



**ISLAND MATTERS** Mufi Hannemann

# Fondly Remembering The Decency Of No. 41

Leaders from near and far have showered praised on former President George H.W. Bush, who died Nov. 30 at age 94. His funeral service was extremely inspirational and spiritual. It has been a well-deserved and perhaps long-overdue salute for a public servant whose collaborative, compassionate spirit stands in contrast to the acrimonious partisanship that typifies today's politics.

While many have focused on his accomplishments, my admiration is more personal, having served him as a White House Fellow when he was vice president during the Reagan administration. I was on his domestic policy staff and had the opportunity to work and travel with him to cities across the globe.

I found "41" to be an honest and sincere person who put people first and did what he thought was right for the nation. He was loyal to his friends. His pledge "to make kinder the face of the nation and gentler the face of the world" summed up his values. Here are some examples I believe show that character:

He was a man who put merit and competence above party loyalty, and although he was part of a Republican administration, he allowed me, a Democrat, to join his staff.

One of my "Mufi's Maxims" is to exercise the mahalo principle, to always thank people. I saw that in Mr. Bush. Much has been made of the personal notes he penned to national figures, such as the letter he left for President-elect Bill Clinton, who defeated him in the 1992 election. Long before texting

or e-mails, I saw him write thank-you notes to acknowledge people for their kindness and thoughtfulness. The late Fofo Sunia, the former delegate to Congress from American Samoa, shared with me a note that then Vice President Bush penned to him, saying that "he was pleased with the work of his White House Fellow of Samoan ancestry," and to offer his assistance. Sunia was tickled pink that he got a note from the veep and that he acknowledged my cultural heritage.

Bush reached across the aisle in his administration's domestic and foreign policies. This flew in the face of the oft-repeated practice in politics of always staying in your comfortable lane of party affiliation. As president, he negotiated and signed the landmark Americans With Disabilities Act. At the time, it was hailed as the most significant civil rights legislation in two decades, and he did it over the objections of some strong business interests who opposed it due to the increased financial burden.

On the foreign policy front, the reunification of Germany would not have happened without Bush's remarkable leadership. And he was at the forefront of working with the United Nations to courageously lead a coalition of 29

nations to thwart an aggressor and restore order during the Gulf War.

I was moved by President George W. Bush's eulogy in which he shared his father's philosophy to setbacks in life: "He accepted that failure is a part of living a full life, but taught us never to be defined by failure." That helps explain how he was able to develop an usually close relationship with President Bill Clinton.

His personal touch of remembering those who served on his staff was remarkable. I recall that when I accompanied then-Congressman Daniel Akaka at his invitation to a White House picnic. President Bush saw me from a distance and beckoned me over. This almost led to a minor crisis when the Secret Service thought this unfamiliar 6-foot-7 dude posed a threat. On another occasion when my sister, Lady Va, introduced herself to him at a World Bank meeting in Europe, an event she was attending with her husband, Sir Deryck Maughan, he inquired, "How's Mufi doing?" and then uttered one of his traditional one-liners as he chuckled, "You know, I tried to make him into a Republican when he worked for me."

George H.W. Bush was the quintessential decent, compassionate person and one who set an enduring example

that we will miss deeply. I have embraced the challenge that "43" reminded us of that his dad laid out to all Americans from his inaugural ceremony that I had the privilege of attending. He said with respect to our children and basically to all young people, "We must hope to give them a sense of what it means to be a loyal friend, a loving parent, a citizen who leaves his home, his neighborhood and town better than he found it."

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The author presents a Mauna Loa macadamia nut gift pack to President George H.W. Bush at The Kāhala Hotel during one of the then-commander in chief's visits to Hawai'i. PHOTO COURTESY MUFU HANNEMANN

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