“ARE YOU FAMOUS AMOS?”

On the island paradise of Oahu,

Wally Amos gets that question every day.

If only the answer were simple.

BY JOHN McALLEY

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARCO GARCIA

SNACK ATTACK
On Waikiki Beach, Amos is a man of the people—and a peddler of his new Wamos Cookies.

ALOHA.

ONE OF THE WORD'S many meanings is "sharing the breath of life." And in a traditional Hawaiian greeting, two people lean into each other, gently touch their foreheads and noses together, and inhale the same "ha," or breath. It's an exquisitely intimate exchange of friendship, but it's not how Wally Amos enters a scene.

Pulling out of his high-rise apartment building a block from Waikiki Beach, the man universally known as Famous Amos announces his presence with the chimes of a Good Humor truck. Fixed beneath the hood of his SUV are speakers that, at the flip of a switch, fill the palm-lined streets with the plink-plink of Disney's "It's a Small World (After All)." Heightening the head-turning spectacle are the car's vanity plates—WALLY1—and the large images of a beaming Amos plastered to its side panels. The badly scraped front-left and rear-right wheel wells aren't intended to impress. "*Twice* I've run into a pillar in my parking lot," the 77-year-old entrepreneur says with a laugh. "And last week I got sideswiped by a bus. I'm supposed to take that up with the city, but the truth is *I've* been more harmful to my car than anyone else."

The elaborately adorned ride functions as a rolling billboard, and an effective one at that. Arguably, Amos is the most well-known face on Oahu, challenged only by the temporary appearance, a few years ago, of some guy named Clooney. (The Oscar-nominated film *The Descendants* was shot here.) To be accurate, it's not Amos' face that sparks recognition, it's his Technicolor uniform: standard-issue flip-flops and shorts topped by an Aloha shirt, a lei of braided ribbons, and a lid worthy of the Mad Hatter—if Lewis Carroll's mischievous oddball had a thing for watermelon.

Everywhere we stop on today's tour of this island paradise, Amos will be bathed in warmth. "Hey, Wally!" hollers a bellman fronting the circular drive of the tony Kahala Hotel & Resort. "Uncle Wally!" cheers a horn-honking local on jam-packed Kalakaua Avenue. (In Hawaii, *uncle* is an affectionate sobriquet showered on elders.) On the chill main street of the North Shore town of Haleiwa, a white pickup with monster wheels rumbles past Matsumoto, the Le Cirque of shave ice. Leaning across the passenger seat, its tatted driver isn't too cool to give the old man a shout-out: "Famous Amos!"

The good vibes are remarkable given the distant success that made Amos identifiable in virtually every corner of the globe. "Now," says the guy who decades ago was dubbed "the cookie man," "I'm famous just for being famous."

OUR WORLD WAS a little less sweet in the early '70s. Stand-alone cookie stores like Mrs. Fields didn't exist. Neither, for that matter, did most of the guilty-pleasure emporiums that now crowd food courts and airport terminals. In March of 1975, when Amos, a broke talent agent and father of three, opened the first Famous Amos cookie store on a seedy stretch of Sunset Strip in Los Angeles, he had no way of knowing he'd change the course of confectioner history and one day see his low-budgeted act of desperation grow into a company worth tens of millions of dollars.

THE MIXMASTER
In part, what fueled Amos' fame was the signage on his first store, and his likeness on each bag. His bold style—even at home, with his son Shawn—didn't hurt either.

"Of the big four, he was definitely the first one in," says David Liederman, whose David's Cookies duked it out with Famous Amos, Mrs. Fields, and the Great American Cookie Factory for gourmet-treat dominance. With Famous Amos as prototype, the age of Cinnabon and Auntie Anne's, ad nauseam, had dawned. "It was a budding industry," Liederman says. "And Wally was a master at getting publicity."

