Last week, we lost Marie Casciato, my longtime Personal Assistant and the Editor of this publication, Saturday Briefing. A celebration of her life was held on Sunday, February 28, at the Outrigger Waikiki on the Beach. Many friends and colleagues spoke of their fond memories of Marie. Some of those tributes are included below, along with those of others who knew her, loved her, and now miss her. My own tribute follows at the end.

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Marion Beverly:
I am proud to say that I was a friend of Marie’s. The laughs we had over the years are too many to list. I am still trying to accept that Marie is not with us anymore. I keep waiting for the phone to ring and hear her laughing voice. Marie was one of those rare people that could make you laugh in a matter of seconds. Her enthusiasm for life came over loud and clear. Marie was one of the most honest, down-to-earth, caring people I have ever met. If something needed to be done, she would take care of it immediately! If Marie heard unpleasant news about Colorado, where our offices are located, I would get a call, “You OK? Kids OK?” I would tell her “yes” and would get back, “OK. Got to go – just wanted to make sure you were all OK.” That was Marie – always taking time to check if her friends and co-workers were OK, no matter how busy her day was. Marie told me once that she loved going to Duke’s restaurant because, “After five minutes in there, no matter what kind of day you had, you would be laughing and having a good time. Duke’s is one of those places.” That’s how it was with Marie. Five minutes in her company, and you would be laughing and having a good time! The void she has left is too big to be filled. I will miss my friend each and every day.

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Elizabeth Cambra:
I’ve had the pleasure of getting to know Marie over the past six years, both from a work and personal perspective. We shared early morning starts every Friday – Marie was there to get Saturday Briefing on the printer, and I simply like the quiet morning hours! In the early days, I happened to mention that I loved horses, at which point Marie lit up and said, “I have someplace you need to visit.” I met Marie on the Honolulu Polo Club field weeks later, and the rest is history! She introduced me to the Therapeutic Horsemanship of Hawaii program, where I immediately started volunteering. Marie rolled her eyes when I said I was just going to volunteer. I’m now proud to say I’m a certified instructor and on the program’s board. Two years later, I started grooming during the polo season. Our thank-you at the end of the season was to get on a horse with a mallet. Marie just laughed the next day when I said I’d found my sporting passion and began leasing a horse,

Continued on page 2
Tributes to Marie Casciato
Continued from page 1

Billy, who is now mine. As my polo coach Rosey says, it is easier to be addicted to drugs than polo … there is rehab for drugs but nothing for polo! Marie was one of my biggest supporters. She smiled when I’d come into the office limping and bruised, let me rant when needed, but most importantly, cheered for me from the stands, no matter how far from the play I actually was! I scored my first match goal in the last game of my first season. As I rode back to the lineup, I looked up, and Marie was grinning ear-to-toe. I have ridden past the stands several times this week, and her mana is strong. Marie, I hope the iced coffee is strong, the polo is great, the horses are as beautiful as your favorite Zano … and know that the next goal is just for you.

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Howard Daniel, Communications Pacific

I had the good fortune to collaborate with Marie on Saturday Briefing practically every week for the past seven years, and it was always a pleasure. Hearing all the tributes at her farewell on Sunday made me dearly wish I’ d gotten to know this vibrant, complex personality on a level that went beyond a mere telephone link. But I got to know her well enough to understand that beneath that unvarnished way she had of telling you what she thought, beat an unfailingly generous, self-effacing heart. Marie was utterly devoted to Dr. Kelley, and she showed it – week in and week out, year after year – as she drew upon all her considerable talents and prodigious energy to make this outstanding newsletter as perfect as could be, in spite of the many challenges and frustrations she had to overcome. Aloha, Marie. I’ll really miss you.

* * * * *

Nurhan Enustun:

Those of us who were fortunate enough to get to know Marie personally saw a caring, gentle, generous, and a very sensitive lady. She enjoyed discussing fine cuisine, new trends, and watching Gordon Ramsey, Anthony Bourdain, and Emeril, to name a few – not that she would eat any of their food! She was a picky eater who had a fondness for junk food. She loved Halloween and spiders, but was petrified of cockroaches. She had been known to check into a hotel if the cockroach she spotted at home was not caught. She didn’t like public displays of attention, preferring to be behind the camera than in front of it.

Her jewelry: Rare Sterling silver earrings, necklaces, and bracelets. Her shoes and purses: Top brands that her mother-in-law, Mrs. King, would send. Her favorite restaurant: Ruth’s Chris Steak House, where she said they had the best carpaccio and beef tenderloin. Her friendship: Priceless.

