

Fire at the Marketplace

In case you haven't heard about the fire this past Sunday at Manoa Marketplace, here is a blow-by-blow account. First, I must say that we are very fortunate that the damage we suffered was not serious. Though we and several other businesses were impacted, no lives were lost, the students are fine, and our studio is still in tact. The impact on the land planning office is much more severe and the people of Manoa Nails no longer have their business.

Sunday, October 14, was the last day of restorative/pranayama week at the studio. I had a lovely morning class with the Basic 1 group and was about a half hour into the intermediate class, a little before 10 am, with the students in *Prasarita Padottanasana* (Expanded Intense Stretch of the Legs Pose.) All of a sudden, there was a loud boom and I thought a Farmer's Market cart had fallen over, or it sounded like the boom of a generator. Then I heard excited voices, so I thought there was a fight going on downstairs. I stepped outside the door and saw black smoke billowing out of Manoa Nails' door (two doors Ewa of us) and a few of the employees standing outside and screaming at someone to get out of the salon. The yoga students, in unison, popped their heads up from the floor when they heard the word "fire", but I quickly told them to stay in the pose as I was still sussing out the situation. Down went the heads. In the next minute or less (how long was it, guys?) it was clear we had to get out of the studio as the smoke was not abating and I didn't really know what was happening in the Nail salon. So then I called them out of the pose and everyone got their bags and slippers (except for me) and we left the studio, closing the door. (I apologize to all the students for at first telling you to not come out of the pose! So much for practicing non-distraction! :)) I think it was Rachel who suggested to call 911 which I did.

As we first walked out onto the balcony and stood a distance away from the salon, I was thinking that the fire truck would come, put out the fire and we'd recommence the class. But then it took a while for the fire engine to arrive and we're thinking the fire station is just across the street! Marlene later said it arrived 15 minutes after the call.

Meanwhile the smoke was getting more intense. We were glad the breeze was blowing it in the Ewa direction, but at one point the wind started to shift, and that's when we retreated even further away. Thank you to Rowen for bravely and gallantly offering to run back into the studio to grab my bag! Then the wind shifted Ewa again. It seemed to take ages for the fire hose to be unwound and threaded up the balcony. Once I could see the water filling up the hose, I felt relieved. But more and more fire trucks started to arrive, until there were six!

As the smoke was stubbornly getting worse, we couldn't get over how people were still nonchalantly buying vegetables directly under the billowing smoke! When it began to become clear that this fire was not going to be simply doused and class was for sure over, the students started to disperse. In all our minds was that ominous mixture of black smoke and whatever chemicals were being unleashed from Manoa Nails.

About 45 minutes into it, the firemen started to clear out the Farmer's Market customers and vendors. Then suddenly there was yellow barricade tape up around the parking lot and the building, fire engines and cop cars blocking every aisle. Kate and her car ended

up being trapped in the lot for several hours, as well as folks using the Laundromat who were also evacuated. Many people had to have extra, extra long lunches!

Meanwhile, I was trying to find out from various firemen and cops if the fire was contained or whether it had spread to the land planning office and our studio. No one could give me any definitive information. For *hours* it was like this! Every so often, I'd see a fireman open our door to look in or sometimes walk in a distance then come back out. This was the worse part...dealing with the unknown and the fear. Ray was having a super busy day at the hospital and I intermittently gave him phone updates.

At around 1 hour and 40 minutes into the fire, I was making my way to Long's to buy zoris (since my slippers were still in the studio) and then get a bite to eat at the Boulangerie. It's at this point when I looked up at the balcony, I saw for the first time, smoke streaming out along the whole roofline, from Nails to our place! So then I thought the fire was running through the roof space and into our studio! This is when I began to crumble. At that very moment I turned around and there was Alison with her son! I felt like she was the perfect person to run into at that moment. So nice and reassuring to see you, Alison!

In the parking lot, I spotted some of the students who had arrived for the Basic 2 class. It was so nice to see all of you, too! This would be Wendy, Russell, Binh, Elaine, Tom, Patsy, Scott, Derek and Evelyn. They had also seen Kevin and Mary. Earlier, Francois and Anais came upon the scene for their shopping. (Thank you, Russell and Binh, for the guavas!)

