In my work with middle- and secondary-school preservice language arts teachers, I am always looking for quality adolescent literature that I can share with them. An additional goal in my teaching is to familiarize my students with literature that is representative of America's rich ethnic and regional diversity. Through these combined goals, I came to know author Graham Salisbury.

I am also a traveler, a tourist; and in 1994, I made my first trip to Hawaii. This trip was significant to me for two reasons: on a personal level, I became hopelessly enamored of Hawaii and its physical beauty; on a professional level, I realized that I knew virtually nothing about Hawaii's sociocultural and literary histories. Even though I hoped to introduce my students to a wide array of cultural perspectives in literature, I knew no works about Hawaii written by authors from Hawaii.

With the help of a librarian in the Young Adult Section of the Hawaii State Library, I found several titles that I later wrote about in an article for The ALAN Review: "Voices of Hawaii in Literature for Adolescents: Getting Past Pineapples and Paradise." Among the books I discussed was Graham Salisbury's Blue Skin of the Sea. He sent me a letter in response to that article, and we struck up a correspondence. I wanted to know more about his writing and his history with Hawaii, so I proposed an interview. He accepted, and for approximately one month we exchanged questions and answers via e-mail.

As we talked electronically, I learned more about Graham (or Sandy, the nickname he goes by). He is a descendant of missionaries in the Hawaiian Islands, the first of whom arrived in 1820, and whose long-term presence there has been alternately praised and condemned. Although he is currently a "Mainlander," living in Portland, Oregon, where he manages an historic office building, he grew up on the islands of Oahu and Hawaii and maintains family connections there.

Graham Salisbury's writing about the struggles and conflicts of boyhood is highly engaging - he is a good storyteller. His first book for adolescents, Blue Skin of the Sea, explores the coming-of-age experiences of two boys on the Big Island of Hawaii in the 1950s and 1960s. Under the Blood-Red Sun, his second book, takes readers into one boy's life on Oahu in the time just prior to and immediately following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Both deservedly have received numerous national awards, and his third book, Shark Bait, has a scheduled publication date of fall 1997.

There are many voices of Hawaii, carried along distinct, merging, or intersecting currents. Graham Salisbury is one of those voices, and he writes about Hawaii across the distances of time and space while thoughtfully addressing concerns that continue to impact the lives of young people. The following interview is taken from my electronic conversations with the author.

Tell me about the process of writing Blue Skin of the Sea - of looking back at the Big Island during that time period and in creating the main characters, Sonny and Keo.
I taught myself to write with Blue Skin of the Sea. It took me four years. Each individual story (except one) has a spark of truth to it, some actual incident, some memory. But each story is purely fiction. The one story with absolutely no basis in reality is "Malanamekahuluohemanu," which came from outer space somewhere. For example, "The Old Man" came out of the actual filming of "The Old Man and the Sea" with Spencer Tracy (the old man). I was very young but saw parts of the movie being filmed. So, I built a story around my memories. "You Would Cry to See Waiakea Town" came out of the 1960 Hilo tidal wave. I remember driving over there afterwards and seeing not one shred of Waiakea Town left, only parking meters flattened to the ground. I built a story around those parking meters.

I wrote all the stories (and a few more that I did not include in the book) as individual stand-alone stories, then wove them together with the "dream memory" thread which, luckily, seems to have worked. All the characters in that book - and all of my books - are as real to me as any live human being. As far as I'm concerned, they actually lived on this earth and I, for a while, knew them and learned from them.

Writing fiction is like that for me. It's one of the great glories of reveling in this art form. It's nice. Very nice.

On the dedication page of Blue Skin of the Sea, you include this quote from La Rochefoucauld: "When you cannot find peace in yourself it is useless to look for it elsewhere." For what reasons did you choose to include that quote?

I used that quote in the dedication of Blue Skin of the Sea because, in a sense, with that book I was "writing my way home." I was raised, for all intents and purposes, fatherless (though I had three of them), and almost without a mother (she was needy, wonderful but needy, and was always trying to settle with her own personal situations and was gone a lot). I spent far too many years searching, begging almost, for recognition/approval/acknowledgement from others, from without myself - uncles, aunts, adults of any kind - because I never got much approval as a kid.