Today, the culinary world is aflame with noisy, outsize, ready-for–prime time personalities like Emeril Lagasse, Guy Fieri, and Rachael Ray. It's arguable that Wally Amos pioneered this now ubiquitous foodie flamboyance. A tireless promoter and motormouth, he'd do anything to draw attention to his brand, which, within sixteen months of its launch, had expanded to three retail stores and, in a deal that helped turn the local phenomenon into a national one, the posh aisles of Bloomingdale's. Through guest spots on television, countless public appearances, and the Famous Amos packaging itself, the image of a fully bearded Amos in a Panama hat and embroidered, Indian gauze shirt became inseparable from the cookie's success and made him into one of the quirkiest and most visible cultural icons of the late 20th century.

The quirks are still there. This mid-July morning, Amos—at 6'1", a reed of a man with a puzzling medicine ball of a belly—sits behind the wheel of his Ford Escape with a bath towel tucked into his shirt and draped down across his lap. Cradling a bowl of fresh fruit and yogurt between his legs, he shovels spoonfuls with one hand while steering his way, with the other, to a storage unit on the outskirts of Waikiki. It's a personal errand on a day otherwise dedicated to playing host in this sunlit nirvana to a pasty mainland journalist. "I'm always on the edge of time. I can never quite get *on* time. So quite often I eat in my car," Amos says cheerfully. "But it's caused me a few bug problems," he adds, reaching, without embarrassment, behind the driver and passenger seats for a pair of roach motels alarmingly close to hanging their "No Vacancy" signs.

Chalk it up to island life. That, and to the pride Amos takes in being an open book. "*Ten* books," he's quick to remind me. In the decades since he sold his cookie empire, the inexhaustibly verbose pitchman has become a philosopher king, a lecture-circuit staple whose stack of motivational books includes titles like *Man With No Name: Turn Lemons Into Lemonade* and *Watermelon Magic: Seeds of Wisdom, Slices of Life*. When you peddle advice for so many years, those messages and fruity metaphors become your vocabulary. "Life is spirit; life is *energy*," Amos says often throughout the day. Other earnest aphorisms require the aid of Google Maps: "Every move we make and every breath we take is leading us somewhere." "The moment is what matters. You're always here, you're never there. There is no there, so you're always here."

Everywhere he looks, Amos sees the universe at work. As our loop around the island begins, the first hit of beauty he shares with me is Hanauma Bay, an awe-inspiring nature preserve swimming with turtles, trumpet fish, and snorkelers. Cruising the filled-to-capacity parking lot, he eyes an open space. This is not dumb luck, it's faith in the flow. "You see?" Amos says, assuredly. "The sign said LOT FULL, and we could have just kept going, missing this beautiful opportunity. But we entered the lot and drove right into a spot. So there's life again, man."

Remarkably, the same thing happens up the road at a South Shore lookout called the Halona Blowhole. "You *see*?" says Amos, barely able to

THE COOKIE THAT MADE AMOS FAMOUS

Despite folklore from the Famous Amos heyday, the "secret" recipe for Wally's world-beating cookie came directly from the back of a Nestlé Toll House bag. "*Everyone's* chocolate chip cookie derives from the recipe Ruth Wakefield created in the early '30s," he says. "The secret is in who is baking them. Everybody's cookies taste different, because life is not flour and sugar. It's spirit; it's *energy*." It's Wally's oddball pointers, too.

"I chill all of my ingredients."

- 2 medium eggs
- 2 sticks salted butter
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- ¾ cup brown sugar
- ¾ cup granulated sugar
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 2 ¼ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup pecans
- 1 cup semi-sweet chocolate chips

"I'm a devout fan of the Watkins brand."

1. Put eggs, butter, salt, baking soda, sugars, and vanilla extract into a stand mixer. Mix at low speed for 1 minute. Increase to medium speed for another minute, then to high for 4 minutes.
2. With the mixer off, add flour, then blend at medium speed for 2 ½ minutes.
3. Rather than chop the pecans, the "cookie man" prefers to break them by hand. Fold them into the batter with the mixer set to low.
4. "The chocolate chips are the last thing to go in," says Wally, who, again, recommends a low mixer speed.
5. Here's where Wally becomes ... Wally. He refrigerates the batter overnight, in an 8-inch square, plastic container.
6. The next day, cut batter into 8-inch by 2-inch rectangles. Sprinkle with flour, and, using two hands, roll on a countertop until each rectangle is a snake-like 1 inch in diameter. Re-refrigerate.
7. Preheat oven to 350 (electric) or 375 (gas). Lightly coat a nonstick, lipped cookie sheet with Pam, then pinch off 1-inch bits of rolled cookie dough, placing them in six rows of 10. Don't be perfectionist about the shape of each dollop.
8. Bake for about 12 minutes. "You want them as brown on the top as they are on the bottom," Wally says. The finished cookie should be the size of a half-dollar, and crispy. Wally, a bad numbers guy, hasn't a clue how many cookies this recipe will make.

