

Becoming Disabled During a Housing Crisis

Chapter 1

In 2019 I got divorced while preparing for open heart surgery and had to leave my 3 and 6 year old daughters on Kauai which will always be the hardest challenge of my life. I had two broken hearts inside me.



This is a true story about a man who is doing everything he can to be back in his daughters' lives.

I originally met my ex on a dating website in December 2008. We dated until moving to Kauai together on Friday the 13th 2010. Marriage ceremony in April of 2012, had Alana June 4, 2013 and Lehua on June 6, 2016. In early 2019, our landscaping business became more challenging. I was feeling dizzy and short of breath increasingly during yard maintenance visits and the doctor said I had a partial fusion of my lower aortic heart valve that would require open heart surgery to replace. Then, the divorce happened.

It could not have happened at a worse time. I scrambled to ask everyone I knew if they had a place I could stay and it was my first experience with being a victim of Kauai's housing crisis. I was about one week away from getting insurance approval to fly to Oahu for an angiogram, so I went on my own hoping I could get reimbursed later. I found an Airbnb for \$39 per night in Honolulu and it turned out to be a massage parlor in Chinatown on a massage table instead of a bed.

You can only imagine how comfortable that was. Saying goodbye to my daughters will always be the hardest choice I have ever made. I cried for what I felt like at least 6 hours a day for those first few weeks. When you go from making them breakfast every morning to having absolutely no one around you during the hardest time in your life, crying is going to happen.

To make it as easy on my ex as possible, I gave her everything I had to give. I didn't take 50% of anything. I left Kauai with just a backpack with two pairs of clothes. I gave her my half of the landscaping business and wrote job details and contact information for our clients.

I took her name off our loans and credit card debt to ensure my kids' security. The worst part is I let her talk me into giving up my legal custody of them since I couldn't be there for a while. I was too sad to have really considered what a choice like that means. I taught her how to use the riding mower and other equipment including machine maintenance. Living off of what was left on our one credit card she asked me to take her name off of.

I spent a total of 12 days on Oahu getting a total of 8 appointments and tests at Straub Medical Center done before running out of money. With nowhere to stay on Kauai, I had to move back to my Mom's in California. From July 2019 to October 30, 2019 I spent all day meditating, praying, helping my mom and stepdad with yard work, getting the proper paperwork transferred to the new hospital, and video chatting with my daughters. Finally, my surgery was set for Halloween day.

I was excited because I was getting some control back. I knew that the clock would start on my 3 months recovery and I could get back to work to save to move back to Kauai; keeping my promise to my daughters to return. It was surgery day. I woke up to my Dad and some complete stranger friend of his hovering over me asking how I was.

I was too out of it to ask him who in the Sam hell this guy was, and why did you find it appropriate to bring him into the surgery recovery area? Little did I know then that it was the least of my problems. First being that there was a drive by shooting nearby that night and some of the

rival gang victims were brought into my IC unit. I remember getting dirty looks from a guy who could see me from his room and he must have assumed I was in the rival gang.

Thankfully, a nurse saw this and explained to him I just had a heart surgery. The second being that after my surgery, they take you on a guided lap around the IC unit. I felt very sleepy about half way through a lap and my machines started beeping. They walked me back to bed and did a bunch of stuff to get my blood sugar normal again. I heard the nurses talking later, and I had gone critical for a bit there.

My respect for the nursing profession became higher than ever. Such a difficult job dealing with the general public and their lunacy. One week in the hospital was some of the slowest time in my life. I could not wait to get out of there. Now, I had a new challenge, getting used to the ticking time bomb sound of a mechanical heart valve. To this day, I play rain sounds at night to drown out the noise and have to take a daily blood thinner so I don't get potentially fatal blood clots. My daughters can hear the valve ticking underwater when we are swimming together too.

Moving back

Chapter 2

12-14 hour days of work with 2 days off per month for nearly 10 months to get back to my daughters.



A proud moment in my life that I can tell my kids later when Costco made us wear bibs during the COVID pandemic to be able to shop there. See how thrilled I was? February and March 2020 was an interesting time for me. I was enthusiastically returning to work. Gaining some level of control back in my life after 3 helpless months of recovering, meditating, watching podcasts, and video chatting with my kiddos. While the world began a coronavirus shutdown, I was returning to work as an Instacart shopper; secure in having an “essential to the quarantine” type of job.

My Dad gave me his 2004 pickup truck to get restarted and I got hired by Instacart weeks before the mandatory quarantine began. Everyone thinks it is simply a grocery delivery job, but in Modesto, CA I found myself delivering to marijuana grow houses, office buildings, Bottoms Up which was an espresso drive thru featuring women in lingerie or bikinis for ice and milk orders, and bad neighborhoods where I regularly heard drive-by shootings blocks away and even had a high speed chase fly by me standing on the sidewalk. I remember the feeling of the gust of wind he generated evading the police while committing a felony. As if I was making any difference at all in any way, I shook my head at him as he passed me.

