feeling in my body," he said.

He fell in with the "sadhus," holy men who relinquish worldly possessions and live on the charity of people they meet along the road. He went from temple to temple and ended up in the Himalayas several years later, where a sadhu friend gave him a blessing that released torrents of bitterness and eventually transformed him.

"One day my heart burst open, and I started crying and crying for days. I looked on people with only love, only love. ... My sadhu friend predicted my life would be very completely changed for love and forgiveness and understanding. He said, 'You are going to make your life a great life.' I felt it in my heart and felt it in my body."

Chuck Spezzano:
The author holds
seminars around the
world about healing



His struggle to find lasting peace continued for the next decade, teaching yoga as he crisscrossed the Middle East and Europe, said Sooriyakumar, 63. The people he befriended along the way and those who took him under their wing were part of the healing process. He realized his decision to love instead of hate opened the door to his present blessings, and when he finally came face to face with the murderers, the journey to find forgiveness was complete, Sooriyakumar said.

"I made a choice. I want to love everybody," he said. "If I don't heal myself, it is hard to be with people, to do something with people."

Sooriyakumar said he was raised Hindu but is open to all faiths. "There is only one truth and very many paths. My religion is of my heart, heart is everything, and compassion, understanding," he said.

He moved to Hawaii 30 years ago and eventually brought his mother and the rest of his family here. Sooriyakumar founded Mouna (Sanskrit for "silence") Farm, Arts and Cultural Village in Waianae to help others find the silence within, he said.

For the past several years he has focused on creating religious works of art, of all faiths, in copper. In an interview with the Honolulu Star-Bulletin in 2006, he said, "My work is my temple, my meditation and my prayer. ... While I work I chant mantras." He prays over the copper and his tools before he starts work, the article said.

Epstein said the awards to Chatfield and Spezzano are for helping thousands of people "let go of their troubled past and move forward positively with their lives."

"Sister Joan has been involved with numerous religious and spiritual programs on forgiveness for over 50 years. Part of this has been in the area of hospice work and

helping people get comfortable enough to let go of their anger, guilt and regrets as they prepare to leave this world," Epstein said. Chatfield also has been active with reconciliation between and within religious organizations and other groups that promote forgiveness, including All Believers Network and the Catholic diocese, Epstein added.

Spezzano, author of 20 books and co-writer of another 20 with his wife, Lency Spezzano, founded the Psychology of Vision in 1991, according to their website pov-int.com. Inspired by the book "A Course in Miracles," the Kaneohe residents frequently hold seminars around the world, using his innovative methods to accelerate healing.

"If we want peace and not to be stuck, then forgiveness is the key. Peace leads to happiness, freedom, love, health and abundance," Spezzano said this week via email from Germany.

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