After many years I figured it all out. The only acknowledgement worth a hill of beans is the acknowledgement that comes from within oneself. All else is far too tenuous. The ultimate test of this new belief came after I published Blue Skin of the Sea - my greatest feat - and I sent a copy to my uncle, from whom I had most wanted this acknowledgement - and he never read it! Even to this day he has not read it. He and I have always been on great terms, and I love him dearly. It's just that he had his own life to worry about and didn't give a hoot what I did. Hard as it may be to accept, one must find peace within oneself if one wishes to find peace at all. It cannot be bought, given, stolen, or contrived. Peace is something that comes from the soul, the roots, the heart.

Sonny, in Blue Skin of the Sea, was in a similar situation. Through him, I studied me. It's that simple. He is the boy I wish I had been. Through writing about him, I became him. And I liked that a whole heck of a lot.

The characters of Sonny and Keo are not based upon anyone I knew. They are pieces of myself, if anyone. Keo is the active boy, the one who is unafraid, the one who follows his mind, the one who sees the sunset but does not react to it. Sonny is the quieter, questioning boy, the one who has fears and doubts, the one who follows his heart and "feels" the sunset. The two of them fit together in the same way [Keo's parents] Aunty Pearl and Uncle Harley do - like a tug and a barge.

Besides Sonny and Keo, there seems to be another main character in Blue Skin of the Sea - the physical environment. The ocean, the coral reefs, and the land all play important roles throughout the book. For what reasons is the physical environment of Hawaii so significant in these stories?

The physical environment in Blue Skin of the Sea - yes, it does play a major role, doesn't it? Why? I suppose it's because the Pacific environment is such a major part of me as a human being. Its ocean is my heart. Its land is my body. Its perfect weather is the air I breathe. I know, that sounds rather dumb, but it's true. I could hardly live in a place where I could not see water - a lake, a river, an ocean.

When one lives on an island, the ocean is always out there. You can look at it as a loving mother surrounding you with her arms, protecting you, holding you close. Or you can see it as an endless road between you and a greater world, a barrier, a separator, a prison. For me, the ocean is a mother, mother being, for me at least, the ultimate safe place.
I glanced into the water, looking for dark moving shapes beneath me, but every shape down there started looking alone. Were scavengers, and mostly nocturnal. And that in the islands, they were well-fed and pretty much left humans about sharks before that moment. They were "out there," somewhere in that vast, watery underworld. I knew they

worse, a sissy?" called a coward over something that probably won't happen? Is it worth getting razzed and branded as a chicken, or But still, I'd never heard of a shark attack in Kona. My self-talk must have been something like this: "Is it worth being
trying not to look nervous, which I was - drowning in fear, would be a better way to put it.

dry land, the beach, hot sand under my feet

reminded myself. And it was in different waters.

We'd been out for about an hour when one of the boys I didn't know calmly pointed his chin toward the reef, about 40 or 50 feet away. "Got one shark surfing with us," he said, as if it were a mullet, or one of those fat hotel-pond carps.

Of course, the shark got my attention - every bit of it. I wondered if it was alone, or if there were more of them we couldn't see. The strength in my arms suddenly felt like jelly. I had never heard of a shark attack on the Kona coast, where I lived. But I had heard of attacks off other islands. They came instantly to mind. There was the boy who died after losing a leg off Kailua Beach Park on the island of Oahu. How could I ever forget that one? I could still see the picture of his chewed-up surfboard on the front page of the Honolulu Advertiser. But that was a long time ago, I reminded myself. And it was in different waters.

None of us moved. None of us started paddling in to shore. We just kept sitting there with our legs, from the knee down, dangling underwater. I don't know what went through anyone else's mind, but I remember my thoughts clearly - dry land, the beach, hot sand under my feet Now!

But did I head in? Not hardy. I sat there with the rest of them, keeping an eye on the shark, as much as I could, anyway, trying not to look nervous, which I was - drowning in fear, would be a better way to put it.

But still, I'd never heard of a shark attack in Kona. My self-talk must have been something like this: "Is it worth being called a coward over something that probably won't happen? Is it worth getting razzed and branded as a chicken, or worse, a sissy?"

The fin disappeared, leaving a small whirlpool, then reappeared farther off. Then closer in. The only way you could tell where the shark was, was when you caught a glimpse of that awful, wet, gray fin. I had never really thought much about sharks before that moment. They were "out there," somewhere in that vast, watery underworld. I knew they were scavengers, and mostly nocturnal. And that in the islands, they were well-fed and pretty much left humans alone.

Didn't they?

I glanced into the water, looking for dark moving shapes beneath me, but every shape down there started looking alone.
I glanced into the water, looking for dark moving shapes beneath me, but every shape down there started looking suspect. Everything that moved, even the smallest fish, sent shivers over my scalp.

