

Coco Zickos

By [Coco Zickos](#) on Jun 19, 2013 in ,

Moses Hamilton turned a tragic car accident into a successful career as an artist. Check him out at Ching Young Village Shopping Center

Moses Hamilton makes every moment count. “Make the best of this moment because it’s quick and it’s short,” he advises. “You never know when it could be gone.

“In the snap of a finger, my whole life changed.”

Moses Hamilton turned a tragic car accident into a successful career as an artist. Check him out at Ching Young Village Shopping Center. Coco Zickos photo



Moses Hamilton sets up his booth at Ching Young Village. Coco Zickos photo

Moses Hamilton. Photos courtesy of Moses Hamilton

He never expected that in one instant his life would take such a dramatic turn. It was Oct. 18, 2002, and the North Shore resident was driving home from work at a restaurant in Hanalei when he crashed his car. The accident left him a high-level quadriplegic with only limited mobility of his upper body.

“I’m pretty dependent on people for everything,” he says.

For months immediately following the crash, Hamilton even needed the assistance of a machine to breathe.

“I was struggling for life,” he says.

When his ventilator finally was removed, Hamilton had to learn how to breathe again and continued to spend time in hospitals on Oahu.



The good news is that while in Rehabilitation Hospital of the Pacific, he was introduced to an art program that taught people how to paint with their mouths – a talent he utilizes to this day.

“Being artistic as a child, I was naturally interested in the program,” he says.

Hamilton always loved to draw and create art.

“He was the kind of kid, if you stuck a pen in his hand at 2 years old, he loved to draw with it,” says his mother and primary caregiver, Cherry Hamilton.



After watching people paint with their mouths for several weeks in the program, her son decided to give it a try.

“It came out pretty primitive, childlike,” he recalls.

Even though he completed the program, he was so frustrated with painting, he gave up. But he received a paint brush as a gift from the art teachers, “just in case,” he says.

When he returned to Kaua’i, he started painting again and his talent grew with patience and practice.

Rather than wallow in self-pity, he found that art eased his anxiety and took him away from focusing on his immobility.

“The more I did it, the better I got and the more I wanted to do it,” he says.

People started showing interest in his artwork, and about four years ago his mother started his current business.

“Art is everything to me. It’s what I’m still capable of doing,” he says. “It makes my life normal. It sets my soul flying free.”

The Kaua’i native, who grew up on Hawaii Island, finds inspiration for his artwork everywhere. His favorite subjects are a Hanakapiai sunset landscape, or an old paniolo playing the ukulele. He also appreciates painting places he used to frequent prior to his accident, as it takes him there in his mind again.

The 37-year-old uses mostly acrylics and deems his style “exaggerated impressionism.” Every one of his paintings intimately brings admirers into a brightly colored world of island scenes, local culture and even famed musicians.

“I love art – it’s creation, it’s a release of who I am on a page,” he says.

Even though he considers himself still to be recovering, he says art has allowed him to look beyond his disability. He admits, however, that he wasn’t able to overcome his physical limits at first. The event was traumatic and affected his ego – the same one that used to live a carefree life, as if he were invincible.

“But, at the same time, it’s a humbling and a growing experience. I learned to be a stronger person and really face up to the challenges of my own self,” says Hamilton.

Sometimes it still gets frustrating and, he says, “I just go totally nuts. But the heart and mind can overcome anything.”

Cherry Hamilton is extremely proud of her son. “Because he overcame so much in such a mellow way, it reminds us all to be grateful and to be happy.”

The accident was one of the most difficult periods of her life.

“But it also became one of the greatest growth periods of my life,” she says. “You don’t get to choose what happens, just how you handle it. It taught me to move forward and to have patience. You learn to buck up and do what you’ve got to do.”

Hamilton enjoys imparting this shared family wisdom with people when they visit him at Ching Young Village Shopping Center, where he regularly sets up shop.

“I get a lot of love from locals and people all over the world as well,” he says regarding his customers and passersby.

People are generally blown away when they discover he is painting with his mouth. Children are especially impressed.

“It’s great to be here and touch people who are going through their own hard times,” he says. “I see a lot of people who have injuries of their own or tragedies going on in their families, so it’s special to be able to give a little hope and inspiration on a regular basis.”

Being able to share his paintings with others also provides Moses Hamilton with joy.

“It gives them a little brightness in their day,” he says of his boldly colored work. “It gives them a little sunshine in their life and a little inspiration in their heart.”

Regular customer

Pegi Cheatum appreciates that he inspires so many people.

“I’m proud of him,” she says.

She is still blown away by what he can do with his work, especially the tiny dots he intricately paints that blend into a unified artistic masterpiece.

“Art is a feeling of so many things you can’t say. He’s expressing so many things in his art about the beauty of the island and his perseverance,” she says.

Hamilton is thankful to have grown up in the Islands and is now able to share the beauty he became accustomed to with others. The once avid surfer was born in Haena and spent his first year of life at Taylor Camp before moving to Hawaii Island.

“Each one of the islands has its own personality. The Big Island is very raw, beautiful, but more of a jungle island and just different,” he says. “It was a beautiful experience growing up there.”

Still, he considers Kaua’i to be the “diamond in the bunch,” which is why he chose to settle down on the Garden Isle.

Growing up in the Islands also gave him a respect for different cultures.

“Being in Hawaii all my life has given me an appreciation of the rainbow of people here,” he says.

The 50th state also has allowed Moses to gain an appreciation for nature and he continues to love watching surfing. In addition, he enjoys spending time outside in his garden with his dogs.

“I cruise around the yard with them. I like watching them run around and play with each other,” he says.

Moses has learned to be grateful for these little moments in life.

“We get so spun around in our society with so much available to us that we sometimes forget to really embrace the little things,” he says.

He relates the human mind to his garden.

“Every day you’ve got to go out there and pick the weeds and fertilize the good thoughts and pull out the bad thoughts. It takes work,” he says.

However, if one can do that, every moment becomes a miracle, even if it is difficult.

“Smile today because tomorrow is not ensured,” he says.

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