"Ease the chocolate in – the more you whip it, the darker it becomes."

"The cookies get a better rise when the batter is cold."

"Uniform cookies are boring."

conceal his shaman's glow, "if you flow with the universe, it opens spaces for you. All you have to do is drive into them."

This overreach for cosmic meaning hits its delirious peak when, midday, over lunch in Lanikai, a luxe enclave on Oahu's windward coast, Amos decides to spoon the leftover sauce of capers and butter from our calamari appetizer onto his grilled ahi entrée. "You see that?" he says, tucking into the fillet. "I hadn't planned that. I hadn't even *thought* of that until a second before I did it. The waitress was going to take it away, and I thought, *That would be nice on my fish.* And it is! That's where life is maximized: When you can have that type of insight and respond to it right away. Life appears second by second, man."

If this robust positivity is cumulatively dizzying, it's infectious in spurts. At Buzz's, home of the mystical capers, he gifts the waitstaff not with pearls of wisdom but with cookies. "Are you Wally?" huffs our server, leaning on the table in mock outrage. "I've got a bone to pick with you. How is it that you come into *my* restaurant and feed *me* instead of the other way around?"

You see Amos' overflowing generosity in the way he responds to the giddy tourists and island natives who approach him every day and in his decades-long commitment to charitable work for programs like Literacy Volunteers of America. He was the national spokesman for that vitally important organization for 23 years, and to this day the man in the funny hat routinely reads to children at the public library in nearby Kailua. His close friend and attorney, Roger Epstein, tells a story that epitomizes sometimes weird, sometimes wonderful Wally World: "We were at the Unity Church in Waikiki, where Wally is a member, and we're talking to this guy. He's not quite homeless but he's close, you know? And as we're talking to him a couple of the guy's *teeth* fall onto the floor. The next day, Wally calls me up and says, 'Rog, we gotta buy the guy some new teeth. If I put in X dollars, would you put in Y?' I mean, he hardly knows this guy, and the next day all he wanted to do was come up out of his pocket for him. So we bought the guy new teeth. That's the kind of person Wally is."

The Hawaiian Islands are the most isolated landmasses on Earth, and "oceans apart" effectively describes Amos' relationship with his children.

HUGS & MISSES Aunt Della (right) turned out to be the tender mom that Ruby (above) was not.

"I WAS SITTIN' HERE eatin' some of the best damn watermelon, and every time I eat good watermelon I feel like I gotta call you," says Amos' son Michael. He's ringing in from more than a continent away in Brooklyn. At rest in the parking lot of Public Storage earlier in the day, Amos is delighted but surprised. They chat for 10 minutes before the senior Amos abruptly ends the call. "That's my oldest son, Mike. He's a great guy, but that's the first time he and I have spoken in maybe a year," he says a little impatiently. "I called to wish him a happy birthday in April, and he didn't call me back. But we are who we are, man. And one of the biggest mistakes we make is feeling that we can tell other people how to live their lives."

Geographically, the Hawaiian Islands are the most isolated landmasses on Earth, and "oceans apart" pretty effectively describes Amos' relationship with his children. Each of them—Michael, 54; Gregory, 51; Shawn, 46; and Sarah, 30—has struggled intensely to make sense of a

painful contradiction at their father's core. The same benevolent man who greets strangers with warm embraces, and whose baked goods and inspirational talks on the need to power through hard times have lifted innumerable lives, has been incapable of walking the talk with the people closest to him. The line between resolute positivity and deep-seated denial can be a fine one, and despite an adult life rife with serial acts of abandonment and infidelity—with three failed marriages in his wake and grown children still astonished by their father's self-absorption and callousness—Amos is so determinedly "in the moment" that he can't be bothered to reckon with the past. "It's a bucket of ashes," he's fond of saying. "You gotta get on with your life."