Still, my legs hung from my board. Just like everyone else. How could they be so gutsy, I remember thinking. I wanted to pull my legs up on my surfboard more than I wanted to breathe. But I didn't. I did what they did - which was nothing. Despite their casual bravado, I would be willing to bet that each of those other three boys were scared spitless. But no one wanted to be the first to show his fear.

Of course, now I know it wasn't a matter of guts at all. And it wasn't our informed knowledge of the ways and habits of sharks that kept us there. It was stupidity, pure and simple - dangerous stupidity.

And, you see boys doing that kind of dumb thing all the time - riding in a fast car with a bunch of friends, maybe scared to death, but too afraid to say they want out, too afraid to be different; drinking beer until they're too sick to stand up; going out of their way to get in trouble, or get bad grades, because they want to be accepted by their failing friends; fighting with other boys to "prove" their manhood; fooling around with dangerous drugs. And on and on.

If you ask a boy - any boy anywhere - he would probably stare down at his feet, shrug, and say nothing. He would never in a zillion years admit it, but the truth is, he does it for "sameness," he does it to be accepted, to be "one of the boys," because he thinks that is what's expected of him. It's that unspoken "code," lurking in the corner of his mind.

That's the bottom line in the incident of the shark. In my heart I didn't give a hoot about any manhood or bravery. I just wanted to get out of the water. But I didn't because I didn't want to be different. I didn't want to be seen as a coward. I didn't want to be teased and rejected.

I'm intrigued with another aspect of your life in Hawaii, your family history. I can't help wondering, as a descendent of some of the first missionaries in Hawaii, what was it like for you growing up in the islands? What did your family's history mean to you then, and what does it mean now?

As a kid, not a dang thing. My life through high school was one of nearly unlimited freedom. I spent grades seven through twelve at a boy's college prep school on the Big Island, a boarding school, which became my real home - and which taught me a few good things, like the concepts of integrity, honesty, perseverance, and good will - which all meant zero to me then, but which managed to miraculously surface later in life thank heaven.

As a kid, I knew of my missionary past, knew of its importance in Hawaiian history (actually, I'm descended from two missionary families, Thurston and Andrews). I knew at a young age that there was a thing called the "Big Five" families - mostly missionary - and that we were not one of them. We were not one of the huge landowner families. In 1895 my great-grandfather bought a newspaper called the Pacific Commercial Advertiser, which eventually became the Honolulu Advertiser, Hawaii's morning newspaper. The paper remained in our family for 100 years. Three years ago we sold it to the Gannett newspaper group. Today there are about 65 or so of us Thurston descendants, mostly living in Hawaii.

The reason, however, that my history is more apparent to me now is that, one, I love gathering my genealogy, and, two, my great-grandfather was a key player in the Hawaiian Revolution (1893). His name was Lorrin Andrews Thurston, and as far as I can tell, was a bit of a scoundrel (though my uncle denies that). Lorrin was an attorney (translate: "a bit of a scoundrel"), and played a major role in the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy. Today his name is reviled in some hard-core Sovereignty circles. [note: Hawaiian Sovereignty is a movement related to groups of Native Hawaiians organizing to address political, cultural, governance, and economic issues. J.B.]

The reason my history speaks louder, and far more clearly to me now, is that I now keep my dang mouth shut about where I come from. I don't want to wear the badge of "descendent of the bad white guy." I love Hawaii. I love its people. Even the hard-core Sovereignty guys, who are only following their hearts. The bottom line for them is saving a culture - which is a right thing to do. And to a large extent, I am with them.
I did not have a thing to do with the Hawaiian Revolution. Yet, some would see it otherwise, though I fail to see how.

We are all new people. The people of the past are dust. My feeling is that it would be far more productive for both sides of the issue to attempt to work out a win-win situation and move on. As it is, there are too many different groups and too many different ideas. Focus is not a player, as it should be.

The funny thing about all this Sovereignty hoopla is that my brother married a beautiful multi-racial woman, and their daughter is descended from both sides of the Hawaiian Revolution. She's descended from Lorrin Thurston and Queen Liliu'okalani, who was the overthrown monarch. And that's Hawaii, isn't it? The true melting pot.