I really did work 12-14 hour days since you can take as few, or as many orders as you want with Instacart. I really did only take 2 days off per month because the job was physically easy, and the time I wasn't working meant I had longer with my daughters, so I kept pushing on. About half way through the year and my truck gets stolen. My dumb ass left the keys in the seat because I was doing a small order and when I came back outside from the grocery store, it was gone.

Police got it back to me 4 days later and some meth head got it stuck driving it through an almond farm. We knew it was meth because they stole my running shoes and left candy wrappers all over. Iceheads love sweets. Altogether, I had replaced all four tires, brakes, rotors, and battery to keep in good enough shape to ship to Kauai. \$1700 from Oakland and took 3 weeks to arrive.

Those two days off a month we're spent either at my Mom's just relaxing or helping with the yard. Occasionally, I would get an Airbnb with a friend or a girlfriend who was okay with me moving back to Kauai. I was very fortunate to meet a woman who was okay with that, but it may have been due to the noble cause of keeping my promise to my daughters. Either way, it kept me going to allow myself some socializing of some kind during the pandemic. Also, running into old classmates around town I hadn't seen in over 12 years or longer. I was never able to attend any school reunions, so this was the version of that for my own life.

Back to Kauai

Chapter 3

Finally, what I had been working so hard for keeping my promise to my daughters was a goal achieved.



The biggest goal of my life was the one I worked the hardest to achieve, but it wasn't easy.

It took 3 weeks for my truck to arrive on Kauai by boat; so that took some planning ahead and \$1700. My mom let me use her car to stay working for those last weeks before my flight. It was time to say goodbye to all of my family once again. It was hard to stay patient during that flight home and I could not wait to see the smiles on my daughters faces when I returned. Unfortunately during COVID, I had a mandatory 10 day quarantine. I was lucky that my ex brought them to see me from my rooms balcony and they even made me cookies. My heart was full again and my promise was kept. The hardest thing I have ever done was completed, and it was time to get resettled on Kauai.

First thing was reestablishing medical insurance within the state. Next, I was looking for a job since Instacart was incredibly slow compared to Modesto, CA and wouldn't pay the bills. I was very lucky to find an available room at The Garden Island Inn which is pre furnished and in a great location. Ironically, it was the same place my ex and I first stayed at when we moved here together in 2010. I set up a grocery delivery, and I was ready to quarantine. Little did I know, that even though my heart was healed spiritually and physically, my body was not done giving me more work to do.

Early January 2020 was difficult because as I was doing my best to look for work, my hip and leg began hurting more and more. After almost two weeks, I had to do something. The pain was becoming unbearable, and so my doctor thought it was sciatica and recommended that I stretch and massage it. This made the condition worse. After a few more days, I went to the ER. I couldn't have picked a worse night to go. I waited to get a room for 5.5 hours. Once I was in and they took blood labs, they told me I needed to be flown to Straub on Oahu because I had internal bleeding in my pelvis muscles.

A hematoma. At this point, it's 10pm when I am on a small Corsair medi-vac plane on a plane that only fits a pilot, two nurses, and myself. Our descent to Honolulu made me sick. Small planes drop elevation fast. I learned the hard way. I get checked in, and they monitor me to see if the bleeding subsides or gets worse. Over three days, it gets better. Primary reason for that is because I was able to rest and heal. Living on my own means all my own laundry, cooking, cleaning, shopping, and everything else that was keeping it from healing properly. Being able to lay in bed and have food brought me allowed my body to rest and heal without the need to surgically drain the excess blood out of the muscle.

I was back on Kauai with a healing hematoma. Job interviews were coming in from decent paying companies, but I had one problem. My hematoma was still causing me to limp and it was hard to hide. I was told something similar at each place which was something like "Let us know when you are healed up and we'll see if we are still hiring." I was running out of savings and time. February was the last month I had saved for. I started going to the local food banks. Penny pinching everywhere I could, I was hoping for some kind of miracle.

I started a GoFundMe. First time I ever had to ask the general public for money, but I didn't know what else to do. It was important to me that people knew that their donations were going somewhere productive, so I told people I was trying to start a chili stand to make my own money for rent and I needed help getting it started. Hundreds of dollars came in and I spent as much as I could afford on equipment. Butane stoves, a pop up tent, pots and pans, a knife set, and an advertising banner. A former landscaping client and friend of mine donated a folding table and roadside advertising sign which also was a big help.