BORN IN TALLAHASSEE, Florida, on July 1, 1936, Amos lived with his mother and father in a three-room house in a segregated section of town called Smokey Hollow. His parents' relationship was distant. Wallace Sr. labored at the local gas plant; Ruby worked as a housekeeper. Churchgoing and fellowship were central to their lives, but that didn't stop Amos' mother from being abusively critical of her only child—and beating him mercilessly. "The beatings weren't regular," Amos remembers. "I wasn't a *bad* boy. It's just that Ruby's standards were so high that if you deviated at all ... There was no being right. I could *never* have been right with Ruby."

Saturdays were spent with his father, who'd once a month take his son for a haircut, and regularly plant him on a stranger's porch while he climbed the stairs to consummate one of his many extramarital flings.

The marriage went to pieces when Amos was 12, and his parents shipped him north to New York, to live with his Aunt Della in Manhattan's Washington Heights neighborhood. The separation from his folks felt like freedom. "I had been to visit Aunt Della before," says Amos, "and I was *excited* to go to New York. I was excited, also, because I didn't have to worry about those beatings anymore."

Friendships came easy to him; high school did not. In 1954, at age 17, Amos dropped out and enlisted in the Air Force. After stints in wintry Upstate New York and racially charged Biloxi, Mississippi, he was stationed in blissed-out Oahu, whose soothing trade winds he never wanted to leave. "I was going to get discharged here," he recalls, "but for the last months of my tour I got transferred to San Francisco. From there, I figured I'd briefly visit New York. I ended up staying for 10 years."

Within 12 months of his return to the city, he'd met, impregnated, and married his first wife, Maria Lefore—and the hustle was on. Michael was born in 1959; Gregory in 1962. With a family to support, Amos used his natural swagger and fierce work ethic to ace a stockroom gig at Saks Fifth Avenue, a job he eventually quit out of suspicion of being underpaid because of the color of his skin. He pounced on an opportunity in the mailroom at the William Morris Agency, which, at the time, was under political pressure to hire black trainees. In a Biography Channel documentary about Amos that aired in 2001, legendary talent agent Bernie Brillstein testified to Amos' tenacity and X factor: "Wally drew attention in a room. He made sure of that. He was tall; he was thin. He always seemed to be dressed well and differently. He was just a driven guy who knew he was going somewhere."

William Morris made Amos the first black agent in its history, a job that put him in charge of booking shows for a glittering constellation of rising pop and soul superstars: Marvin Gaye, Simon & Garfunkel, and Diana Ross & the Supremes among them. Amos was feeling imbued with some sparkle himself, stepping out on his wife, Maria, without hesitation or guilt. She'd have none of it.

Faced with a decision to either commit or walk, Amos walked, divorcing Maria in 1966—just in time to marry an exotically beautiful aspiring singer named Shirley Ellis.

Amos' third son, Shawn, was born in September 1967. A month later, Amos relocated his new family to Los Angeles, leaving behind 8-year-old Michael and 5-year-old Gregory. He ditched the Morris Agency, too, having hit their glass ceiling for African-Americans and deciding to go it alone as a personal manager. The gamble was disastrous from the start; clients of the caliber he was accustomed to working with never materialized. Amos allayed his anxiety by making chocolate chip and pecan cookies from his Aunt Della's recipe, the same treats that enchanted him as a 12-year-old boy. Or so goes the legend that has sold billions of Famous Amos cookies.

That story was baked. "I had a meeting with one of my clients, an actress named Shari Summers," Amos remembers more accurately, "and she broke out chocolate chip cookies she had made. I tasted them and, oh my *god*. Years before, Aunt Della had stopped sending cookies to me, and at that moment I realized I could make 'em myself, so I asked Shari for the recipe. I thought she was going to say it was some deep, dark secret. It turns out it was right off the back of the Nestlé Toll House bag. I went straight to the supermarket, and, sure enough, there it was."