Speaking of history, what led you to write *Under the Blood-Red Sun*, a book for adolescents set on Oahu in those days before and after Japan's attack on the island? To the question of cultural accuracy and authenticity of voice, how does a writer, who is not Japanese American, capture the details and the emotions in the lives of first- and second-generation Japanese immigrants in Hawaii during those days of 1941?

First and foremost, my father was there, an ensign in the U.S. Navy, fresh out of the Naval Academy. On the morning of December 7, 1941, at age 24, he watched men die, helpless to fight back. He had no weapon, no way to answer the horror bellowing around him in massive towers of smoke and blood and screams and chaos. He fought fires and carried bodies and searched burning ships for survivors. And lived.

He wasn't my father at the time. That would come a few years later. In fact, he would live until 1945, then go down with his fighter on my first birthday, the exact day. Still, I imagine him there at Pearl Harbor on that infamous day. I imagine him and all those thousands of men rousted from their sleep to stumble out and face death. I imagine myself and what kind of courage I might have found within myself, or not found.

That's kind of where it all started. From that personal point of reference.

Then I got to thinking about my own childhood in the islands, so idyllic, so free and simple and perfect. How would it have been for me if I had been born earlier, perhaps several years after my own mother was born? What if I had been twelve or so on the day Pearl Harbor was bombed? How perfect would my childhood have been then? I suppose that's where it started, from those consuming words, "what if."

With a small flicker in my mind, a story began to grow. Only I really didn't know it was growing, for a while anyway. It was a subconscious thing. Then one day it felt like rising, ready to bring all that sub-level rumination to the surface. And so it began.

I wrote an entire version of *Under the Blood-Red Sun* from Billy's point of view, which was the natural thing to do as I am, wellhaele (Caucasian). But that book, which was a story quite different from the *Under the Blood-Red Sun* that ultimately emerged, did not work. It simply felt flat. Empty, contrived. So, I put it away and started over. From Tomi's point of view.

Yikes! How could I do that? Jeese!

You're not Japanese, you idiot. How the spit can you possibly know what it was like for a Japanese family at any time, let alone at the time of Pearl Harbor?

Well, I couldn't.

But you know, we humans have something wonderful that binds us all together - feelings. Love, pain, envy, anger, hope. We all share these emotions. After all, these are the pieces of our humanity. So really, I did not see stepping into Tomi's mind as being impossible. I simply wrote in the human voice.

I did know about being "local." I grew up with kids of all kinds of races (and a zillion combinations thereof) including Japanese. We were all these strange but beautiful hybrids, swirling around in a stew of cultural interminglings. But we all shared a common voice. We spoke the same mangled English with great joy and enthusiasm. We all did the same things - surfed, bummed around, went to the movies, ate cracked seed, sashimi, and laulaus. We were one huge family
things - surfed, bummed around, went to the movies, ate cracked seed, sashimi, and laulaus. We were one huge family of brothers and sisters and didn't even realize it.

We called each other "haole scum" and "jap" and "chink" and "manong" and "tita" and "blalah" and "zit face"; and none of it meant a thing. It was like punching somebody in the shoulder as if to say, "Howzit, you punk?"

So sure, why not? I could write a book from a Hawaii Japanese boy's point of view, because in Hawai'i, his point of view was very much like my own point of view. He might have miso soup for dinner and I might have hominy grits, but in the morning we'd both head outside and slap hands and cruise down to the beach with our fins and boogie boards and talk trash in the ocean until the sun went down. So, yeah, I could do it. Besides, the story screamed to have Tomi tell it.

I must say that I did a great deal of research - library, newspaper, and personal interview. I even had a Japanese woman, born in Japan and raised in Hawai'i, help me get my Japanese cultural facts straight. I would never have published the book without first having done that. It was very important for me to get the facts of that era as correct as I could.

In the end, though, what I wrote was not so much about the attack on Pearl Harbor, or even about a Japanese family. What I wrote about was friendship, loyalty, honor, and courage. And adolescent boys dealing with a life situation. Pearl Harbor, to me, was a fascinating foil against which I could explore the integrities of boyhood. I basically wrote about myself and the friends I grew up with. This always appeals to me - boyhood issues - friends, fathers, mothers, grandparents, bullies, loners, and that Silent Code of Conduct that all kids have to deal with. And courage, which young people seem to have in great helpings.

**What about future publications? Tell me about your latest book, Shark Bait:** who are the characters, and what is the storyline?