I still had rent to think about and time was out. My chili stand wasn't profitable fast enough, so I started researching how to live in your truck and what people recommended. Out of the blue, a stranger from Princeville privately messaged me asking if I still needed help. I said yes, that I was going to be houseless for the first time in life in a matter of weeks and I was looking for help and recommendations. She offered to pay a full month's rent for me which was February. I was blown away and beyond grateful. I offered to cook or clean for her and she refused everything except for my gratitude.

Houseless, not homeless

Chapter 4

My home is Kauai, so I was not homeless in a manner of speaking. Just without housing.



Working through the pain, I will always be proud of my efforts to pay my own way. I had started my chili stand and was making a little money again. My hematoma was still around, but I wasn't going to let it stop me. I did as much resting as I could, but February was going to end soon.

I was donated a free month at the Kilauea Farmers Market for March which included free use of the commercial kitchen Saturday mornings. This was a great opportunity for further networking and getting my name out there. Brian's Ono Chili Stand had a vegan or a beef chili and things were going pretty well. It was a challenge setting up the pop up tent and table by myself and my hip would be hurting pretty bad by the time I got everything set up at the farmers market booth. Slow selling days, I would give free bowls to the other vendors just to further network and ended up selling a few extra bowls.

There were weeks I would profit \$150-220 for the day, but I also had two weeks that I only made \$40-60 after costs. It wasn't going to be enough to pay rent. Even with the days I set up roadside near Kealia beach, it wasn't adding up. Looking back, I should have been charging more per bowl. Towards the end of the month Hawaii's governor announced reopening from the quarantine. The very next day, I get a call from Safeway asking me if I am still interested. I thought that a cashiering job would be perfect with the hematoma since I could stand, it just hurt to walk. They were okay with my condition and it didn't affect my ability to perform the job duties as needed. It wasn't going to be enough money in time, and I had to leave my home.

I made a friend who lived in a boat at Nawiliwili Harbor, and he said I could park near his boat. He said if anyone asks, to tell them that I am working for him early the next morning. I bought twin size bedding to fit in my truck bed, and a power adapter so I could use my hair trimmer. I also started at YMCA membership for showers and exercise which was convenient since my visitations with my kids were there on Fridays. I still to this day do my best to ignore my pain while I am with my kids because I want it to stay fun for them. They get something each week. Either a small toy, candy, or I cook them something like tamales or fidéo.

When March started, I had signed up for all affordable housing and homeless outreach programs available, but they all came with waiting lists. The housing crisis on Kauai had trickled down to also becoming a houseless crisis. People like me with jobs who work full time who cannot afford rent at the average home. Rent is supposed to be 1/3 of your monthly income, and every place available was 2/3 of my monthly income. Sometimes higher than that. I am friends with two city council members, and so much red tape gets in the way of solutions. More affordable housing is being built currently, but there is already a very long waiting list for them. The emergency shelter stays full all year long, and the police routinely kick everyone out of houseless camps when they get too comfortable.

I had a hard time telling when my hematoma was healed because as I felt less pain in my hip, my ankle began to hurt. I got an x-ray and somehow I had an ankle fracture from who knows where. On the same side as the hematoma. Another thing to bear through, but my truck's transmission was starting to fail. I took care of it as best as I could for future months.

It was hard getting used to the feeling of not belonging somewhere without a home. I would spend hours in public parking lots and beach lookouts. Around this time, I became friends with a houseless woman named Lydia. She used to do meth and was just trying to stay clean these days. I was working, so I would treat her to lunch and we spent time socializing for months a few times per week. A few nights, she had nowhere to go, and she stayed with me in the bed of my truck. Even though she kept bathed and was attractive, I had a predominant feeling of needing to protect her, provide a safe space, and help her in little ways that make her life easier. The less you have in life, the more help you want to help those with less than you.

I took it upon myself to start serving my chili for free at the Lydgate homeless camp. I wanted to help people on my own and thought it would be a good idea. Little did I know, the help I would receive. I had money donated for my efforts, and a non-profit was able to reimburse me for my food costs part of the time. I had given vegan chili samples to the health food store Hoku Natural Foods and they wanted to carry it in their store. This required more permits, but my truck's transmission was getting worse, and I needed it for getting my equipment and food around. I had spent money on compostable containers, spoons, labeling, business cards, and a food handlers permit before my truck finally broke down for good.

Before my truck stopped running, I got a call from KEO homeless outreach program and they had a transitional housing room available on November 19. After 8.5 months, I had a home to live in again. Being able to use the toilet and not having people banging on the door, or doing meth in the stall next to you. Being able to shower and not have some creepy guy in there waiting for guys to come bathe to stare at. Not having to wait for no one to be around when I go lay down in my truck bed. That was always my least favorite part of it was people seeing me go in my Leer bed shell to sleep. I never really had to deal with cops or anyone telling me to move because if cops did see me, they wouldn't do anything until they received a complaint first, and when they were at the harbor, it was to bust youths drinking alcohol in large groups.

