

# Her Fiery Eyes of Indignation

WAYNE RICKS

It was August 1985. I first met Auntie Pi'ikea while working at Uncle Mua's house in Mā'ili.<sup>1</sup> I was building a hidden closet for Uncle Mua. He didn't tell me what it was for, but I could only guess it was for cocaine and money, since he was Wai'anae's big-time coke dealer. Carpenter skills like mine were in demand and, since I was a cocaine user, I fit in real good in the drug world. Auntie Pi'ikea slipped me a note telling me that she had work for me, and for me to call her.

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The next day I went to a pay phone, and I paged her beeper with the pay phone number. Two minutes later she called me and gave me instructions on how to get to her house up in Wai'anae Valley. I drove up the valley, meandering all the way to the end of a dirt road to a small house, unfinished and unpainted. Auntie was there to greet me. She showed me around and explained what had happened. She had hired a carpenter to build her a small, one-bedroom house, and he took off with the money she paid him without finishing the job. She told me that kind of shit happens when you're working with addicts. She told me she checked me out, and Uncle Mua had vouched for me. He said I was depend-

## SHE WAS FIERCELY PROUD AND DIDN'T WANT TO BE DEPENDENT ON ANYONE.

Auntie Pi'ikea had a few projects she wanted completed in her tiny house so she could bring her two children home to stay. Her children had been staying at her brother's place temporarily while she finished construction on her home. I immediately began working on finishing her simple, no-frills house.

She had no running water, no bathroom, and no kitchen. She had temporary power from an extension cord from the neighbor's house. A friend had given her permission to build a dwelling on his property. She had no permits, just a dream of having a home of her own where she could live with her children—your basic American dream.

As I worked on her house, Auntie Pi'ikea would confide in me as she got to know me. She explained that her father was a full-blooded Hawaiian, and he was on the waiting list for Hawaiian Homestead land. When he

died he was still waiting, and now that he was in the afterlife, she figured he was still waiting. The torch had been handed to her brother and her; they were still waiting for an award for a homestead. Her brother was married with three children and had a good-paying job as a heavy equipment operator. He was renting a house down behind Tamura Superette in Wai'anae.

Auntie Pi'ikea criticized her brother all the time, but I got the feeling it was because she hated the idea that she had to depend on him to house her kids. She was fiercely proud and didn't want to be dependent on anyone. She was a proud Hawaiian, and I could see that in her. She had high cheekbones, sunbaked brown skin, kinky black hair, and those fiery eyes of indignation with enough attitude to take on the whole world. She would pull no punches. She told it like it was, and she wouldn't take any shit from anyone. It didn't matter who you were, if she thought you were wrong, she would let you know. She was a hundred-and-ten-pound pit bull that would tear your limbs off if you wanted to scrap with her. She was absolutely tenacious.

During the week when welfare checks went out, Auntie Pi'ikea's pager would beep off the hook. I'd hear her telling people to meet her at certain locations, and she would tell me she had to run errands and that she would be back. Yeah, Auntie Pi'ikea was a drug dealer. We would get into conversations about why she dealt drugs. She told me she was on welfare, and she hated it. She didn't like being dependent on the government, but she had very little choice in the matter. The father of her children had split and didn't want anything to do with her or the kids. He was living somewhere, doing drugs, and wasting his life away. She was on her own, and it was difficult finding a job, especially for a single mom with two children. What jobs she did find would not

help her out of the welfare trap. Any money she would earn would be just enough to pay for childcare, and then the government would take away her welfare, and then she would be in a deeper hole than she was now. She understood the vicious circle of the welfare game, and she hated it. She'd say, "Wayne, this welfare bullshit is fucked up. Those assholes don't want us to get ahead, they just want to keep us down."

Auntie Pi'ikea had specific rules to follow in dealing her drugs, and she was very strict about it. If you wanted drugs from her, you had to follow her rules or else you would end up sucking dirt and rocks. There was one rule she was adamant about: She would not take anyone's EBT card. If you came to her with food stamps to buy drugs, you'd get an earful. She would be livid and say, "You fucka, I told you no bring me food stamps! Dats for your kids. You betta feed them. I catch you no feeding dem, I going buss your ass!" By the time she was done with you, she would have torn you a new asshole.