My third book, *Shark Bait*, is a short one. One of the things I wanted to do was write a short book (under 150 pages), just to see if I could do it. I tend to be wordy, and as a result, often boring. So, I wanted to try something more zippy. *Shark Bait* is it. It's about good boys getting caught up in a bad thing, not because they are bad, but because they have that "code" I was talking about, and they have their loyalties. Bottom line, this book is Trust vs. Loyalty.

*Shark Bait* is a real action-consequence story. It's about respect. The thing is, I have no desire to glorify violence as a solution to problems. But, I will use violence as a way to show how violence does not work in one's best interest. I have no wish to condone cruelty in any fashion but will use cruel acts in fiction to show how the use of cruelty depreciates one's character, how it freezes the heart and runs against what most of us believe to be good.

*Shark Bait* involves a father, a son, a couple of tough guys, and some good friends. And the U.S. Navy. I got the idea from a kid I knew growing up in Hawaii. He was a real sweet guy. Died years later, shot at close range by his good friend. Stupid argument. This guy, though, had a strange side to him - he loved to pick fights with Navy guys when they came to town. Just liked to fight. Weird. But, he is the germ for this novel. The story I've created is fiction, though, all the way. I loved writing this book. Good fun exploring the power of "codes."

**You have such a unique family connection to Hawaii's history; have you ever considered writing something set in the 1890s of your great-grandfather's time, or in the 1990s involving such issues as Sovereignty and some people's views on your family's role in Hawaii's past?**

Yes, I've thought a lot about it and how it might fit into some story. To this point, however, I haven't fallen into anything that has given me a buzz.

I suppose I'll just stick to what I know and enjoy - young people and their concerns. Sovereignty may play a part in some future story, though. Maybe. But what I really don't want to do is take a political position on it. I see my job as anti-politics; I don't want to preach or propagandize. My job is only to explore and find a few answers to some tough problems. You know, create a little closure where closure can't be found in real life.

**Do you currently have plans for your fourth book?**
As far as the future is concerned, I’m ruminating at the moment, waiting for something to whap me on the side of the head. It will, for sure. And when it does, I’m off and running. Can’t wait to see what it is!

I often look back at Under the Blood-Red Sun and Blue Skin of the Sea and wonder how in the world I did it. How could I, a guy who flunked English in college - twice - how could I even think about writing a book, for heaven’s sake? Well, in my life I’ve learned one very startling thing: one can do just about anything, if he or she wants to bad enough. The key is desire. Think about Tomi in Under the Blood-Red Sun. If, under the relentless pressure to fight Keet Wilson, he could keep his honor and not fight, then maybe piddling me could keep struggling out a few pages a day and keep the dream of his story alive. So, through Tomi (and Sonny in Blue Skin of the Sea) I managed.

There you have it. There is no mystery. Just one-step-at-a-time perseverance. And trust that you will succeed. Because you will. You only fail when you don’t try.

References


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Graham Humphreys, 2011. I recently sat down with Graham at the Phoenix Artists Club in Soho and we talked for almost three hours about his career, including his move to London, his early work, the film posters, as well as the VHS covers and the projects he’s working on today. Graham has also supplied me with several exclusive images of his work, some of which have never been seen before, and these are included throughout the interview. We had two people in the art college in Salisbury who were the first punks in the West Country and they were terrifying to look at. I remember doing a poster for a gentleman called Alan Wheatley who had a design company that did a lot of posters for the Entertainment company. This practice dialog uses an interview with a famous actor to help students practice and learn about the use of common tenses in English. Use this interview with a famous actor to practice speaking and pronunciation skills, as well as review important grammar points on tense usage. Read, practice with a partner, and check your understanding of important vocabulary and grammar points. Finally, create a dialog of your own with exercise cues. Interview Part 1: Practice Using the Present Simple and Present Continuous. The first part of the dialog concerns daily routines, as well as current activities. Interviewer: Are you staying home this evening? Actor: No. This evening I’m going to the movies. Extract Two You hear part of an interview with a successful fashion retailer called Jason Pendry. 3 How does Jason feel when he produces a new fashion collection? A critical of his design team B reluctant to give media interviews C apprehensive about losing customers.  Now look at questions 1 and 2. PAUSE 15 SECONDS. – *** – Jodie: Writing songs for films is more restricting than creating songs for an album, isn't it Alan? Alan: Actually it’s great, because instead of wandering round the streets wondering what to write about, they give you a pretty specific brief - the song has to reflect the mood of a scene or the characters. So you feel it’s genuinely part of the film rather than being stuck on the end as a bit of extra marketing, and that’s more interesting.