

# Memoirs of a Bodhisattva

Short stories by Skip Nelson



## A Night Among the Stars

*My ex was a private duty nurse in Palm Desert, California. One of her patients during those years was John Ford, the legendary movie director. They lived about 5 minutes from our house in a modest ranch-style home on a residential street.*

*Ford was dying of cancer. For about two years, my ex worked at the home. I spent a lot of time there when I was between jobs and on weekends. We became very close to the Ford family, especially with Barbara Ford, his only daughter.*

*I have never had the pleasure of attending an Oscar Ceremony, but, my ex-wife and I had the privilege to attend the first American Film Institute's Lifetime Achievement Award dinner honoring John Ford.*

*On March 31, 1973, at the Beverly Hilton Hotel in Beverly Hills, California, The American Film Institute held it's first ever annual Lifetime Achievement award ceremony. We were all put up at the hotel, and President Richard Nixon, who also attended the ceremony, and his entourage occupied the floor above us.*

*One of the other nurses, Joe, a flaming black gay man, and Dan Ford, John Ford's grandson and I were seated at a table with actor Woody Strode, (who played Ethiopian gladiator Draba, in which he has to fight Spartacus (played by Kirk Douglas) to the death) along with our wives and dates.*

*Woody and his wife, Luukialuana Kalaeloa Strode, who was a genuine Hawaiian princess, used to visit "The Old Man" at the house in Palm Desert often and bring food for the family. One such dish was a fabulous teriyaki leg of lamb I will never forget. We got to know them quite well. As well as John Wayne, Peter Bogdanovich, Cybil Shepherd and a few others who dropped by often.*

*At one point Woody asked us if we wanted to meet Clint Eastwood. We agreed and he called Clint over. Joe, Danny, Woody and I were all wearing very similar white tuxedos, which was totally by accident. Eastwood came over to say hello and looked at us and quipped "What? Are you guys in a group?"*

*At one point, Joe decided he wanted to meet Mr. Nixon. He got up and abruptly started towards the table where Nixon was seated, yelling "Hey, Mr. President!!" He was immediately stopped by the Secret Service and returned to his seat at our table.*

*After the awards show, we all retired to "The Old Man's" hotel suite. Anybody who was anybody in Hollywood at that time was there.*

*Among the notables in the suite were the top people in Hollywood. Robert Mitchum, Jimmy Stewart, John Wayne, Lee Marvin, Richard Widmark, Ben Johnson, John Carradine, Maureen O'Hara, Peter Bogdanovich, Cybil Shepherd, Harry Carey, Jr., and dozens of others.*

*At one point, Robert Mitchum came over to me and put his arm around my shoulder. (He had no idea who I was) and started talking to me. My ex said we looked like old lifetime buddies. He was probably stoned. Nobody carried pocket cameras in those days. Damn.*

*Clearly a night to remember.*