Auntie Pi'ikea trusted me, and she was happy that I finished all her projects she needed done. She brought her children home, and they were so happy to be with their mom. Her house was not fancy. It was not even a functioning, standard, American-style home. But it was her home, and it was the best way she knew how to live.

Sometimes she asked if I would help her deliver stuff to town. Yeah, I started running drugs for Auntie Pi'ikea. She had me delivering to her m̄hū friends downtown. That was the first time I had interacted with m̄hū. They were friendly, respectful, and fun to hang out with. Auntie liked them because they were dependable and honest. They paid in full, and there was no bullshit. They were her best customers.

Eventually ice—crystal methamphetamine—was introduced and became the drug of choice for many local folks. In her entrepreneurial mode, Auntie Pi'ikea switched over to dealing ice. Here's the tricky thing about drugs: Some drugs affect you in ways you can handle, meaning you can function in society and keep your addiction a secret. Other drugs take you down hard. You end up doing things you never considered before, and you find yourself committing acts that would normally outrage you. Meth took Auntie down hard.

One day I showed up to pick up my deliveries, and I found Auntie Pi'ikea sitting in her barren house, sipping on some Crown Royal. Her eyes were black and sunken,

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indicating she had been up for days. She was slurring and babbling. She said, "Wayne, dey like kill me. I been up for days watching for dem. Dey wen kill my dogs. I found my dogs poisoned. I tink dey stay spraying poison through my walls. I like you seal up all da cracks in my house. I like you put raza wire around my roof so dey no can get up on da roof." I asked her, "Who's they?" She told me it was the government, trying to take her down. Auntie was experiencing delusional paranoia that comes with psychosis.

Back then, ice was the bomb. It came from the Korean yakuza. Ephedrine, the main ingredient, was readily



available in Asia and was not a controlled substance at that time. A couple of hits, and you were literally up for days. As soon as you started to come down, another couple of hits, and you were back at it again, with all the pain gone away. Sleep deprivation is used as a form of torture, so you can only imagine what no sleep for days would do to your senses.

Auntie Pi‘ikea told me there were no deliveries because she didn’t re-up her supply. She had sent her kids back to her brother’s house because she feared for their lives. Later, her kids told me they split because they couldn’t handle not having a bathroom, and they had no privacy. They also said that their mom was acting weird, and they were scared for her. I too was scared for her, because I’d always seen her be so strong. I had grown close to her, and she was acting suicidal, so I stayed with her until she finally fell asleep. That night was the last

time I saw her. Shortly after that I went to work for the Koreans. By that time I had gained a reputation that I could be trusted.

I admired Auntie Pi‘ikea because she was a proud Hawaiian woman trying to make her way through a haole world. Right or wrong, dealing drugs was her way of trying to make a go of it. Along with dealing comes the money—and power—to control your environment. Auntie really needed that because she was lost in this world of America. She felt powerless without land that should have been hers in the first place, waiting on a ridiculously long list of homestead applicants. She was locked into the welfare trap, and while she vehemently opposed it, she needed it for her kids to survive. The long arm of colonialism has had far-reaching effects that continue to take their toll on the Hawaiian people.

# I loved Auntie Pi‘ikea.

And I will never forget her fiery eyes of indignation.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

As a Vietnam veteran, Wayne Ricks was disillusioned after the war, and drugs became a huge part of his life as he self-medicated to escape his realities. He ended a forty-year run by serving time in a federal prison. After his release, he decided to continue his education to make something of himself. He didn't want his epitaph to read, "Here lies a wasted soul." He wrote this true story as evidence of how drugs had become intertwined in local lives, causing havoc and destruction for so many.

## NOTE

1. Aside from the author's name, the names used in this essay are pseudonyms to protect the identities of the people described.

