



Kam Fong – “Hawaii Five-O”

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The Old Testament book of Job tells the powerful story of a man who was crushed by misfortune but who refused to rail against God.

Or to question Him.

Tragically bereft of his wealth, his children and his health, he neither accepted his misfortunes as proper punishment for his own sins nor questioned the judgment of the Lord.

The young man in our story, however, wasn't Job.

He was Kam Fong who wasn't sure that there was a God at all but who turned to a priest in his moment of torment crying, “Why? What have I done to deserve this? Why would a God let this happen?”

Kam Fong, the Chinese detective Chin Ho in *Hawaii Five-O*, is a man whose calm is generated partly by his Oriental heritage but even more by his intense faith in God and God's love.

He was born to his Oriental heritage, but he found his faith and God's love only after passage through earthly Hell.

That Hell was a part of World War II.

“I lost my wife and two children,” Kam says, “when two bombers crashed into our home.”

Though Kam was born in Honolulu, he was reared in an atmosphere more Chinese than American, disciplined according to the rigid code of upright Chinese parents. He even lived

for a year in China, the land of his grandparents, where he absorbed more understanding of and respect for the Chinese culture.

Love of family is a strong Chinese trait, so Kam, when he married young and became a father, was the doting head of his household.

His life, in fact, seemed perfect.

With a lovely and loving wife, a fine son and daughter and a good job at Pearl Harbor where he worked as a welder there was little more he could wish for

Then came the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and World War II, and the sunny Islands of Hawaii were darkened by tragedy.

Kam was at home when the Japanese attack began.

"I remember that Sunday morning," he says. "We went outside on the street, onto the sidewalks, to watch the planes go by. Everybody was out watching, because we thought it was a maneuver.

"Then we heard a guy on the radio screaming, 'Get off the street. This is an attack. This is for real. This is war!'"

"Even then, though, nobody paid any attention. Not at first. But then we realized the attack was real."

Within an hour, Kam had reported to work at Pearl Harbor, to a scene of horror almost beyond peace-time imagination. And he didn't get back home for three days.

Home!

Death was on the seas and in the skies, and the world was going mad, but his home was his happy refuge from horror

The world had gone so completely mad, however, that there could be no refuge, at least not in Hawaii in the early days of the war.

And one day, bombers plunged into Kam's house killing his wife and his children, a daughter, five, and a son, two and a half and, most cruelly of all he thought at the time, sparing him.

"I was in a back room when the planes crashed into the front of the house," he says. "I got out the back way."

But to what?

Kam was frantic with misery. He loathed his present and dreaded his future, because his life no longer had meaning.

"Be a man," his mother admonished. "You have to go on. A man must keep on living. What's to be will be."

Deep in the Chinese folk-memory must be the knowledge that man can endure the almost unendurable, since millions of Chinese for thousands of years have done so and, in the process, have developed fortitude and patience.

Perhaps this folk-memory steeled Kam's mother; yet, it didn't steel him.

"I had to know why such tragedy had happened," Kam says. "I felt there must be some reason, and I wondered what I'd done wrong.

"Prior to this, I really had no religion. You see, being Oriental, my mother and father were not churchgoing types.

"But after the tragedy, because I felt there must have been some reason for it, I finally decided to go to a Catholic priest, Father Peters, for help.

"I wanted to have answers from him. And he gave them to me."

To Kam's impassioned, "Why? What did I do wrong?" the priest said more than a simple, "We do not question God."

Yes, he did say that, but he said much more, too, explaining that we must accept God's will not only because God is omnipotent but, rather, because God is all-loving.

Our Father, he told Kam, works for our ultimate good.

"He said, 'Look at that tree out there,'" Kam tells the story. "He said, 'You see the leaf from the top branch is falling down. Next you see how the leaf from the bottom branch drops off; then one from near the center

" 'Maybe the top leaf as he falls wonders why he should have gone first. Why not another leaf?'

"Listening to Father Peters, I learned that, from the day we are born, we are all waiting to go back home. And, if we accept this fact, tragedy is not so hard to bear

"Father Peters felt maybe my loss was God's way of bringing me to the church.

"So I studied catechism and the teachings of the church, and, in time, became a Catholic."

Through the help of the priest, Kam was able to follow his mother's admonition: "Go on. Keep on living."

Nevertheless, he swore he'd never marry again, and he felt that he couldn't continue at his old job.

"Because of the war, we were frozen to our jobs," he remembers, "but I wanted to get into something more exciting to keep my mind off what had happened.

"So I went to the commandant at Pearl Harbor and asked for a release. He released me but said any time I wanted to come back, he'd reinstate me."

Kam joined the Honolulu Police Department as a foot patrolman and, as such, he found all the excitement he could handle.

"We had a real hectic time during the war," he chuckles. "We had blackouts. Everyone was supposed to be off the streets, and the town was in total darkness. There were a lot of soldiers and sailors here, you know, who'd just come in from overseas, and they'd raise hell. Oh, yes, it was exciting.

"We had a lot of fights and riots."

The fledgling policeman found action aplenty as a member of Honolulu's finest, and, eventually, in connection with his duties he found something else as well. Love.

Love. The glorious adjunct to living he'd never expected to encounter again.

And, if he hadn't been a policeman, he might not have encountered it.

Kam was assigned to handle traffic at the Hawaiian Pineapple Company as a shift ended, and among the employees he saw there was a Hawaiian-Portuguese girl who worked as a cashier

Everytime he looked her way, he smiled, because she was pretty, and the sight of her made him feel good.

But, for the longest time, she didn't smile back.

