Section Editor
Anne W. McCammon,
MD, FAAN

Just out of Pā'ia

C. William Britt, Jr., MD

Correspondence & reprint
requests to Dr. Britt:
CBritt@inwhealth.net

The din of the Hali'imaile lunch crowd drifted to the veranda where Bob and Evelyn sat enjoying the breeze. "The pineapple upside-down cake I just had for dessert is the best way to eat pineapple I've ever found," Bob said.

"I'll see if I can get the recipe off the restaurant's Web site. Are you ready to go?" Evelyn asked.

Bob preferred returning to the condo in Kihei to searching the north shore of Maui for some place he had no desire to visit. "Are you sure you want to go out there?"

"Yes! I promised Dr. Winthrop. Anyway, it's just out of Pā'ia. We'll get back in plenty of time for you to sit on the lanai and read neurology journals."

"You know I have to get caught up on vacations," Bob mumbled.

They walked to the rented Chevrolet Impala. Bob slid behind the wheel and said, "This is something—early January, the car's been sitting outside, and you have to turn on the air conditioning to cool it off!"

"It's not Minneapolis, for sure. I love seeing everything so green," Evelyn said. Bob pulled out of the gravel parking lot and drove cautiously on the narrow, winding road. In the wind the sugarcane in the fields on each side undulated in broad waves, motion vivid in Bob's mind, the inland correlate of that lapping the island's shores. The road intersected Baldwin Avenue, which he took into Pā'ia.

"Go slow," Evelyn requested. "Let's pick up flowers here, and I'll get the directions then."

When they didn't pass a flower shop, Bob thought, "The whole purpose is taking flowers, and we're going to get out there without any." Once past the city limits, Bob accelerated. "I'm sure there'll be a stand," Evelyn said.

The highway wound around deep ocean inlets but never took them far from the coast. Bob said, "I know this is supposed to be paradise, but there's some rough terrain out here."

Evelyn pulled a notepad out of her purse, flipped over a few pages, and read aloud, "Milepost 6, ocean side of the highway, fifth trash can, halfway across,

flat stone." After passing several mile markers they saw a cardboard sign beside the road with writing in black Sharpie:

FRUIT FLOWERS COCONUT WATER

Around the next curve was a small produce stand. Watched intently by a little girl sitting in the shade nearby, Bob parked the car safely on an expansion of the shoulder of the road. Evelyn headed for the tubs of tall flowers beside the stand while Bob went inside. The tan young woman standing behind a table laden with fruit asked, "Can I help you?"

"I'd like to try some coconut water," Bob replied.

"You'll like it," the woman said, turning to a basket behind her. She placed a large green coconut on the table and picked up a butcher knife. "We use the water for a lot of things, like conditioner for our hair." She cut a hole in one side of the coconut while he glanced out the back of the stand to a wild tropical orchard. When the woman offered him the coconut, he took it with both hands and sucked on the straw she had inserted through the hole.

The little girl wandered into the stand, her look sweet and innocent. Suddenly the woman snapped, "Don't take another one!" The girl's hand jerked, releasing the straw she was lifting out of a cup that held many just like it. Fright crossed the girl's face. She ran away, the woman calling, "I told you before, you can only have one straw a day!"

The coconut water was refreshing at first, but Bob tired of the salty aftertaste before he had drunk it all, and the callous treatment of the child had dampened his spirits further. He handed the coconut back to the woman. "Don't you want to take it with you?" she asked.

"No, thanks."

Evelyn entered the stand and laid a bundle of brilliant flowers on the table. "Will that be all?" the woman asked.

"Yes," Evelyn said. "Would you trim the stalks? I imagine the vase won't be more than about 8

The neurologic case, the characters, and their interactions described in this story are fictional.
Listen to Dr. Britt read this piece, available exclusively on *Neurology*® for the iPad®.

inches tall." The woman reached for her knife, understanding. While Evelyn examined the truncated bundle, Bob paid the woman and started back to the car. Evelyn got final directions before joining him.

After a couple of curves the highway ran straight up a hill, and the cemetery appeared on their left. He drove through the entrance onto a curbed cement road, which immediately turned downhill, paralleling the highway. Beside the ocean side of the road was a long row of trash barrels, each about fifty yards from the next.

Driving slowly, Bob admired the beaches and bays of the north shore and the expanse of the Pacific from this elevation. Soon Evelyn pointed at a barrel and said, "That should be the one." A gust of wind rocked the car as he parked. While they were getting out, several petals from Evelyn's bouquet wafted onto the front seat. The couple started across the lawn and quickly found the marker:

RICHARD G. WINTHROP

MARCH 26, 1978–MAY 18, 2007.

