

BACKGROUND: Born and raised in a small New Jersey farming community; law degree from American University in Washington, D.C.; still a member of the bar in D.C., where he had a storefront criminal practice; traveled the United States, Canada, Europe and India "exploring consciousness"; subsistence living in the woods of Washington state; moved to the island of Hawai'i in 1974.

HOME: Ahualoa.

FAMILY: Wife, Laura; daughters, Kristin, 22, Shaina, 12.

WORK: Executive director, West Hawai'i Mediation Services; beekeeper and honey maker; energy conservation consultant.

"MY FEELING ABOUT the Big Island is this: It is an amazing place to be. The island of Hawai'i sits on top of creation, the creative force in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, and there's nothing like that anywhere in the world."

One of Richard Spiegel's mantras is, "Think globally, act locally." He says the Big Island is the best place he's found to do that. "This is as close to the edge as I've ever been—the edge of nature and the edge of change."

Spiegel has contributed to that change in quiet but substantial ways. In 1984, at his Kukuihaele home—a house without locks—things started disappearing. The culprits turned out to be a couple of neighborhood teens. But Spiegel, a lawyer long disenchanted with the legal system, didn't think prosecuting the kids would accomplish anything positive. "I really just wanted to talk to these people and let them know what it feels like to have

some unknown person invade your privacy." The prosecutor told him about the Ku'ikahi YMCA Mediation Center in Hilo, which allows disputants to talk out their problems face to face with trained mediators. "Before my case ever came up, I took the training and became involved as a volunteer mediator." Within a year, Spiegel became director of the program. About three years later he started West Hawai'i Mediation Services, based in Waimea, with 55 volunteer mediators resolving disputes.

"This mediation center asks: How do we bring about peace for humans? Well, we do it right here in Waimea for the families of this town, this island, because if we can't do it here, how can we ask international leaders to do it?"

One of the most visible disputes Spiegel helped mediate is the geothermal issue. "I don't necessarily have a judgment on geothermal," he says, asking only that everyone first gain an understanding of the potential costs and benefits before bargaining ahead. "I do have a judgment on shipping energy from here to O'ahu—I think

that's crazy. I'm concerned about making the Big Island an industrial suburb of O'ahu."

While working on the issue, Spiegel wondered: "Suppose we conserve 50 percent of the energy we're using? It would make a new geothermal plant irrelevant. It would give us a window to explore what's appropriate technology."

Convinced Big Islanders can make significant energy cuts, last year Spiegel joined Island Energy Systems, an energy conservation consulting firm. Clients have included the Mauna Lani Resort and the

Hawai'i county government. They listen to the company's recommendations for the most pragmatic reasons: "You don't have to talk conservation," says Spiegel, "you can talk money savings."

Richard Spiegel's other business has him talking to bees. "My biggest and most important teacher in life has been nature. The bees are there to keep me in connection with what is for me the realest of the real, the cycles of nature."

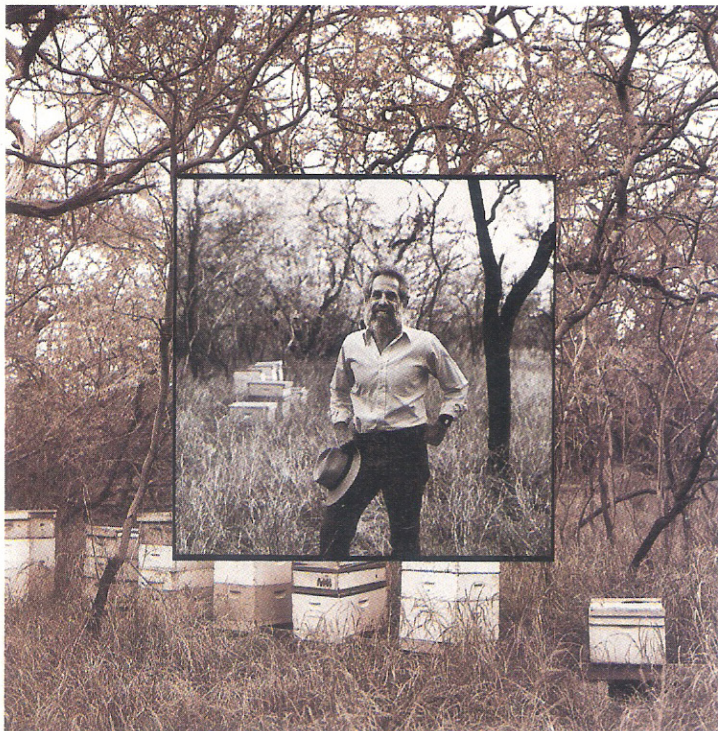
His honey is made entirely from the nectar of kiawe trees in a Puakō forest. It is ultra creamy in color and texture. And it costs up to about \$10 for an 8-ounce jar (if you buy it at Bloomingdale's). Why so pricey? "Honey is a sugar and sugar in excess is not good for humans," says Spiegel. "We've made this honey to be some of the finest in the world; we've also made it very expensive, so it costs too much to eat too much of it." Spiegel also feels troubled by another aspect of the business: "Bees get killed or injured sometimes. I never liked that."

When he looks to the future, Spiegel sees great possibilities and great hurdles for the Big Island. "People

are coming here," he says, "because it's incredibly beautiful. But they bring with them who they are and lay that down on top of this, so they make the place into what they were trying to escape. This island is to me a very delicate system. If you mess with the water or the air or the volcano, you've got to know what you're doing. And if you don't know what you're doing, maybe you better not mess with it until you do.

"We've got to expand our awareness of what we're doing and slow it down before we do ourselves irreversible harm. That has to do especially with development along this coast, with real estate speculation, with ideas like a spaceport, geothermal and undersea mining. This is not to say I want to stop progress. But what we have called progress in the past, as far as I'm concerned, is not progress. Profit cannot be the sole motivating force in progress. There must be integrity. If we slow down and gather enough information and learn to communicate, we can make appropriate decisions and solve the problems that confront us."

RICHARD SPIEGEL



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