Loyalty ranks high in any recipe for life. So does esteem for one's self. But from whom would Amos have learned these things?

With his management company limping along, Amos looked for anything to give him a leg up with the power brokers he was courting. Used as an aromatic calling card, his homemade cookies—bite-size, crispy, and bulging with pecans and chocolate chips—made more of an impression than his client list.

Less savory were Amos' unchecked infidelities, which opened fissures in his second marriage. If the fundamental demands of marriage were too much for him, what surfaced next was even further beyond his capacity. Shirley, after a string of nervous breakdowns, was diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder, a form of mental illness that many years later caused her to take her own life.

Confronted, again, with the hard work of family and commitment, Amos again walked away. How does he explain such devastating indifference today? He doesn't. He won't. He can't. "I'm not that guy anymore," he says, pushing the vegetables around his plate at Buzz's. "I have reflected on that behavior, and the question I ask myself is, how long do I *need* to reflect on that behavior?"

Shawn Amos no longer talks to his father, but in a deeply revealing diary called "Cookies & Milk" that he wrote for the Huffington Post in 2011 he tried to locate the insight that eludes his dad and, Shawn suggests, other African-American men of his dad's age: "Men of my father's generation were perpetual hustlers, always on the make and always on the move. The world was theirs to take—if they were not taken first .... These were men who started families with no knowledge of how a family is held together. As boys, they watched their own fathers withstand humiliation in their own towns and workplaces until they slipped away with other women to new lives in other places."

Foundering professionally and emotionally, and piling up debt, Amos needed another hustle, fast. With his cookies a runaway hit in the suites of Hollywood, he lunged at a suggestion made to him by Quincy Jones' secretary: Why not make a business of it? With $25,000 in seed money—including $10,000 from Amos' pal Marvin Gaye—the Famous Amos Cookie Company opened its doors on Sunday, March 9, 1975. A little more than a decade and a half later, the business—flush with sales from grocery chains, convenience stores, and vending machines—was sold to the President Baking Company for a stunning $61 million.

That kind of success attests to Amos' savvy for sweets, and Haleiwa, home of his favorite ice cream shop, is our next stop. Slowly walking the town's main drag, Amos has the aura of a titan of industry—at least one who carries a kazoo, and to the sun-hammered vacationers who flock to him.

"My husband says you're Famous Amos. Is it *true*?" gushes a mother, trailed by her two mildly confused teenage daughters, to whom Amos hands his business card.

"Can I get a picture with you?" asks a bikinied twentysomething waving her hands and iPhone.

The meet-and-greet achieves existential surreality when an elfin, visibly disoriented island native not a day under 80—shirtless, short a handful of choppers, and more deeply tanned than the Situation—approaches, pushing a bicycle, and gets right up in Wally's grill. "Are you Famous Amos?" he mutters.

Sated and strolling back to his car, the cookie man is pleased—and more than a little bemused. "These people are nice to me because they think I'm a celebrity," he says, pushing back his watermelon hat. "They like me because they think I'm rich. What they *don't* know," he adds, laughing, "is that I don't have a pot to piss in or a window to throw it out of."

HIS REALTOR probably refers to it as a one-bedroom, but "studio" best describes the 800-square-foot apartment that has been Amos' home for the past two years. For the bulk of his three-plus decades in Oahu, Amos and his third wife, Christine—the mother of his youngest child, Sarah—lived in a five-bedroom, four-and-a-half bath spread on one of the largest lots in exclusive Lanikai. Their 32-year marriage ended in divorce in November 2011, a victim of predictable drift and Amos' even more predictable philandering.

The couple moved to Hawaii in 1977, when Amos and his nascent cookie company were on a soaring trajectory. "Christine and I were new together," he says, stationed in front of a stand mixer in his efficiency kitchen the day after our island jaunt. Stripped of his ornate hat and festive neckwear, Amos looks his age. A little weary, a little wrinkled, understandably tired. Some of the weight is from the tug-of-war he's having with his fourth wife, Joy, who'd like to be home today but has surrendered the place to the cookie man and his note-taking apprentice.

