Roopal Shah

Interview with Roopal Shah
By: Kathy L. Aldinger

How did you get involved with the Hawai’i Ku Like Kakou Community Mural Project?

Meleanna likes to say that I fell out of the sky. (laughter) After a number of amazing years in India, I was intent on interacting with America differently and eager to learn from the indigenous experience here. Circumstances worked out as APEC graced this sacred land. Right place at the right time - and with a skill set that was useful to this incredible hui of artists interested in manifesting an indigenous framing of economics inspired by a spirit of aloha, relationships, and sharing, rather than consumption maximization.

What were some of the concerns regarding the mural and were there hurdles to overcome?

One of the central lessons from the mural is that the highest manifestation of self is through spirit, and if you find yourself guided by spirit, whether you think of it as the universe, or God, or whatever, that sometimes things work out in ways that you couldn’t have directed - even if you wanted. So, yes, there have been obstacles, but what most of us have been “wowed” by are the doors that have opened up to make this possible. The Hawai’i Convention Center very kindly offered to let us paint on the premises. The mural has a happy and high visibility home; Aunty Ti – part of the HCC kokua team – watches over the mural as if it was one of her own children. Some of “wow” factors are not by chance; they happened because of relationships that the Meyer sisters have cultivated over the many years that they have been in public service. But the number of people, including you guys (the UH APEC Interns), who have just been so willingly a part of this mural and community engagement project has made for a pretty miraculous opportunity, as well as outcome.

What does peace and economic security look like to you?

You can collect all of the money in the world in search of economic security, but you will never, ever have enough to feel secure. When you strive for “security,” - economic or otherwise - what you really seek is love and mental peace, and you cannot buy that with all of the money in the world. The only real way, that I have found any security, in my own journey, is the arduous road of cultivating the spirit within.
What drew you to Hawai‘i?

I used to be a lawyer in my past life and clerked for Federal District Court Judge David Ezra in 1995-96. That was an incredible experience and opportunity. Since that time, I recognize Hawai‘i's unique cultural attributes and incredible spirit of aloha. A Gandhian search for my [T]ruth, a quest to learn from Hawai‘i's indigenous community(s), and the ocean called me back here for a second Hawaii sitting!

How long have you been in Hawai‘i?

Since January 2011... trying to find my way on the Big Island.

Do you see going back into law or does the future hold something different for you?

I’m finding my legal skills useful in ways that I hadn’t predicted. I am grateful to the law for all that I have learned, including the ability to think and write persuasively. I practiced law for almost a decade. And I enjoyed my experiences in the law. I’m not sure exactly what’s in store next. For the time being, I’m focused on learning just to be, rather than constantly defining myself by what I am doing.

Interview conducted by Kathy Aldinger, UH Mānoa Peace Studies undergraduate student, and does not necessarily reflect the views of UHERO or the University of Hawai‘i.