Farewell my friend, I will miss you! Rest in peace, and may God bless your soul.

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“Foley” [Kathy Foley]:

My bud, “Marylou.” It’s tough to fathom you’re not within earshot anymore and that I won’t hear your distinct schlep down the hall. Who is going to be the office feather-ruffer? It is far too quiet without you, my friend; I miss you.

Marie and I go back over 20 years. We worked for Dr. Kelley initially, and, as both of us had roots on the East Coast, we naturally became fast friends. Marie had lots of idiosyncrasies that made her … well, Marie! I can safely say she was one of a kind. I would catch her talking to a jumping spider that happened upon her desk, trying to get it to jump up on her hand. She loved all kinds of spiders, but if she happened upon a roach or even a reasonable facsimile, you and everyone in the vicinity would know it.

Not only did Marie and I spend most of our daylight hours together, much of the weekend twilight hours were spent at the Annex on Lewers Street. Marie did nothing less than 150 percent, and that was reflected both at work and at play. She’d tear up the dance floor – gum chewing, Diet Coke swigging, earrings rocking and rollin’ – until last call, when she’d limp out on her bum knee. She loved the B-52s’ “Love Shack,” anything Billy Idol, especially “Rebel Yell,” and Axel Rose. Other things that will give rise to fond memories for me are iced coffee, Fendi perfume, designer shoes and bags, Ross’, white rice and ketchup, Halloween, “and stuff” at the end of pretty much every other sentence, and of course, her signature finger-twirling of those beautiful long red locks with just a little bit of rebel-shaved sideburns. I am grateful for Marie in my life. She is an example to me of true and total devotion – to Mark, to her friends, to Dr. Kelley, and to Outrigger. To have a friend who would do absolutely anything for you is a precious gift. I’ll see you again, “Marylou,” and on that occasion, let’s bust a move for old times’ sake, shall we?

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Continued on page 3
Tributes to Marie Casciato
Continued from page 2

Lehua Kala‘i:

Marie and I shared close working quarters (side-by-side cubicles) in the Executive Office at OHANA Waikiki East for 16 years. Every Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, we worked as a team to publish and distribute Saturday Briefing. Back in the 90s when the newsletter was printed in black and white, we would cut out graphics and half-tone photos, and glue them down next to the articles submitted by the Outrigger ‘ohana. We would chuckle about how we published it back then, and how far it had progressed. Marie was very meticulous, extremely creative, and took pride every week in the full production of Saturday Briefing. She transformed it into a colorful, sophisticated, and professional newsletter. We were a team and had a standing joke that she is always on my left, and I’m on her right. When we were on the wrong side of one another, whether folding or stuffing Saturday Briefing in envelopes, we would be much slower, and it just felt awkward. Needless to say, we always made sure we were standing on the correct side of one another. A hui hou — until we meet again, on your right side!

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Larry McKenzie:

Aloha

I turn down a road
along an ocean blue
sunshine mixed with rain
A song in my heart
brings a loved one to mind
a place, a face, a name
The silence is sheltered in the wind
along a narrowed path
green bordered by blue
Knowing you’re just around the bend
brings warmth against the cold
in the early morning hue
The tide may wash away
the foot prints
and the pain slowly fade away
But nothing will replace
the loss we feel
each and every day
You are ‘ohana my dear friend
but I never had the chance to say goodbye

I turned and you had traveled on
But the comfort of your memory
brings peace in my weariness
with the kindness you have sown

Aloha

* * * * *

Sharon Okada:

Dear Marie: I trust your journey to paradise was a very peaceful one. As for us in this worldly place, we are still grieving over your sudden departure. There are too many reminders and memories of you at our office; I still cannot stop crying. I can hear you telling me to “snap out of it!” but please give me a little time to get over this. Marie, I just have to tell you that your farewell to us was a beautiful one. Seeing your catamaran sailing off Waikiki Beach with your family, friends, and your Outrigger family, and those of us onshore sending you off with “Hawai‘i Aloha” was like watching the last scene of a heart-warming movie — so perfect for you. Aloha, Marie. I will miss you very much.

* * * * *

Bill Peters:

Marie and I were friends and co-workers for the past 11 years. When a friend passes on, all one can say is that it is sad. I will miss her friendship.