"I remembered how much I loved Hawaii from my days in the Air Force," Amos continues, "and I wanted to move back. Christine said, 'Oh, you're crazy.' So we were both right—I *am* crazy. But we moved to Hawaii."

That meant leaving 10-year-old Shawn behind in L.A. to caretake his severely unstable mother. Theirs weren't the only needs Amos left unmet. He turned out to be an atrocious businessman—worse still, one with an ego. As he traveled the world on the wings of his Famous Amos fame, the company—badly underfinanced and poorly managed—was in free fall. Borrowing frantically to keep it aloft, Amos had so completely leveraged his stake in Famous Amos that when he finally relinquished ownership of it in 1985, he made not a penny.

If that weren't devastating enough, the eager-to-please guy in the Panama hat signed away all rights to his name and likeness. The business implications were lethal. Didn't he realize what he was doing? "I did to some degree," he says, spooning ingredients for a batch of chocolate chip and pecan cookies into the bowl of his KitchenAid. "What I didn't realize is I didn't *have* to sign it. I didn't have an attorney with me saying, 'We can change this; we can amend that.' I just chose to go along." He sighs deeply. "That's a fault I have."

With Christine at his side, Amos spent the next couple of decades trying to catch lightning in a bottle again, launching one cookie venture after another. In 1991, Wally Amos Presents Chip and Cookie was started up—and was almost immediately shut down by a lawsuit that dragged on for four-and-a-half years. Contractually, he was prohibited from using his name. So a year later Amos relaunched Chip and Cookie under the cheeky but tone-deaf banner Uncle Noname's Cookie Company. It filed for Chapter 11 in 1996. Somewhere lost in the batter was another flop called Aunt Della's.

In 1998, Keebler gobbled up the Famous Amos Cookie Company and, in a gesture of goodwill, temporarily brought Amos into the fold as a spokesman for his old brand. They also agreed to legally let him have "Wally" back—as long as the name wasn't used to sell cookies. Uncle Wally's *Muffins* are still sold in Walmart stores, but Amos' small stake in that company went to Christine in the divorce.

The couple's last stab was a pair of local Chip and Cookie stores: one in Kailua, the other in Waikiki. Both were shuttered in 2010. As a parting shot, Amos was sued for $108,000 in unpaid rent. The guy whose only steady source of income is a Social Security check, and whose current debt is as steep as nearby Diamondhead, is sanguine about it. "I don't *have* $108,000," he says. "At some point, I'm either going to have to pay it or hope they show me leniency."

Amos dips his finger into the bowl of batter, which has been taking shape as we talk. "*Look* at this, man," he says, momentarily transported by the sight and feel of an old friend. "It's a *rich* cookie dough. I mean, that's Rolls-Royce, Gucci, Chanel. Have I told you about Recipes For Life?"

It's the marketing credo he hopes will help platform Amos 9.0—or whatever the number is. For the past year he's been hustling to get Wamos Cookies off the ground. It not only rhymes with *famous*, it uses the Famous Amos recipe dating back to 1975, before one corporate behemoth after another (Kellogg now owns the brand) dumbed down the gourmet cookie with cheaper ingredients. "On my *worst* day I wouldn't be able to sell what they're making," he says about the snack now a staple of most every

vending machine in America. "I couldn't *give* that cookie away." It's a sharp indictment, especially from a man whose dignity is so wrapped up in the adoration afforded him each day because of that cookie's enduring popularity.

Loyalty ranks high in any recipe for life. So does esteem—for one's self and for others. But from whom would Amos have learned these things? When the subject of his mother and father comes up, he disappears for a minute, then returns with a small spice bottle that he sets before me. The cap reads, "Your Fine Taste Is Showing." Inside the bottle are Ruby's ashes. "Remember when I told you we put some of her in the ocean?" he says. "Well, here's the rest."

Amos' mother eventually followed her son to New York, and then to L.A. She died in 1994, as disapproving and terrifying as ever. Did he ever see his father again?