"She didn't like me at all at first," Kam reports. "She thought I was fresh."

Finally, though, she returned his greeting, and at last she let him give her a lift home from work. Their marriage was the eventual outcome.

"When my family was killed, I said I'd never marry again," Kam reports, "but five and a half years later I was married. My wife and I have four children."

As Kam speaks of his children, his eyes twinkle with happiness and pride.

"We've been married twenty-five years and have two boys and two girls," he says. "My oldest boy, Dennis Michael, has graduated from the university. I have a girl, Brenda Marie, who's going to the university, and a girl who's a junior at Kameamea School. That's Valerie Ann. Then I have a little boy, Dixon Patrick. You see, I gave them all Irish names.

"Being Catholic, we named them for saints."

Kam brings his children up in the way he was reared, according to traditional Chinese practice.

"I was brought up in the old school with respect for my parents," he says. "They demanded respect, and I demand it.

"I teach my children, 'You do not disgrace the family name.'

"Oriental parents are very strict with their children, you know. As long as I support my children, they know that I'm the boss. Nevertheless, they know that I love them very much, just as they love me very much.

"When I lay down the rules, I explain to them that all the universe operates by rules. An aircraft pilot must obey certain laws or he can't fly the plane. Without obeying laws, a doctor can't perform an operation."

Kam has also instilled in his children the Chinese notion of honor whereby a man's word is his bond.

"In China," he points out, "a man does business on his word. No other contract is necessary."

While Kam's children have been reared according to Chinese tradition and philosophy, their heritage from their mother has not been ignored.

The family observes Portuguese and Hawaiian fetes as well as Chinese celebrations and enjoys meals with an international flavor.

"I believe that we can only achieve world peace through intermarriage," Kam says, "and perhaps we are leading the way in Hawaii, because we are creating a new breed of people here. The golden people. The cosmopolitans.

"Almost everyone here is of many racial backgrounds, and I've seen how this works for peace.

"Take, for example, a girl from a strict Japanese family who marries a white man. Her parents are outraged, and her mother won't speak to the son-in-law. But, when a baby is born, and that little child runs with outstretched arms and says 'Grandma' (or the Japanese for 'Grandma'), the mother forgives everything, because how could she fail to love that child? He's her own flesh and blood.

"And, after that, no one can say anything critical of a white man to her, because her own grandchild is part white.

"The prejudice is completely forgotten.

"I know that this happens, because I've seen it happen more than once.

"My oldest son, who is only half Chinese, is dating a white girl, and, if they marry I may have a blond grandchild with a Chinese name."

Kam smiles at the idea which he finds infinitely pleasing.

Kam's children were indirectly responsible for their father's professional entry into show business; though he'd been interested in amateur theatricals for most of his life.

"In intermediate school and high school I was interested in dramatics," Kam says. "But after high school I lost interest

for a while, because I married, and was busy with my family and job and so forth.

"Later, though, I thought I'd try dramatics again, so I went out for community theater and got a small role."

Kam found that he still enjoyed amateur theatricals; but at that point he didn't contemplate acting as a profession.

On the other hand he was contemplating a change of careers, since, as a policeman, he wasn't making enough to support his family adequately.

"As my family grew up," Kam tells, "I found that I couldn't live on the money I was getting, \$560 a month. I wanted nicer things than I could afford.

"So I decided to go into the real estate business. Then I became a radio disc jockey and emceed shows and did bit parts in movies that came to town.

"This worked out, because in real estate, I really had no fixed hours. I didn't get paid unless I sold something, so I'd work three hours a day as a disc jockey and then go try to sell some real estate. After that, at night, I'd go out and emcee shows.

"Occasionally a movie company would come in and use me to play a Japanese soldier. It was a big thing for a resident of Hawaii to get a part in a picture. A few years back, we might expect a movie company to come to the Islands.

"I did this when I could. I did amateur work, because I loved it, but I didn't think of acting as a profession until a lady friend set up an appointment for me with the *Hawaii Five-O* people without telling me anything about it."

When the friend told Kam that a television company was going to be based in Honolulu and that she'd made an appointment for him to see the casting people, he was initially dismayed.

He didn't want to hurt his friend's feelings; yet he didn't want to keep the appointment. For some reason, he just wasn't interested in talking with the television people.

Nevertheless, at his friend's urging, he kept the date and

was greeted by three men who eyed him carefully.

"That's Chin Ho," one of them announced.

"No, that's not Chin Ho," another disagreed.

Then they asked Kam to sit down and they discussed the matter some more while he wondered what they were talking about.

Finally they reached an agreement and broke the news to him: he was going to play Chin Ho, a regular in *Hawaii Five-O*.

"I didn't know what to think," Kam remembers. "I'd gone in thinking I might get one or two days work. I'd never imagined I'd get a regular role."

Today, a popular and affluent actor, fond husband and a proud father, Kam is one of the happiest of men; but, beyond most men, he knows how transient happiness can be.

He remembers how, once before, perfect happiness became total despair

He knows that he could lose everything earthly again. Yet he also knows that he will never again despair

For no matter what earthly treasure he may lose, he'll still have the assurance of God's love.

"I have a family now that I love very much," Kam says, "but I know something terrible could happen. I discuss this with my wife. We put our heads together, and I say if that should happen—if we should have to give up our children—we could accept it.

"Because we'd know that it would only be a matter of time before all of us would be together again.

"We'd look on the good side and neither question nor condemn.

"We'd accept our loss and be glad for the years we had together—twenty years, twenty-five years, ten years—whatever the time might be.

"Whatever happens, we'll think of the good things, and we'll be happy because of them."