* * * * *

Ceeeeeee [Candace Reinhardt]:

When I first met Marie, I was intimidated by her. She was from the Big Apple, street-wise, and well traveled. I was a country bumpkin from Aiea – wide-eyed at her language and style. As a former New Yorker, she walked or took a cab wherever she went. Many a late evening after work I was her “taxi” home, and there formed our friendship. She was a generous and fiercely loyal friend. To me, she was “Sister Mary Ella,” “Mary Lou,” “Lulu Belle,” or “Red.” And I was always “Ceeeeeee,” with her own special way of saying it. I soon found out we weren’t so different after all. We loved shoes and silver jewelry – she bought me my first ear cuff, and I’ve been wearing one ever since. And, we found out we had the same shopping strategy when we ran into each other at three different Ross’ (our favorite store) on the same day. God bless you, Lulu Belle. I’ll see you in heaven.

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Continued on page 4
Tributes to Marie Casciato

Continued from page 3

Gill Stevenson:

I am honored to share with you the version of Marie that I knew and loved dearly and terrified because how do I even begin to sum up in mere words the Technicolor contradiction that was Marie? How to do it and be true to the Marie I knew?

She hated fuss and being the center of attention. We met in the days when hair was big, shoulders were bigger, and Lewers Street was home of the Annex (a nightclub, for those of you too young to remember). Back then, Marie wore her hair short, together with her stunning trademark jewelry. We bonded in mutual admiration over earrings during her first days at Exec. Office. Then began weekends when we would shop and drive our way round Oahu, accompanied by Meat Loaf and Billy Idol – I am not sure how our eardrums survived it all. There were middle-of-the-night phone calls because she had seen a roach – Marie lived above the 7th floor because she believed it reduced the chance of roach flybys – 747s, she’d call them. But if one flew in, she would be on the phone screaming.

I will not be alone if I wax lyrical about how amazing Marie was, because she was, about how she would do anything for anyone, because she would. But there was so much more to Marie than that – she was one of those rare people who would tell you the truth. It wasn’t always pretty, and you didn’t always like it, but if you asked – and sometimes if you didn’t – then the truth was what you got. She would tell you exactly what she thought and then support you anyway.

Marie loved children – gizmos she called them – and would go gaga over babies and older kids alike. On a bookshelf at home, I have a children’s book Marie gave me one Christmas, “Charlotte’s Web” by E.B. White. The story is of a spider and a pig and their friendship. Marie was passionate about spiders; I collected pigs – the story was perfect. Inside the cover, Marie wrote “Friendship.” Just one word, but it was enough. The last time I saw Marie was last spring – we spent a month doing life together, shopping, listening to Meat Loaf, catching up, dreaming, remembering, laughing, and just a little crying. We talked of how we would spend our old age – I asked her to make sure that my ashes were scattered on the ocean – she told me that she would keep me in her jewelry box. And I have no doubt that she would have done so, because she was Marie and because she was my friend.

Ruthann Yamanaka:

Marie was a woman whose huge heart and unbridled passion for all things important to her were inspirations. Marie was devoted to her work for Dr. Kelley, to Outrigger, to Saturday Briefing, to doing what is right, to friends … and yes, to spiders. I’ve never met anyone like Marie and likely never will. She was an artistic blend of unpredictable energy and varied talents … a sensitive soul with an often crusty manner yet a beautiful honesty about who she was and how she chose to live.

For me, people like Marie are special because they create opportunities to see the world differently, and therefore, to grow. I am forever grateful to Marie for broadening my understanding of what passion for what you love looks like. She is a golden heart that I am confident is being richly rewarded with peace and joy in heaven.

Dr. Chuck Kelley:

On Monday, we all suffered a great loss. That day, Marie was working in the office as usual, when she suddenly collapsed to the floor, and in the blink of an eye was gone. There was nothing her friends could do to bring her back. Nothing the emergency response team could do. Nothing the emergency room physicians could do. One moment she was with us, full of energy and life, then in a fraction of a second, an instant, she was gone. There was no warning, no clue to prompt us to say “goodbye,” or “I love you.” It is a difficult thing to understand and accept.

Six days have already passed, and we will carry on. We will each carry forward our own special memories of

Continued on page 5
Tributes to Marie Casciato

Continued from page 4

how Marie enriched our lives.

I will remember what an important part of our Executive Office team she was.

She was single-minded and goal-directed, striving for Kīnā'ole (flawlessness) every day. She never stopped pushing along a project until she felt it was being done right, and done right the first time.

As editor of the Saturday Briefing, she put everything she had into making it the very best publication possible. In her head, she kept a set of “rules” about which topics were to be included and about how things were to be punctuated or laid out. She proofread and checked every word, every line, for spelling and accuracy. We all appreciated how she kept the publication accurate and at a level of quality that reflected well on all of us. In all her years as editor, she never missed a Saturday Briefing deadline.