BELOVED SON BROTHER and FRIEND

Lying beside the flat granite marker were 2 Corona bottles and a small bottle of peach schnapps. All 3 bottles were empty and the paper schnapps label, weathered. The brass vase in one corner of the marker held a bundle of withered flowers.

Bob noticed Evelyn's smile. "Ricky's friends visit and remember him," she said before removing the faded bouquet. 'Not for a while, though,' Bob thought, fighting the impulse to say it out loud.

Evelyn placed the fresh flowers in the vase and began arranging them with a fine eye for color and composition. Bob meandered nearby, reading the names and inspecting the designs on the markers. He was drawn to the site of a recent burial. Bundles of flowers were strewn on top of the clay-colored dirt heaped over the grave. As he approached, a sweet floral scent and the musty smell of freshly turned earth, the odorants of interment, were carried to him on the breeze.

An intense melancholy came over him. 'A great name for a Supreme Court justice, The Honorable Richard G. Winthrop.' He returned to Ricky's grave and stood close to Evelyn.

Tears were shining in her eyes. "Ricky was his oldest boy. Dr. Winthrop wanted him to finish college, but Ricky dropped out, moved over here, and worked in a surf shop. One day he had a seizure ... that's how the brain tumor ..."; Evelyn took a deep breath before trying to finish her thought, the wind filling in the silence. Finally she said, "Glio ..."

"... blastoma," Bob finished. Then he repeated the entire word: "Glioblastoma."

"Because he was a resident of Hawaii," Evelyn continued, "his insurance would only pay for treatment here. Ricky didn't move back home until just before he died. He wanted to be buried on Maui, though."

Bob thought about Dr. William Winthrop, Bill, a colleague whose confidence and encouragement when laying out the plan for treating Ev's breast cancer several years ago had been so reassuring. Somehow that particular bond had always seemed a barrier to developing a true friendship. Bob imagined Bill finding a plot on the island, selecting a granite marker with a vase, finalizing the inscription ...

Evelyn interrupted Bob's thoughts, but it was as if she had read his mind. "When I told Dr. Winthrop we'd bring flowers, he seemed ..." Evelyn paused, searching for the right word, "... appreciative, I suppose. He said there wasn't enough room in the church for all the people who came to the funeral here."

"I'm sure you never get over the death of a child," Bob said. Then he looked to the ocean beyond the new grave, past the mound of volcanic soil and wind-blown flowers, past imagined relatives and friends grieving beside the rectangular pit. Translucent sails propelled filmy windsurfers across the whitecapped bay. Hazy Monet seascapes and swirling Van Goghs appeared in his mind. In his work he had always found a way to escape moments like this, talks of death, times of loss.

Bob pushed the impressionist scenes from his mind and looked at Ricky's marker. BELOVED SON. He thought, 'If the woman in the stand could see this inscription, how differently she'd treat her precious little girl!'

The couple stood at the decorated grave for a while, their floral vacation shirts whipping in the wind. "There's been no meaningful progress against glioblastomas since I was in training 30 years ago." Bob paused before continuing, "I'd always believed treatments would come along during my career that would really impact those tumors."

They returned hand in hand to the cement road. Evelyn tossed the faded bouquet into the trash barrel and got in the car. Bob slid behind the wheel and started the engine.

While clicking his seatbelt into place, he smelled the faint scent of tropical blossoms. He glanced across the cemetery and saw the fresh flowers bowed and quivering in the vase.

Then he looked at the vaporous beaches and bays and thought, 'How naive my expectations.'

Gently Bob shifted the Impala into gear.

Neurology®

Just out of Pa'ia

C. William Britt, Jr.

Neurology 2012;78;1535-1536

DOI 10.1212/WNL.0b013e3182553c9a

This information is current as of May 7, 2012

Updated Information & Services

including high resolution figures, can be found at:
<http://n.neurology.org/content/78/19/1535.full>

Permissions & Licensing

Information about reproducing this article in parts (figures, tables) or in its entirety can be found online at:
http://www.neurology.org/about/about_the_journal#permissions

Reprints

Information about ordering reprints can be found online:
<http://n.neurology.org/subscribers/advertise>

Neurology® is the official journal of the American Academy of Neurology. Published continuously since 1951, it is now a weekly with 48 issues per year. Copyright Copyright © 2012 by AAN Enterprises, Inc.. All rights reserved. Print ISSN: 0028-3878. Online ISSN: 1526-632X.