Becoming disabled

Chapter 4

The time spent in transitional housing was spent dealing with medical issues rather than it's intended purpose of finding permanent housing.



Blue corn tamales as a fundraiser since my truck broke down. I am hapa (half) Mexican, but tamales were never made in our family. I just followed a recipe, plus some genetic instinct.

Starting living in the Komo Hana transitional home was great at first. I was in a real bed, and out of the 5 rooms, only one other was occupied by a woman who worked overnight. Around this time, I felt like my hematoma had either traveled down my leg to my ankle, or I had another issue to deal with. I got an x-ray to find a fracture in one of the small bones that only would start hurting with prolonged walking. I was able to continue my cashiering job despite the pain and it slowly healed in 4-6 weeks or so. A few months later, I slipped and fell at the YMCA pool right in front of a wet floor sign, and hurt my knee, shoulder, and arm. I waited a few days to see if things would heal on their own and my shoulder wouldn't stop hurting. Another x-ray found a chip fracture and I had to take a month off of work. This started me at falling behind on rent and having to rely on food delivery which ate up my paychecks with no chance to save since I hurt too bad to cook for myself.

After my shoulder healed, I decided making and selling tamales from home was worth a shot. I bought what ingredients I could find on the island, and the rest online. My mom made plenty of Mexican food growing up, but tamales was not one of them. I started by following a recipe and watching on YouTube how to fold one properly.

By my third batch, I felt confident in my tamale making ability. The whole process would take me an average of 6 hours to complete a batch, but I made decent profits the first few times I made them. Sales started to drop because only so many people were willing to pick them up in Puhi, and I only had attracted a few regular purchasers at that point. Lots of online interest, especially using blue corn mass made for a great presentation.

Even before my shoulder had fully healed, I noticed that if I walked more than 150 feet or so, my legs would cramp up severely. Resting by laying down, sitting, or standing for 5-10 minutes would make the pain subside. I was worried that I had peripheral artery disease which fit with my symptoms and was a disability. My doctor made an appointment with a cardiovascular specialist on Oahu, but this was 2.5 months away for the soonest appointment.

I had a hard time finishing my work shifts and was starting to be written up for going home early too often. A few times I was able to provide a doctor's note, like one day going to ER with ketoacidosis, but without a diagnosis, I just had to deal with the pain until I had proof. If I had no money and had to walk to work, I would be in excruciating pain, having to stop to rest 3-4 times to keep walking the 1.1 miles home. They prescribed me something to increase blood flow to the legs, but it didn't do anything. It wasn't until an ultrasound showed artery blockages in my left leg that I was close to having what I needed to get diagnosed.

November 19th arrives and I am still unable to find housing. I am also still having trouble saving money, taking so much time off work and eventually having to quit due to my health problems. My plan is to ask the new roommate moving in if he is cool with me staying here in the living room and to not tell KEO that I was still staying there. My other roommate was very cool with it, and he was as well until Christmas day came and I believe it was his first Christmas away from his kids.

He got drunk that night and proceeded to threaten me around 6 or 7 times. A switch flipped in his head and now he was heated that I was still there. He had previously said a few times that he doesn't cook and that was proven by his 100% of the time I was there, he only ever ate frozen microwave burritos. Yet for some reason, he has a culinary knife set right next to his bed. On top of that, it would be scary hearing him in his room brag about his gang back in California beating up and robbing people. I couldn't tell KEO because I wasn't supposed to be there, but the manager responsible for our house was becoming legit friends and I eventually told her I was still there and she was okay with it.

I got out of there the next day. He was on the phone talking about me and what he should do to me for staying there and I called one of my best friends to please come pick me up. I am glad I did because I really was fearing for my life knowing what kind of guy he was, and him angrily pacing in his room with a mostly empty bottle of rum sitting on his window sill. My heart had been racing all night and continued for hours after she got me. I was out of that toxic environment without any idea where I would go. I had been attending The United Church of Christ in Waimea for several months and as a last ditch effort, I asked him if I could stay in the church pavilion on the cement floor and Pastor Olaf moved me to an extension of the church as a temporary solution.

This is where I currently stay as my story will hopefully come to some kind of stable conclusion. My two best friends have been helping me with food without me asking, and getting my storage in a safe location. I am waiting to hear from a job interview I recently had for part time work, and am taking things one day at a time. A GoFundMe campaign helped a bit with expenses.

My coffee maker has become my go-to source for making ramen, oatmeal, tea, and cup o noodles since I don't have a kitchen or hot water. All I can do is stay positive, pray, meditate, and keep moving forward until a housing opportunity presents itself. I will never forget my friends for helping me. I couldn't imagine going through all of this without them.