"Once," he says, almost inaudibly. "I was stationed at Keesler Air Force Base, in Biloxi, and I went to Tallahassee for a weekend. Some friends were headed in that direction, so I caught a ride, and I saw him." Picking up one of his business cards, Amos absently begins sweeping into a small pile the loose sugar scattered across the counter. "I wanted my dad to buy me a jacket, but he wouldn't. I always wanted my dad to give me something, but he never gave me anything, really. So we—I never—I never saw him after that."

I'M WORRIED about my father, and I'm looking for a way that I can take care of him," Greg Amos says. He's on the phone from his home in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where he works as a freelance writer. Greg doesn't remember feeling angry when his father took off on him, at age 5. His fury didn't surface until he reached 30.

"To me," he says, "turning 30 represented becoming a true adult, a time when you're supposed to be taking care of yourself. Well, I *wasn't* taking care of myself because I always had a longing to be cared for by the one parent that never took care of me, which was my father. So when I turned 30, I went into a fairly deep depression, and a lot of feelings surfaced from when I was 5 and 6. I recognized that I felt abandoned by him."

Greg wrote a letter, which his father brings up twice in our conversations together—telling the story exactly the same way both times. "The letter said, *I will never, ever, EVER see you or speak to you again in this life,"* the senior Amos recalls. "But I knew I'd done nothing wrong. And I knew it would be just a matter of time before Greg came around."

Recounted over the phone, Wally's words throw Greg into spasms of laughter. "My father will frequently say, 'I'm not responsible for what happened in the past.' Even 30 years ago, in his first book, he was saying a *different* Wally did X, Y, and Z. But I no longer expect my father to understand my feelings. At this point in my life I've made a conscious decision to talk to and spend as much time with him as I can. I'm at a stage where what is healthy for me is to voice my feelings as they arrive and not keep them in. At the moment, he seems to appreciate it. Whether or not it changes his m.o., I can't tell you."

Greg, twice divorced, last saw his father in May. Greg's brother Mike, a divorced father of three, keeps only a light touch with his dad. Sarah, Wally's youngest, wasn't comfortable talking to me for this story. But she and her father occasionally chat, and after nearly eight years at ABC News she has embraced family by partnering with her half-brother

Shawn in a digital-content company called Freshwire. Even Shawn, who has three children with his second wife, seems to be coming to grips with the impossible complexity of loyalty and legacy. He won't talk to his father, but he didn't get in the way when Piper, his 12-year-old daughter, had a special request for her father's father.

As we were wending our way around the distant island, which, with its eruptive vitality, jagged contours, and deep Pacific blues, in many ways mirrors the man who settled there 36 years ago, Amos reached for his cell phone. "You gotta hear this, man."

It was a message from Piper, from last spring. A thousand poets could write a thousand words and still not capture the unfettered beauty and air of expectancy in the voice of the grandchild Amos hasn't seen in three, four, maybe five years. He can't remember.

"Hi Grandpapa!" the message goes. "It's Piper! I'm just calling to ask you, um ... Career Day is coming up at my school, and I was wondering if you could send a video of yourself talking about the Famous Amos company and maybe send some cookies for our class. So please call me back. I love you *so* much, and I miss you. Bye-bye."

WALLY AMOS seems to be in good hands. At 77, he's finally figured out that cookies and promotion, *not* business, are what he knows best. He's got eager and experienced partners on Wamos Cookies. This month, the brand will be available at L.A.-area Costco stores, and the hope is a lucrative QVC deal will follow. Apparently, our interview and the not always comfortable looking back has paid dividends, too.

When I return to the mainland there's a voicemail waiting for me. It's the cookie man, flying high once again. "Hey John, it's Wally! I feel really in charge, man. I feel so clear in my confidence. Everything is *surging* back into my body. You have been a *catalyst* for this resurrection of Wally Amos, and I am indebted to you. I have an idea that something big is getting ready to happen. It's coming on, and it's going to be *so* wonderful. I'm telling you, this is it! I see a bestselling book and a movie and *all* the stuff that comes after. I feel better than I've felt in *ages*. So, take care, man, and have a very safe trip. Mahalo and *aloooo-HAAAA*!"

John McAlley is the executive editor of Spirit. *Shoot him an email at john.mcalley@paceco.com with your thoughts about Wally Amos' story.*