

***Oh, somewhere over the rainbow / Way up high / And the dream that you dare to, / Why,
oh why can't I? I? I?***

It must have been around 1972 that I took my two sons to see a revival of the film *The Wizard of Oz* back east. Adam was five years old and Philip not yet four. We had to wait in a long line to get in – made up of parents and kids like us. We finally gained entrance and took what seemed the last three seats available – when the film began.

Now I had seen the movie back when it first came out – as an eleven or twelve year old. And like others I enjoyed it. The original story was written by Frank Baum back in 1900 and seems to encourage young people to trust in their own virtues rather than project them onto some fraudulent “God” or Wizard who kept people in thrall with his pyrotechnics and echo-chamber voice. The film version does justice to all this.

But what I failed to anticipate was its effect on my sons. We started out ok what with black and white scenes of Kansas farm country and characters. The boys were observant, expectant. But then came the cyclone and the whirling house and Dorothy's being deposited in the land of the Munchkins – little folk with high voices. And all in Technicolor! Adam began to fidget. And so on until the principals take the road through the forest. As the trees began to show hostile faces and wave branches like so many menacing arms Adam began to cry. Since already my younger Philip saw Adam as his mentor, he also began to cry. To make this short, I had to take them both out of the theater to calm them down. And as I think about it, that film is quite violent what with the cyclone, the Technicolor switch, the ominous forest, the phony staging of Oz's appearance, the winged monkeys, the cackle and dissolution of the Wicked Witch . . . at age 10 or so my boys might have been up to all that but at five and younger, they didn't stay to find out. The one consoling thing in the whole film, which Adam and Philip were too young to appreciate, was the ballad *Somewhere over the Rainbow* as sung by Judy Garland five minutes into the film.

Speaking of which, only yesterday for the first time did I hear someone I had never heard of sing those lyrics. Others may know of him very well. It's sung by the Hawaiian Israel Kamakawiwo'ole, born in 1959 and died at age 38 due to complications from obesity (he weighed close to 800 pounds). His rendition is quite other than Judy Garland's. As Michael Corcoran has said, *There's the opening reggae strum of the ukulele and the “ooooh, ooooh” crooning as glassy as the wall of a 20-foot wave, as breezy as the trade winds on a perfect day. Then the exotic becomes familiar. “Somewhere over the rainbow, way up high,” sings the velvet-smooth voice, poised to flip into falsetto. “Who IS that?” That's what folks have been asking ever since his 1993 solo debut.*

IZ's rendition still mesmerizes people to this day (as it did me). There is something childlike yet very masculine about this apparently very lovable artist. It's certainly not Judy Garland, although I enjoy her interpretation too. This being the Sunday on which God in our first reading creates the rainbow, why not check out Israel Kamakawiwo'ole's version of the lyric and music - to the reggae beat of a ukulele? It may be just what you need to hear.