

Of Men and Apes

By Ken Cable

“If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea”

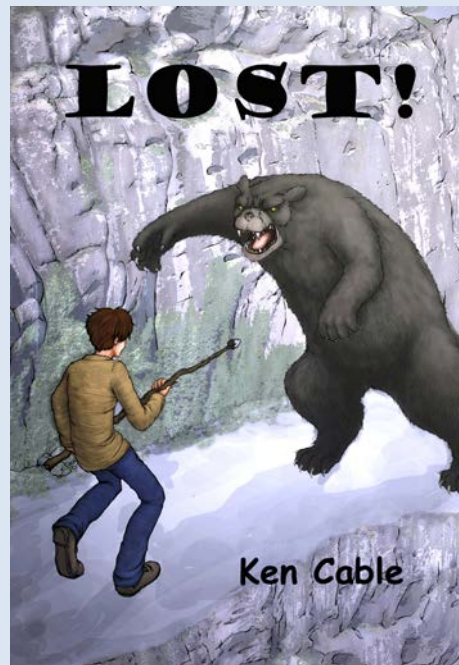
The Psalm 139 excerpt graces the grave marker of American aviator and hero, Charles Lindbergh, the first man to fly solo across the Atlantic from New York to Paris in May 1927. Lindbergh is buried in the Palapalo Ho’omau Church Cemetery, Kipahulu, Maui. His grave lies on a gentle slope overlooking the sea where thousands of airliners fly over his distant resting place on their way to other shores. It is doubtful that many of the passengers and pilots of these high-flying aircraft are aware that a pioneer of over-the-ocean flights lies at rest below.

It is a rare journey for my wife Dorothy and me when we don’t meet remarkable characters along the way. Occasionally these are not positive encounters; most often they are. Meeting Sam Pryor at Lindbergh’s grave was a very positive one.

We were in Maui and had driven past the beautiful little community of Hana to the Seven “Sacred” Pools. Dorothy and I knew that just beyond the pools lay the grave site of Charles Lindbergh and we were taking some friends to see it.

You have to almost know which long drive to turn into when visiting the Palapalo Ho’omau Church Cemetery in Kipahulu. We knew from a previous search. The gate was

Ken Cable’s



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open and we drove in between very old rock walls overgrown with night blooming Sirius to a small parking lot among tall coconut palms.

The final resting place of Hawaiians for two centuries, the cemetery radiates away from a small limestone church built in 1854. At the seaward edge lies Charles Lindbergh. Closer to the church are several simple graves featuring a roughly finished cement slab with an unadorned first name scratched into each surface, Kippy, George and Keiki among them. Who or what lay below these simple slabs was soon revealed to us during this second visit to the cemetery.

While we stood enjoying the marvelous view from Charles Lindbergh's grave, a green jeep driven by a young woman pulled into the cemetery. An elderly gentleman sat in the front passenger seat and another young woman and a three year old boy sat in the back. The gentleman got out of the jeep, walked a few feet away and began speaking – to no one.

My first impression was of an old man, lost in senility, speaking to his memories. But as I listened, I heard references to Interpol (an international police organization), Charles Lindbergh and Gibbon apes. Paraphrased, he said in his travels for Pan American Airways (we later learned he had been a vice-president of the airline) he did missions for Interpol, was a friend and companion to Kippy, George and Keiki, buried beneath the cement slabs – and a friend and confidant of Charles Lindbergh buried nearby.

We moved closer and Sam Pryor showed us his Interpol credentials and confided that Charles Lindbergh came to Maui and lived the last years of his life in a home he built on the ocean edge of the Pryor estate. Lindbergh selected his final resting place and designed his own grave marker. Mr. Pryor told us stories of his lifelong friendship with Gibbon apes; Kippy, George and Keiki were members of his Gibbon apes family buried beneath the cement slabs. Then he invited us to return with him to his house down the road for a drink.

As he climbed back in the jeep, one young lady (his nurse – the other young woman was his granddaughter and his great grandson) approached us and assured us that Mr. Pryor's invitation was sincere and gave us directions to his home. She asked that we park just inside the gate and follow that path to his house – and to please not disturb the two gibbons in a large cage nearby. I can't imagine what would inspire us not to accept his invitation.

When we drove in to Sam Pryor's estate we entered a virtual Garden of Eden; tropical flowers bloomed everywhere, and orchids of every variety were abundant. Centered in the garden was a large cage containing two curious gibbons, watching us through dark eyes. We did not disturb them but continued down a path toward the house under an arbor of orchids.

Sam Pryor's home was a typical Euro-Polynesian design. We found him sitting, drink in hand, on a wide veranda with broad views of his estate and the ocean. A sea of coconut palms stretched away toward the shoreline; stalks of bananas hung from a

beam above the railing, and a small serving table stood near him laden with a variety of drinks and glasses. After a greeting, he invited us to make ourselves a drink and told us about his estate and his friendship with Charles Lindbergh.

Looking out and down toward the shoreline a sea of coconut palms, all of equal height, met our eyes. Mr. Pryor explained that early missionaries had cut down all of the palms to clear the land, but he replaced them with 3,000 new trees. He told us we could follow a trail down through the grove to a point above the beach where we could see the Lindbergh home. He asked us not to approach the house to protect the privacy of family members still in residence.

When we returned to his veranda, Mr. Pryor told us more about his friendship with Charles Lindbergh, his affection for Gibbons and his long time association with Interpol. He ended our discussion telling us that he intended to be buried in the Ho'omau Church Cemetery next to his deceased wife, near his beloved Gibbons and just yards from the Lone Eagle's monument.

Several years later we revisited the Ho'omau cemetery and stood a moment at Sam Pryor's grave. Our meeting with him was brief, but the memory is unforgettable.

Ken Cable is a nature and travel writer, whose novel of survival about three young boys lost in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, is a return to the young adventure novels of the past. The novel follows the boys as they struggle to keep from freezing, find food, and find a way to fight off a rogue bear who is not sympathetic to their plight. The novel, set in the '70s, is about three actual boys – Cable's two sons and a nephew. The story is made up.