It was actually sort of a happening scene at the Marketplace as so many people were trapped there, eating or shopping, or were part of the peanut gallery watching the drama. I saw so many people I knew, people I hadn't seen in years! All the Marketplace personnel were called in and watched the proceedings together. Owners and employees of all the other businesses comforted with their concern.

There were so many firemen everywhere and it was interesting to see their process, at what stage they brought out various implements, tanks, containers on wheels, etc. When I saw them carry up two very long metal implements like crowbars with three prongs on the ends, I didn't think that looked good, like they were about to bash through walls...our walls??! Someone wondered aloud if it's a prerequisite to be cute for the job of fireman!

Eating my sandwich on the bench outside the Boulangerie, a 76-year old gentleman, originally from Japan, sat down and we had a great conversation. His car was trapped. Once he found out I was with the yoga studio, he proceeded to tell me how 50+ years ago, when he was very young, he was in the Merchant Marines and during a break he went to India to study yoga and meditation at an ashram. He said it was a very difficult schedule and regimen, waking up at 4:30 am to do pranayama and asana. He didn't end up staying long at the ashram and made his way to Brazil instead.

All in all, it took two hours for the smoke to cease, but it wasn't until 4 pm that we were allowed to go upstairs to survey the damage to our businesses. It was a little eerie stepping into the room, seeing all the students' mats and blankets as they'd left them, with debris covering some of them. Then there was the hole in the ceiling that firemen punctured to see if the fire had spread through the roof area. It had not! Due to the hole,

we had some worrisome water damage to the floor. There was black soot everywhere and pervasive smoke smell. A little shocking, but not as bad as I had imagined!

After vacating the studio that morning, Lynnette had mentioned her bag of vegetables that were still in there. I think she said I could throw them away. When I finally pulled myself away from the Marketplace, I drove up to her house, thinking I'd leave them at their doorstep. As I was walking up the driveway, in comes Lynnette, following me up in her car! We both were laughing at the timing. This was serendipitous because I got to meet Micah, their darling new son! I love seeing Lynnette and Daniel as parents. Daniel is a natural holding Micah in his arms! It was a very nice ending to the traumatic day.

Now we're in the aftermath of dealing with the insurance companies, air quality personnel, cleaning crews hired by the Marketplace. Hopefully we can start cleaning the props, walls and furnishings very soon.

As far as Manoa Nails goes, it's a complete loss, so are the bathrooms, the maintenance office, janitor's closet, and stairwell. The woman who was cooking on the propane gas stove in the back of the nail salon, suffered non-life threatening burns. The land planning office between us and the salon copped it bad and has much more damage to deal with than us. Apparently Bank of Hawaii also has major water damage.

Thank you to all the students, friends, and family who have emailed or called expressing your concern and offering help. We're very touched.

In the next couple days, we should have a better idea when we can have a cleaning party :) Yippee! Also, please take note! The students were so bummed to miss out on their restorative/pranayama class that I promised them we'd do it this coming Sunday (in both the Intermediate 1 and Basic 2 classes.) Cross your fingers we'll be open by then!

I think by writing this narrative of the day, it's not only a way to let everyone know what happened, but it's also my process of debriefing. It was a very long and tense day with the strong undercurrent of 'not knowing'. It was sad. But I came away from the day having new admiration for the firemen who work so incredibly hard, who were so polite and nice the whole time, who escorted us up to our businesses, or people into the Laundromat to finally retrieve their laundry. I also now find it extremely hard to comprehend how it must be to lose one's house and/or loved ones in a fire.

My aloha also goes out to the staff of the Marketplace whose genuine love and caring for the place was evident. Thank you to Karen, Richard, Cinda, Eric and Brian. We're so fortunate to have you all taking care of the place.

Thanks also to Evelyn who was there most of the day; I was glad to have your moral support. You're a trooper!

The hope now is that we can get things moving, clean up and welcome everyone back as soon as possible. Stay tuned for our re-opening! I've always thought of our yoga studio as 'the little engine that could.' We've all got the heart for it and for this we're very grateful.