We all feel the loss created by our friend Marie’s passing, and we send with her our aloha.

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Jean Dickenson

I started on the Outrigger account with Hill & Knowlton/Communications Pacific and worked with Marie from 1992 through 1998. Although I relocated to the Mainland, we remained friends ever since. I always enjoyed getting Christmas cards from Mark and Marie, highlighted by little rubber stamps of spiders and Felix the Cat. I first got to know Marie over the telephone. To me, she was a calm, confident, and professional voice. Whenever I called, I was greeted with, ‘Aloha mai, Dr. Kelley’s office, this is Marie.’ We worked together for many months before we ever met, mostly on articles for Saturday Briefing. This was probably about 1992 or 1993, and during that time, I would draw a mental picture of the lovely woman on the other end of the phone. I knew she was very smart, extremely capable, and very grounded. So the mental image I developed was that of a much older, very conservative looking woman. I thought that Marie Casciato might look a little bit like Estelle Kelley. Imagine my surprise the day that Marie and I finally met! She was certainly very grounded and confident, but she was also young! A brunette! Half of her hair was buzz cut super short and the other side was longer - styled with a very avant garde “rocker chic” look. Marie wore a long dangling earring on one side and a spider earring on the other. Certainly not what I expected. I remember one year, Outrigger held a costume party at the Prince Kuhio (OPK), and the theme was ‘dress as your nationality.’ It was a wonderful event, full of kimonos, hula skirts, lederhosen, and the like. Marie came dressed in black, wearing a veil. What was she? ‘I’m an Italian widow,’ she replied with a smile. Marie was always a surprise - fun-loving, good spirited, and energetic. I last saw Marie in November. While her hairstyles might have changed over the years, one thing that didn’t change was her keen sense of who she was, her giving nature, and her professionalism. It was an honor and a pleasure to know her. Although we will all miss her, our memories will remain.

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Jeannie Rolles:

How do you say aloha to Marie? There are so many ways that she interacted with all of us, from one end of the company to the other. We are just beginning to appreciate all she did and the knowledge she had of how to handle a thousand and one matters. Week after week she saw that Saturday Briefing was done well and delivered on time, while handling numerous interruptions and questions. I feel fortunate to have worked with Marie and to have had her friendship. I know that she is already organizing heaven and starting to write a Sunday Briefing for all the angels! Aloha kakou!

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David Carey:

Many have known Marie in her life outside her job, but I only knew Marie in her work around the Outrigger Executive Offices. We interacted in some way nearly every day. Marie was a multi-talented individual. What has struck me in the week or so since her passing is how many people she touched in so many ways. It is as
Dr. Richard R. Kelley:

Last Monday, none of us knew Marie Casciato was going on a journey. None of us had a chance to say goodbye. And now, we are left with the task of describing the meaning of her time here on earth – the days and hours represented by the dash found between the date of birth and the date of death – ‘The dash of life …’

For, Marie, life was full. I can tell by the baskets of e-mails I have received from so many. And I was just a co-worker – not a family member.

Marie did not work for me … or Outrigger Hotels. We got together five days a week on her terms.

Outspoken … Dedicated … Creative … Loyal … My friend. Those are just a few of the words I might use to describe Marie. She was more than my secretary. She tackled any job I might suggest. If I was wrong, and I often am, she would let me know. Whether it was taking reservations for VIPs or securing tickets, activities, or whatever for them after they arrived … or handling requests to help a local charity or one miles away … she did it quickly and efficiently, but always in her own inimitable style.

She brought our weekly publication, Saturday Briefing, from a rag-tag paste-up of black-and-white stories to a four-color, cost-effective communication tool that is the envy of many.

Saturday Briefing was her baby. She worried about every detail like a parent watching a child who is about to step on stage for the first time in life as the lead in the school play. Every line, every space, and every word was considered, analyzed, and finally put in place … with passion.

And now she’s gone on her journey. I’m not sure where, but I have a pretty good idea.

Yesterday, we watched tsunamis swirl across the Pacific Ocean, and last night, on TV, we saw some guy with gray hair talking about the possible causes. “Tectonic plates,” he said.

My wife Linda and I turned to each other and sighed, “There’s nothing tectonic about that. It’s just an indication that Marie has made it to heaven, where she is already talking to God … rearranging the furniture, and … of course … MAKING WAVES!”

Aloha, Marie.