



### Clifford Straehley, MD

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Paulinia was a beautiful and intelligent child. She was seven years old and very ill with a massive abdominal tumor. I had performed a laparotomy in the hope that the tumor would prove to be resectable, but it surrounded the aorta, all of its visceral branches, and the vena cava. All I had been able to do was biopsy the tumor, which proved to be a liposarcoma. Paulinia was unable to eat, although she could retain oral fluids.

A few days after the biopsy, Paulinia asked me, “Dr. Straehley, am I dying?”

Many years ago, during medical school and my surgical residency, I was told that one informs the family, but protects the child from the knowledge of impending death. But I knew that if I lied to her she would lose faith in me. I answered, “Yes, Paulinia, God has decided to take you to heaven with him.”

Then she made an interesting request. “Dr. Straehley, please take me to the Waikiki Pancake House one more time.”

On the following Sunday, the chief nurse and I took Paulinia on a gurney in an ambulance to the Waikiki Pancake House. We had called the manager beforehand, and he had set up a table and alerted all of his employees. They came out to greet her as she was wheeled in. Paulinia smiled and laughed as several of the employees kissed her and wished her aloha. One of them brought her a lei.

After we returned to the hospital, Paulinia asked me, “Dr. Straehley, will you sit beside me and hold my hand when I die?”

I left orders that when her vital signs began to fail, I should be called regardless of the time of day. Several nights later I received the expected call. As I sat at her bedside and held her hand, Paulinia said, “You came.”

Shortly thereafter she died. On her face there rested a beautiful smile. Paulinia had died in peace.

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