



That Banyan Tree

By **LEE CATALUNA**

In the days after the Lahaina fires, The Washington Post invited readers to “send us your Maui memories” to “show what Maui means to the world.”

TREE

(reading the newspaper)

“Maui is special to anyone who’s visited. The west side is a second home to our family. Watching the sunset in Lahaina was one of the most beautiful things I’ve ever seen.”

“My sweetheart and I took our first trip to Hawaii in 2003. We stayed for two weeks at the Lahaina Inn and loved walking under the big banyan tree. We came back for the destination wedding of our dreams. We are devastated at the loss of a place that felt like ours.”

“My family owned a condo on the south end of Lahaina. The banyan tree was planted by an ancestor of my cousins 150 years ago, and I remember playing under it in the 1950s when spending the summer with my grandmother.”

MOM

What is going on?

TREE

I’m reading my press.

MOM

You’re a tree. Why are you talking?

TREE

I’m that banyan tree.

MOM

I’m so tired I think a tree is talking.

TREE

I’m more than a tree. I’m the spirit of welcoming, making strangers feel at home, like they each have their own special connection to this place.

“On our many trips to Maui, my husband is always anxious to be in Lahaina sitting under the banyan tree with his friends, the birds. To him, this is a special and almost spiritual activity: getting a bag of chips and feeding the pigeons. I call him the ‘Bird man of Lahaina.’”

“My first trip to Maui in 2018 was my ‘therapy’ in the midst of some devastating circumstances. The trip

helped to restore my soul. I sit under the banyan tree, and I am healed.”

MOM

Shut up.

TREE

You need healing. Come, lie cradled in the folds of my roots.

MOM

Oh hell no. Dudes been pissing on your roots for decades.

TREE

No!

MOM

There’s always wads of toilet paper and trash stuck in your crevices. Crazy tourists feeding Doritos to the non-native birds. For as long as I can remember, this whole place smelled like piss and bird crap and Doritos.

TREE

I can’t control what people do around me.



Illustration by B. Miyo Art: created as a bumper sticker with 100 percent of proceeds benefiting Hawaii Community Foundation for Lahaina wildfire efforts and directly to Lahaina families; available for purchase at bmiyo.com

MOM

Oh yeah? How many times have you hidden drug deals and assaults behind your 16 trunks? And who needs 16 trunks? A coconut tree has just one trunk and is way more useful. And what about all the little kids who swing on your vines like Tarzan and crash to the ground?

TREE

You're the mom. Teach them to hold on.

MOM

I tell them that all the time! Hold onto our culture, hold onto the land, hold onto what is good.

TREE

By the way, these are aerial roots, not vines. It explains that on my plaque.

MOM

I've read your damn plaque. It says you were brought from India in 1873 by the Americans to mark the anniversary of the Missionary Church, which pushed out the Hawaiian religion. That's next-level colonist.

TREE

I've been watching this town change and distort longer than you've been alive. I was right here the day of the fire. I couldn't warn anybody. I couldn't

protect anybody. I couldn't run.

MOM

I must be pretty messed up if I'm arguing with a damn tree.

TREE

I am not a damn tree! I'm a symbol!

"I would visit the historic Pioneer Inn in the late 1970s. All the big rock stars came, including Mick Fleetwood, Elton John, and Boz Scaggs. I am mourning the loss of such a beautiful town, especially the gorgeous banyan tree."

"Our family spent two weeks in Maui in 1999. One of the highlights of our trip was the Haleakalā bike ride. We felt overwhelmed by its beauty."

MOM

Those people don't live here. And that one was about Haleakalā, not Lahaina.

TREE

It's close.

MOM

No it's not.

TREE

"Our stay in Hana was memorable. There were clouds hanging just off the island, laden with rain. There was only one other set of campers. They faced the ocean and started playing flutes. The clouds retreated. Truly magical."

And this one:

"My husband and I went to Maui for our five-year wedding anniversary. We took a sunset cruise and saw where Oprah has a house!"

MOM

These people don't know Lahaina. Not rain flutes and Oprah. Real things, like the way dirt would blow from the uplands and cover everything in the kitchen so that you got used to the taste of the soil, warm and rusty and sweet. The mango tree where Grandpa and his brother used to sit on folding chairs and drink coffee. Standing with your feet on

the same place on the wood floor where your mama and your grandma and your great-grandma used to stand to wash dishes, and you look down at your feet and they fit perfectly in the footprints of your kūpuna. A home that was not just a house but a place where your ancestors knew where to find you in your dreams. That's all gone.

TREE

I know. I watched it burn.

MOM

What about my children?

The place by the sink was supposed to be for their feet too.

TREE

Don't worry, Mama. I'll be here long after you and your children are gone.

MOM

Maui is not a dream destination. It's not a playground or a personal wellness retreat or damn fantasy island. It's home. It belongs to itself. The people with roots here, we take care of it.

TREE

...I have roots here.

MOM

I guess you do.

TREE

Different from you, but...

MOM

No. Roots is roots.

TREE

What can I do?

MOM

After I'm gone, when my descendants play Tarzan on your aerial roots, don't let them fall. I'm going to make sure they hold on and hold on and hold on.

END OF PLAY.

